

Life After Love

(Claudia and Mark are seated at a table in an upscale restaurant)

Mark

Well? What do you think?

Claudia

Honestly? I was expecting more.

Mark

Okay...I was hoping for a better reaction, but...

Claudia

The way you were going on about this place, I thought it would have more pizzazz.

Mark

You want pizzazz or do you want good food? If it's the food you're after, this is the place. The Herald ranked Chez Suzette off the charts.

Claudia

I suppose I should be impressed by that.

Mark

I traded my left lung for this reservation - five weeks ago. So, yes, it wouldn't hurt you to be at least a little impressed.

Claudia

Oh, Sweetie, I would have been just as happy at Taco Bell. Spending time with you is what's key. It's not the *where*, it's the *who*.

Mark

You're on. Next time we'll feast on Chalupas.

Claudia

I'm serious, Mark. There's no need to spoil me with these lavish luncheons. Now that you're a family man, your pennies should be put to better use.

Mark

Nothing to fear, Mother, we're doing just fine. *(Beat)* Kate says "hi", by the way.

Claudia

I'm sure that's the watered-down version. *(Beat)* Tell her "hi" back.

Mark

Do you want me to add a hug?

(*Mark smiles. Claudia grimaces*)

Claudia

So, tell me, how is your little bundle of nerves?

Mark

Joy.

Claudia

I thought her name was Annabelle.

Mark

It *is* Annabelle.

Claudia

I'm confused.

Mark

A baby is usually referred to as "a bundle of joy".

Claudia

I've seen you around her.

Mark

I'm a first-time father. I think that accounts for some of the stress.

Claudia

You don't have to tell *me* about stress. I remember the routine...sacrificing everything for the sake of the child. The dirty diapers...the late-night feedings...

Mark

I thought Ingrid managed those things. Wasn't that the point of hiring a nanny?

Claudia

When a child is in distress, a mother is in distress. It's a bond between the two that can't be broken. Just because I didn't tend to your necessities *directly*, it doesn't mean that I wasn't there in spirit.

Mark

Sorry I made your *spirit* so miserable.

Claudia

I said nothing about misery, Mark. I was explaining how even the world's best parents are destined to suffer heartaches at the hands of their children. We must learn not to take these things personally.

Mark

Thanks for the heads up. If Annabelle could talk, I'm sure she'd thank you too.

Claudia

Annabelle. Such an unusual name. Whatever possessed you to call her that?

Mark

I already explained it to you, Mother.

Claudia

Well, if you did, I don't remember.

Mark

Oh, please, your memory's as sharp as a dagger - and twice as deadly.

Claudia

Then perhaps I wasn't listening. You do tend to prattle.

Mark

(*Sighs*) *Annabelle* was Kate's grandmother.

Claudia

Your grandmother had a name, you know. Lillian, in case you forgot.

Mark

You see, *this* is why I don't like talking to you.

Claudia

I was simply making an observation. As the head of the household, I would think you'd have a say in the matter.

Mark

I had a say. We agreed on *Annabelle*. Mutually, unequivocally, we agreed.

Claudia

Splendid - it's settled. Hooray for you.

Mark

I hear a "but" coming.

Claudia

No, no. It's lovely. *Ann-a-belle*. Almost musical, the way it sounds.

Mark

We're very pleased with it.

Claudia

Still, you must admit, Lillian would be a more natural fit.

Mark

And you said it anyway.

Claudia

I didn't say "but". I said "still". Besides, it's only one woman's opinion.

Mark

Right.

Claudia

And, apparently, I'm not the woman whose opinion counts.

Mark

Will you stop that?

Claudia

What did I say?

Mark

You are trying to get me to choose sides and I'm not falling for it. Can't you just accept the fact that I have another woman in my life?

Claudia

Two women, theoretically - if you want to count your little bundle of joy.

Mark

Yes. Thank you for pointing that out. It only proves my argument - that I have more than just you to answer to.

Claudia

And I acknowledge that. I only wish that you could spare more than just these few fleeting moments. Is that too much to ask?

Mark

I'm doing the best I can. But with work and now a family...

Claudia

Not to mention your pesky old mother...battling her way into your busy schedule.

Mark

I can always count on you to keep score.

Claudia

If I don't do it, who will?

Mark

You really need to get a life, Mother.

Claudia

What's wrong with the life I have?

Mark

You need to focus on life outside of me and how I name my daughter. (*Sighs*) Look, you will always be my mother and I will always be your son.

Claudia

There. Was that so hard to admit?

Mark

But I still stand by what I said before. There are other worlds out there.

Claudia

I'm comfortable with the world I'm in, thank you very much.

Mark

Seriously, you've never thought of dating again?

Claudia

That is really none of your concern.

Mark

There must be moments when you wish for some sort of companionship.

Claudia

How could you possibly know what I wish for?

Mark

If I'm wrong, you're welcome to correct me.

Claudia

Fine. Not that it's any of your business, but I have been seeing someone. Happy?

Mark

And you never thought to mention it?

Claudia

That was the objective. I felt it was best to keep it from you.

Mark

Why? Did you think I'd disapprove?

Claudia

Of course. Why else? (*Pause*) You loved your father very much.

Mark

I idolized him, yes, and wouldn't trade him for the world.

Claudia

You see? And if I told you I was marrying my gentleman friend, what would your reaction be to that?

Mark

What??

Claudia

Exactly! This is *exactly* the response I was expecting.

Mark

What??

Claudia

You're repeating yourself, sweetie.

Mark

You've met someone and you're getting married??

Claudia

That's the thrust of it, yes.

Mark

Don't say *thrust*. It conjures up images.

Claudia

My poor boy.

Mark

When were you going to tell me?

Claudia

I'm telling you now.

Mark

So, who is he? Does he have a name?

Claudia

Of course, he has a name, silly; it's Pathik Sameer.

Mark

It sounds like a dish with an abundance of curry.

Claudia`

He's from India.

Mark

That would have been my first guess.

Claudia

I know what you're thinking. I don't typically favor dark and swarthy men.

Mark

To say that you've been one to embrace cultural diversity would be an understatement.

Claudia

Well, I'm embracing it now - and with a newfound passion. You know what they say.

Mark

No, Mother, what do they say?

Claudia

It's never too late to learn.

Mark

When it comes to new tricks, Mother, you are forever an old dog. So, what does Pathik do for a living?

Claudia

He teaches Biology at the University of Mumbai.

Mark

A respectable job. So, he teaches *here* now, I assume?

Claudia

Oh, no, he still holds his post in Mumbai. I met him while he was here on holiday.

Mark

Well, then, he's *planning* on moving here?

Claudia

Actually, no. I'll be the one who's relocating.

Mark

To India. You're moving to India.

Claudia

Such an exotic locale. Don't worry, dear. We'll only be separated by a few thousand miles.

Mark

Listen to yourself. You, a certified germaphobe, whose anxiety keeps you from rubbing elbows at the Sawgrass Mall, are moving to India.

Claudia

And getting married there as well. A full Hindu ceremony. Three days of celebration. I'll have to convert, of course.

Mark

Well, naturally! Yes, yes, I can see it now. You draped in a Sari, wilting in the noonday sun while those around you are busy worshipping cows. Yes, that sounds right up your alley.

Claudia

The heart wants what it wants, Mark. The path to true love is fraught with sacrifices.

Mark

Oh, please. Spare me the charade.

Claudia

Charade? I have no idea what you're talking about.

Mark

Pathik Sameer works the checkout at Publix. He's happily married with six kids. Did you forget I shop there too?

Claudia

It's the first name that came to mind. Obviously, I need to expand my social network.

Mark

You lied to me. Why?

Claudia

It's what you said you wanted, isn't it - me to be tied down and out of your hair?

Mark

Who said I wanted you out of my hair...or out of my life, for that matter? What I really want is for you to be happy.

Claudia

I meant what I said before; *the heart wants what it wants*. And, right now, all it wants to be is a good mother to you and an amazing grandmother to your Annabelle.

Mark

And that's enough for you, Mom?

Claudia

"Mom"? The last time you called me *that* you were in elementary school and I was a natural brunette.

Mark

I don't know what came over me.

Claudia

Next thing you'll be asking for my advice - or something equally foolish.

Mark

Heaven forbid.

Claudia

I consider myself lucky to have found true love once in my lifetime. And I'm not in a hurry to go looking for a man who could never live up to your father. Well, you know what I mean...you found your true love...you and your Kathy...

Mark

Kate.

Claudia

Kate, right. Look, I know you adore her...it's plain to see. Can you imagine what life would be without her?

Mark

Not really.

Claudia

No more than I could have imagined what life would be without your father. Yet, here I am...a little off balance, to be sure; but happy, all the same.

Mark

I'm not going to stop worrying about you. You do realize that?

Claudia

I wouldn't have it any other way. (*Pats Mark's hand*) And, as happy as this old broad is, she could still stand a little nourishment. Be a dear and flag down a waiter, would you?

Mark

(*Teasing*) You know, I've been thinking; since you have no preference, maybe Taco Bell would be quicker.

Claudia

You wouldn't dare.

Mark

So, what was all that "*it's not the where, it's the who*" business about?

Claudia

Mark, please, this is Chez Suzette!

(Blackout)