

BYLINE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WAREHOUSE - LOADING BAY - NIGHT

WAYNE NANCE (32), his good looks further enhanced by a designer suit, appears out of place waiting on a dirty, grease streaked loading dock. Crates rest by his shiny loafers.

Two burly MEN climb out of a nearby truck. One opens a crate for Wayne's inspection.

After a moment, a smile creases Wayne's face. He uses his toe to slide a briefcase to the men. Satisfied with the contents, one extends a hand to Wayne to shake.

Wayne gives the offered hand a disdainful look. Snaps his fingers instead.

More MEN appear from inside the warehouse. The delivery men back away. Hop off the dock and climb back inside the truck.

Once the truck rumbles off, Wayne signals for the men to move the crates inside.

EXT. BUILDING ROOFTOP - NIGHT

CELIA VAUGHN (32), wearing baggy black unisex pants, hooded jacket and knit hat, lays on her stomach at the edge of the roof. She tapes the men with a tiny digital camera.

As Wayne disappears from view, Celia stops recording to glance around. She rubs the nape of her neck then rolls away from the roof's edge. She rises and runs to the opposite side of the roof. Silently descends.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Celia peeks around the corner. She creeps along to a door and tries the knob. It doesn't budge. Glancing around, she pulls out a small case. Celia takes a knee to pick the lock. Opens the door.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Crates are stacked in front of the door.

Celia tries to see around them. Can't.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Celia slides inside. The door closes behind her.

INT. WAREHOUSE - LAB - NIGHT

Crates stacked six feet high line the dimly lit perimeter of the building.

The middle of the space contains a well lighted, plastic enclosed laboratory.

Oblivious to the men stacking crates around him, Wayne checks results on a state of the art computer. He smiles and pats a tray of vials proudly.

Celia circles around a stack and gets a close up of Wayne's face on her camera. She records as he pulls out a cell phone. Hits speed dial. She tightens the focus as much as she can.

WAYNE

Everything is in place. Mass
production can begin in one week.

Celia stops recording and looks at her tiny gold and silver watch. Torn, she looks at the vials. Looks at her watch again. Creeps through the shadows towards the vials.

Celia crouches behind Wayne at his computer. She looks at him. At the vials. At him. Gauging the distance.

The men stack the last crate.

Celia takes a calming breath. Eases into the open. Inches toward the vials.

Her hand closes around two vials. She smiles. Looks at Wayne.

He's looking at her. Gun in his hand, curiously not aimed.

WAYNE

Who the hell are you?

Celia's eyes dart around.

WAYNE

Hand them over.

He carefully approaches. Hand outstretched. Gun in the air.

Celia considers him. She grabs a whole tray of vials.

Wayne backs off.

She uses them as a shield instead. Inches away.

He puts the gun down.

WAYNE

Look. I have cash. Lots of cash.
Just leave my research alone.

Celia eases into the shadows. She bumps a crate. Sending it crashing to the floor.

Wayne jumps at her. She drops a couple vials trying to avoid him. Crinkles her nose at the stench.

CELIA

Ick!

WAYNE

Give those to me!

A couple of the other men hurry over to see what happened.

Celia turns and scampers away.

WAYNE

Stop that man! He's got the
product.

The men chase after Celia.

Another group appear in front of her. Almost blocking her exit.

Celia puts her head down and sprints toward them.

Behind her, a man aims his gun at her fleeing back.

Wayne knocks the gun away as he fires.

WAYNE

He's got a batch, you idiot. You
wanna kill us all?

Nearly in the second group's clutches, Celia flings open the door and flies outside.

EXT. DARK ALLEY - NIGHT

Awkwardly clutching the tray of vials, Celia runs full tilt not bothering to look back.

The men burst from the warehouse. See her dart around a corner and give chase.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Celia sprints along the deserted sidewalk towards a lighted area. Nearing the area, she checks behind her. Seeing no one, she rips her pants off revealing the bottom of a bright red dress and killer legs.

She tucks the vials in the pants and holds them with her teeth. Discards the tray in a nearby dumpster.

Still running, she pulls off her jacket and hat. Her hair flies free. She stuffs everything inside the jacket and turns it into a red sequined bag just as she emerges into the lighted, populated area.

She walks a little bit down the street before stopping to catch her breath.

The men run out into the open and stop short to look around. They stalk right past Celia looking for their prey.

She smiles and runs her fingers through her hair and sashays across the street in her tennis shoes.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

Refined laughter tinkers from GLADYS RAYMOND'S (60) mouth. The mirth does nothing to soften her hard features nor light her cold grey eyes.

GLADYS

I do so enjoy your stories, Ida.

IDA KERNS (68), inspects Gladys through delicate glasses.

IDA

Enough about me. Did I hear a rumor that Bradley has his eye on some fine young lass?

Gladys snorts her derision.

GLADYS

Fine young lady my eye. She's a *working* girl. If you know what I mean.

Ida gasps and gasps at her chest in dismay.

HENRY RAYMOND (62) sweeps to Gladys' side and hands her a drink. He offers Ida a calming smile.

HENRY

For Chrissakes Gladys, she's a reporter. Not a prostitute.

GLADYS

From you of all people. That woman skewers you in the press every chance she gets.

HENRY

That has nothing to do with her dating our son, dear.

Gladys looks across the room. Ida follows her gaze.

BRADLEY RAYMOND, 38, cocky with faux self assurance, chats with a couple giggling, underage DEBUTANTES.

IDA

Which one is she?

GLADYS

I wouldn't know. We haven't met her, yet. More of her doing I'd imagine...

Henry smiles as Bradley gestures grandly with his glass of champagne making the Debutantes titter.

HENRY

Darling, I hardly think they're committed.

The lights flash. Henry offers his arms to both ladies to escort them back inside the theater.

One of the debutantes clutch at Bradley's elbow. He shakes her off by putting an arm around them both and squeezing their behinds in the crowd.

An older WOMAN sniffs disdainfully and pushes away through the crowd. She snatches her HUSBAND along with her. He shoots Bradley an envying sigh then follows.

Bradley's leer melts away as he spots Celia gliding towards them on impossibly high red heels. He slips free of the crowd and meets her halfway.

BRADLEY

Wow. You really have gotten this bathroom timing down. You're just in time.

Celia hides a grimace behind a smile.

CELIA

The secret is to watch the end of
act one from the back. Eh voila,
short ladies' room line.

Bradley tucks Celia's hand under his elbow to escort her
inside the auditorium.

He shoots another look at the debutantes as they pass.

Fully aware, Celia rolls her eyes.

INT. RAYMOND'S CAR - DRIVING - NIGHT

Bradley gives Celia a patronizing smile.

BRADLEY

You shouldn't have to work this
hard, sweetie. It's ten-thirty and
you're going back to the office.

She absently plays with her bag.

CELIA

Duty calls.

BRADLEY

I had a wonderful dinner all
planned and everything.

CELIA

Don't pout. There'll be other
dinners.

Bradley shrugs. He pulls the car over to the curb. Takes a
deep breath and looks at her.

Catching a glimpse of red velvet, Celia studies him warily.

BRADLEY

I wanted this to be perfect, but--

CELIA

(interrupts)

The evening was perfect.

She gives him a quick peck on the cheek and scrambles out of
the car.

Startled, Bradley fumbles with a ring box and stares after
her.

EXT. NEWS TIMES - NIGHT

Celia scurries towards the building entrance faster than humanly possible in those heels.

INT. NEWS TIMES - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Celia's shoulders relax as she blows out a breath.

MR. GEORGE, an aging security guard, sits at the desk. Stares at his computer monitor. He never looks up as Celia strides towards him.

MR. GEORGE

All these late hours can't be good for you, Ms. Vaughn. Don't you ever stop working?

She continues towards her office with a smile.

CELIA

I went to a play this evening, Mr. George. Completely unrelated to work.

MR. GEORGE

Right. How was intermission?

CELIA

(laughs)
It was fantastic.

She disappears into the newsroom. Mr. George shakes his head with a smile and continues playing solitaire.

INT. NEWS TIMES - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Desks line the middle of the huge open room. The perimeter is lined with open offices.

Some PEOPLE work at the middle desks. The offices are empty.

Celia hurries into her office.

INT. NEWS TIMES CELIA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Plaques and awards sit haphazardly on a shelf jammed with books. A box in the corner has more awards and journalism trophies tossed in.

Celia plops in front of her computer and plugs the camera in. While it dumps footage, she turns on her television to a local news affiliate.

On the computer screen, she freezes the digital image of Wayne. She stares at him long and hard. She shakes the vials from her pants on the desk. Considers them.

Flashing red and blue lights on the TV catch her attention.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - NIGHT

Lights flash on fire trucks, police cruisers and ambulances. Impressive flames compete for attention.

Scared DOCTORS, NURSES and PATIENTS stare in horror at the burning abortion clinic. Curious ONLOOKERS and PROTESTERS round out the civilian crowd.

A REPORTER talks in the foreground. She struggles to keep her excitement in check.

INT. NEWS TIMES - CELIA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Celia turns up the volume.

FEMALE REPORTER (O.S.)
...arson. The ATF has jurisdiction.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - NIGHT

The reporter looks around and snags a passing ATF agent. DOUG NEIL (34) stops and looks at the reporter and the cameras with equal parts annoyance and disdain.

The reporter, caught up in his rugged good looks, primps then smiles flirtatiously.

FEMALE REPORTER
What can you tell us about this
fire?

Doug considers her for a moment. His own flirty smile lights his face.

DOUG
Nothing.

FEMALE REPORTER
Surely you know something.

DOUG
I do. But your question was *what*
can I tell you.

The reporter flushes in embarrassment. Doug flashes his smile directly at the camera then walks away.

INT. NEWS TIMES - CELIA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Celia glares his image.

Her phone rings. She picks it up without taking her eyes off the television.

CELIA

Celia Vaughn.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Why am I seeing your story on a rival network? My office first thing tom--

CELIA

Richard, Richard! You're not on voicemail.

RICHARD (V.O.)

You're at the office this late? What happened with Bradley?

CELIA

Getting a little clingy.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Hmmp. This have anything to do with you?

CELIA

I'm not scooped.

RICHARD (V.O.)

I didn't say you were. Go home. Get some rest. We'll discuss where to go from here in the morning.

He hangs up. She puts the phone down and considers the TV.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - NIGHT

The news camera pans across the crowd. Wayne smugly watches among the onlookers.

REPORTER (O.S.)

...where Pro Life supporters have turned out en masse.

INT. NEWS TIMES - CELIA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Celia frowns. Rewinds the TiVo. Slows the picture down. A slow smile spreads over her face. Celia sweeps all the vials, but one in her drawer.

Without touching the actual vial, she wraps the remaining one in plastic and ties a red bow around the top. She drops it in her bag, hits record, then hurries from the office.

CELIA
I'm not scooped.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - NIGHT

Doug absently scans the crowd of onlookers as the flames die down.

REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN trip over each other trying to interview the rowdy PROTESTERS who carry inflammatory picket signs.

Wayne tucks himself in among the non activist onlookers.

Doug's gaze travels slowly over everyone.

CHIEF BILL strides over to Doug.

CHIEF BILL
It's not pretty in there. Your forensics team is going to have a challenge.

DOUG
It look like the others?

CHIEF BILL
Let's get your guys suited up. Clear for entry in ten.

Doug's jaw clenches. He nods. Heads for the CORONER who climbs wearily out of his vehicle.

DOUG
Initial reports of eight missing. Including a 7 year old boy.

The CORONER winces. Gathers his tools.

CORONER
Is it too much to hope that they died from the smoke this time instead of burning to death?

DOUG
'Fraid so.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Celia threads her way through the vehicle blockade.

A couple grim-faced OFFICERS head her way. She ducks in the shadows as they shepherd out the onlookers.

Celia navigates the maze of cars and ducks under an SUV.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - NIGHT

The fire is out. Onlookers have all disbursed except for the protesters.

The last CAMERAMAN stops recording and packs up his equipment.

The protesters halt their march mid-chant and pack up, too.

INT. ABORTION CLINIC - UNDER SUV - NIGHT

Celia rolls her eyes from where she peeks around a tire.

INT. ABORTION CLINIC - NIGHT

Doug, Chief Bill and AGENT JOHNSON exit the clinic in time to see the protesters leave.

DOUG

Sickening. Only care about the casualties when someone's watching.

CHIEF BILL

Thank God we only got minor injuries in this one.

DOUG

Her life was spared. Too bad she didn't do the same for her baby.

INT. ABORTION CLINIC - UNDER SUV - NIGHT

Celia raises an annoyed eyebrow at his comment.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

Even with the quicker entry. We got nothing.

DOUG (O.S.)

Fires just don't move like this without an accelerant. It's impossible.

An interested smile spreads across Celia's face.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

It's going to be a long night. I'm gonna get rid of these cars.

Celia watches in a panic as he shoos away the extra vehicles. No way for her to sneak out without being seen. She settles in to write the story on her phone.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - MORNING

Doug exits the charred clinic with a yawn. Johnson drags along behind him.

JOHNSON

I'ma get some shut eye. See you at the office this afternoon.

DOUG

We gotta stop this guy.

JOHNSON

We will.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - UNDER SUV - MORNING

Celia experimentally moves her limbs. She watches Johnson's sedan drive off. The SUV drops a little as Doug climbs in. The motors starts. Celia looks for a way out.

The SUV is put in reverse. Celia lays on her stomach. She shimmies along with the vehicle as it backs out. Lays flat and waits for it to drive off.

The moment it pulls away, she hops up and sprints for the bushes along the sidewalk.

INT. DOUG'S SUV - MORNING

Doug rubs his face and glances in his rearview as a figure darts into the shrubs. He frowns and slows down.

DOUG

She wouldn't.

Doug floors the vehicle and peels away.

EXT. ABORTION CLINIC - ALLEY - MORNING

Celia hears the tires squeal and hops on her motorcycle. She tears out of the alley.

EXT. STREETS - MORNING

Doug's SUV careens around corners. He stops abruptly as an ELDERLY LADY begins crossing the street on a red light.

A block over, he sees the motorcycle whiz across the intersection.

The moment the lady clears his path, he floors the accelerator again.

EXT. AVENUE - MORNING

Celia guns the motorcycle. She whizzes across intersection after intersection in the sparse traffic. To her left, she sees the SUV doing the same thing.

She sucks in a breath. Makes an abrupt turn.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Doug looks for the motorcycle. It's gone. He skids around a corner and flies through town.

EXT. CELIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Celia hits a remote button, opening her garage door. She careens inside and shuts the bike down. Closes the garage door and unplugs the power source before racing in the house.

INT. DOUG'S SUV - MORNING

Doug punches his remote button. Frowns when the garage doesn't open. He screeches to a halt in the driveway.

INT. CELIA'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Celia shucks her clothes and dives under the covers.

She feigns sleep as Doug bursts into the room.

DOUG

Celia?

She snores softly.

Doug can't hide his grin. He kicks off his shoes and lays down beside her.

She smiles and rolls over. Snuggles close to him.

CELIA

Mmmmm. Are you just getting home?

DOUG

Are you?

CELIA

I had wonderful dreams. All night.
About you.

She kisses his neck.

DOUG

Really? So that wasn't you that I just raced home from the site of the latest abortion clinic fire?

CELIA

There was another fire?

DOUG

Cut it out, Celia. You stink.

Celia frowns at him and sits up.

CELIA

You sure know how to woo a girl.

DOUG

You're not getting off that easy. I can't believe you hid under my SUV. I could've killed you. And whatever you heard, forget it. We're not releasing any of that to the public just yet.

Celia glances away guiltily. She climbs out of bed.

CELIA

I kinda already filed my story. But don't worry. I didn't mention any names.

DOUG

You were under my truck all night. How in the heck did you file your story?

CELIA

If you would actually use the smartphone I got you, you would know.

Doug grimaces and covers his face.

DOUG

I'm so screwed. We're never going to catch this guy if you keep telling him everything we're thinking. My boss is going to love this.

CELIA

You know me better than that.

Doug sighs.

Celia crawls back on the bed beside him.

CELIA

Now aren't you glad I talked you
out of announcing our marriage?
This way, your boss has no proof.

Doug peeks at her from under his elbow.

DOUG

Yes. And they'll have a harder time
figuring out my motive when you
turn up dead.

CELIA

See? It's a win-win.

Doug lovingly pulls her close. Celia sniffs with a frown.

CELIA

You stink, too. C'mon.

Doug groans, but follows Celia to the bathroom.