

FAMILY LIES

Written by

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Address
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FADE IN:

INT. CLAIRE AND JAMES BEDROOM - DAY

BLAM! SNAP! POP! CLAIRE (low 60's) jumps from her sleep. She sniffs the air. She frowns.

The smoke detector BLARES. Claire rushes downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Claire finds JAMES (60s) waving a towel over the smoke detector, shhing it. She looks over her kitchen. Pots in her sink. Spills on her counter. Trash overflows. James notices her.

JAMES

Go back to bed. I got this.

CLAIRE

You got what? The fire department on its way? James Coleman, what are you doing in my kitchen?

The smoke detector stops. James rushes over the Claire and covers her eyes.

JAMES

You can't see this. It's my surprise.

Claire pushes his hand away. She begins cleaning. She stares at the stove.

CLAIRE

Bacon is not meant to be black, James.

JAMES

It's all a part of my plan.

Claire goes to a pot and flicks it over a bowl but nothing comes out.

CLAIRE

Are these supposed to be grits?

Claire laughs and pecks James on his forehead.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Thanks for the effort.

She reaches for the coffee pot. She pours a cup and smiles at the result. James nods his head.

JAMES
But that coffee though...

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

PRODUCER counts down JESSICA (modest, 40) and TATE (mid 30s, handsome) off the show. They take off their headsets. INTERN brings Tate a cup of something. He looks at her like she has three heads. The intern is horrified.

JESSICA
Don't mind him. He only drinks out of glasses.

TATE
What was that?

JESSICA
The new intern. Give her a chance.

Jessica slides her chair closer to Tate.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
We good?

TATE
We always good.

JESSICA
You bring a bag?

TATE
We don't usually smoke here but...

Tate reaches in his pocket.

JESSICA
Ty, this is serious. Our flight leaves in three hours.

TATE
Oh yeah, about that, I can't go and play house with you.

JESSICA
(panicky)
What? We had a deal.

Tate laughs. The intern returns with a glass of chocolate milk. He downs it. Tate gets up to leave.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

TATE
To practice playing hubby.

Jessica shakes her head as she watches Tate leave. Her cell phone RINGS.

JESSICA (IN THE PHONE)
Oh, hey, Daddy!

INT. PATIO - DAY

James is sitting on a patio deck. In the background, we see Claire cleaning dishes.

JAMES (IN THE PHONE)
You promised.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

JESSICA (IN THE PHONE)
I'm coming Daddy. I'll be there by dinner.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

JAMES (IN THE PHONE)
You'd better. You'll make your mother so happy. Plus, I got something to tell you girls. Gotta go. Here comes, Nosy Rosy.

Claire wipes her hands on her apron.

CLAIRE
Who was that? Your other woman?

JAMES
Yeah, she says hi.

CLAIRE
Well, get her over here so she can help me with this mess you've made.

James walks over to her and twirls her around. She laughs.

JAMES
I love you Claire Ann Russell.

CLAIRE
If you really loved me, you'd stay out of my kitchen.

Claire leads James back into the kitchen and points to what she wants him to do.

INT. PAUL AND MICHELLE BEDROOM - DAY

PAUL (high 30s, muscular) watches his wife, MICHELLE, (high 30s, high-maintenance) saunter around the room on her cell phone.

MICHELLE (IN THE PHONE)

Yes, Dalton, I understand but I usually spend time with my mother this weekend.

Michelle puts on her blouse.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I will try to mark up the contract this weekend but cannot make any promises. Besides, when would you sign it if I'm in Mississippi?

Michelle puts on her pumps.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Your private jet?

Michelle rolls a suitcase over to Paul.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

In that case, I'll have it ready by Sunday.

Michelle ends her call and glares at Paul.

PAUL

Why do you do that? Act like I'm not even here.

MICHELLE

I've done it so long that it's beginning to be true.

PAUL

I try to do right by you, Michelle. When do I get the same respect?

Michelle looks him up and down.

MICHELLE

I'll be ready to go when you are.

Michelle leaves and Paul starts packing a bag.

INT. ASHLEY AND DAVIS BEDROOM - DAY

ASHLEY (late 20s) scurries around the room, gathering clothes and other belongings.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

DAVIS (late 20s) sits on the side of the tub. He whispers into his cell phone.

DAVIS (IN THE PHONE)
You can't keep putting this kind of pressure on me.

We hear a FEMALE voice through the phone.

FEMALE
I've been patient with you long enough.

DAVIS
Just let me get through this weekend. Then we can talk.

FEMALE
I'm done talking. I need some action.

ASHLEY (O.C.)
Davis, c'mon honey, We're going to be late.

DAVIS (IN THE PHONE)
I gotta go.

FEMALE
Your time is up.

The door swings open. Ashley finds Davis still sitting in his boxers.

ASHLEY
Hurry up. We gotta go.

DAVIS
Give me a few more minutes.

Ashley leaves. Davis stares at his reflection. He washes his face.

ASHLEY (O.C.)
Davis.

DAVIS
I'm coming.

Davis slowly dresses.

EXT. GRAVE - DAY

ISAIAH (high 30s) removes old withered flowers from a headstone and replaces them with a fresh set of flowers. His cell phone RINGS.

ISAIAH (IN THE PHONE)

Hello.

EXT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

James sits in his recliner, remote in hand.

JAMES (IN THE PHONE)

Just wanted to make sure you are in town.

ISAIAH

Yes, I am here at Mama and Daddy's graves.

JAMES

Oh, sorry to interrupt.

ISAIAH

No worries. I've been thinking. This may not be the best time.

JAMES

Of course it is. You shouldn't be alone. It's your first Mother's Day without her.

Isaiah hangs his head.

ISAIAH

You may be right.

JAMES

I know I'm right. Just stop by. We'll be here.

Isaiah hangs up and stuffs the phone in his pocket. He kneels before his mother's grave.

EXT. RUSSELL DOOR - DAY

Ashley walks up to the door, carrying bags. Davis is a few paces behind her, on his phone. He ends his call and walks up to Ashley. She looks disgusted.

Davis hands her his cell phone.

DAVIS
Here, take it. No more phone.

Davis RINGS the doorbell. Just as James opens the door, Davis' phone RINGS. He snatches it from Ashley and tips away from the door.

Davis whispers into the phone.

DAVIS (IN THE PHONE) (CONT'D)
Now is not a good time.

JAMES
I know he'd better get off that phone and help you with those bags.

Claire comes to the door. She hugs Ashley.

CLAIRE
Is everything all right?

Ashley looks over her shoulder at Davis. He is still on the phone.

ASHLEY
I guess.

Ashley picks up the bags and James sets them back down. James ushers Ashley in the house and slams the door. Moments later, the bell RINGS.

Davis stands at the door.

JAMES
You ready to join us?

Claire pushes James out of the way and lets Davis in.

INT. RUSSELL LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ashley notices all of the pictures spread across the table. She pulls her mother over to them.

ASHLEY
Are you making a new album?

CLAIRE
Yes, I thought this would be a great time to make one. When we are all together. I called Jessica. She said she had to work.

JAMES
I may have a trick or two up my sleeve.

CLAIRE
Who?

JAMES
You know the girl prefers Jessie.

CLAIRE
I named her Jessica and that is what I will call her.

JAMES
No wonder the girl hardly comes home.

CLAIRE
Don't make me out to be the bad guy here.
Her name is...

JAMES
Jessie.

Claire dismisses him and goes to Ashley who has pushed pictures around.

CLAIRE
Don't mess up my layout.

EXT. RUSSELL DRIVEWAY - DAY

A luxury car pulls up. With designer shades and rhinestone cell phone, Michelle, gives commands.

MICHELLE (IN THE PHONE)
I saw the attached copy you sent and that will not do. You have to get it right if you want to continue to work for me.

Michelle looks over her shoulder and finds Paul staring at her. She removes the phone from her ear and rests it on her chest.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
(to Paul)
Get the bags.

Paul does as he's told. He waits for Michelle at the front of the car. She walks up to him, still on the phone.

MICHELLE (IN THE PHONE) (CONT'D)
Because that is not the way I want it.

Michelle senses Paul looking at her. She stops.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

(to Paul)

Let's just get through this weekend
without a fight, ok?

PAUL

Maybe we could if you'd stay off the
phone.

MICHELLE

Look, don't start with me. I have a
business to run. So just shut up, smile,
and we can go back to normal in a couple
of days.

Michelle puts the phone back up to her ear.

MICHELLE (IN THE PHONE) (CONT'D)

No, not you. I need to talk you through
this contract so Dalton can sign it this
weekend. Now listen...

Michelle walks ahead of Paul who stands frozen, shaking
his head.

Michelle gets to the front door.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Daphne, I need that contract right and
tight before you go home tonight or
consider yourself unemployed come Monday
morning.

Michelle hangs up the phone and beckons Paul to meet her
at the door. She swings the door open and grabs his hand
before they walk in.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Hey Mama. Hey Daddy.

INT. RUSSELL LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul and Michelle greet James and Claire. They take their
bags upstairs.

INT. PAUL AND MICHELLE BEDROOM #2 - DAY

Michelle changes clothes.

PAUL

You know, you really shouldn't talk to your assistant the way you do.

MICHELLE

Why do you care?

PAUL

I'm a human being. That's why I care. Have you ever thought about how you treat people?

MICHELLE

I don't have time for this. Daphne has worked for me for years. She knows how I do business.

PAUL

Doesn't make it right.

MICHELLE

Are you ready to play family?

Michelle reaches for his hand and pecks him on the lips. She smears some of her lipstick. He tries to wipe it off. She pushes his hand away.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Claire prepares sandwiches while Ashley makes lemonade. Michelle walks in.

Ashley hugs Michelle.

MICHELLE

Where's your knight in shiny armor?

ASHLEY

He's upstairs, showering. Long drive.

MICHELLE

I bet he's on that cell phone.

Claire scoffs.

CLAIRE

Well, ain't that the pot talking about the kettle.

MICHELLE

I turn all of my business off when I come for this weekend.

Claire and Ashley laugh.

CLAIRE

Just get a knife and make it your business to cut these sandwiches.

Claire mixes a green salad.

MICHELLE

Have you ever thought about us not meeting like this EVERY Mother's Day?

ASHLEY

Why wouldn't we?

MICHELLE

It's been three years since we were all together. Your eldest is just so damn busy.

CLAIRE

Language.

ASHLEY

Whenever you want to know what she's doing, you can call. Or read her blog.

MICHELLE

Please. Do I look like I have time to keep up with her? It's just not fair. We come and she gets a pass.

CLAIRE

No one gives her a pass. She comes when she can.

MICHELLE

She comes when she wants. I'm going to follow suit.

Claire leaves for the patio with the salad in hand.

ASHLEY

You shouldn't upset Mama.

MICHELLE

We should be upset. Year after year, we come for Mother's Day. And Jessica comes for when?

ASHLEY

Well, Mama and Daddy understand.

MICHELLE

We were just here three months ago for
First Lady Wilkins' funeral.

ASHLEY

Because Mama needed us.

MICHELLE

She needed all three of us.

Claire walks back into the kitchen.

CLAIRE

Need all three of you for what?

ASHLEY

Nothing, Mama. Michelle was just saying.
We should have come together as a unit
and gotten you a Mother's Day gift
instead of individually.

Michelle leaves with half of the sandwiches cut. Ashley
hugs her mother and goes over to finish them.

INT. RUSSELL LIVING ROOM

Claire and Ashley walk in with the sandwiches and
lemonade.

CLAIRE

Just a little something to tide us over
until dinner. Come and join us on the
patio.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

Everyone sits under the canopy and enjoys their lunch.

MICHELLE

It would be so nice if we could all be
here.

JAMES

I may have a trick or two up my sleeve
this Mother's Day.

The girls all look at James.

Ashley bubbles over with joy.

ASHLEY

You didn't?

James smiles and nods his head.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

You did??

Michelle folds her arms in disbelief.

MICHELLE

Did you get her commitment in writing?
All she seems to honor is a contract.

Paul smiles over the news.

PAUL

Jessica's coming?

Davis is in disbelief.

DAVIS

I don't think I've seen Jessica since we
got married.

ASHLEY

That's because you never take me to visit
her.

CLAIRE

Well, if your Daddy pulls this one off,
it'll be the best Mother's Day yet.

MICHELLE

You know, Mama, you are going to love
what I got you this Mother's Day.

CLAIRE

What could be better than my Theresa
coming?

Michelle looks away in disgust.

ASHLEY

I agree with Mama. This is going to be
awesome. Just Jessica coming is surprise
enough. Daddy, you are the best.

Ashley goes over to hug James.

PAUL

It will be good to see ole Jessica.

Paul smiles over the idea.

JAMES

Yes, seeing her in person and not on the internet or FaceTime.

MICHELLE

Do you people hear yourselves? Jessica is not the second coming. If she really cared, she'd be here every year, like me and Ashley. We value our time with you, Mama.

Michelle storms off. Claire walks after her but James stops her.

JAMES

Let her have the moment.

INT. LIVING ROOM

James, Ashley, and Claire sit together on the couch, flipping through the photo album. Michelle and Paul sit across from each other. Davis stands behind the sofa.

ASHLEY

(laughing)

Oh my god! Who is this?

CLAIRE

That's Michelle. Michelle, remember when Jessica drew on you with a sharpie?

Everyone laughs except Michelle.

MICHELLE

How could I forget? You remind me every year.

Michelle rolls her eyes.

ASHLEY

(to Michelle)

I'll never forget when you cut my hair when I was six. Talking 'bout I looked just like Mama.

JAMES

I don't know what Michelle thought she was doing. You looked more like a rooster.

ASHLEY

Ooo, look. A picture of Michelle and
Isaiah in the church choir.

JAMES

You two were so close. Almost like
brother and sister.

MICHELLE

Enough of this stroll down memory lane.
Daddy, you got what you wanted. We're all
here.

Claire cuts James a sharp look; he brushes it off.

JAMES

Once Jessica gets here, we can...

CLAIRE

(interrupts)

We can prepare dinner. I would love to
have all my girls in the kitchen with me.

MICHELLE

Why? Jessica was never in the kitchen
when we were younger.

ASHLEY

Because she had things to do.

MICHELLE

And I didn't. I still did my chores and
helped Mama whenever she wanted.

Michelle stands and takes up plates and cups.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

See. Helping.

Michelle walks into the house.

JAMES

What is her problem?

CLAIRE

Same old Michelle. If she isn't getting
her way, she is acting out.

5

EXT. DRIVE WAY

5

A car pulls up. JESSICA and TATE talk in the car.

JESSICA
 (nervous)
 Ok. We're here.

TATE
 Oh, really? All this time I thought we
 were there.

JESSICA
 Don't be corny this weekend. Just stand
 there and be cute and we should be good.

TATE
 You think I'm cute?

JESSICA
 Tate. Focus.

Jessica reaches in her bag and pulls out an envelope. She
 hands it to Tate.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
 As agreed, half now, half Sunday.

Tate takes it, looks through it, and smirks. He hands it
 back.

TATE
 Keep it. This is gonna be fun.

6 INT. LIVING ROOM ENTRANCE 6

Jessica and Tate walk in.

JESSICA
 Hello, hello, hello! Hungry family at the
 door.

7 INT. LIVING ROOM 7

Ashley's eyes widen. She rushes past Jessica and hugs
 Tate.

ASHLEY
 Oh. My. God. Tate Lee, the sexy half of
 the TNT Morning Show.

Davis walks over to him.

DAVIS
 You are a marketing dream. You can sell
 anything.

Tate takes in all of the fanfare. Claire walks over to Jessica. Claire focuses her attention on Tate.

CLAIRE

It is so good to see you. And you brought a guest.

Claire steps back to look Tate up and down. He takes Claire's hand and kisses it.

TATE

It is definitely a pleasure to meet you. All of you. Jessica doesn't stop talking about her wonderful family.

Michelle snorts.

JESSICA

(uncomfortable)

Well, Mama, it was my surprise. Surprise!

TATE

Yes, ma'am, we wanted to surprise you.

Tate wraps his arm around Terri's waist. James steps up beside his wife.

TATE (CONT'D)

Since I'm her man now.

Jessica elbows Tate.

CLAIRE

(impressed)

Her man?

ASHLEY

(excited)

Her man!

PAUL

(confused)

Her man?

JAMES

(shocked)

Her man?

MICHELLE

(sarcastic)

Her man. Yeah, right.

JESSICA

Well, now that we've all met, I'll just get him to his hotel and--

CLAIRE

Hotel? How can we get to know him?

Claire begins to usher Jessica and Tate up the stairs to get settled.

INT. HALLWAY

Jessica walks toward her room, leaving Tate and Claire behind.

CLAIRE

You know, I listen to you on that show. But I never imagined you two...

TATE

I know. It's almost like it happened this morning.

Jessica walks into her room.

Claire walks Tate to the guest room.

CLAIRE

I wasn't expecting company so this room isn't as fresh as I'd like it.

Claire flattens out the comforter.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

So how long have you and Jessica been dating?

TATE

Not long.

CLAIRE

No one would think you two were dating based on your show.

TATE

I know. We like to keep our fans guessing.

Claire smiles. Tate smiles back.

CLAIRE

Let me get you some fresh towels.

Claire rushes down the hall.

Jessica hears her and goes to the guest room.

INT. GUEST ROOM - DAY

Jessica barges in and pushes Tate onto the bed.

TATE

Girl, you'd better stop that. I like it rough.

Tate laughs at Jessica's aggravation.

JESSICA

How dare you tell them you are my man.

TATE

I thought that was the big idea.

JESSICA

It was to be implied. If this all blows up, they'll know I'm lying.

TATE

But you are.

JESSICA

Not blatantly.

TATE

I think this word manipulation is turning me on.

Tate grabs Jessica and playfully grinds on her. Claire walks in and drops the towels.

Claire covers her eyes.

CLAIRE

Oh my word.

Claire walks off. Jessica balls her fist at Tate and goes after her mother.

JESSICA

Mama...

Tate picks up the towels and lies across the bed with a wide grin.

TATE

Oh yeah, lots of fun.

INT. DINING ROOM

Everyone comes down and sits around the table, except Ashley and Claire who bring out the food. Jessica notices the spaghetti.

JESSICA

Is that turkey?

MICHELLE

And if it isn't?

JESSICA

I wasn't talking to you. Tate and I don't eat red meat.

MICHELLE

Why don't you sample it and see?

CLAIRE

Will you two stop it? Theresa, I remembered and that batch is indeed turkey.

Claire goes back into the kitchen and brings a red dish filled with spaghetti.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Ground beef.

JESSICA

Thank you Mama.

They smile at each other.

DAVIS

Yo, Tate, we need to link up. I can think of a lot of ways to help you make more money.

TATE

Thanks.

MICHELLE

So when did this become an office bromance? I mean, really, we all know Jessica is gay.

JESSICA

See, this is why I don't come home.

ASHLEY

Why don't you leave her alone?

MICHELLE

And why don't you shut up?

JESSICA

Don't talk to Ashley that way.

James hits the table.

JAMES

Girls. We have a guest in our home.

CLAIRE

Yes. Tate, I do apologize for their behavior.

TATE

No worries.

Tate grabs Jessica by her waist.

TATE (CONT'D)

I like feisty Jessica.

Jessica shoots him a look and he backs off.

Michelle downs a glass of wine and pours herself another.

PAUL

Michelle, maybe you've had enough.

MICHELLE

Paul, maybe this is how I enjoy my family.

Paul leaves the table. Claire nudges Michelle.

CLAIRE

Maybe you should see what is bothering him.

JESSICA

She's what's bothering him.

CLAIRE

Don't start that again.

MICHELLE

At least, I got a husband to bother.

Michelle leaves the table.

There is a long pause. Tate fake yawns.

TATE

I think I will get some shut eye myself.

CLAIRE

Don't you want to finish your meal?

JESSICA

We really try not to eat after 6pm.

CLAIRE

Oh, I cooked too late, I didn't know.

Tate smiles at Claire, reassuring her everything is okay.

TATE

How could you?

Tate and Jessica leave.

Davis eats spaghetti while Ashley sits there.

ASHLEY

We're going upstairs too.

Davis still has food in his mouth.

DAVIS

We are?

Ashley elbows him.

DAVIS (CONT'D)

Yes, we are.

ASHLEY

Mama, I'll be back down to help you clear these dishes.

CLAIRE

No need, baby. Your father will help me.

James still has food in his mouth.

JAMES

I will?

Claire elbows James.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Yes, I will. You get some rest baby girl and we'll see you in the morning.

INT. KITCHEN

Claire and James wash dishes.

CLAIRE

I don't know what you did or how you said it but getting Theresa here...

JAMES

Jessica.

CLAIRE

Fine. Just for the weekend.

JAMES

That's my girl.

James pecks her on the cheek. Claire stops as she realizes why he got Jessica to come.

CLAIRE

You want to tell them about Isaiah.

JAMES

I want to tell them about everything.

CLAIRE

This would not be a good time. They can't even eat a meal together. So why would we tell them now?

CLACK.

The noise distracts them.

Ashley runs up the stairs as quietly as she can.

INT. ASHLEY AND DAVIS BEDROOM #2

Ashley rushes into her room. Davis is on his computer. She tries to get his attention.

ASHLEY

Davis. Davis? My Mom and Dad...

Davis ignores her. She looks at his computer screen. He is reading an article about three attorneys indicted on embezzlement charges.

Ashley points to one.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Don't we know him?

Davis slams the computer.

DAVIS
I'm getting tired of you looking over my
shoulder everywhere I go.

Davis pulls the covers over his head.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

Ashley goes to the door.

CLAIRE
Just checking in on you. Everything ok?

ASHLEY
Of course.

Claire starts to walk off but Ashley stops her.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
Is everything ok with you and Daddy?

CLAIRE
Of course. Why would you ask?

Michelle sticks her head out of her bedroom.

MICHELLE
Mama, is that you? I need towels.

Claire turns to Ashley.

CLAIRE
That girl is always needing something.

Claire and Ashley laugh.

Claire walks to Michelle's room and hands her some
towels.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Does Paul need anything?

Michelle looks over at her shoulder at him.

PAUL
(mumbles)
A new wife.

CLAIRE
I didn't hear him.

MICHELLE
He says he enjoys life.

Michelle closes the door.

INT. MICHELLE AND PAUL'S ROOM

MICHELLE
Why do you insist on upsetting me?

PAUL
How many ways do I have to say I no longer want to be in this marriage?

MICHELLE
The feeling is mutual.

PAUL
So why won't you divorce me?

MICHELLE
My mama loves a perfect family.

Michelle throws the towels on the bed and walks into the bathroom.

INT. HALLWAY

Claire knocks on Jessica's door.

Jessica opens it.

CLAIRE
Got some fresh towels.

JESSICA
Thanks Mama.

Jessica tries to shut the door and Claire stops her.

CLAIRE
How long has this be going on between you and Tate?

JESSICA
Do you really want to do this in the hallway?

CLAIRE

Just asking.

JESSICA

You look tired. Wouldn't you rather bombard me with questions when you are at full strength?

Claire hands Jessica the towels.

CLAIRE

See you in the morning.

Jessica walks into her room.

INT. CLAIRE AND JAMES BEDROOM

Claire takes off earrings and jewelry as James comes out of the bathroom. There is a long silence as they prepare for bed.

Claire walks toward the bathroom.

CLAIRE

Must I remind you that it's Mother's Day weekend?

JAMES

And they are all here.

CLAIRE

For me to enjoy.

Claire walks into the bathroom.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

My weekend.