

SEVEN MAGPIES

by

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Episode 1

60 minute TV drama pilot

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INT. PSYCHIATRIC UNIT - UNSPECIFIED TIME OF DAY

LAUREN. Early 30s. Lost eyes. Unbrushed hair. Weary, ashen face. She's wearing some kind of hospital gown.

A PSYCHIATRIST sitting opposite speaks.

PSYCHIATRIST

Do you know where you are?

LAUREN stares. Is she on some kind of medication? Did she even register the question? Moments pass. Eventually --

LAUREN

Yes.

PSYCHIATRIST

Why do you think you are here?

More staring at nothing in particular. Seconds tick by.

PSYCHIATRIST

Lauren?

The prompt breaks her distracted state. She looks straight at the source of the voice, her face impassive yet fragile.

LAUREN

I did a very bad thing.

INT. LAUREN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

LAUREN. Dressed for work. Her job, whatever it is, demands smart formal clothes, tied-back hair, subtle make-up.

She stands before a full-length mirror. Her reflection stares back at her with a chilly air of uncertainty.

Sensing ominous company, she slowly turns to face --

-- a STRANGE GUY in his 20s (DANNY) glaring at her from the corner of the room, an ugly open gash on the side of his head, a crater-esque wound on his forehead, his once-smart white shirt splattered with claret. WTF?

But LAUREN isn't alarmed. She seems to know him.

LAUREN

I can do this. You've lost.

She shuts her eyes. Deep breath. Opens them to find --

-- DANNY, the vision, the ghost, whatever, has vanished.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

It's a spacious fitted kitchen, all mod cons, in a house built with the bricks of success.

Meet MARK, LAUREN'S husband, late 30s, yet retaining a youthful glint in his eye. Upon LAUREN'S entry, he hands her a coffee.

MARK

You don't need to prove yourself to anybody if you're not ready.

LAUREN

What I need, Mark, is to feel useful again. Part of it all.

MARK

It's only been five months.

LAUREN

I'm hardly likely to forget, am I?

She realises her tone was maybe a tad too harsh.

LAUREN

Look. I appreciate your concern. But I can't play the hermit card forever. Besides, Bitchface Anne has been standing in for me. God knows what I'll be returning to. The sooner I get her away from my desk, the better.

She takes a good swig of her coffee, then places the mug on the nearest worksurface. She can't finish it, she hasn't got time.

LAUREN

I'll see you tonight.

MARK goes to hug his wife, to kiss her goodbye. Her response, a flinch, raised hands, a backward step.

LAUREN

No!

MARK. Wounded by her rejection. Awkward stares. Then --

LAUREN

I have to go.

She grabs her jacket, her handbag, and she leaves.

INT. OPEN-PLAN OFFICE SPACE - MORNING

An apprehensive, self-conscious LAUREN saunters past a layout of desks within booths.

Inside their open-plan cells, WORK COLLEAGUES clock her arrival and stare, awkward, not knowing what to say.

She walks past a separate room, a supervisor's office, and peers through the open door without stopping, locking eyes with the sole occupant, a WOMAN seated behind a desk.

Upon the sight of LAUREN, her face journeys through surprise, ill at ease, indifference. It's BITCHFACE ANNE.

The door to an office further down opens. NEVILLE, her boss, steps out, clutching paperwork, thrown by LAUREN'S arrival.

NEVILLE

Oh. Lauren. I wasn't expecting you back for at least another month or s--

LAUREN

Daytime TV doesn't float my boat.

It was no joke. Her face serious, her manner steadfast.

NEVILLE

Okaaaay. You'd better step inside.

LAUREN sails past NEVILLE into his office. NEVILLE spots BITCHFACE ANNE looking his way from her own doorway. They trade troubled glances. Then the boss enters his office and shuts out the world.

INT. NEVILLE'S OFFICE - MORNING

NEVILLE makes himself comfortable behind his desk. Places his paperwork on the flat surface. Takes a gulp of his mug of tea. Opposite, LAUREN sits in silence.

NEVILLE

So. Lauren. How are you? I do hope you're over the worst of your --

LAUREN

I'll feel a lot better once Bitchface Anne has been turfed out of my office. Any chance of that happening, like, straight away?

NEVILLE

Ah. I think I need to fill you in.

LAUREN eyes him with suspicion.

NEVILLE

You'll be pleased to know, in your absence, Anne has been doing a cracking job. Which is why I've... well, the company has decided... to permanently hand the position over to her.

LAUREN. Shocked. Appalled.

LAUREN

Am I being dismissed?

NEVILLE

Of course not. We just feel, under the circumstances, it might be in your best interest to consider a less-demanding role.

Livid o'clock, LAUREN'S chair scrapes back, she takes to her feet, both palms slammed flat upon the desk.

LAUREN

Are you shitting me?

NEVILLE

Now, now. There's no need for that kind of language.

LAUREN

I disagree. Crap. Fuck. Bollocks.

NEVILLE

Lauren, please. I know you've had your fair share of family problems, but --

LAUREN

Family problems? My six-year-old daughter was killed by a hit-and-run driver!

Seething, she steps back. Awaits his response. Nothing.

LAUREN

Right, that's it. I quit!

NEVILLE

You don't mean that.

LAUREN

Try me.

NEVILLE

I won't accept your resignation.

LAUREN

Oh, really?

She knocks over his mug, spilling tea over his paperwork.

He leaps to his feet, shaking liquid from paper.

LAUREN

How about now?

INT. OPEN-PLAN OFFICE SPACE - MORNING

LAUREN bursts free of her boss's office and marches along the room. Her COLLEAGUES gawp as she slows to a halt outside her former office. She paints a plastic smile --

INT. LAUREN'S FORMER OFFICE - MORNING

-- and breezes inside, faux warm and friendly. Behind her desk, an apprehensive BITCHFACE ANNE steels herself.

LAUREN

Anne. Darling. Let me be the first to congratulate you.

LAUREN grabs BITCHFACE ANNE'S open flask upon her desk, a homemade kale and broccoli smoothie.

Whoops, green yucky goo vomits upon a horror-struck BITCHFACE ANNE'S head. Revenge dealt, LAUREN exits.

INT. OPEN-PLAN OFFICE SPACE - MORNING

LAUREN marches towards us, the genesis of a triumphant grin attempting yet failing to sprout through the sheer hurt and betrayal this woman is feeling right now.

EXT. SHOP-LINED STREET - LATE MORNING

Almost zombie-like, LAUREN shuffles along the street.

Oh, she clocks a TODDLER in an unsupervised buggy, close to the entrance of a convenience store.

She squats low before the infant, smiling as she takes his tiny hand and gives it a shake.

LAUREN

Hello you. Where's your mummy?

The pissed off MOTHER appears, early 20s, plastic bag of goods in hand, yanking the buggy away from the suspected female perv and pushing it with haste along the street.

LAUREN

I wasn't going to hurt him.

A tad rattled by the incident, LAUREN studies her surroundings. Aha, she spots a pub across the street.

INT. PUB - MIDDAY

The pub is empty. LAUREN sits alone at a table by the window, staring at a neat dark rum. Not drinking it. Just staring at it.

A SUITED MAN enters the premises and walks over to her. This is JOHN, a CID policeman.

JOHN

You planning on drinking that?

She looks up. There's recognition. But also contempt.

LAUREN

What do you want, John?

He sits down without invitation.

JOHN

Nothing. I was walking past.
Spotted you through the window. So
I figured I'd pop in and say
hello.

No comment from her. He indicates to the drink.

JOHN

Does this mean you've once again
fallen off the wagon?

LAUREN

If you must know, I've been dry
for months.

JOHN

Then why order the drink?

LAUREN

Maybe it helps to remind me I no longer need it.

JOHN

How's life been treating you?

LAUREN

Every day is one big fucking bed of roses.

For a moment, JOHN stares at her. Then --

JOHN

I miss you, Lauren.

LAUREN

Don't even go there.

JOHN

Why not? We had something good, you know we did. We still could.

LAUREN

Is it a bird, is it a plane? No, it's Short Memory Man.

JOHN is silenced, thrown by her escalating sarcasm.

LAUREN

Quit pretending you don't know what I'm talking about.

JOHN

You can't keep blaming yourself for what happened.

LAUREN

I blame us both. And if you don't change the subject right now, I swear, I will seriously lose it.

LAUREN glares at him. He stares back at her, employing the kind of unsolicited sympathetic face you'd love to punch to oblivion.

JOHN

You need to accept, at the end of the day, that terrible incident was beyond your control.

LAUREN bangs her fist hard on the table.

LAUREN

Wrong! At the end of the day, if I hadn't been so fucking busy shagging you, my child would still be alive!

Sod this, it's time for LAUREN to depart, her drink abandoned. And as she rockets towards the exit --

JOHN

When you've calmed down, call me.

LAUREN

I deleted your number.

And she's gone.

The freshly jilted JOHN notices the PUB LANDLORD gawping at him from the bar. Cue the embarrassed smile.

JOHN

It's okay. I'm a police officer.

INT. DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

LAUREN and MARK eating dinner, a civilised act betrayed by an uncomfortable silence which heavies the air. Until --

MARK

So let me get this straight. You knocked a mug of tea all over your manager's paperwork. On purpose. And then you poured a smoothie over Anne's head.

LAUREN

Bitchface Anne's head, yes.

LAUREN'S face. Emotionless. Zero remorse.

MARK

Riiiiight. And is it safe to assume, as a result, your employment there has been terminated?

LAUREN

No idea. I didn't hang around long enough to find out.

MARK loses his knife and fork to his plate, then rubs his face with both palms, trying to understand.

MARK

You can't just... attack people.

LAUREN

That evil witch had it coming. And Neville gave her my job! I've worked bloody hard to get where I am... where I was. And now she's lapping up a promotion she doesn't deserve.

She throws down her cutlery, appetite lost. Plants one hand across her stressed brow, the other flat upon the table.

He sees his opportunity and offers across a hand of unity. Their fingertips touch. But no, she yanks her hand away.

MARK

Oh, Lauren. How did we even get to this point?

LAUREN

You know how. You had an affair.

MARK

It was hardly an affair...

LAUREN

You slept with another woman.

MARK

And you slept with another man.

#awkward.

MARK

While we're on the subject. Us sleeping in separate rooms. It's not working.

LAUREN

I wondered when this would crop up.

MARK

Is it a crime to want my Lauren back? The one I used to know?

LAUREN

She's gone, Mark. Former Me ceased to exist the day our daughter died.

MARK

So that's it, is it? The end of our marriage. Is that truly what you want?

Repulsed, she studies his face, his eyes, his manner.

LAUREN

I don't get it. How are you able to function? Why aren't you hurting like me? Why aren't you devastated?

MARK

I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Furious, he leaps to his feet, holding nothing back.

MARK

I have done so much these past few months to keep this house going! To keep us both sane! Working from home when I can. Cooking our meals. Sorting out the bills. Putting up with your moods, your... episodes!

LAUREN goes to respond, but --

MARK

No, you bloody hear me out for once! I've tried my hardest to relieve you of the pressure. To allow you to grieve in peace. Why? Because this, Lauren, is my coping mechanism. My method of dealing with the pain. So don't you ever, ever accuse me of not feeling the way you do. On the outside, I may look unbreakable... but behind the mask, I am falling to pieces.

Eyes welling up with the grief kept hidden for so long, MARK offers one final glare. And then he departs. Slam!

All LAUREN can do is sit in guilty silence.

INT. LAUREN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Alone, LAUREN lays awake in her double bed, staring at the ceiling. Decision made, she can't stay forever horizontal. She tosses aside the duvet and clambers out of bed.