

THE COTTAGE

While house hunting, a woman finds herself playing a game she can only win with the truth.

25-DE06-W31

FADE IN:

EXT. VERITY LANE, A TOWN SOMEWHERE - DAY

The white cottage with the light blue door looks like a delicate beacon atop the freshly landscaped hill. Vibrant yellow daffodils line the driveway.

A "for sale" sign with a smiling blonde real estate agent's face is planted next to the open iron gate.

Happy chatter resounds from kids at homes nearby.

INT. SUV - DAY

BEN and LIZ (both 40) sit smothered by uncomfortable silence. Ben drives. Liz watches the mind numbing map arrow move on the car's display screen.

SIRI's robotic voice echoes through the car. "In two miles turn left onto Verity Lane."

Ben surveys the rural terrain out his window.

BEN
Seems nice out here.

He glances at Liz.

BEN (CONT'D)
What do you think?

She makes no move. Her eyes stay fixed on the screen.

BEN (CONT'D)
Liz.

She startles.

LIZ
Huh?

He's at a loss.

BEN
Nothing. I was just saying it's nice here.

She gives the outside world a quick look.

LIZ
Oh. Yeah.

Silence again. Liz returns to her thoughts. And the arrow.

INT. SUV - MOMENTS LATER

The car approaches the cottage. Liz uses her hand to shade her face from the sun. A flicker of hope flashes in her eyes.

LIZ
This is it.

She points to the drive on the left. They pull in, and the SUV disappears down the path between the yellow flowers.

EXT. COTTAGE

Liz and Ben ascend the steps to the front stoop.

Ben knocks on the door. Liz runs her fingers down a crack in the cottage's facade.

The door swings opens. Liz retracts her hand from the flaw.

Liz and Ben stand face to face with the blonde realtor.

CECILY HOUGHTON, (40's) hand outstretched, stands in the doorway. She's very professional in dress and manner.

CECILY
Liz. Ben. It's so nice to finally
meet you in person.

They each shake her hand.

CECILY (CONT'D)
Please. Come in.

In Vanna White fashion, she extends her open palm toward the interior of the home.

Liz and Ben pass through the threshold.

INT. COTTAGE

Cecily shuts the door behind them.

The main living room is large and open.

The walls are a snowy white. A touch up here or there wouldn't hurt. The dents and dings in the wooden accents add to their rustic charm.

Two hallways branch off on either side and a staircase extends up the wall. A fireplace, embellished with hand painted tiles, is the focal point.

It's imperfect but idyllic. Lived in, but well loved.

Liz takes it all in. She crosses the room to the fireplace. Ben gives the room a quick once over and looks to Liz.

LIZ
(to Cecily)
It's beautiful.

BEN
You should know. How many times did
you look at the pictures online?

He smiles playfully at Liz. She gives him a feeble one in return.

CECILY
I'm glad you like it. It is quite a
unique home.

Cecily takes a place near Liz. Her hands clasped casually at her waist. She looks between Liz and Ben.

Liz moves to the staircase. She gives the railing a gentle shake.

Ben stares out the front window.

CECILY (CONT'D)
You're from the city?

Liz nods.

LIZ
Yeah. We're just looking to -

Liz shrugs one shoulder.

LIZ (CONT'D)
- get away.

Cecily smiles at Liz.

CECILY
This could be a great place for a
new start.

Liz turns her focus back to the room. She subconsciously spins the ring on her left hand. Ben watches her. Cecily notices.

CECILY (CONT'D)
And you've been married ten years?

Ben tilts his head slightly at the woman they just met. Liz is unfazed.

LIZ
It'll be ten years in June. Yes.

Liz turns and points down a hallway.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Uh. Can I — ?

She makes her way that direction.

Cecily, finger in the air, steps forward.

CECILY
Wait.

Liz turns back.

LIZ
Oh I'm sorry. I'll let you lead the way.

CECILY
No. It's not that. There's just something we need to do first.

Cecily straightens her skirt and clasps her hands again.

CECILY (CONT'D)
I just need to know if you're ready?

LIZ
Oh okay. Sure. For what?

Cecily steps forward.

CECILY
The game.

Liz chuckles in confusion.

LIZ
What game?

Her eyebrows raise in question.

CECILY
(to Liz)
The game you came here to play.

Liz looks to Ben, puzzled.

Ben's not there.

She scrutinizes the room. No Ben. Liz looks at Cecily in alarm.

LIZ
Where'd he go?!

CECILY
Don't worry Liz. He will be here
when the game is over.

Cecily steps slightly closer.

CECILY (CONT'D)
Are you ready?

Liz's eyes are wide. Confused. Cecily walks toward the window. Her heels clack softly on the hardwood floor.

LIZ
For *WHAT*? What game? I don't
understand.

Liz's eyes dart to the door. It's unlocked. She looks at Cecily. Cecily draws the blinds. The room becomes dim.

Liz doesn't move. Her eyes meet Cecily's. They're kind. It's safe here. Liz relaxes.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Okay.

Cecily nods.

A holographic 3D image appears in front of Liz. She moves backward. Her eyes search for something that makes sense. There's no projector. No computer. Just Cecily. And the image.

In the image, a little girl sits on a couch with a coloring book on her lap. A box of markers beside her. A woman stands behind her.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Wait. How did you do that? That —
that's just in my head.

Liz closes her eyes and rubs her fingers on her temples.

LIZ (CONT'D)
This has all gotta be in my head.

She looks up at the image again. It's really there.

Sadness flashes on her face.

Cecily steps into the light that seems to come from nowhere.
It illuminates her.

CECILY
There is only one way to win the
game. Find what's true, Liz.

Liz scrunches up her forehead like it's in pain.

LIZ
What??

Cecily turns her attention toward the image.

CECILY
You know this moment well. You
relive it often.

Liz shrugs.

LIZ
That's me when I was little. And my
mom. That's it.

Silence.

CECILY
I can help you. If you'd like.

Cecily looks at the image and it comes to life. Liz gasps.
She scans Cecily for a remote. Anything. She comes up short.

LIZ
How — ?!

Cecily tilts her head toward the holograms. Liz concedes. She
watches the silent scene play out.

LIVE IMAGE: The WOMAN (30's) approaches the LITTLE GIRL (6)
on the couch, suitcase in hand. She bends down and kisses the
top of her head.

The little girl rips a page out of her coloring book and hands it to the woman. She folds it up and stuffs it in her pocket.

The woman walks out the front door. The little girl gets up and watches her get into the car with a MAN. Tears stain the little girl's face.

END LIVE IMAGE

CECILY

This moment — and many just like it
— left you scarred.

Cecily waits. Liz, unsure.

LIZ

Okay — yeah. So my mom left a lot.

Sympathy flashes in Cecily's eyes.

CECILY

Now think about what is true.

Liz looks longingly at the woman in the image.

LIZ

I — I don't know.

CECILY

You do know.

Liz's eyes shift to the little girl.

LIZ

I was worthy of love.

Cecily nods and raises her eyebrows.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I *am* worthy of love.

Liz looks surprised by the words she just spoke.

CECILY

Believe it, Liz.

LIZ

I am created in the image of God.
And I am worthy of love.

Liz's words appear in large black script across the wall.
They glow and fade away. Liz watches in wonder.

Pleased, Cecily smiles and another 3D image appears.

This time it's a teenage girl. Liz. She sits at a lunch table with two friends. One of them holds something in her hand.

Liz shakes her head.

LIZ (CONT'D)
This one? Really?

Liz's face flushes.

LIZ (CONT'D)
That age is hard for everybody. But
it was fine. I survived.

Cecily cues the image and the scene comes to life.

LIVE IMAGE: The object in GIRL 1's hand is a necklace. She boastfully places it around her neck while the other girls watch in adoration.

GIRL 2 pulls a card out of her backpack. It has a huge heart on the front. She opens it and places it in the middle of the table. The girls marvel at the gifts. Liz gathers her trash and casually leaves the table.

END LIVE IMAGE

She looks up at Cecily. Cecily's eyes are focused on her. Liz sighs.

CECILY
This moment made you believe an
untruth. One you still carry.

Liz avoids eye contact. Liz cringes at the thought. Then her shoulders drop.

LIZ
Middle school. Forty. What's the
difference?

She throws her hands up in defeat. Her eyes meet Cecily's.

CECILY
I know it's hard. But what is true,
Liz?

Liz looks at her own face in the reflection of the window.

LIZ
How do we ever live up to those
standards?

CECILY
Look deeper.

Liz smiles like she sees herself for the first time.

LIZ
It's not the reflection that
matters.

She places her hand on her chest.

LIZ (CONT'D)
My beauty comes from within.

Her words appear on the wall, glow, and fade again.

Cecily changes the image.

This time it's Liz at a park. She is mid-jog on the running path. There's a playground to her left.

Liz shuts her eyes tightly.

LIVE IMAGE: Liz jogs past a playground. A group of FOUR MOMS (30-40) sit at a picnic table. They talk and laugh, surrounded by snacks and toys. Their children play close by.

END LIVE IMAGE

LIZ (CONT'D)
That moment seems like nothing — I
know. But — the thing is — I'm not
a mother. And sometimes — sometimes
that feels like I'm nothing.

Tears fill Liz's eyes. Cecily comes over and stands inches away from her.

CECILY
Liz.

Liz fights back tears.

CECILY (CONT'D)
Look for the truth. You will find
that you are *many* things.

Cecily stays close by. Liz forces herself to look at the image.

She loses herself in thought. She places her hand gently on her abdomen. She takes a deep breath.

LIZ

I can nurture — even though I'm not
a mom. Children do not make me
complete.

Liz's lets her hand slowly fall.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I am complete.

Cecily nods. The script appears and goes again. Liz wipes the
tears from her eyes.

CECILY

You're doing great. The game is
almost over.

Another image appears. This image is Liz and Ben. They sit in
their parked car. They appear to be in deep conversation.

Liz bites her lip. She subconsciously spins the ring on her
left hand again.

LIZ

You don't have to play the video.
Please. Don't.

Cecily nods. Liz drops to her knees. Cecily squats down
beside her.

CECILY

You're almost there, Liz. Find what
you came here to find.

Liz sobs.

LIZ

I was ashamed. I was scared he
would think I was a failure if he
knew.

CECILY

If he knew what?

LIZ

That I was depressed. And that I
needed help.

Liz gestures to the image.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I checked myself into a facility
that day.

She drops her head in her hand and cries.

LIZ (CONT'D)

But he wasn't ashamed. He never has been. I know that now. I'm the one who was.

Cecily puts her hand lightly on Liz's shoulder.

CECILY

Find the truth, Liz. I know this hurts. But it won't hurt long.

Liz wipes the tears from her cheeks with her whole hand. Like a child.

LIZ

God is my refuge and my strength, but needing help does not make me weak.

Liz straightens her posture somewhat.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I am not ashamed.

The script glows on the wall and fades. Cecily keeps her hand on Liz's shoulder.

CECILY

Search your heart. What have you found, Liz? Who are you?

Liz takes a deep breath. Her eyes red and damp with tears.

LIZ

The lies will always be there. But that's all they are. I am enough — because of who He is.

Cecily nods with glee. The room glows with all at once with the truths Liz spoke.

Liz and Cecily look up at the words together. Like embers on the walls.

CECILY

You did it, Liz. You won.

Liz laughs softly and joyfully through her tears.

Cecily stands. She goes to the blinds and opens them. The room fills with sunlight. Liz squints.

Cecily tilts her head toward the yard. Liz's eyes widen.

Ben. He examines the exterior of the home. Unaware.

Liz softens at the sight of him.

Cecily smiles at Liz.

CECILY (CONT'D)

Well done.

Liz smiles back and nods in thanks. She stands and goes out the front door toward Ben.

EXT. VERITY LANE - A MONTH LATER - DAY

Liz and Ben walk hand in hand up their driveway. Liz's free hand holds a leash. A dog traipses happily at the end of it.

EXT. COTTAGE

Ben lets the dog off its leash. He tosses a ball across the yard. The dog runs after it.

Liz walks up the steps to the front stoop. A small package is propped against the bright blue door. She picks it up and opens it.

It's a simple cross stitched heart in a frame. With a card that says "welcome home".

Liz smiles and sits down on the top step. She clutches the frame in her arms. She watches Ben and the dog, contentedly.

Behind her, on the facade of the cottage is the crack. Still there. Now patched with mortar.

THE END

