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BITTER MONARCH

LOGLINE: When a fashion model collects brides to maintain her beauty, one groom fights back.

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY COURTYARD -- DAY

SCREAMS as wedding guests scatter in all directions. Blood splatters the crisp white decorations.

A grey WOLF leaps above the crowd, enraged and snapping in all directions at once. BENSON WITTOL, the groom, plants himself between the wolf and his bride.

BENSON

Run, Ivy! Go!

IVY MILKWEED, the youthful bride, takes off her heels, gathers up her wedding dress, checks back over her shoulder, and runs for her life.

GROWLING and SCREAMS of panic grow more distant as she arcs down the nearest street, heading toward downtown. Tries the doors of a big building, locked. She comes to an imposing gothic style church with people milling about and darts inside.

INT. GOTHIC CHURCH FASHION SHOW -- DAY

Models in bridal wear strut up and down a catwalk to loud music and pulsating lights. A few patrons notice Ivy in her wedding gown, but she hardly stands out in this buffet of over-the-top fashionistas. Everyone fights for attention here.

Breathing hard, Ivy sweeps past irritated attendees and darts backstage just as the wolf peers into the building doorway.

He sniffs the air, satisfied, and then morphs into a foppishly well dressed man. Handsome, though a bit rough around the edges, his air of danger clears a path through the crowd for him.

INT. GOTHIC CHURCH FASHION SHOW -- DAY

Benson makes more of a disturbance when he stumbles into the fashion show, one hand holding a jagged looking bite on his arm. Still, the noise and lights persist and the show goes on.

INT. FASHION SHOW BACKSTAGE -- DAY

MELINDRE "LINDY" MAGUS, an androgynously beautiful model, steps into a new outfit for her next turn on the catwalk. Like fruit flies around a rotten apple, dressers and makeup artists swarm her.

LINDY

Enough.

They leave.

Lindy prepares for her walk just as Ivy crashes into her.

LINDY (CONT'D)

Watch it! What are you doing back here?

IVY

You have to help me hide. I was getting married and then there was a wolf and...

LINDY

Sit down.

She gestures to a nearby chair.

LINDY (CONT'D)

A wolf, you say?

She admires herself in the mirror.

IVY

Yes.

LINDY

He'll be following your scent then.

IVY

What should I do? Please, he'll be here any minute.

LINDY

I can hide you.

INT. GOTHIC CHURCH FASHION SHOW -- DAY

Wolf, in human form, makes his way toward backstage, nearly upon them.

INT. FASHION SHOW BACKSTAGE -- DAY

Lindy holds up a pair of scissors, out of nowhere.

LINDY

I need a piece of your hair.

Ivy pulls a strand of hair over her shoulder and Lindy snips a piece off. Rubbing the hair between her fingers, Lindy mumbles rhythmic phrases under her breath.

Ivy transforms into a monarch butterfly.

Lindy gently grabs the butterfly and shoves it into a prop cage nearby just as Wolf enters.

Wolf narrows his eyes at Lindy. His voice deep, he speaks slowly.

WOLF

Did she come this way?

TITNDY

Yes. Fine work.

A dresser rushes over.

DRESSER

You're up Lindy!

Lindy grabs the cage with the butterfly in it and walks out onto the catwalk. Each model has a similar cage and the butterflies inside are nearly identical.

Wolf turns around and leaves.

INT. FASHION SHOW -- DAY

Lindy steps out onto the catwalk, butterfly cage slung over one shoulder as she struts to the end, poses, and turns back.

Benson weaves through the audience.

BENSON

Have any of you seen a bride come through here?

A few people in the crowd shrug or act disinterested.

PHOTOGRAPHER

I clicked a few photos of one earlier. Is this her?

The photographer leans over to show Benson his camera.

BENSON

Yes! Where did she go?

The photographer points toward backstage and then goes back to his work.

Benson shoves past people to get backstage.

INT. FASHION SHOW BACKSTAGE -- DAY

Dressers help Lindy disrobe.

Benson barges in, stopping short at Lindy, and then turns his back to her to talk.

BENSON

I...didn't see anything. I'm
sorry. I'm just looking for my
bride.

LINDY

Brides are ephemeral. Their beauty only lasts for one day.

She taps the butterfly cage and the butterfly inside flutters around erratically, wings flashing brown and orange.

LINDY (CONT'D)

My grandmother used to have a tray of exotic skin creams. She kept them on her dresser and used only a tiny amount at a time.

BENSON

Have you seen a girl with a wedding dress, or not?

The dresser finishes and leaves. Lindy uses her pinky to adjust her eye makeup in the mirror, pleased at the result.

LINDY

Eventually each ornate bottle would run out, but she kept them all, a reminder of her failed youth. Her mistake was relying on medicinal creams and medicines.

BENSON

How is this helpful?

LINDY

So loyal. You'd make an excellent companion. I can always use more companions. Here, take this.

She picks up the cage.

BENSON

Why? Look, I have to find...

He starts to push past her. She puts a hand on his chest.

LINDY

A gift. For your wedding day. For good luck. Go back to the wedding. You'll find your future there.

Benson takes the cage and turns to go.

LINDY (CONT'D)

Wait!

Benson turns back.

LINDY (CONT'D)

I've given you a gift. Am I invited to your special event?

BENSON

Sure. You'll probably be the only quest left.

Lindy's dresser rushes over.

DRESSER

You're up!

Lindy speaks to an empty room, assuming it hears her.

LINDY

Wolf, we're going to a wedding.

EXT. CITY COURTYARD -- DAY

Benson arrives back at the wedding site. Chairs lay toppled and broken, ruby roses strewn haphazardly among the wreckage.

BENSON

Ivy?

He sits in a lone standing chair and sets the butterfly cage on the ground by his feet.

BENSON (CONT'D)

She wanted butterflies. A big cloud of you. Instead of rice because rice is bad for the birds.

He opens the cage and the butterfly flies out and lands on his knee. He lifts it with one finger.

BENSON (CONT'D)

She'd have liked you.

He walks over to a huge ornamental cage filled with other butterflies and puts his inside. She's soon lost among hundreds of identical monarchs.

He turns to see Lindy sitting in one of the guest chairs. On the bride side.

LINDY

You need quests.

BENSON

Right. With no bride.

Ivy walks over, takes out a butterfly, and whispers to it. It turns into a beautiful woman, not Ivy, but someone else.

LINDY

Go. Sit.

The woman obeys, disoriented.

Benson is disoriented too.

BENSON

What are you?

A growl issues from behind Lindy. Wolf, in wolf form, pads up next to Lindy.

Benson grabs the nearest chair to defend himself, about to hurl it, but Wolf sits.

Lindy pats Wolf's head.

LINDY

It's okay. He's not after you. He brings me beauty.

Wolf licks her hand.

BENSON

Ivy.

Benson looks from the woman in the guest seat to the cage of butterflies. He runs to the cage.

BENSON (CONT'D)

Ivy!

He turns back to Lindy and Wolf.

BENSON (CONT'D)

Undo it!

Wolf's hackles rise, the beginning of a growl rumbling in his throat.

Benson, enraged, snaps off the leg of a chair and advances on Wolf.

LINDY

Boys, boys. No need for that. All you have to do to save her is...

She walks past them to the cage and opens the door. Hundreds of monarchs fly out in a fog. A beautiful display for any wedding.

LINDY (CONT'D)

Find her. If you choose the right one, I'll give her back.

The monarchs scatter in all directions.

Wolf gleefully bounds into the air, spinning and snapping at the butterflies like a child catching bubbles, tearing many to pieces.

BENSON

No!

He uses his makeshift sword to stab Wolf mid leap. The splintered wood punctures deep into Wolf's side.

Wolf howls in pain and falls to the ground, panting. Lindy shrieks.

LINDY

You fool. Now you'll never get her back.

She glances down at wolf, who takes his last breath and returns to his human form. Dead.

LINDY (CONT'D)

You'll pay for this.

She crooks a finger at him, looking older and faded after the sacrifice of monarchs. Closes her eyes and whispers.

Benson turns to run, but he's too late. As he rotates, he becomes a wolf.

LINDY (CONT'D)

Now she'll never find you either.

She storms away, back toward downtown. Wolf's body fades into the ground, dust.

It's just Benson now, as a wolf. A few straggling butterflies remain and he eyes them woefully.

MODEL # 1

There now.

Benson starts at the voice. Turns to see MODEL # 1 stepping out from behind a tree.

MODEL # 1 (CONT'D)

I can help you. But it's only temporary and there's a price.

BENSON

Anything.

She waves a hand at him, concentrating. He changes back to his human form.

BENSON (CONT'D)

Temporary?

MODEL # 1

Butterflies have short lives. Like beauty, they are fleeting. If you don't find her soon, your bride will die.

BENSON

How do I find her? What if she's one of those?

He indicates the fallen butterflies.

MODEL # 1

She could be.

BENSON

No, I don't accept that. I will find her.

MODEL # 1

You have two weeks. After that, you will return to your wolf form and will be compelled to serve Lindy.

BENSON

I can do it. I know it.

MODEL # 1

Bring her to me when you do. I will help if I can.

She turns and leaves.

INT. "OYAMEL FOREST" SHOP -- NIGHT

Knickknacks and glass ornaments adorn the front windows. A selection of bonsai trees and hummingbird feeders clutter wooden shelves. The store hasn't seen a customer in a while and MRS. BAYBERRY picks up the "CLOSED" sign and heads to the door to hang it.

A JINGLE as Benson throws the door open, nearly frightening MRS. BAYBERRY to pieces.

BENSON

Butterflies!

MRS. BAYBERRY

Pardon me? You'll have to come back tomorrow, son. I've got Bonsais to feed.

BENSON

They say you know about them. Monarchs. How do I catch them? How do I tell them apart?

MRS. BAYBERRY

Tell them apart? Why I suppose you really don't. Except that the males have spots. Now you'll really have to go.

She tries to usher him out, but he ducks around her.

BENSON

What do they like? Where do they go at night? Where can I find them?

Mrs. Bayberry heads to the counter and picks up the antique telephone, dialing, rotary style.

MRS. BAYBERRY

Police? Yes, I do need assistance. Yes. No, my life is not in danger, but this gentleman will not leave my shop...

Benson frantically looks around the shop. Hummingbird food, bonsai food, bunches of herbs and grasses tied with ribbons.

One has a butterfly symbol on it. Milkweed. He snatches one and rushes out of the store.

Mrs. Bayberry sets the phone back in its cradle.

MRS. BAYBERRY (CONT'D)

Delinquent.

She hobbles over and locks the door, hangs the "Closed" sign, and tends to the first bonsai tree.

EXT. FOREST JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN -- NIGHT

Benson has the ornamental butterfly cage. He tosses in the bundle of milkweed and uses a small twig to hold the cage door open. He sits, still in his tuxedo. A long day. His arm hurts. His head nods and he drifts asleep.

EXT. FOREST JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN -- MORNING

SOUND OF FLUTTERING BUTTERFLIES. Benson sits up and rubs his eyes, disoriented. He remembers. He checks the cage. There are several butterflies inside. On his hands and knees, he inspects the butterflies one by one. He gently frees the ones with spots, closes the door, and picks up the cage.

MONTAGE OF BENSON REPEATING THIS BUTTERFLY COLLECTION PROCESS

SUPERIMPOSE "12 DAYS LATER"

INT. GOTHIC CHURCH -- DAY

Benson enters the church carrying the butterfly cage. He's grown a full beard and looks rougher, hairier, more...wild. Time is nearly up.

The church is pristine, not a scrap of fabric or photographer in site. It's as if the fashion show never existed. Benson enters with the cage and sits down in the front pew.

BENSON

Ivy, if you're in there,
please...show me how to find you.

Some butterflies sit on the milkweed. Others hang from the cage bars. Others flit around frenetically. They all look the same.

LINDY

Ah, you've come back to me. Ready to serve. Are these for me?

Lindy comes out of the shadows, beautiful and ageless as she holds her smooth hand out to the butterfly cage.

BENSON

Never.

MODEL # 1

I promised he could choose.

As she also emerges from nowhere.

Lindy and the other model stand face to face.

LINDY

One. Bring it to me.

She sits in one of the pews and icily orders the other model.

LINDY (CONT'D)

Get me some tea.

The model bows slightly and leaves.

Benson studies the cage. He puts his hand in, hoping a butterfly will land on it. None do. He opens the cage door wide. One at a time the butterflies take off.

The other model brings Lindy a cup of tea. Lindy sips it and waits for Benson's verdict.

Benson looks scruffier by the minute.

BENSON

I don't know. I need more time.

LINDY

Time is up. When I was a little girl, my grandmother used to...

She clutches her chest. Wide eyed, turns to the other model.

LINDY (CONT'D)

You!

She slips to the floor. Closes her eyes. Benson looks to the other model.

BENSON

What happened?

MODEL # 1

Milkweed. Monarchs are poisonous because they feed on it.

BENSON

But the spells.

MODEL # 1

Oh right. Well, I'm sorry about that. I do want you to find your true love and all that, but top model is so hard to attain you know.

Benson, about to protest, finds himself returning to his wolf form, unable to speak.

MODEL # 1 (CONT'D)

Okay, what I need are really beautiful young women to maintain my beauty. You bring them to me.

Just then a single butterfly lands on Benson's nose.

MODEL # 1 (CONT'D)

Oh how sweet! She found you!

She lifts the butterfly off of Benson's nose and puts it in the cage. Benson follows obediently as she lifts the cage and leaves the church.

FADE OUT.