

1. INT. LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON.

Open on a spacious, brightly-lit room. It is sparsely-decorated but comfortable, and a large sofa sits pride of place in the centre. On the sofa sits JANE, utterly absorbed in reading a book; her expression is peaceful and beatific. A few moments pass as we share in her quiet contemplation.

Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. JANE jumps and stares in the direction of the sound, but doesn't move. Her expression is wary. She waits - there is another, louder knock. Still, JANE remains seated.

CLAIRE

(off)

Jane?

She knocks again, louder. JANE closes her book, deliberating.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Jane, hurry up! It's only me.

(beat, knocking again)

What are you doing? Jane? JANE!

JANE slides reluctantly from the sofa and trudges over to the door. She stops in front of it; CLAIRE knocks again, more insistently.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Jane, open the door, now! I swear, if you don't open this door or give me some sign of life in under ten seconds, I'm calling the police. You know I'll do it!

(beat)

FINE! You asked for it. Ten ... nine ... eight ... sev-!

JANE arranges her face into an unconvincing smile and opens the door to reveal a very irritated CLAIRE, who pushes immediately past her into the apartment. She is immaculately dressed in a freshly-ironed business suit, her hair pulled back into a tight bun.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Are you deaf?

JANE

Sorry, I was just-

CLAIRE

I've been knocking for ages.

JANE

I know, I heard you. I was in the bathroom.

CLAIRE
What were you doing in there?

JANE
What do you think?

BEAT.

CLAIRE
You were kind of a long time.

JANE
If you don't believe me, maybe
you'd like to go in and have a
rummage?
(she takes out her phone)
Here, I'll even get a picture up of
the Bristol Stool Chart if you
like-

CLAIRE
Alright, alright! Fine. Point
taken.

JANE puts her phone away.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
You just ... you can't do that. You
nearly gave me a heart attack. I
didn't know if ... I didn't know
what to think.

JANE
Claire, if I'd woken up this
morning and decided to end it all,
I can assure you I'd choose
something more comfortable than
drowning in my own toilet bowl.

CLAIRE
I absolutely *hate* it when you say
things like that.

JANE
(exasperated)
For God's sake, I was clearly
joking-

CLAIRE
Well, don't. Just don't.

BEAT.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
You really scared me.

JANE
I didn't mean to. I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

I know.

They look at each other for a long time, until CLAIRE, uncomfortable, suddenly breaks eye contact. She begins to walk slowly around the room, closely scrutinising everything around her. She crosses to the sofa and picks up a pillow, looking beneath it before plumping it and rearranging it neatly. She wanders away, still peering around critically. She crosses to a nearby side table and runs a finger across it, holding it up to the light to check for dust. JANE, still standing by the door, watches her silently. Her expression is hard to read, caught somewhere between amusement and annoyance.

JANE

I'm sure I can get you a brochure,
if you're that interested.

CLAIRE starts.

CLAIRE

I was just-

JANE

Just poking your nose in, as usual.

BEAT.

CLAIRE

Don't start.

JANE

I'm not starting. It's just a bit
alarming to watch how little you
can resist interfering.

CLAIRE

I'm not interfering, I was just ...
just checking ...

JANE

Oh, really? Checking what, Claire?

BEAT.

JANE

Come on, enlighten me. I mean, I
already know that you think it's a
miracle that I haven't burned the
place down by now, but-

CLAIRE

That's not true.

JANE

Sure. Okay.

CLAIRE

Don't be ridiculous.

(beat)

But you can't deny that the last time I came, it wasn't exactly spotless-

JANE

Oh, Christ. Here we go: the obligatory lecture from Miss Perfect about all the ways my flat doesn't measure up to her exacting standards.

CLAIRE)

I wouldn't call not wanting clouds of flies to hover over my countertops 'exacting standards', but sure.

JANE

(angrily)

It was ONE fly, Claire. One. Singular, not plural. If you're going to exaggerate, at least make it convincing.

CLAIRE

I'm not exaggerating - it was barely fit for human habitation-

JANE (CONT'D)

Oh, and by the way, don't think I don't know that you told Mum.

BEAT.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

No, I didn't.

JANE

Don't lie. Little tip for you: if you're going to talk behind my back, maybe advise her against sending me giant gift baskets of Mr Muscle two days later.

CLAIRE

Well, forgive me! I didn't realise that it made me such a terrible person to not want my sister to get sick, but clearly-

JANE snorts loudly and walks away from CLAIRE toward the armchair, flopping into it with force.

JANE
I think that ship has sailed.

BEAT.

CLAIRE
Physically. I meant physically.

JANE neither replies nor looks at her; she seems to have lost interest in the conversation. CLAIRE watches her warily for a moment, then crosses the room to join her on the adjacent sofa.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Look, Jane. As usual, this has gotten off on the wrong foot.

JANE
It's not actually that hard to get off on the right foot, you know. The first step involves not rooting through my drawers.

CLAIRE
You can never just meet me halfway, can you?

JANE
Yes, I can, actually.

CLAIRE
Okay.

BEAT.

JANE
I just really don't appreciate being treated like a baby. Or like I can't cope.

CLAIRE
I don't think that you can't cope, and I'm not trying to overstep. I just want to make sure that you're okay. That's all. Nothing else.

JANE
Fine, but-

CLAIRE
And actually, that 'Miss Perfect' thing is a two-way street. Maybe you're right - maybe I don't always instinctively know how to handle it. But maybe you expect too much.

JANE looks at her for a moment, then nods. They fall silent for a long moment, avoiding eye contact. Then-

JANE

Do you want some tea or something?
I think I still have some of your
fancy fennel shit left over from
last time.

CLAIRE

That would be nice.

JANE

Alright. Let me have a look.

JANE gets up and leaves the room. CLAIRE remains seated. Spying JANE's book in front of her on the coffee table, she picks it up, turning it over to read the blurb. She shakes her head, half-amused, half-exasperated. She opens it carefully and flicks through a couple of pages. After a moment, JANE returns with two steaming mugs of tea.

CLAIRE

Still prefer to live in your
fantasy novels, I see?

JANE stops in front of her with the mugs and stares down at her.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Oh, for God's sake, stop it.

JANE

Congrats. You managed a grand total
of thirty seconds.

CLAIRE

You know I didn't mean anything by
that. All I meant was that you're
still spending a lot of your time
reading, that's all. It's good.
It's a good thing! Why do you have
to make it so-

JANE puts CLAIRE's tea mug down in front of her slightly too
forcefully, and a small amount spills on to the coffee table.

JANE

Look, Claire, I need to be clear
about something before we go any
further. I'm not doing this. I'm
not sitting here for the next hour
fencing off thinly-veiled questions
about my life. I'm not talking
about my future plans, I'm not
talking about my feelings and I'm
not, I repeat not, talking about my
mental health. I'm sorry, but I
just - I'm not doing it.

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

I didn't ask you to visit me, but since you keep taking it upon yourself to do it more often than both of us would like, I need you to respect what I'm saying. All I want is exactly the kind of boring, normal, excruciatingly awkward conversation about nothing remotely deep or useful that we used to have before you decided to pretend that we're close. If you can't do that, then I suggest you just leave now and save us both the hassle.

BEAT.

CLAIRE

You don't think we're close?

JANE

I mean ... do you?

There is a long pause as they look at each other. After a moment, JANE returns to her armchair.

CLAIRE

Am I at least allowed to ask you how you are?

JANE

Of course you are. And I'm fine, mostly. How are you?

CLAIRE

Good. A little stressed with work, I suppose, but what's new? I keep telling myself it's nothing I can't handle, but I'm not sure this time.

JANE

That sucks.

CLAIRE

Yeah.

BEAT.

JANE

I'm sure you'll sort it soon. You always do.

CLAIRE

I hope so.

A long, awkward silence falls. JANE sips her tea meditatively. CLAIRE cups her mug but doesn't drink, staring into its depths. Suddenly, she slams it back down on to the coffee table, standing up.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, but I can't do this. I can't sit here and exchange awkward small talk as though everything is normal and there isn't a colossal fucking elephant in the room.

JANE

Don't.

CLAIRE

You may be able to live happily in your little fantasy world, ignoring the problem and pretending that we can have a cute little sisterly chitchat, but I can't sit here and lie to myself the way that you clearly can. Frankly, with the way you've chosen to live I'd expect nothing less.

JANE

'Chosen to' - ?

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

But if I go along with this ridiculous charade, if I sit here and act like this is remotely normal, I'm not just participating in your behaviour - I'm *condoning* it.

JANE covers her face with her hands.

JANE (CONT'D)

Claire, please. Please just stop. I'm begging you-

CLAIRE

Look at you. Just look at yourself. What's happened to you? You used to be such a vibrant, happy person. You had interests, and dreams, and - and *friends*-

JANE

I do have friends-

CLAIRE

When this first started I thought it was just a phase. I thought that eventually, with time, you'd snap out of it and start to connect to your life again. I thought if I gave you enough space, you'd realise that life exists out *there*, not in here. But you've just hidden yourself further and further away.

JANE

Please-

CLAIRE

I miss you. Mum misses you. Don't you care? Don't you miss us, too?

JANE stands up suddenly, furious.

JANE

Of course I miss you. I miss everything - I miss my entire life! You come in here, you have a go, you lecture me ... you have no idea how I feel at all. You don't have a clue how lonely it is, cooped up in here day in, day out-

CLAIRE

Then do something about it, for God's sake! Don't just give up and accept it.

JANE

It's not that simple.

CLAIRE

Why not?

BEAT.

JANE

I don't know what you want me to say, Claire. I just ... I can't. I wish I could do what you're asking, I wish it more than anything. But I can't.

CLAIRE

You do realise that the way you live is quite literally used as a form of torture, don't you?

JANE

Yes, I'm aware of that, thanks. My condition doesn't have brain cell atrophy as a side effect.

CLAIRE

Your 'condition'.

JANE

It is a condition!

BEAT.

CLAIRE

I almost want to apologise to you.

JANE

Why? It's not your fault.

CLAIRE

I think I've done you a disservice, indulging this for such a long time the way that I have. Did you know that Mum wanted to ask Uncle Gary to just pick you up and carry you outside?

JANE

No, I didn't.

CLAIRE

Well, she did. But I refused. I told her that it wasn't our place to do that - that it wouldn't help you. That you had to come to it on your own. But now I'm starting to think that she was right. It was the worst thing I could have done.

JANE

No, it wasn't. It really wasn't.

CLAIRE

Because you're never going to, are you? You're never going to do it on your own. You're just going to let yourself fester inside these four walls, with all that talent and imagination going to waste.

JANE

That's not fair.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

And I see now that by allowing you to disappear, all I've done is lose you quicker. Well, you know what? Not anymore.

CLAIRE crosses the room toward JANE and grabs her by the arm.

JANE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

CLAIRE

This ends now - you're coming outside with me.

JANE begins to struggle and try to tug her arm out of CLAIRE's grasp as she pulls her toward the front door.

JANE

Claire, stop it.

CLAIRE

You can do it. All you need is a push.

CLAIRE continues to pull her, determined.

JANE
I mean it, let go!

CLAIRE
(ignoring her)
You're not living this ridiculous
existence anymore. The first step
will be the hardest, but after that
...

JANE pulls her arm away forcefully and tries to run, but
CLAIRE grabs her again and begins to grapple her toward the
door, pinning her arms to her sides. A look of panic spreads
across JANE's face.

JANE
No! Claire! Please ... please!
Please let go!

CLAIRE
You'll thank me later. You need
this! As soon as you feel the sun
on your face and breathe the fresh
air, you'll wish you'd - done - it
- sooner ...

JANE is becoming more and more distressed, thrashing and
howling in CLAIRE's arms like a wounded animal.

JANE
Let go! Stop! Stop it! Please don't
make me! PLEASE!
(beside herself,
incoherent)
YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME YOU'RE
GOING TO KILL ME YOU'RE GOING TO
KILL ME YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME
YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME!!

CLAIRE
(struggling to hold her)
Calm - down -

CLAIRE reaches the door and pulls it open, propping it with
her shoe. JANE's face contorts into a panic-stricken snarl as
she sees the exterior through the door. She lets out a blood-
curdling scream of abject terror.

Suddenly, she tears herself free, spins in CLAIRE's arms and
slaps her several times, raining fists upon her face and
neck; CLAIRE stumbles and falls back against the wall with
the force of the blows. JANE, tears streaming down her
cheeks, drops to the floor and scrambles away. She crouches
on the floor with her back against the armchair, breathing
heavily and sobbing.

Slowly, CLAIRE rises to her feet, clutching at her cheek as if stung. She stares at JANE coldly. JANE gazes up at her from the floor, horrified.

JANE

Claire ... please ...

Wordlessly, CLAIRE crosses the room to the sofa to pick up her bag. As she passes her, JANE tries to touch her leg. CLAIRE kicks sharply at her hand, and JANE recoils.

JANE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry - I don't know what came over me ... I would never, ever want to hurt you, you know that. Claire, please ... please ... don't leave like this, don't leave me on my own ...

Reaching the door, CLAIRE slings her bag on to her shoulder. Her face is red on one side, her expression cold and unsympathetic.

CLAIRE

Why not? You've made it quite clear that you're happier that way.

JANE

No ... please ...

CLAIRE

I see it now. You're beyond help.

JANE

Don't say that. Please don't say that to me, I can't bear it.

CLAIRE

I have tossed and turned my way through countless sleepless nights worrying about you. I've spent double my food budget every week for a year just to make sure that you aren't starving yourself. I've even gotten into trouble at work for being on my phone too often, purely to check how many hours ago you were last online because I was so afraid of what you might do. Well, no more. You want to wither away in here on your own? Be my guest - I hope you rot.

CLAIRE leaves, slamming the door behind her.

JANE

(sobbing)

Claire! CLAIRE!

JANE scrambles to her feet and takes one faltering step toward the closed door. She stands, rooted to the spot, staring at it. There is a pause. Then she sinks slowly to the floor again, clutching her knees tightly to her chest.

FADE OUT.