

SEVEN MAGPIES

by

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Episode One

(60 minute TV drama pilot)

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BLACK

A YOUNG CHILD'S voice. Whispered words as she recites:

CHILD

One for sorrow, two for joy, three for
a girl, four for a boy, five for
silver, six for gold... seven for a
secret never to be told...

INT. PSYCHIATRIC UNIT - DAY

LAUREN. Early 30s. Lost eyes. Unbrushed hair. Weary, ashen face. She's wearing something which resembles a hospital gown. Behind her chair, a featureless wall, white and clinical.

A PSYCHIATRIST sitting opposite speaks.

PSYCHIATRIST

Do you know where you are?

LAUREN stares into space. Is she on some kind of medication? Did she even register the question? Moments pass. Eventually --

LAUREN

Yes.

PSYCHIATRIST

Why do you think you are here?

More staring at nothing in particular. Seconds tick by.

PSYCHIATRIST

Lauren?

The prompt breaks her distracted state. She looks straight at the source of the voice, her face impassive yet fragile.

LAUREN

I did a very bad thing.

TITLE CARD: "SEVEN MAGPIES."

INT. LAUREN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

That same LAUREN. Dressed for work. Her job, whatever it is, demands smart formal clothes, tied-back hair, subtle make-up.

She stands before a full-length mirror. Her reflection stares back at her with a chilly air of uncertainty. Can she do this? Is she ready to pick up the pieces and move on?

Uh oh, sensing company, she slowly turns to face --

-- a STRANGE GUY in his 20s (who we will eventually know as DANNY) glaring at her from the corner of the room, his skin pale, almost grey; an ugly open gash on the side of his head; a crater-esque wound on his forehead; zig-zagged streams of dried blood on his face and neck; his once-smart white shirt spattered with claret. WTF?

Strangely, LAUREN isn't too alarmed by the sight. In fact, she seems to know him. A scowl of contempt, then --

LAUREN
I can do this. You've lost.

She shuts her eyes tight. Takes a deep breath. Opens them again to find --

-- DANNY, the vision, the ghost, whatever he was, has vanished. Once more, she is alone.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Meet MARK, LAUREN'S husband, preparing two mugs of coffee, late 30s, yet retaining a youthful glint in his eye. It's a spacious fitted kitchen, all mod cons, in a house built with the bricks of success. Upon LAUREN'S entry, MARK hands her a coffee.

MARK
You don't need to prove anything to anybody if you're not ready.

LAUREN
What I need is to feel useful again.
Part of it all.

MARK
It's only been five months.

LAUREN
I'm hardly likely to forget, am I?

She realises her tone was maybe a tad too harsh.

LAUREN
Look. Mark. I appreciate your concern. But I can't play the hermit card forever. Besides, Bitchface Anne has been standing in for me. God knows what I'm going back to. The sooner I get her away from my desk, the better.

She takes a good swig of her coffee, then places the mug on the nearest worksurface. She can't finish it, she hasn't got time.

LAUREN
I'll see you tonight.

MARK goes to hug his wife, to kiss her goodbye. Her response, a flinch, raised hands, a backward step.

LAUREN
No!

MARK. Wounded by her rejection. Awkward stares. Then --

LAUREN
I have to go.

She grabs her jacket, her handbag, and she leaves.

INT. OPEN-PLAN OFFICE SPACE - MORNING

An apprehensive, self-conscious LAUREN saunters past a layout of desks within booths. Inside their open-plan cells, WORK COLLEAGUES drum busy fingers upon computer keyboards whilst feeding sales spiel into their headset mics.

One by one, these COLLEAGUES take note of her arrival and stop what they're doing, gawping awkwardly as she passes, not knowing what to say. LAUREN has clearly returned after suffering at the hands of a terrible tragedy.

She walks past a separate room, a supervisor's office, and peers through the open door without stopping, locking eyes with the sole occupant, a WOMAN seated behind a desk. The WOMAN'S face journeys through surprise at the sight of LAUREN, then ill at ease, then indifference. This is BITCHFACE ANNE.

The door to an office further down opens. NEVILLE, her boss, steps out, clutching paperwork, thrown by LAUREN'S arrival.

NEVILLE
Oh. Lauren. I wasn't expecting you back for at least another month or s--

LAUREN
Daytime TV doesn't float my boat.

It was no joke. Her face serious, her manner steadfast.

NEVILLE
Okaaaay. You'd better step inside.

LAUREN sails past NEVILLE into his office. NEVILLE spots BITCHFACE ANNE looking his way from her own doorway. They trade glances. Then the boss enters his office and shuts out the world.

INT. NEVILLE'S OFFICE - MORNING

NEVILLE makes himself comfortable behind his desk. Places his paperwork on the flat surface. Takes a gulp of his mug of tea. He looks a tad nervous. Opposite, LAUREN sits in silence.

NEVILLE

So. Lauren. How are you? I do hope you're over the worst of your --

LAUREN

I'll feel a lot better once Bitchface has been turfed out of my office. Any chance of that happening, like, straight away?

NEVILLE

Ah. I think I need to fill you in.

LAUREN eyes him with suspicion.

NEVILLE

You'll be pleased to know, in your absence, Anne has been doing a cracking job. Which is why I've... well, the company has decided to permanently hand the position over to her.

LAUREN. Shocked. Appalled.

LAUREN

Am I being dismissed?

NEVILLE

No, no, nothing of the sort. We just feel, under the circumstances, it might be in your best interest to consider taking on a less-demanding role.

Livid o'clock, LAUREN'S chair scrapes back, she takes to her feet, both palms slammed flat upon the desk.

LAUREN

Are you shitting me?

NEVILLE

Now, now. There's no need for that kind of language.

LAUREN

Oh, I think there is. Really foul language. Like fuck. And bollocks.

NEVILLE

Lauren. Please. I know you've had your fair share of family problems, but --

LAUREN

Family problems? My six-year-old daughter was killed by a drug-driver!

Seething, she steps back a pace. Awaits his response. Nothing.

LAUREN

Right, that's it. I quit!

NEVILLE

You don't mean that.

LAUREN

Try me.

NEVILLE

I won't accept your resignation.

LAUREN

Oh, really?

She knocks over his mug, spilling tea over his paperwork. He lets out a yelp and stands bolt-upright, desperately trying to shake liquid from paper.

LAUREN

How about now?

INT. OPEN-PLAN OFFICE SPACE - MORNING

LAUREN bursts free of her boss's office and marches along the room. Her COLLEAGUES gawp as she slows to a halt outside her former office. She paints a plastic smile upon her face --

INT. LAUREN'S FORMER OFFICE - MORNING

-- and breezes inside, seemingly warm and friendly. Behind her desk, BITCHFACE ANNE looks more than a little apprehensive.

LAUREN

Anne. Darling. Let me be the first to congratulate you.

LAUREN spots an open floral-patterned flask upon her desk containing BITCHFACE ANNE'S annoying health fad, a homemade kale and broccoli smoothie. She picks it up and turns it upside-down. Green yucky goo vomits upon a horror-struck BITCHFACE ANNE'S head, splattily-splattily-splat! Revenge dealt, LAUREN is out of there. Fast.

INT. OPEN-PLAN OFFICE SPACE - MORNING

LAUREN marches towards us, the genesis of a triumphant grin attempting yet failing to sprout through the sheer hurt and betrayal this woman is feeling right now.

EXT. SHOP-LINED STREET - LATE MORNING

LAUREN shuffles along the street, almost zombie-like. Oh, she clocks a TODDLER in an unsupervised buggy, close to the entrance of a convenience store. She squats low before the infant, smiling as she takes his tiny hand and gives it a shake.

LAUREN

Hello you. Where's your mummy?

The MOTHER suddenly appears, early 20s, plastic bag of goods in hand, yanking the buggy away from the suspected female perv. And as the disgruntled parent pushes the buggy down the street, glaring over her shoulder as she does so, LAUREN stands up and rather meekly calls out --

LAUREN

I wasn't going to hurt him.

A tad rattled by the incident, LAUREN studies her surroundings. What now? Aha, she spots a pub across the street.

INT. PUB - MIDDAY

The pub is empty, save for the token OLD MAN sitting at the bar.

LAUREN sits alone at a table by the window, staring at a neat dark rum. Not drinking it. Just staring at it.

A SUITED MAN enters the premises and walks over to her. This is JOHN, a CID policeman.

JOHN

You planning on drinking that?

She looks up. There's recognition. But also contempt.

LAUREN

What do you want, John?

He sits down without invitation.

JOHN

Nothing. I was walking past. Spotted you through the window. So I figured I'd drop in and say hello.

No comment from her. He indicates to the drink.

JOHN

Does this mean you've fallen off the wagon again?

LAUREN

If you must know, I've been dry for months.

JOHN

Then why order the drink?

LAUREN

Maybe... it helps to remind me I don't need it any more.

JOHN dons a "fair enough, each to their own" face.

JOHN

How's life been treating you?

LAUREN

Every day is one big fucking bed of roses.

For a moment, JOHN stares at her. Then --

JOHN

I miss you, Lauren.

LAUREN

Don't even go there.

JOHN

Why not? We had something good, you know we did. We still could.

LAUREN

Is it a bird, is it a plane? No, it's Short Memory Man.

JOHN is silenced, thrown by her escalating sarcasm.

LAUREN

Quit pretending you don't know what I'm talking about.

JOHN

You can't keep blaming yourself for what happened.

LAUREN

I blame us both. And if you don't
change the subject right now, I swear,
I will seriously lose it.

LAUREN glares at him. He stares back at her, employing the kind
of unwanted sympathetic face you'd love to punch to oblivion.

JOHN

You need to accept, at the end of the
day, it was an unfortunate accident.

LAUREN bangs her fist hard on the table.

LAUREN

Wrong! At the end of the day, if I
hadn't been so fucking busy shagging
you, my child would still be alive!

Sod this, it's time for LAUREN to depart, her drink abandoned.
And as she rockets towards the exit --

JOHN

When you've calmed down, call me, yeah?

LAUREN

I deleted your number.

And she's gone.

The freshly jilted JOHN notices the PUB LANDLORD and OLD MAN
gawping at him from the bar. Cue the embarrassed smile.

JOHN

It's okay. I'm an officer of the Law.

INT. DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

LAUREN and MARK eating dinner, a civilised act betrayed by an
uncomfortable silence which heavies the air. Until --

MARK

So let me get this straight. You
knocked a mug of tea all over your
manager's paperwork. On purpose. And
then you poured a smoothie over Anne's
head.

LAUREN

Bitchface Anne's head, yes.

LAUREN'S face. Emotionless. Zero remorse.

MARK

Riiiiight. And is it safe to assume, as a result, your employment there has been terminated?

LAUREN

No idea. I didn't hang around long enough to find out.

MARK loses his knife and fork to his plate, then rubs his face with both palms, attempting to get his head around it all.

MARK

You can't just... attack people.

LAUREN

That evil witch had it coming. And Neville gave her my job! I've worked bloody hard to get where I am... where I was. And now she's lapping up a promotion she doesn't deserve.

She throws down her cutlery, her appetite lost, and plants one hand across her stressed brow, the other flat upon the table.

He sees his opportunity and offers across a hand of unity. Their fingertips touch. But no, she yanks her hand away.

MARK

Oh, Lauren. What happened to us? How did we even get to this point?

LAUREN

You know what happened. You had an affair.

MARK

So did you.

LAUREN

You did it first.

#awkward. MARK falls silent. Chews on his bottom lip. There's clearly something else he wishes to discuss.

MARK

While we're on the subject. Us sleeping in separate rooms. It's not working.

LAUREN

I wondered when this would crop up.

MARK

Is it a crime to want my Lauren back?
The one I used to know?

LAUREN

She's gone, Mark. Former Me won't be
making a comeback. She ceased to exist
the day our daughter died.

MARK

So that's it, is it? The end of our
marriage. Is that what you really want?

She doesn't answer his question. Instead, she studies his face,
his eyes, his manner.

LAUREN

I don't get it. How are you able to
function? Why aren't you hurting like
me? Why aren't you devastated?

MARK

I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Furious, he leaps to his feet, holding nothing back.

MARK

I have done so much these past few
months to keep this house going! To
keep us both sane! Working from home
when I can. Cooking our meals. Sorting
out the bills. Putting up with your
moods, your... episodes!

LAUREN goes to respond, but --

MARK

No, you bloody hear me out for once!
I've tried my hardest to relieve you of
the pressure. To allow you to grieve in
peace. Why? Because this, Lauren, is my
coping mechanism. My method of dealing
with the pain. So don't you ever, ever
accuse me of not feeling the way you
do. On the outside, I may look
unbreakable... but behind the mask, I
am falling to pieces.

Eyes welling up with the grief he has kept hidden for so long,
MARK offers her one final glare. And then he departs. Slam!

All LAUREN can do is sit in silence, alone with her thoughts.