

House of Chapters

by
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INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Close-up of the front door of the apartment, from inside. Brief MAIN TITLES fade in over this static image. Voices from the other side of the door can be heard as two people approach through an echo-laden corridor.

GEORGE

This is certainly the sort of property a young professional of your calibre should be looking at. Especially in the current market.

PAYNE

I must admit, it is well located, Mr. Wellington.

GEORGE

Please, please... Call me George.

Keys jangle as George opens the door, and the two men enter the apartment, which is large and unfurnished, with spotless wooden floors. Bright sunlight floods the main living area through the luxuriously sized windows.

George is a garishly dressed estate agent, with a thick-knotted tie and gel assisted hairstyle. Mr. Payne (the prospective buyer) is wearing a well-tailored dark suit and has a far less irritating hair style.

George gesticulates while talking.

GEORGE

And I'm sure you'll agree it's ideally suited for a young couple. Imagine, if you will, your wife preparing a dinner for the both of you in the kitchen over here while you relax on the balcony with the evening papers.

PAYNE

I'm single actually.

GEORGE

Excellent! Well then it could be any number of women, couldn't it? You're absolutely right. Why limit yourself Harry?

(Checking)

Do you mind if I call you Harry?

PAYNE

I'd prefer if you didn't.

GEORGE

Of course. You didn't say what you did for a living, Mr. Payne.

PAYNE

I'm a businessman.

GEORGE

Really? What sort of business.

PAYNE

I work for myself.

GEORGE

Sounds impressive. That must be good for getting chicks. Am I right? I'm not complaining, you understand - I do alright, but I know that the ladies like someone who have their own business.

PAYNE

I'm sure.

GEORGE

Heh, there was this one night we were in quite a swanky West End joint - me and the lads from the office - and the 'I'm an estate agent' thing was getting us nowhere. And it was killing me. It really was. I mean if I see a good looking girl and I know I can't have her. Man... That just wrecks my head. So when they asked us what we did we just told them what we thought they wanted to hear. Anything that would get 'em hot. You know? So I was a surgeon for one and I traded bonds for the next -

Payne doesn't appear to be very interested in this story, not that this stops George telling it. He nods occasionally and inspects the apartment as the 'tour' continues.

GEORGE

No morals. I think that's the best way to approach the mating game. There's no point trying to outfox 'em. They'll have you on every front when you're being sincere. And they can sense fear the same way sharks smell blood in the water. Mark my words - be ruthless.

GEORGE(cont'd)

Then you always get what you're after. All's fair in love and -

PAYNE

(Very seriously)

I've found a sense of humour helps.

This stops George in his tracks.

GEORGE

Yeah. I've heard that too.

He takes a breath and moves on. They wander down a small corridor, at the end of which are two doors.

GEORGE

And while we're on the subject of the fairer sex, may I present to you...

(Opening one door)

The master bedroom.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bedroom, in sharp contrast to the part of the apartment we've just seen, is generously furnished. Photos adorn most of the flat surfaces and the bed and windows are decorated with elegant fabrics.

Payne and George are rooted to the spot as they, and we, look into the room and see a canoodling couple in the bed.

George marches in, but they seem completely oblivious to his intrusion. The female is very attractive - something which George, despite his anger, obviously notices.

GEORGE

What the bloody hell do you think you're doing here? Did Vanessa give you the keys? I've warned her about that! I'm showing a client round... Hey!

LADY IN THE BED

I love you Harold. I'll always love you.

GEORGE

Hey! Are you listening? I'm talking to you!

Payne gravely places a hand on George's shoulder.

PAYNE

I don't think they can hear you.
And...

The cam pans to show that the male half of the embracing couple bears an uncanny resemblance to Payne.

PAYNE

And I think that's me in the bed.

George and Payne fall utterly silent.

MAN IN THE BED

I love you too Sally. Will you
marry me?

The Lady In The Bed grins like Tigger as she holds Payne's 'double' tightly to her.

LADY IN THE BED

Yes! Oh yes! Of course I will.
Nothing would make me happier.
Mrs. Sally Payne! It has a ring
to it, don't you think?

The Man reaches over and into a drawer in the bedside table.

MAN IN THE BED

And speaking of rings.

He produces a small, plush jeweller's gift box. As they open it together, Payne cannot avert his gaze. George takes hold of him and bundles him out of the room, slamming the door shut and resting his full weight against it.

GEORGE

(Exasperated)

I thought you said you didn't
have a wife!

PAYNE

I don't. And even if I did, I'm
not in there with her, am I? I'm
out here. With you!

Payne mops sweat from his brow with a handkerchief. They stand in silence for a moment, both staring into separate middle distances.

PAYNE

So. What do we do now?

GEORGE

Well I'm definitely not going
back in there!

PAYNE

What's through this other door
then?

GEORGE

(Uncertainly)

That's the second bedroom...

PAYNE

Shall we?

George lunges to stop Payne from opening the second door but is too late. Through the doorway two figures can be made out in a much darker, barely furnished room. One stands while the other kneels in front of the first.

Payne and George exchange glances.

Close in to show that the two figures are actually two new 'versions' of George and Payne. Payne II stands over the kneeling George II, holding a gun to his head.

GEORGE II

(Sobbing)

I swear to God, Mr. Payne. I have
no idea what is going on. This is
nothing to do with me. You have
to believe me.

GEORGE

Oh God. Oh God!

George (I) pulls the door shut. Just before it is fully closed the gun goes off, illuminating the room inside.

Payne glares accusingly at George, who is understandably perturbed by what they have both just seen.

PAYNE

Why would I want to kill you?

GEORGE

Why would you have a gun?

PAYNE

I always carry a gun.

GEORGE

A gun? Why ? I thought you said
you were a businessman?

PAYNE

I am. And everyone in my business
carries a gun.

GEORGE

(Throwing his hands in
the air)

I don't want to know. I really
don't. Whatever is going on here
is too much for me. I'm just
trying to sell this place. I have
to get out of here! I don't even
know what we just saw...

While George panics, Payne seems quite calm.

PAYNE

We're seeing the future - isn't
it obvious?

GEORGE

The future? What are you -

PAYNE

Have you read that book by
Stephen Hawking?

GEORGE

No. Have you?

PAYNE

No, but I did see a TV special on
it last year. I think we're stuck
in something like a wormhole.
Time is looping back on itself
somehow. We're seeing the future
being played out right in front
of us. Or maybe just one of many
possible futures.

GEORGE

I'm really not following at
all...

PAYNE

We could be looking into
alternative universes. The future
is not fixed. I may or may not
propose to the woman we just saw
in there. I may never even meet
her.

GEORGE

And you may or may not shoot me
in the head?

PAYNE

Exactly. And as it stands, in
this universe at least, I have no
reason to kill you. So relax.

GEORGE

Relax? How can I relax? Even if we ignore the fact that I just witnessed my own murder and am standing not two feet from my apparent killer, this is quite outside the scope of my experience. We left my comfort zone about a hundred miles back. I don't see how you can be taking all of this in your stride.. Does this sort of thing happen to you often?

PAYNE

No, of course not. Calm down. You're becoming hysterical. I've just learned that no matter what life throws at you it pays to remain calm. Anxiety serves no real purpose.

GEORGE

Easy for you to say, Harry. You didn't just see your brains spray out the side of your skull.

PAYNE

I already explained, I am not a psycho. There's no percentage in offing you, so why would I bother? You're only an estate agent.

George misses the last of what Payne says as he is distracted by something on the floor, out of shot. Payne notices this and glances down.

CUT TO:

Yet another version of Payne. This one is slightly older and dressed in a more homely fashion than his sharply dressed, young doppelganger. He kneels on the floor a few feet away from the two onlookers, and plays with three children, all under six. There are brightly coloured toys strewn across the now carpeted floor.

While Payne is transfixed by this vision of family, George flips out and leaps over the newly materialised father to reach the front door of the apartment.

GEORGE

Right, I've had enough. I can't take any more. I am gone. Let yourself out when you're finished with this madness.

George flings open the front door, but instead of finding the hallway, as he expects, his exit is blocked by the appearance of another bedroom. This one, too, is occupied. He looks back at Payne.

PAYNE
Three bedrooms?

GEORGE
It should be the front door. I can't get out. It won't let me leave.

PAYNE
Well if we're being forced to watch, why don't we settle into the role of voyeur and see how this plays out. What good would it do to complain anyway? Who is there to hear us?

Payne joins George at the entrance to this new bedroom.

PAYNE
So what do we have here? Nice bedroom. Could do with a bit of a redesign, though. Looks too much like a hotel room for my taste.

From the bed we hear the conversation of another couple.

PAYNE
(Enjoying this)
Shhh...

We see that this time there seems to be a duplicate of George in the bedroom. He strokes the back of a young lady, whose face we cannot yet see.

GEORGE III
The first time I ever saw you, I knew I had to make you mine. No matter how difficult it was going to be.

Payne sniggers as he slaps George heavily on the back.

PAYNE
Looks like you get lucky too, George! Way to go. I knew you had it in you. I wonder what you told her you did for a living?

The lady in the bed turns around to face her lover, and we can see that it is Sally - Payne's phantom fiancée from earlier. George looks round at Payne fearfully.

SALLY

But George, if Harry ever finds out about us you know what he'll do. He's a dangerous man. He's killed dozens of times before and thought nothing of it!

GEORGE III

Please, my love, don't worry. How will he ever discover us? It's only you and me. And to hell with the rest of the world.

George backs away from the door. The light which was pouring in through the front window has now faded and the room is dull.

PAYNE

Yeah. How will I ever discover this, George?

GEORGE

No. No - you don't understand. I wouldn't. I would never... Not with another man's wife.

Close-up on Payne, who grits his teeth as he reaches inside his suit jacket and produces his gun.

PAYNE

Really, George? That's not what it looks like. Is it?

GEORGE

(Crying and falling to his knees)

I swear to God, Mr. Payne. I have no idea what is going on. This is nothing to do with me. You have to believe me.

Brief close-up of George, wide-eyed, as it dawns on him that he's acting out the scene he saw earlier.

PAYNE

I knew you were going to say that.

CUT TO:

The credits roll, white-on-black.

A loud gunshot rings out for a few seconds, after which there is about half a minute of silence before a short jazz tune.

After the credits...

INT. APARTMENT LIVING AREA - NIGHT

The room is dark. Payne reclines on a leather sofa that wasn't there before, still holding the gun. George's feet are just in shot, as his body lies on the floor.

PAYNE

(To George's corpse)

I like this place. I think I'll
take it.

FADE TO BLACK.