

# *Orphan Black* and Subtext

In the pilot of *Orphan Black*, two-bit hustler Sarah Manning (Tatiana Maslany) sees a woman commit suicide on the train tracks. She finds the woman's wallet on the platform and discovers that the woman is named Elizabeth (Beth) Childs. All we know is what Sarah knows, because we're in Sarah's point of view. She finds Beth's keys and goes to her apartment, which is pretty fancy. So she quickly grasps this woman had some money. She looks through Beth's closet and sees that she has some very nice clothes. What she doesn't know yet, and will discover, is that this woman whose identity she's on the brink of stealing is actually a police detective. And she's actually in some hot water.

So now it appears that what seemed like a gift from above (she realizes that she could actually take over this person's life) is going to get her into a lot of trouble. Even in the pilot, the trouble starts from the get-go. This scene hinges on the subtext of what happens when Sarah is snooping around Beth's townhouse, and Beth's hunky boyfriend Paul (Dylan Bruce) unexpectedly comes home.

INT. BETH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Beth is frozen, listening as the door closes.

PAUL (O.S.)  
Beth?

SARAH  
(under her breath)  
Fuck...

PAUL  
Beth?

Sound of footfalls, receding, then approaching, right outside the door... it's pushed open...

PAUL stands looking in. 30ish, leaner and better looking than expected. Suit and loosened tie, travel-worn. He seems cautious with her, not sure what to expect.

PAUL  
Hi.

SARAH  
(as Beth)  
Hey.

He takes in the bag on the bed.

PAUL  
Are you going somewhere?

SARAH  
No, gym stuff.

Sarah tosses it in the cupboard. He's expectant.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
You're back early.

PAUL  
Well, I wanted to be here. So how was the hearing?

SARAH  
Oh... I couldn't do it.

PAUL  
You skipped it?

SARAH  
No. I got sick to my stomach, basically  
puked on them.

PAUL  
(real concern)  
Are you serious?

He comes to hold her. She sidesteps.

SARAH  
I'm okay, don't worry.

She sidesteps again but he cuts her off. She can't meet his  
gaze. He looks at her closer.

PAUL  
Beth...?

SARAH  
What?

He senses something amiss, beyond the immediate. Sarah  
pushes past him. He follows her out.

PAUL  
What's happened?

SARAH  
A lot.

PAUL  
I know, but you're...

There's no retreat. She turns to challenge him.

SARAH  
I'm what?

He can't put his finger on it.

PAUL  
What did you do to your hair?

SARAH  
Nothing. Got it cut.

PAUL  
It's longer.

SARAH  
It's just wet.

Concerned, he reaches out to touch her face.

PAUL  
Something's different...

In a corner, Sarah doesn't think. She jumps him -- arms around his neck, kissing him deeply.

All the actual dialogue in the scene is really just superficial interaction between them, and what the audience knows in this case that the boyfriend does not know, is that Beth is actually dead and Sarah is pretending to be Beth. The actual drama and conflict is unspoken. What makes the scene interesting is that we know what's going on in Sarah's mind, and see her surprising non-verbal behavior.

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## Episode Cited

"Natural Selection," *Orphan Black*, written by Graeme Manson; Bell Media/BBC America/  
Temple Street Productions.