

COLD OPEN

1

INT. RUTHERFORD STATELY MANOR - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT
(PRESENT)

1

A vast, opulent drawing room in a Stately Manor. The air is thick with the sterile presence of LAW ENFORCEMENT and PARAMEDICS.

THE ACCUSED (20s-30s) sits on a plush, antique armchair. He is dishevelled. His head is bowed, so we never see his face.

Standing over him is DETECTIVE MELISSA RAYNER (30s). She is slender, with blonde hair pulled back in a tight ponytail. Her intensity is palpable, her Devon lilt subtly audible.

Melissa stares down at the Accused, her lack of handcuffs a peculiar grace note in the tension.

She massages her temples. She leans in slightly.

MELISSA

*When we arrived, you were already here.
We know you made the call. Now, please,
can you shed light on the events that
transpired here tonight? I need a
recount.*

The Accused slowly lifts his head only slightly, enough to see Melissa's face, but we still do not see his. He looks utterly spent.

THE ACCUSED

I've already explained everything.

MELISSA

*Why the delay in contacting the
authorities?*

The Accused takes a deep, ragged breath.

THE ACCUSED

I'm not sure. The shock, I suppose.

MELISSA

Is that your final answer?

THE ACCUSED

*What is this, Who Wants To Be A
Millionaire?*

(CONTINUED)

Melissa inches nearer, her gaze filled with doubt, not appreciating the quip. An undercurrent of anger flickers. Her jaw tightens.

THE ACCUSED (CONT'D)
*I don't know what you want me to say.
I've already said everything I know.*

A sharp voice cuts through the tension from the doorway.

DETECTIVE MORGAN (O.S.)
Hey, Melissa!

Melissa's intense gaze snaps away from the Accused.

DETECTIVE MORGAN (50s, stubbled, haggard) stands in the doorway, his face pale and troubled—more so than when he first barged in hours ago.

MORGAN
*Melissa. You gotta see this — now. The
forensics... it doesn't match the scene.
None of it makes sense. I don't even
know how any of this can be explained.*

Melissa looks from Morgan back to the Accused, a flash of pure bewilderment replacing her suspicion. She turns to follow Morgan.

The Accused slowly drops his head again, the weight of his secret pressing down.

MAIN TITLES.

INT. RUTHERFORD STATELY MANOR - DRAWING ROOM - MORNING

THREE MONTHS EARLIER

A vast, bright, and impeccably tidy room. Expensive, religious-themed art hangs on the walls. ANTHEA RUTHERFORD (50s, perfectly coiffed, wearing a crisp linen suit) is perched on an antique wicker chair. She exudes an arctic reserve.

Across from her, ELLIOT (30s, sharp, but currently swimming in panic) is perched on the edge of a velvet armchair. He's sweating slightly.

ANTHEA
So, tell me about yourself, Elliot.

(CONTINUED)

Elliot's smile is stretched and plastic. He nervously wets his lips, swallowing the desert in his mouth.

ELLIOT
*Well... I sprouted from Wales,
originally.*

ANTHEA
*Wales! I'm a Snowdonia kid, originally.
It's stunning there.*

Anthea sets her notebook aside. She picks up a porcelain teacup and sips delicately.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)
Can you speak Welsh as well?

ELLIOT
*Uh, not exactly fluently. But I can
certainly manage the basics.*

ELLIOT (V.O.)
*Please, God, let "bore da" and "diolch"
cover this. She's beaming! The 'Wales'
card might be the only decent card I
hold.*

Anthea, neat as a pin in her linen suit, places the teacup back on the coaster with a precise clink.

She looks him over. Elliot is impeccably dressed in a sharp suit—clearly an effort. He is clean-shaven, a look he hasn't worn in years.

ANTHEA
Okay, tell me more about yourself.

ELLIOT
*By day, I'm a freelance writer. And I've
been very careful with my savings. You
know, for the proverbial rainy day.*

ANTHEA
*The "Be Our Guest" ad mentioned you had
a passion for dogs.*

ELLIOT
*Oh, absolutely! I adore dogs. Seriously.
A real, genuine dog person.*

(CONTINUED)

ELLIOT (V.O.)

A complete fabrication. I'm actually terrified of anything with four legs. Or three legs, for that matter.

Anthea looks down, subtly doodling on her notepad. Elliot leans forward desperately.

ELLIOT

And— and hey, I'm practically a domestic wizard! Ready to sprinkle some magic around the house. I'm very tidy. Very handy. I noticed your ad for the £550, all-inclusive ensuite was extremely appealing.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

Too much. Too desperate. I'm laying it on so thick I could grout a bathroom with it. This is why my exes all ran for the hills.

Anthea stops doodling and looks up, her expression unreadable.

ANTHEA

And your religious affiliation, Elliot?

Elliot freezes. He manages a weak, panicked smile.

ELLIOT

I'm... uh... I'm deeply committed to the, ah... the Good Book. All of it.

ANTHEA

Very broad. Specifically, Elliot.

Elliot is a deer in headlights.

ELLIOT

I follow the tenets of... The Word.

Anthea raises a single, perfect eyebrow. She places her pen down slowly.

ANTHEA

I see. Let's talk about the room. It's not huge, but it's cosy and tidy. You have your own ensuite bathroom, of course. Do you often have guests over?

(CONTINUED)

ELLIOT

No need to stress. My social circle has shrunk big time lately. I'm quite the lone wolf, actually. I enjoy my own company.

Anthea grins, a rare, genuine expression.

ANTHEA

Now, that is music to my ears! Honestly, our last guest... was a nightmare. A veritable nightmare.

She shudders visibly.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

His family also hailed from a council estate.

Elliot maintains a perfect poker face. He nods slowly, respectfully.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

Just one other thing, Elliot. If you happen to see Brandi, the housemaid—

Anthea leans in conspiratorially.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

She's staff. Please don't bother her with conversation.

Elliot blinks, swallowing a sharp reaction. He forces a gentle, understanding smile.

ELLIOT

Of course. Understood.

Elliot maintains his polite, slightly vacant smile.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

I try not to jump to conclusions, but judging people is literally my job. And I'm pretty confident Anthea Rutherford is exactly who I think she is.

ANTHEA

We do weekly room inspections, just to ensure you're not unleashing any destructive architectural talents. But fear not, you'll have a key for full privacy.

(CONTINUED)

She pauses, then brightens.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

*And there's a spot on the driveway
reserved just for your precious car.*

Elliot's jaw muscles twitch almost imperceptibly.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

*The car. Right. The rented BMW I
borrowed for this afternoon's
performance. How exactly do I explain
that suddenly vanishing once I move in?*

ELLIOT

Sounds good to me. Absolutely.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

*The truth is, I haven't owned a car
since... the incident. I've spent the
last six years forging documents. IDs,
licences—it's a decent side hustle, but
definitely not tax deductible. I need
this room. A place where I can actually
sleep without looking over my shoulder.*

ANTHEA

*Fantastic! Public transport is not my
cup of tea; the characters you run into
are quite startling.*

She slides a notepad toward him.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

*You'll get a code for the front door,
just in case we're not around. Oh, and
don't stress about Carter. He's more
bark than bite. Honestly, I never even
wanted the pesky mutt, but...*

Anthea trails off, distracted by a new thought.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

*...and my husband simply insists on
taking the sloop out even when the
forecast is clearly a Force Seven.
Honestly, men! He and our daughter,
they're both the same. And my roses,
well, I just couldn't bear to let them
rot on the vine, so I took up
watercolour...*

(CONTINUED)

Elliot glances around the vast room. Every flat surface holds an object of antique value. The walls are covered in religious scripture, framed. The bookshelves are packed with various editions of the Bible.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

Heavy on the Jesus Christ. Good call on not going with the "die-hard Pope fan" route. No TV, just Bibles. This is definitely a shrine.

ANTHEA

Don't you agree, Elliot?

Elliot snaps back to Anthea, his face blank. He has no idea what she was talking about.

ELLIOT

Uh... of course.

Anthea's face lights up.

ANTHEA

Oh, you can't imagine how much better that makes me feel.

ELLIOT

Glad to hear it.

Anthea inches closer to the edge of the wicker chair.

ANTHEA

And one more thing. We need to chat about a couple of house rules. You probably saw them in my email. Don't sweat it; it's no biggie. This isn't a prison, but I've got my little quirks. So, is everything all okay with you?

ELLIOT (V.O.)

The email never made it. My digital footprint is slightly less visible than a ghost's. What rules? No alcohol? No women? No breathing after 10 PM?

ELLIOT

Yep. Totally cool with it.

Anthea gives him a skeptical, appraising look, sizing him up.

ANTHEA

(Clapping her hands, once, sharply)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

*Fantastic! We've had tons of interest,
but I've got a good vibe about you,
Elliot.*

She stands, expecting him to follow.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

Ready to check out the room?

Elliot takes a deep, silent breath. He stands, adjusting his rented suit jacket.

ELLIOT

Lead the way.

Anthea guides Elliot out of the living room. They start up a spiral staircase. It is flanked by enormous, expensive oil paintings of historic hunt scenes.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

ELLIOT (V.O)

*Three sets of these cursed things. This
place is gorgeous. Devonshire Moors.
Classic country estate. No signal for
miles, I bet. Which is exactly why I
chose it.*

They reach the top of the final spiral staircase. Anthea stops abruptly. She reaches for a long, wooden BROOMSTICK resting against the wall.

She uses the broomstick to unlatch a small wooden door set into the ceiling. A rickety set of pull-down steps cascades noisily into the hallway.

ANTHEA

And ta-da!

She gestures enthusiastically toward the dark, gaping hole.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)

I promised you total privacy up here.

Elliot stares up into the attic abyss. He sees a scattering of cobwebs near the edges of the opening.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

*The attic. The bloody attic. Nowhere in
the ad did it say: 'Bunk in the Roof.'*

Anthea watches him, beaming with pride.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIOT
(Squinting up)
Is that where my room is?

ANTHEA
*Isn't it grand? It was my husband
Roger's brainwave to convert the attic.
Earning some extra cash and all that
jazz. He single-handedly transformed it.
Quite the handyman, that one.*

Elliot glances from the rough opening to Anthea's beaming, proud face.

ELLIOT
*Oh, great. I struggle with assembling
IKEA furniture.*

Anthea ignores the joke. She holds a small, shaky TORCH toward him. Her hand trembles slightly.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Isn't there a light up there?

ANTHEA
*Of course... but it's not very bright at
the moment.*

Anthea grabs the rickety, woodworm-ridden pull-down steps, holding them steady for him. The gesture is clear: Climb.

ELLIOT (V.O.)
*I fully expect her to yank these stairs
away once I'm halfway up. If she knew
the full story, she absolutely should.*

ANTHEA
*You'll love it up there. We recently
gave it a fresh coat of paint, too.*

Elliot takes the dim torch and begins to climb into the darkness.

INT. RUTHERFORD ATTIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elliot's head pops through the opening. The ceiling is low and arched. The space is vast and pitch black. He switches on the torch, but the beam is feeble and flickers, desperately needing new batteries.

The air is thick with the stench of DAMPNESS. There is no trace of fresh paint.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He gropes the wall near the opening, searching for a light switch, but finds nothing.

ANTHEA (O.S.)
*You can blast your TV and music as loud
as you please up there! Once that door's
shut, we won't hear a thing.*

Elliot shuffles his feet into the attic space. Before he can react, the attic door slams shut with a loud BANG.

Elliot is plunged into absolute darkness, save for the weak, dying flicker of the torch. The damp, death-like stench is overwhelming. He is forced to crouch under the low ceiling.

Pounding Panic.

He slams his hand against the attic door.

ELLIOT
(Muffled)
Hello? Anthea?

He pounds again. The door remains tightly shut.

After a moment of dead silence, Elliot hears a FUMBLING sound from below.

The attic door suddenly swings open again, bathing Elliot in a sliver of hallway light. Anthea is standing on the ladder, looking up at him.

INT. RUTHERFORD ATTIC ROOM / HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Anthea holds the attic door open, the broom still in her hand.

ANTHEA
*Oh, I am so sorry. That door's been
acting up forever. I keep nagging Roger
to fix it, but he's as stubborn as a
mule.*

Elliot nods, trying to dismiss the brief moment of terror.

ANTHEA (CONT'D)
(A bit flustered)
*Despite the door, this room's not too
shabby. The light switch is right above
you. Give it a tug.*

Elliot reaches up and pulls a chain. The ceiling light flickers, then beams on.

(CONTINUED)