

Back Fence Talk

By

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EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

It's a lovely summer's day. Some kids are having a water fight and the jingle of an ice-cream van can be heard. The SECURITY DOOR swings open and NAOMI (Late 20's) steps out.

She spots someone and walks over.

Sat on a bench observing everything is ADA (early 40s) a homely, slightly chubby woman. Naomi approaches.

NAOMI

Not surprised to see you out here,  
it's like an oven in there.

She catches Ada's attention.

ADA

I agree, and besides who would want  
to be inside on a day like this.

Naomi takes a seat beside her.

ADA

I haven't seen you in a while. What  
you been up too?

NAOMI

Oh, I've been around. It was Toby's  
birthday last Saturday.

ADA

Of course! How old is he?  
Wait...He's three now, isn't he?

NAOMI

Yeah. I took him to see his  
grandparents for the weekend, just  
got back a few hours ago actually.

ADA

Where is my little darling?

NAOMI

He's asleep.

ADA

Awww.

NAOMI

He's been up all morning, playing  
with his new toys. They spoil him  
you know, they really do...Me too.

ADA

I know what you mean. It's like that with firstborns.

NAOMI

First? Once is enough thank you.

ADA

I remember I said that once...

NAOMI

That's where we're different. Besides, it takes two to have a family.

ADA

Oh don't talk like that.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

A man in maintenance uniform arrives at an apartment, he rings...No answer. He rings again...Nothing. He looks at his watch.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

NAOMI

So how about you? Sitting here all by yourself.

ADA

I'm having a day off.

NAOMI

Good for you, let them clean up after their own mess for once.

ADA

But that's the problem, I worry they won't.

NAOMI

They'll learn. How's everyone anyway?

Ada sighs.

ADA

You know them. I tell you those buggers up there are driving me crazy. My husband's in a mood and

(MORE)

ADA (cont'd)  
 my daughter came home at four in  
 the morning today. I know it gets  
 dark later this time of year, but  
 four? And she tries to creep in...

She laughs to herself.

ADA  
 (cont'd)  
 ...makes so much bloody noise she  
 wakes everybody up!

Both women laugh.

The MAINTENANCE MAN walks out the building towards the two women.

MAINTENANCE MAN  
 Sorry ladies. Neither of you two  
 happen to know who lives at number  
 nineteen up there?

ADA  
 Not very well, you've been waiting?

MAINTENANCE MAN  
 For almost half an hour now.

ADA  
 It's best you leave then. I haven't  
 seen them in weeks.

MAINTENANCE MAN  
 Are you serious?

Ada nods.

MAINTENANCE MAN  
 Because they booked a repair today.  
 Anyway, I guess I'm off. Thanks.

The man gets into his van.

NAOMI  
 You know, I was just gonna ask you  
 that.

ADA  
 What?

NAOMI

That couple, up in number nineteen.

ADA

Yeah, everyone's been talking, all sorts of rumors going on. No one's seen them.

NAOMI

It doesn't look good. Haven't you noticed the police everywhere lately? And...I think something bad happened.

ADA

Me too, don't know if it's what you know. But I came to see them not long before they disappeared.

NAOMI

You did? What happened?

ADA

Quite a while ago now. They were behind in rent, so I went to see what was going on.

The apartment building stands solitary, bright, absorbed by the sun's radiance.

DISSOLVE TO:

BEGIN ADA'S FLASHBACK:

SUPER: THREE WEEKS AGO

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

It's a complete contrast. It's significantly darker, no water fights, no people. The assembly of small square lights on the apartment building are the only signs of life.

INT. APARTMENT NO. 19 - KITCHEN

Food is on a cooker. MICHELLE (Mid 20s) stands close by, spoon in hand with a patient demeanor. CLAYTON (mid 20s) is sat at a table beside her reading a newspaper.

The doorbell RINGS, neither of them flinch. The doorbell rings again, Michelle is the first to move. She turns to Clayton, he still has his head down reading the paper.

MICHELLE  
Aren't you going to get that?

CLAYTON  
Someone came round earlier, selling  
junk. Don't answer it.

The bell rings a third time, the stew begins to boil and so does Michelle. Behind her harmonious appearance lies a hot temper.

MICHELLE  
Like I trust you.

She heads to the DOOR, opens it. Ada is stood there.

MICHELLE  
Hi, er...

ADA  
Ada.

MICHELLE  
Yes, right. Ada. Sorry about that,  
I had food on the fire.

She glares towards Clayton in the kitchen.

MICHELLE  
(cont'd)  
You remember me right, Michelle?

ADA  
I never forget a face. Can I have a  
quick chat?

Michelle's smile is weak, she is still visibly angry.

ADA  
Or have I come at a wrong time?

MICHELLE  
No, no of course not.

Michelle lets her in and leads her into the kitchen.

MICHELLE  
Is there something wrong?

ADA  
No, its just...

MICHELLE  
Oh, it's the money right?

She gestures to Clayton.

MICHELLE  
You've met my husband before  
haven't you?

Ada looks at Clayton.

MICHELLE  
Ada, Clayton. Clayton, Ada. (at  
Clayton) Sort it out.

Michelle returns to the food. Clayton puts his paper down.

CLAYTON  
(at Ada)  
Hi, have a seat if you want.

Confused, he shrugs at Ada (gesturing towards Michelle) and goes back to his paper.

There's a moment of silence.

MICHELLE  
Ada, I'm sorry. But you must excuse  
my husband, he's a bit slow.

CLAYTON  
I'm sorry?

MICHELLE  
How many times have you told me you  
was going to sort out the rent?

Clayton freezes, he realizes what Michelle's getting at. Suddenly, a mobile RINGS. It's Clayton's.

CLAYTON  
Sorry, excuse me.

Clayton leaves the kitchen. Michelle eyes him suspiciously and Ada sees this.

EVERYTHING ZONES OUT AND THE SURROUNDING SOUND DIES TO A MUTE.

Naomi appears on Clayton's chair.

NAOMI

It's true, I knew they were  
struggling financially.

ADA

But, didn't you see the way she  
looked at him when he left?

MICHELLE

What do you mean?

ADA

She knew something was going on.  
She knew he was up to something.

FADE OUT.

SUPER: A FEW DAYS EARLIER

INT/EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - STAIRWAY - DAY

Ada is carrying bags of laundry heading down the stairs, she  
sees Michelle sat at the bottom. Michelle looks worse for  
wear, her make-up is patchy as if she's been crying.

Ada passes her.

ADA

Hi...You okay?

MICHELLE

Yeah, thanks. I don't look good do  
I? Just under the weather, that's  
all.

ADA

You shouldn't be out here, like  
that. You should go inside.

Michelle nods in agreement. Ada turns to leave.

MICHELLE

Wait, sorry. What's your name?

ADA

Ada.

Michelle notices Ada is carrying laundry.

MICHELLE

You're on your way to the  
launderette aren't you?

ADA

I am.

MICHELLE

You've seen my husband before haven't you? He went to pick up some clothes earlier and he hasn't come back. Can you check if he's there?

ADA

Fine, no problem.

MICHELLE

It's not like I don't trust him or anything...

ADA

It's alright, I understand. My husband promises to do things all the time and he never does em.

MICHELLE

I'll take your advice and head back inside. Thanks Ada.

INT. LAUNDERETTE

A few people are at the launderette, Ada unpacks her clothes into a washing machine. Clayton is is at the far end chatting with a woman. She giggles occasionally while Clayton helps with her washing. Naomi appears beside Ada.

ADA

This was what she was concerned about.

Clayton notices Ada at the other end and goes quiet. Ada turns to face him and the two exchange greetings. Clayton and the woman leave, he helps her carry the laundry.

NAOMI

I have to say, this feels all too familiar.

Ada finishes unpacking.

ADA

When I returned home I spoke to Michelle again. She told me Clayton hadn't returned. I said that I saw him, but that was all.

She closes the washing machine door.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

NAOMI

Okay, I can see that. He doesn't look the reliable type. I know all about that. But to be honest I didn't see anything wrong.

ADA

What? You saw nothing wrong with that?

NAOMI

Not really. But I know what you mean, I think he's just like that. I spoke with him when I came by their apartment once too.

BEGIN NAOMI'S FLASHBACK:

INT. MICHELLE AND CLAYTON'S APARTMENT

RING. Naomi is at the door.

Clayton opens, he eyes her provocatively.

NAOMI

Hi, erm, sorry to bother you. But I'm doing some work in my apartment and I wonder if I could borrow a drill?

The two stare at each other momentarily.

CLAYTON

Sure, come inside. But I'm surprised your boyfriend or your husband doesn't have any tools.

NAOMI

If only they were there to ask.

CLAYTON

I'm sorry?

NAOMI

Sorry I mean. It's just me, I'm single.

CLAYTON

(surprised)

You serious?

Naomi gives him a curious look.

CLAYTON

No, I mean. I'm just...surprised.

Naomi goes inside just by the door as Clayton leaves. Michelle goes to see who's at the door. She startles, surprised to see Naomi inside.

MICHELLE

Oh, hi. What's the problem?

NAOMI

It's nothing really, I'm just borrowing your drill. Fixing a couple of shelves.

MICHELLE

Okay.

Clayton returns with a drill.

CLAYTON

You going to do that by yourself? Because I'm not doing anything at the moment, I could come over.

NAOMI

I'll be okay. (smiling) You think I can't do it by myself?

CLAYTON

No, I...I was just trying to help.

Naomi turns to leave, she sees a crooked coat hanger on the wall.

MICHELLE

You'd probably just make a mess of it anyway.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

ADA

So you know what I'm talking about.

NAOMI

I never said I agreed with you.  
Just said I know what you mean.

ADA

Okay, so what do you know then?

MICHELLE

Most of it is only speculation but  
it does add up. I personally  
believe many things contributed to  
their disappearance.

BEGIN NAOMI'S FLASHBACK:

INT. MICHELLE AND CLAYTON'S APARTMENT

MONTAGE

A) Michelle and Clayton are sat down at a table full of bill letters. Michelle yells at Clayton, Clayton shouts back holding and pointing at one of the bill letters.

Naomi and Ada stand present, observing.

NAOMI

If they were behind on rent, then  
it's a given they behind with  
everything else as well.

B) Michelle, smartly dressed walks into her apartment. Clayton is sat in the living room waiting for her. She turns to him and disappointingly shakes her head.

NAOMI

Michelle was out of work and  
Clayton was the only one getting  
any decent money.

C) Clayton arrives home, Michelle is asleep on a couch in the living room. She gets up when he comes in, he falls on the couch opposite and puts his head in his hands.

NAOMI

But soon even he was in trouble,  
his employers were hit hard by the  
recession. He kept his job despite

(MORE)

NAOMI (cont'd)  
 job cuts but was forced to work  
 longer hours.

D) Clayton finds his work scattered all over the floor as Michelle is arranging the furniture. This angers him and he shouts at her. He viciously searches through the mess and grabs his keys out of it. Michelle tries to get his attention but he ignores her and leaves the apartment.

NAOMI  
 The long hours made him grumpy and  
 the two of them fell out.

ADA  
 Well at least we can agree there  
 was tension between them. But where  
 do you think he was on his way too?

FADE OUT.

END FLASHBACK.

BEGIN ADA'S FLASHBACK:

INT. MICHELLE AND CLAYTON'S APARTMENT

MONTAGE

A) Michelle is in the kitchen, the phone rings, she answers. She listens in at the other end, her face changes from calmness to worry.

Ada and Naomi stand observing.

ADA  
 I heard she started to receive a  
 few calls from friends claiming to  
 have seen Clayton with different  
 women.

B) Michelle searches through Clayton's pockets, his desk and in his drawers. She finds a photo of a young woman in one of the draws, some phone numbers written on a piece of paper on his desk and a condom in his pockets.

ADA  
 She probably searched through all  
 his things. But I doubt she found  
 anything that would satisfy her.

NAOMI

He barely had time to see his own wife let alone somebody else.

ADA

True. But who said he wasn't seeing someone from work?

C) With the curtains closed, Michelle stands solitary in a darkly lit living room. She peers through the curtain as she watches Clayton leave. She picks up the phone and dials a number, she holds it to her ear.

ADA

I believe she considered having an affair herself but perhaps couldn't bring herself to do it.

NAOMI

If what you say is true, then, I wouldn't blame her. But then again she had no proof of what he was doing.

D) Clayton arrives home, Michelle smiles and welcomes him. They hug, he pecks her on the cheek. As he goes her smiles disappears.

ADA

All of a sudden she became calm...cool...calculated almost. She had something up her sleeve.

NAOMI

Maybe she pretended nothing happened, she resigned herself to the fact that she could do nothing.

ADA

That's not within her nature.

NAOMI

You can't make that judgment. We're both looking in from the outside. I think Clayton was doing a lot of things behind her back personally.

FADE OUT.

BEGIN NAOMI'S FLASHBACK:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Naomi is on her way to the apartment building, she notices Clayton and unknown man with their back to her at the boot of a car. She backs off a distance to watch them. Ada appears beside her.

The man hands some cash over to Clayton, then Clayton pulls a gym bag out of the boot. The two shake hands and the man goes into the car.

ADA

Well whats going on here?

NAOMI

Not sure, but my theory is that Clayton started doing favors with the wrong people to get a bit extra cash.

ADA

Do you know what's in the back?

NAOMI

No, but he's certainly playing a dangerous game getting involved with people like this.

Clayton walks to the security door, opens it.

INT. MICHELLE AND CLAYTON'S APARTMENT

MONTAGE:

A) Clayton walks in and closes the apartment door, he checks each room before make his way to the bedroom. He stifles momentarily as he sees Michelle apparently asleep in bed. He hides to gym bag at the bottom of a wardrobe, Michelle has a glimpse of this before closing her eyes.

Naomi and Ada stand observing.

NAOMI

What ever it was that he was doing, he wanted to keep it a secret.

ADA

Yeah, but the thing with secrets is that they always come out.

B) Clayton signals to Michelle as he prepares to leave for work, he pulls out some cash from his pockets and leaves it on the table. A smile beams across his face.

NAOMI

I heard him one day warn her not to open the door for anybody regardless of who it was. When she asked why he refused to say.

ADA

You might be right, that would explain why it took them so long to answer the door when I came by.

C) Michelle is tidying the bed in the bedroom. She stops by the wardrobe and opens it, she takes out the gym bag and puts in on the bed. She lingers if she should open it or not. The doorbell interrupts her. She quietly goes over to the peephole to see who it is, after a moment of hesitation she opens the door.

NAOMI

I was told by neighbors it was the police. They'd only come to ask her some questions, but she immediately confessed.

ADA

Confessed what? She didn't even know what was in the bag.

MICHELLE

She pieced both things together I assumed. She must've feared for Clayton, little did she know, she was the one in danger.

FADE OUT.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

ADA

I think I know where this one is going. But I don't think that's what happened.

NAOMI

Well at least let me finish.

ADA

Okay, but I mean why wasn't Clayton or Michelle arrested?

NAOMI

I don't know, I weren't there.

ADA

But let me tell you something, I was there. On that evening when they were last seen.

DISSOLVE TO:

BEGIN ADA'S FLASHBACK:

INT. MICHELLE AND CLAYTON'S APARTMENT

The clock is ticking.

Michelle, Clayton and Ada are all in the kitchen.

CLAYTON

Look Ada, I could pay a half now and next Monday. First thing in the morning I'll stop by your apartment and pay the remainder.

ADA

If you don't have enough you don't have enough. But if you want pay some now and some next week, fine.

MICHELLE

Clayton? What are you talking about? You just got paid yesterday!

Clayton laments, looks down at the floor.

MICHELLE

Clay, what's wrong? You're not yourself anymore. I know there's something bothering you. Just tell me.

Clayton looks nervously at Michelle.

MICHELLE

I remember when we were first dating, we used always go out. Movies, restaurants, you used to make me laugh. (to Ada) You know what I'm talking about right?

Ada looks uncomfortable.

MICHELLE

(cont'd)

We hardly do anything anymore. Do you still love me?

Clayton gives her a look.

CLAYTON

Don't ask stupid questions.

MICHELLE

What makes it stupid? I just want to know. Or is it that you can't answer it?

Clayton looks her dead in the eye.

CLAYTON

Of course I do! Why do you think I'm here!?

Naomi appears beside Ada.

ADA

That was all she needed to hear. Once she heard it, she knew it was a lie. After all he'd done, this must've hurt her the most.

Michelle turns away, she starts to prepare the food. She grabs something from underneath the cupboard, sprinkles it. Ada sees this.

MICHELLE

...Because I love you and I always will...Even if you died today.

She hands Clayton his food.

CLAYTON

(apologetically)

Thanks.

Michelle sits down at the table facing him.

Clayton notices she's not eating, he goes to say something but doesn't.

Ada sensing the tension between the two, gets up to leave.

Clayton turns to her.

CLAYTON  
Monday. I'll be by your apartment  
first thing Monday morning.

FADE OUT.

SUPER: A FEW DAYS LATER.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - CORRIDOR

Ada and Naomi are walking.

ADA  
When Monday arrived, he never came.  
I came by their apartment again but  
this time no one answered.

Ada sees Michelle, she's wearing shades and pulling a  
suitcase coming down the corridor towards her. Ada waves but  
Michelle doesn't acknowledge her.

ADA  
And This is when I realized. She  
poisoned him. Once she'd come round  
to what she had done she had to go.  
She was so anxious she didn't even  
notice me.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

NAOMI  
Sorry, But I just can't see it.  
Would you murder your husband over  
an affair?

ADA  
Well...I don't answer hypothetical  
questions. But believe me, she is  
capable. That was her way of  
showing that she loved him.

NAOMI  
How sick do you she is?

ADA  
You don't want me to answer that  
question do you?

NAOMI

No. I don't think either of them are capable of murder...But then again if things were getting out of hand...

BEGIN NAOMI'S FLASHBACK:

INT. NAOMI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Naomi is sat beside a desk writing, she is interrupting when she can hear an argument going on. Curious, she goes outside to find where it's coming from. Ada appears alongside her.

NAOMI

Can you hear that? It's coming from their apartment.

Both woman try to make out what's being said.

NAOMI

I bet this is when he realized she handed the bag over to the police.

Suddenly a loud slam is heard. Then silence.

ADA

What was that?

NAOMI

I don't know, but after this everything began to die down between the two of them.

FADE IN:

SUPER: THE NEXT DAY.

INT. MICHELLE AND CLAYTON'S APARTMENT

RING. Naomi is at the door.

Clayton opens slightly, he looks ominous.

NAOMI

Hi again. I appreciate you lending me your drill.

Clayton remains expressionless, he takes the drill. Naomi looks concerned.

NAOMI

Sorry, I don't mean to bother you again but can I take a look at your shelf. Your wife told me you had one in your living room.

There's a beat. He eventually opens the door. Naomi enters, he closes the door after her. As Naomi makes her way to the living room she notices two open suitcases packed with clothes in the bedroom. Clayton, hands behind his back follows behind her, he closes the bedroom door.

The apartment is darkly lit and eerily quiet.

NAOMI

Where's your wife?

CLAYTON

She left, didn't tell me where she was going.

Naomi pretends to examine the shelf, aware of Clayton behind her.

CLAYTON

You women confuse me sometimes. You talk about being careful, playing safe. And then you turn around and behave irrationally without listening to people. All for this...independence of yours.

Naomi turns around in response to Clayton's strange remark.

NAOMI

What?

She can see from a reflection on a mirror that Clayton is holding a crowbar behind his back.

She backs up and scans the room. It's a mess, drawers are removed and things are lying all over the place.

NAOMI

I think I better go now...

She slowly heads for the door, facing her him as she moves. Finally she's there.

NAOMI

Thank you.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Clayton is struggling with a garbage bag he is taking to the dumpster. Naomi and Ada watch him at a distance.

NAOMI

He had a look on his eyes as if he could kill, in fact I think he just had.

ADA

So Michelle isn't capable of killing but for some reason he is?

MICHELLE

Once he realized what she had done he was in a rage. You heard them yourself, and I think, accidentally he killed her.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

ADA

Interesting theory, but I don't trust accuracy of your sources.

NAOMI

Accuracy of my sources? I feared for my life when I was in that apartment.

ADA

...And I'm glad you're still with us. Can't say the same for Clayton though.

NAOMI

Yeah, you're right with the cops and criminals after him, he's a dead man. A dead man running.

ADA

No, he's just dead...

As the women continue to bicker a car arrives. Their bickering stops as they draw their attention on the new the arrival.

The doors open, Clayton is the first to exit. He leads a tanned skinned Michelle out after him, they wave at the two women.

Ada and Naomi are shocked, with forced smiles they return the greeting.

The couple head inside, both women look at each other as they recoup their thoughts.

There's a moment of silence.

ADA

...I don't know if you heard, but there was a big row out here this morning.

NAOMI

Yeah, I did hear something about that. Over parking wasn't it?

ADA

Yeah, crazy stuff I tell you...

FADE OUT.