

SOUTHERN BELLE

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TEASER

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Pale moonlight dances in through a small window, illuminating marbled counter tops. It's dark. Quiet.

Quiet except soft sobs sneaking through the closed door.

Suddenly, a PHONE lights up from its place on the vanity. We see the caller ID: "ADDY <3"

A picture of a gorgeous blonde woman accompanies the name.

A hand reaches down and silences the phone. Knuckles bruised and scraped.

Slowly the owner of the hand is revealed. PAUL BENNET, late 30s, disheveled.

He stares at his reflection in the mirror clutching the edge of the sink, shoulders hunched.

The phone lights up again.

It BUZZES.

And BUZZES.

And BUZZES.

Paul's hand DARTS forward.

He grabs the phone and CHUCKS it towards the wall. There is a distinct CRACK as the phone makes contact before clattering to the ground.

Paul runs his hands over his face then sinks to his elbows on the vanity.

A new notification glows behind the phones shattered screen.

"ADDY <3. Five Missed Calls"

Heavy silence is punctuated by quite sobs.

END OF TEASER

ACT 1**INT. CRAWFORD & HUGHES - ADELAIDE'S OFFICE - DAY**

At the premier law firm in Dayton, Tennessee, A mid-twenties lawyer flips through a case in a spacious office. The kind with big glass walls and a framed degree flaunting itself from its place on the wall.

There's an engraved name plate on the desk. ADELAIDE STANTON.

Addy.

She's gorgeous, even more than her caller ID photo. A mid 20s southern beauty like something of the cover of a country music album.

Her nose is seemingly buried in a case file, but her attention wanders again and again to another office down the hall.

The door is closed but through one of the glass walls she can see A CRYING WOMAN talking to someone just out of view.

After a few moments, the woman is escorted out of the office by another lawyer, Paul Bennet. He's hardly the same man from the teaser. With a well pressed suit and slicked back hair, he is a picture of cool prestige.

Paul places a gentle hand on the woman's back comforting her all the way to the elevator as she wipes the tears from her eye.

Adelaide watches the interaction with laser focus.

The second Paul notices her and sports his practiced self-assured smile, She redirects her attention back to her work, her desk, anything but him.

Paul saunters over and leans casually up against the doorframe. Adelaide doesn't look up from her work.

ADELAIDE

Who was she?

PAUL

Jealous?

He smirks. She rolls her eyes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
She was a client, Adelaide. Is this still about last night?

ADELAIDE
I called you six times. Six.

PAUL
It was a long day. I was out as soon as I hit the bed.

Paul pushes of the doorframe and moves behind her chair. He leans down till his face is right next to hers.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Let me make it up to you.

He kisses her neck and Adelaide finally smiles.

ADELAIDE
Get off. I'm trying to work.

Paul runs a finger up and down her arm.

PAUL
What are you working on?

ADELAIDE
I finally wrapped up the Strickland case. I'm trying to find something new. Something that's not such a--

PAUL
Pain in the ass?

She turns to look up him, eyes hot. Their faces only inches apart.

ADELAIDE
Exactly.

Paul leans in then straightens up abruptly. A tease.

PAUL
I'm headed to lunch, but I can talk with Ed later. See if he has anything for you.

ADELAIDE
That's ok. I'll figure it out.

PAUL
Alright.

He kisses her cheek and turns to leave.

ADELAIDE
Want some company?

PAUL
It's a work lunch. You don't want
to sit through that. Ill bring you
something back.

ADELAIDE
Are you sure you don't want
company?

Paul sighs and turns around.

PAUL
Adelaide, I said it's a work--

Adelaide is sitting on the front edge of her desk. The top
button of her blouse is undone. She's working on the second.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Maybe I've got ten minutes.

She undoes another button.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Or twenty.

He draws the blinds and stalks towards her.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY

A quiet hallway, empty except one woman.

CELIA, 30, sophisticated but gentle, waits patiently outside
an office door.

The school bell rings. Within seconds a flood of
highschoolers spill into the hallway. Celia waits.

A moment later the office door opens. Two disgruntled
students storm out.

A voice from inside calls after them.

GEORGIA (O.S.)
And I don't want to see either of
you back in here again.

INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPLES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Celia pokes her head into the office and gives a light knock on the door.

CELIA
Principle Stanton?

Standing at her desk is GEORGIA STANTON, 60s, a confident, straight-laced woman.

GEORGIA
Hi there. What can I do for you?

Celia invites herself further into the office.

CELIA
Hello. I don't have a lot of time, but Charlotte Mayfield said I should drop by about a teaching position. Celia.

GEORGIA
Of course, Celia. It's nice to meet you. Have a seat.

She gestures to one of the fine leather chairs across from her desk. This is not some underfunded public school.

Celia takes a seat.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Now, I looked at your resume--

She ruffles through some papers, finds the resume and takes a seat.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
--and on the surface you look more than qualified, but I have some concerns.

She slides the resume towards Celia and points at a section titled "Work Experience".

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
From what I can tell, you haven't held any sort of teaching position in the last four years.

She moves down to another section. "References".

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

These references are remarkable,
but I can't wrap my head around why
someone would abandon such a
promising career so early.

Celia's phone chimes. She takes a quick looks at it then back
at Georgia.

CELIA

Look, I'll make this quick. I have
a very strict schedule, but I
volunteer when I can. I tutor.

She leans forward folding her hands on the desk.

CELIA (CONT'D)

I know what my resume says. What
I'm looking for is someone to give
me an opportunity to do what I
love. Teach.

Georgia leans back in her chair. She takes a long look at
Celia.

GEORGIA

I like you. Here's what we'll do--

Celia's phone chimes again. Twice in quick succession. This
time Celia ignores it.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Do you need to get that?

CELIA

I'm sorry. I'm just running a
little late.

GEORGIA

Let's wrap this up then. I have a
position opening for long term
substitute, but I'd like to get you
in here for a formal interview
first. Wednesday, next week.

Celia drops her head.

CELIA

I can't do Wednesday.

GEORGIA

That's the time I have available.
If your schedule is an issue, maybe
we should table this conversation
for another time.

CELIA

No. Wednesday's fine. I'll make it
work.

Georgia stands and reaches out her hand.

GEORGIA

Great! I look forward to it.

Celia returns the handshake punctuated by another cellphone
chime. She makes a hasty exit.

INT. PARKING GARAGE

Paul leans against his car. The floor of the garage is empty
except for him.

He is on the phone with his boss, EDWARD "ED" HUGHES.

ED (V.O.)

I looked over the case and you were
right to turn it down. Chances are
she was lying about half of it
anyway.

PAUL

Do you think she'll try and take it
somewhere else?

Another car pulls into the spot next to him. It's an
expensive car. Tinted windows. Paul acknowledges the driver
with a nod.

ED (V.O.)

If she does, stonewall her. Call
around and see if she's talked to
anyone else. I don't know a firm
dumb enough to consider it, but
make sure they turn her down.

There's a moment of silence on the other end of the line,
then:

ED (CONT'D)

Be persuasive if you have to.

PAUL
My check book can be very
persuasive.

ED (V.O.)
That's what I like to here. Let me
know when it's sorted.

Paul hangs up the phone as the driver of the other car steps out. KURT KAHYMEN, 30s, he's a clean cut man with expensive taste.

KURT
Paul! How are you buddy.

He offers a handshake then pulls Paul in for a quick pat on the back.

PAUL
Kurt.

He's too outgoing. A drunk frat boy. But, as he leans back against his car and crosses his arms, something shifts. His goes even, his eyes get hard.

KURT
So, I assume you got the file I
sent over?

PAUL
I did.

KURT
What are you going to do about it?

PAUL
Lat's talk about what I need you to
do. My hands can't be anywhere near
this.

KURT
I can put you in touch with
someone. Won't leave a trail.

PAUL
I need someone who will keep their
mouth shut.

Kurt flashes his perfect teeth.

KURT
I've got just the guy.

PAUL
Good. Who else knows about this.

KURT
I got the file from Peter, but he's not going to say anything. I'm worried about his assistant. Janet Fletcher.

PAUL
Don't worry about Janet. I've got some sway with here.

Paul heads for his car.

KURT
You know if this gets out, you're finished.

Paul stopped. Turns. Looks Kurt dead in the eyes

PAUL
I'll handle it.

He gets in his car and drives away leaving Kurt standing alone. His face falls as he lets out a shaky breath.

INT. CRAWFORD & HUGHES - ADELAIDE'S OFFICE

Adelaide is sitting at her desk, computer closed, looking off into space. She calls out to someone in the hallway.

ADELAIDE
Hey, Hattie!

Paul's assistant, HATTIE DAVIS, pops in. She's young, Early 20s, and very perky.

HATTIE
Yeah?

ADELAIDE
Do you know what time Paul will be back from his lunch meeting?

HATTIE
I would have to double check, but as far as I know, he cancelled the rest of his meetings for the day.

Adelaide is silent.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
Why? Did you need something?

ADELAIDE
No, that's alright. Thanks, Hattie.

As Hattie turns to leave, Adelaide stops her.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)
Wait. Do you know anything about Paul's case from earlier?

HATTIE
Not much. Just that he turned it down. Lack of evidence I think. Poor girl was really broken up.

ADELAIDE
You wouldn't happen to have the file would you?

HATTIE
God, no. I don't handle any case files directly. You know how Paul can be.

ADELAIDE
I can imagine.

Hattie pauses for a moment, but doesn't leave.

HATTIE
He did have me call to set up the appointment. I could get you her number.

ADELAIDE
That would be great. Thanks, Hattie.

Adelaide goes back to staring off absently. Hattie still lingers. Teetering at the cusp of the doorway.

HATTIE
This isn't about that necklace again, is it?

Adelaide Doesn't answer.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
I'm sure he's just waiting for the right time to give it to you.

ADELAIDE

Our anniversary was last night.
Don't you think that would have
been the time?

HATTIE

With the way Paul looks at you, I'm
sure you have nothing to worry
about. Don't work yourself up if
you don't have to.

She pats the frame of the door as she leaves.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

I'll get you that number.

Adelaide opens her computer. There are a few windows open:
some documents, her email. She opens her browser.

Already queued up is a high end jewelry site. A beautiful
PENDENT NECKLACE sits front and center on her screen.

Then, a message from Hattie pops up. It's a phone number with
the name "Michelle Gibson" underneath.

Adelaide picks up her phone and dial the number, waiting as
it rings.

MICHELLE (V.O.)

Hello.

ADELAIDE

Hi, is this Michelle Gibson?

MICHELLE (V.O.)

Who is this?

ADELAIDE

My name is Adelaide Stanton. I'm
with Crawford and Hughes Law Group.
I'm calling regarding a case we
have on file. Michelle Gibson.

There's a pause on the other line.

MICHELLE (V.O.)

That's me. I just spoke with your
other lawyer this morning. Has
something changed?

ADELAIDE

I wanted to review a few details of
your case. Did Paul explain why he
declined to represent you?

MICHELLE (V.O.)
He said there wasn't enough
evidence.

Adelaide stands and paces around her office.

ADELAIDE
And out of curiosity, why exactly
did you choose Paul Bennet as your
choice of council?

MICHELLE (V.O.)
My sister did all the research. To
be honest I never heard of him
until a few weeks ago.

The line between professional and accusatory is vague.

ADELAIDE
So you've never met with him before
today?

MICHELLE (V.O.)
Um, no. Is this relevant to my
case.

Too far.

ADELAIDE
Just establishing context. And what
charges are you attempting to file?

MICHELLE (V.O.)
I know Mr. Bennet said a criminal
trial would be a shot in the dark,
but I thought he might at least owe
for my injuries.

ADELAIDE
He?

MICHELLE (V.O.)
My husband.

Adelaide stops pacing. She sighs heavily and drops her head.

ADELAIDE
This is a domestic violence suit.

MICHELLE (V.O.)
Have you even read my file.

The file has not and will not reach her desk.

ADELAIDE
I'm looking at it now.
Unfortunately, it looks like our
previous evaluation was correct.
I'm sorry, Michelle.

Adelaide hangs up abruptly. She slumps back into her chair.

On her computer the pendent necklace still looms. She closes it, HARD.

INT. RESTAURANT

A small slew of people crowds the inside of a restaurant.

Paul pushes his way through the well-dressed group to the hostess booth.

PAUL
Sorry I'm late.

He is not talking to the hostess, but to a woman standing a few steps away. She turns to acknowledge him.

It's Celia.

CELIA
Here I was thinking I would be the
late one.

She gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.

A hostesses calls Paul's name. He takes Celia's hand in his, gives it a squeeze and leads her to their table.

They take their seats. Paul looks at the menu. Celia does not. Neither of them are talking.

Finally, Paul puts down the menu and looks up at the waiter who is patiently waiting to take their order.

PAUL
Let's go with our usual. The
Salmon. And bring us out a bottle
of wine.

WAITER
Red or white?

PAUL
Why don't we have some fun and make
it your choice. Special occasion.

The waiter nods.

WAITER

I know just the thing.

He smiles and leaves to fetch their drinks. Paul and Celia are quiet for a long moment.

CELIA

So, how was your day? How was work?

PAUL

It was fine. Work's work.

Celia fidgets with the her napkin.

CELIA

It's been keeping you late the last couple weeks.

Paul furrows his brow. His tone is measured.

PAUL

Is that a question or are you accusing me of something?

CELIA

I'm not accusing you of anything, Paul. I'm just asking how things are at work.

The waiter returns with a bottle of wine interrupting the growing tension.

WAITER

A bottle of Roussanne.

Paul takes a deep breath as the waiter pours them both a glass and leave the bottle.

PAUL

I had an important case. You know how it is.

Celia nods. They return to an uneasy silence, sipping wine and looking at anything but each other.

Celia twists her necklace around her fingers. She tries again to initiate a conversation.

CELIA

I visited the school today. Saint Helena.

PAUL
Oh, yeah? What for?

Celia drops her necklace and opts for running her finger along the edge of her wine glass.

She takes a long sip.

CELIA
I asked about a job.

Paul stares at her.

CELIA (CONT'D)
It's nothing concrete, but the principle said she could fit me in next Wednesday for an interview.

PAUL
We have plans next Wednesday.

Celia takes another sip of wine as Paul continues to stare at her.

CELIA
It wont take all day.

PAUL
So what, we don't about important decisions anymore?

CELIA
I'm telling you right now.

PAUL
And how long have you been planning this?

Celia leans forward lowering her voice against their growing uptick in volume.

CELIA
You say it like it's some kind of scheme. My friend said they were hiring. I just stopped in to ask a few questions.

PAUL
And what friend was that?

CELIA
Charlotte.

PAUL
You're talking to Charlotte again?
What does that bitch have to say
now.

CELIA
She thought I could use direction.
Have a little something for myself.

PAUL
What is that supposed to mean?

CELIA
It's not--

PAUL
So everything I give you is not
enough? You don't even know how
much money I've spent on you.

By now, the rest of the restaurant has started noticing the commotion.

Paul gestures at the bottle of wine, his voice growing louder.

PAUL (CONT'D)
This bottle of wine cost seventy
dollars! You think that stupid
fucking necklace was free? Now
you're going to sit here and talk
about 'a little something for
yourself'

CELIA
You know that's not what I meant.

Paul gets up abruptly. He throws his napkin down on the table and muffles under his breath as he walks away.

PAUL
I need a smoke.

CELIA
Paul!

He leaves her alone at their table. Celia pours herself another glass of wine.

On the center of the table, Paul's phone sits facedown where it has been chiming every now and again since they sat down.

Celia looks at the phone then glances towards the exit and back again to the phone.

She reaches across the table and picks it up.

Just as she does the phone starts ringing.

An all too familiar caller ID pops up. Addy <3.

Celia lets the phone ring a few times then accepts the call. The second she hears a voice on the other end she freezes.

INT. CRAWFORD & HUGHES - ADELAIDE'S OFFICE

Adelaide is standing by the window of her office.

Not waiting for a response from the other end of the line, she lets loose.

ADELAIDE

Look, Paul, I know your not at lunch. Hattie told me you cancelled your meetings for the day. And don't start calling me I'm jealous, I deserve to know why your lying to me.

Silence.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)

Paul?

INT. RESTAURANT

Celia is still in stunned silence.

CELIA

Hello?

INT. ADELAIDE'S OFFICE

ADELAIDE

Who is this? Where is Paul?

No response.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)

Who am I speaking to? I swear to god if you don't answer me--

INT. RESTAURANT

Celia hangs up the phone. Her breath is shaky, so are her hands.

She places the phone back down across the table just as Paul returns and sits back down.

He smiles at her. Far calmer than when he left.

PAUL
Are you ok?

Celia nods.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to get so upset about the job thing. It just caught me off guard. You should do whatever makes you happy.

Celia stills says nothing.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Let's just forget about it, ok? We should try and enjoy ourselves.

He reaches over and takes her hand in his. Now we see it.

A beautiful diamond ring adorns her left hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Happy anniversary, baby.

This is Celia BENNET. His wife.

END OF ACT ONE