

**AMERICAN BEAUTY**

EXT. BURNHAM HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Carolyn, carrying a basket OF fresh cut ROSES, passes By the GARAGE DOOR WINDOW. From inside the garage, we HEAR The Beatles' "COME TOGETHER." Carolyn stops and SNIFFS the air, frowning. She peers through the window.

Her POV: LESTER, IN a T- shirt and gym short.9, lies on a new WEIGHT BENCH, doing bench presses with shiny new BARBELLS.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Come together blasts from a new BOOMBOX on the floor. LESTER finishes his last rep, straining, then puts the weights in their rack on the bench and sits up, sweaty and out of breath. He takes a drag off a joint, then picks up a BOOK off the floor, a bodybuilding manual titled THE COMPLETE BOOK OF CHEST AND ARMS. Suddenly, the GARAGE DOOR starts to open. Lester looks up, squinting at:

His POV: the door raises to reveal Carolyn, silhouetted against the bright sunlight outside, standing in front of the Mercedes-Benz ML320, pointing a REMOTE at us.

LESTER just LAUGHS. Carolyn strides IN, still holding her basket of roses, angry. She tries to turn off the BOOMBOX, but every time she pushes a button, it skips to the next song, or he FM tuner, she yanks the power cord out of the wall.

LESTER  
Ooh. Mom's mad.

CAROLYN  
What the hell do you think you're doing?

LESTER  
Bench presses. I'm going to wail on my pecs, and then I'm going to do my back.

CAROLYN  
You're smoking pot now? That's a fine example to set for our daughter.

LESTER  
You're one to talk, you bloodless, money-grubbing freak.

Carolyn is furious, But unable to think OF a response, Having accepted that reason is no longer an option with him.

CAROLYN  
(finally, re:  
equipment)  
You took the Mercedes to get all  
this stuff?

LESTER  
Of course I did. The Camry's too  
small.

CAROLYN  
Were you stoned then?

LESTER  
What are you going to do, ground  
me?

CAROLYN  
Lester, that is a forty-thousand  
dollar car. I don't want you  
driving it when -

LESTER  
Fine. I'll never drive your  
precious Mercedes again. Big whoop.  
It's just a glorified station wagon  
that you paid way too much for  
because you want to impress people.

A beat. Carolyn stands there, powerless and hating it.

LESTER (cont'd)  
Do you mind? I'm trying to work  
out here.  
(then, suggestively)  
Unless you want to spot me.

Struggling FOR dignity, Carolyn turns and walks out, then  
stops at the garage door and turns back to him.

CAROLYN  
You will not get away with this,  
mister! I promise you!

And she's gone. Lester smiles, then leans back on the bench  
and grabs the weights.

LESTER  
(as he lifts)  
That's. What. You. Think.

**AMERICAN BEAUTY (2)**

INT. BURNHAM HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE on Carolyn, her eyes wide, listening to the rhythmic BRUSH of Lester's hand as he masturbates under the covers.

She flips over and faces him.

CAROLYN  
What are you doing?

A beat.

LESTER  
Nothing.

Carolyn switches on the bedside LIGHT.

CAROLYN  
You were masturbating.

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED:

LESTER  
I was not.

CAROLYN  
Yes, you were.

He turns to her, trying to look innocent, then gives up.

LESTER  
All right, so shoot me. I was whacking off.

Carolyn gets out of bed, repelled. Lester LAUGHS.

LESTER (CONT'D)  
That's right. I was choking the bishop. Shaving the carrot. Saying hi to my monster.

CAROLYN  
That's disgusting.

LESTER  
Well, excuse me, but I still have blood pumping through my veins!

CAROLYN  
So do I!

LESTER

Really? I'm the only one who seems to be doing anything about it.

CAROLYN

Lester. I refuse to live like this. This is not a marriage.

LESTER

This hasn't been a marriage for years. But you were happy as long as I kept my mouth shut. Well, guess what? I've changed. And the new me whacks off when he feels horny, because you're obviously not going to help me out in that department.

CAROLYN

Oh. I see. You think you're the only one who's sexually frustrated?

LESTER

I'm not? Well then, come on, baby! I'm ready.

(CONTINUED)

43.

CONTINUED: (2)

CAROLYN

(furious)

Do not mess with me, mister, or I will divorce you so fast it'll make your head spin!

LESTER

On what grounds? I'm not a drunk, I don't fuck other women, I don't mistreat you, I've never hit you, or even tried to touch you since you made it so abundantly clear just how unnecessary you consider me to be. But. I did support you while you got your license. And some people might think that entitles me to half of what's yours.

She sinks into a chair, stunned. It's clear he knows where she's most vulnerable. He sees this, and likes it; it feels good to win for a change. He curls up under the covers contentedly.

LESTER (CONT'D)

Turn out the light when you come to bed, okay?

Carolyn enters through the kitchen, flushed and angry. She just stands there, staring at Lester. After a moment, he looks up at her.

(CONTINUED)

68.

CONTINUED:

LESTER

What?

CAROLYN

Ah, whose car is that out front?

LESTER

Mine. 1970 Pontiac Firebird. The car I always wanted and now I have it. I rule!

CAROLYN

Where's the Camry?

LESTER

I traded it in.

CAROLYN

Shouldn't you have consulted me first?

LESTER

Hmm, let me think... No. You never drove it.

(then)

Have you done something different? You look great.

CAROLYN

(brusque)

Where's Jane?

LESTER

Jane not home. We have the whole house to ourselves.

He smiles at her playfully. She stares back, annoyed. It's the same look she had at the beginning, when he dropped his briefcase, but whatever power that look had is gone. Lester just LAUGHS.

LESTER (CONT'D)

Christ, Carolyn. When did you become so... joyless?

CAROLYN

(taken aback)

Joyless?! I am not joyless! There happens to be a lot about me that you don't know, mister smarty man. There is plenty of joy in my life.

(CONTINUED)

69.

CONTINUED: (2)

LESTER

(leaning toward her)

Whatever happened to that girl who used to fake seizures at frat parties when she got bored? And who used to run up to the roof of our first apartment building to flash the traffic helicopters? Have you totally forgotten about her? Because I haven't.

His face is close to hers, and suddenly the atmosphere is charged. She pulls back automatically, but it's clear she's drawn to him. He smiles, and moves even closer, holding his beer loosely balanced. Then, just before their lips meet...

CAROLYN

(barely audible)

Lester. You're going to spill beer on the couch.

She's immediately sorry she said it, but it's too late. His smile fades, and the moment is gone.

LESTER

So what? It's just a couch.

CAROLYN

This is a four thousand dollar sofa upholstered in Italian silk. This is not "just a couch."

LESTER

It's just a couch!

He stands and gestures toward all the things in the room.

LESTER (CONT'D)

This isn't life. This is just stuff. And it's become more important to you than living. Well, honey, that's just nuts.

Carolyn stares at him, on the verge of tears, then turns and walks out of the room before he can see her cry.

LESTER (CONT'D)

(calls after her)

I'm only trying to help you.

INT. FITTS HOUSE - RICKY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On VIDEO: Jane lays in Ricky's bed, wearing a tank top. She glances at us.

(CONTINUED)

70.

CONTINUED:

JANE

(shy)  
Don't.

We're watching the WIDE-SCREEN TV in Ricky's room.

A CORD leads from the TV to Ricky's DIGICAM. Ricky holds the camera, sitting naked in a chair. It's been almost a month since his father beat him up, and there are still slight SCARS on his face. He's aiming his camera at Jane.

RICKY

Why?

JANE

(re: image on TV)  
It's weird, watching myself. I don't like how I look.

RICKY

I can't believe you don't know how beautiful you are.

JANE

I'm not going to sit here for that shit.

She gets out of bed, takes his Digicam and focuses it on him. We see his image on the TV as she videotapes.

JANE (CONT'D)

Ha. How does it feel now?

RICKY

Fine.

JANE

You don't feel naked?

RICKY

I am naked.

JANE

You know what I mean.

Jane ZOOMS in on his face, which remains placid.

JANE (CONT'D)

Tell me about being in the hospital.

Ricky smiles.

(CONTINUED)

71.

CONTINUED: (2)

RICKY

When I was fifteen, my dad caught me smoking dope. He totally freaked and decided to send me to military school. I told you his whole thing about structure and discipline, right?

(laughs)

Well, of course, I got kicked out. Dad and I had this huge fight, and he hit me... and then the next day at school, some kid made a crack about my haircut, and... I just snapped. I wanted to kill him. And I would have. Killed him. If they hadn't pulled me off.

(then)

That's when my dad put me in the hospital. Then they drugged me up and left me in there for two years.

JANE

Wow. You must really hate him.

RICKY

He's not a bad man.

He grabs a half-smoked JOINT from an ashtray and lights it.

JANE

Well... you better believe I'd hate my father if he did something like that to me.

(laughs)

Wait. I do hate my father.

RICKY

Why?

He passes her the joint, then takes the Digicam and focuses it on her. We see her image on the TV as he videotapes.

JANE

He's a total asshole and he's got this crush on my friend Angela and it's disgusting.

RICKY

You'd rather he had the crush on you?



JANE

Gross, no! But it'd be nice if I was anywhere near as important to him as she is.

(then)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

72.

CONTINUED: (3)

JANE (CONT'D)

I know you think my dad's harmless, but you're wrong. He's doing massive psychological damage to me.

RICKY

How?

Jane looks into the camera, a loopy, stoned grin on her face.

JANE

Well, now, I too need structure. A little fucking discipline.

They LAUGH. She lays back on the bed.

JANE (CONT'D)

I'm serious, though. How could he not be damaging me? I need a father who's a role model, not some horny geek-boy who's gonna spray his shorts whenever I bring a girlfriend home from school.

(snorts)

What a lame-o. Somebody really should put him out of his misery.

Her mind wanders for a beat.

RICKY

Want me to kill him for you?

Jane looks at him and sits up.

JANE

Yeah, would you?

RICKY

(smiles)

It'll cost you.

JANE

Well, I've been baby-sitting since I was about ten. I've got almost three thousand dollars. 'Course, I was saving it up for a boob job.

She stands and sticks out her breasts, then falls back on the bed, LAUGHING.

JANE (CONT'D)

But my tits can wait, huh?

RICKY

You know, that's not a very nice thing to do, hiring somebody to kill your dad.

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED: (4)

JANE

Well, I guess I'm just not a very nice girl, then, am I?

She smiles dreamily at him. He turns the Digicam off and the TV screen goes BLUE. He lowers the camera and looks at her intently.

JANE (CONT'D)

(suddenly nervous)  
You know I'm not serious, right?

RICKY

Of course.

He puts the Digicam down and joins Jane on the bed. A long moment where neither of them speaks. He caresses her hair, gazing into her eyes.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Do you know how lucky we are to have found each other?