

'ONCE BITTEN' – PITCH

By Jeff McMahon

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Logline: *A middle-aged socialite, sworn off men after a failed marriage, now smitten by her new working class neighbour, competes with her scheming best friend in order to win his love – before he shuffles off this mortal coil.*

Middle-aged socialite Ruth Bastian is wary of men – thanks to her deceased philanderer husband. These days, when she's not busy being social secretary to her country club or chairing the executive of the Bastian Foundation charity, she enjoys matriarchal status in a quiet gated estate. It's the perfect environment to suppress her real need to find true love.

Perfect that is until her new neighbour arrives. Morrie Anderson – late 50s, widower, recently retired carpenter, chain-smoker with baggage, and an apparent penchant for prostitutes, in particular the young Denise.

Morrie Anderson, Ruth's polar opposite. Someone best avoided.

Easier said than done, for when Morrie collapses in his driveway, Ruth finds herself going to his aid – and by default becomes involved in his welfare.

Something about the attraction of polar opposites?

Morrie's chain-smoking lands him before physician Dr Jeanette Parker. With a demented mother whose capers in a care facility are costing a fortune, Jeanette is desperate for a wealthy man. When she learns that Morrie is the recent winner of a major lottery, her interest in him quickly extends beyond the medical, and she invites him to partner her in a charity golf tournament at her country club.

Called away at the last minute to attend to her mother's latest escapade, Jeanette recruits none other than Ruth, the tournament's organiser, to take her place. As the game progresses, the reluctant partner Ruth experiences Morrie's true character (and golfing finesse) and warms to him. Come the post-game celebrations, she has changed her tune about men. She is smitten.

Jeanette is not happy – having a rival had not been part of the deal.

And so begins a tug-o-war between the two women.

Ruth can pull strings when she wants to, and Morrie is invited to join the country club and accompany her to various social events. After years of abstinence, she throws caution to the wind and makes out with her neighbor – the stigma of her late philanderer husband erased and happiness now on the horizon.

Suspecting her chances with Morrie might be fading, Jeanette puts ideas into his head about Ruth's 'disposition'. She needn't worry. When Denise pays Morrie another visit, Ruth, being her own worst enemy, assumes an indiscretion and surreptitiously convenes a meeting of the other residents, moving to ostracize Morrie. But her hold over the others has waned and Orlando, long-time resident and confidant, castigates Ruth for her impertinence. A serious slap in the face!

Things come to a head when the estranged Morrie is hospitalised following an incident with Ruth's car. Outside the ward, Ruth confronts Denise arriving for a visit. But Denise turns out to be not the prostitute presumed by Ruth but is, in fact, Morrie's niece. Ruth's status sinks to an all-time low.

And Jeanette revels in it.

With Morrie's recuperation requiring outside assistance, Ruth, determined to atone her folly, takes control, overruling the overtures of the others. Yet despite all their concerns, his condition deteriorates, and not wishing to be a burden on anyone, he decides he will end it all – another slap in the face for Ruth!

In a cathartic confrontation, Morrie off-loads his baggage regarding the death from lung cancer of his non-smoker wife. In turn Ruth, still smarting over her own late husband's philandering, swallows her pride and declares her affection for Morrie. He is sceptical, having doubts about her sexual 'disposition'! Now why would he think that?! The finger points to Jeannette.

Challenged by Ruth, the doctor concedes that her initial scheme was to win Morrie and his money – not by implying that Ruth was a lesbian but that she was entering menopause. Aged only 45, that's yet another slap in the face for Ruth, particularly from her supposed best friend! But then, being privy to the reality of Morrie's situation and with time literally running out for him, Jeanette's intentions turned altruistic, scheming simply to save her best friend from being hurt by a man a second time round.

Ruth is not deterred. The scar has healed and she jumps at her second chance at true love and to live happily ever after – however long that might be.

Written in the vein of the Nancy Meyer movies *'It's Complicated'* and *'Something's Gotta Give'*, and with a suggested PG-13 rating, *'Once Bitten'* is pitched at the 25-45 year old demographic.

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