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

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 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 adds 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 what's 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 it 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 came 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.