

TCM THE PLOT THICKENS

EPISODE 2: I'M NOT FROM HERE

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam figured she'd go work in the movie business and save enough money to pay for school. Her mom's aunt, Mignonne, volunteered to go with her. It would take two days and two nights to get from Denver to Hollywood.

Pam packed only a single pair of jeans and a purple coat.

PAM GRIER: I had a bucket of Colonel Sanders chicken and thirty-three dollars in my pocket, and that's it. And nobody was around. Nobody, you know, hug me and wish me goodbye. Like, you know, hey, one less person to feed. I don't know.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam and Mignonne set off early on a Friday morning in the summer of 1968, in Pam's blue Pontiac.

PAM GRIER: It was a battered Pontiac Firebird. No air conditioning, windows cranked down, cranked up.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Aunt Mignonne was in her 70's and owned a catering business. She cooked Kosher food for wealthy Jewish families. Pam worried about how far her thirty-three dollars would go. Mignonne reassured her - she had it covered.

PAM GRIER: And she popped my eyes out. She opened up her pocketbook. There was a big ass roll of money, cash. I knew I was going to be all right.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam and Mignonne took Route 66. They ate at dive restaurants. They slept in rundown motels on beds that had those vibrating "magic fingers" that shake you to sleep for a nickel. Mignonne told Pam stories about her own life and what she hoped for her niece.

PAM GRIER: And she said, if you ever are afraid, call me. Because I want you to try to stay and be one of the first girls in the family to graduate.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam didn't know what was ahead of her without her mom or Daddy Ray. But as the Rockies disappeared in the rearview mirror, Pam knew one thing for sure. She wanted a bigger life. And it wouldn't be long before Los Angeles delivered.

THEME MUSIC

BEN MANKIEWICZ: I'm your host Ben Mankiewicz. You're listening to season four of The Plot Thickens, a podcast from Turner Classic Movies.

This season - Pam Grier. And how she rose to become the queen of Blaxploitation films and Hollywood's first female action hero.

This is Episode Two: I'm Not From Here.

THEME MUSIC

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The first place Pam went when she got to L.A. was David Baumgarten's office on Sunset Boulevard. He was head of the Agency for the Performing Arts, or APA. And he was one of the reasons she was there.

David saw her in a Denver beauty pageant and told her she had a future in Hollywood. He'd also promised her a job. He made good on that. He hired Pam as a receptionist at APA. In the mornings, she answered phones and scheduled meetings. In the afternoons, Pam did the same thing at American International Pictures or AIP. It was a movie studio that made low-budget films.

PAM GRIER: APA was in the morning, and then there was American International Pictures in the afternoon, and then at night was a sports club that I played music for, a private sports club. I was a DJ.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That was her favorite job. Spinning records in the dark booth. In total, Pam worked five part time jobs.

PAM GRIER: It was expensive to live in L.A. Are you kidding me? Everywhere I drove in L.A. it was twenty-five cents a gallon of regular gas. And this is a whole new, different world out there.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: During morning shifts at APA, Pam became fast friends with the other receptionist, a British woman named Linda. She noticed Pam didn't dress like everyone else at work.

PAM GRIER: The secretary said, here, we're going to take you shopping. Because I wore the same blouse and skirt every day. In Century City, in a store called Judy's. And the secretary said "We got to go to Judy's, it so has the greatest clothes and everything. Have you been to Judy's?" No!

And when we get there, I said "Can I try on the clothes here? Can I try on the clothes?" Because we couldn't try them on in stores back in Denver. You had to take them home in a bag with a receipt, try them on and bring them back, because if whites saw you try on clothing, they wouldn't want to wear it after you did in a clothing store so.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: So white people could try on the clothes in the store. But Black people couldn't.

PAM GRIER: Exactly. Not in Denver. Not in certain stores in Denver. And they said, Sure, of course, you can try on all these clothes. Really?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Linda piled blouses, skirts, and pants in Pam's arms and sent her into the dressing room. The fanciest store Pam had ever been in was her neighborhood Sears. She started to cry. L.A. was a very different place from Denver.

Pam settled on a black skirt and white blouse. It became her uniform. Pam never told Linda that this was the first time she'd ever tried on clothes in a store where white people shopped. In fact, she didn't share with any of her new coworkers just how different her life was back in Denver.

VINTAGE NEWSREEL: UCLA is a top-rated institution...

In 1968, the student movement was in full swing at UCLA. Anti-war rallies and sit-ins took place on campus pretty regularly. UCLA had also recently created a graduate program in film. Pam figured if she was going to work in the movie business - she ought to learn about it. But tuition was nearly \$2000 a year. Pam knew she could never save that kind of money - not even with those five jobs. She called her mom.

PAM GRIER: I don't think I'm gonna make it mom. It's really expensive. It's a whole other world, I need to come home and go to school there. No, you need to stay there. Try, try. And I just, well, mom, I can

come home live with you guys and I can be a doctor. I'll be OK. And she said, No, try that. She's really wanted me to be independent.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam hung up the phone and took a walk through campus.

PAM GRIER: There are these political groups on campus. The Black Panther Party. Sundiata, SIC, and they're having rallies, and it was it was nice to see that. And the women liberation, we're burning our bras and stuff like that, "Oh they're expensive, don't burn them."

Everybody had these wonderful agendas going on the campus and I just thought, Wow. Pam, you got to try to stay, don't give up. It's easier to give up.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam was leaving campus when she saw something in one of the parking lots.

PAM GRIER: There's this area where there's cables, stacks of cables and ropes and gizmos and gadgets in a van, and these students, and I was watching them and I kind of walked over. I think I said, "So what are you doing?" And they said, "We're getting ready to go make our short." And I went "Your short?" "Yeah, we're in film school and we got to make our shorts."

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam had no idea what a short was, but she was up for anything. The students told her they were going to be doing some night shooting and she could come along as crew.

PAM GRIER: I remember telling someone, "I'll be crew, we're going to shoot film." It was exciting because we were on a street, not Hollywood Boulevard, but off of Hollywood, but in the middle of the night shooting scenes. I was holding one of these booms like this and my afro got in the way and they said, Pam, and they were trying to push my fro down. I was like, I'm sorry, so I won't wear an afro next time I'll wear it in a scarf or ponytail. And they would tell me what to do, and it was wonderful. The actors are walking along the sidewalk giving dialog, and we were in the van being pushed along. And next, you know, the lights behind us from a patrolman, it says, Oh, we got to go, we're going to be arrested! Because we're illegal. We're doing something illegal. Everybody's jumping in the van and throwing things in, and they were trying to push it to get the clutch started. And it was like, Oh, I don't know. I don't know if I can do this, but it's, it's kind of fun.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They eventually made their getaway in the van and the cops never followed. But that night, Pam got her first taste of guerilla filmmaking. The students talked about a French film director, Francois Truffaut, and Swedish director Ingmar Bergman - names Pam had never heard before.

PAM GRIER: No, I said, I've never heard of him. So I was really sincere and they didn't make fun of me or mock me. You know, I just I really, I'm fascinated by what you are doing here tonight. It means a lot to me, because I was seriously thinking about packing up and going home. There was just no way!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: After that night, Pam knew she couldn't give up on L.A., not yet anyway. She had so much more to learn about filmmaking – so much more to learn about life beyond Denver.

THEME MUSIC

BEN MANKIEWICZ: After the break, Pam gets a gig as a back up singer and ends up in a historic late night jam session.

PAM GRIER: Next thing you know? There is a big ass bowl of cocaine that comes out of from somewhere.

-----AD BREAK-----

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It was 1969. Pam had been in Los Angeles for about a year. She was on the phone with a friend who always liked to hear Pam sing. She told her friend how she was trying to save money to enroll at UCLA. Her friend offered to help. She knew someone who was looking for backup singers. His name was Bobby Womack.

PAM GRIER: I sing alto, I can sing some soprano, scat, jazz, so you know, Bobby Womack, OK, I can, I can learn, I can follow, you know, whatever he wants me to do.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam was more than ready to audition, but Bobby hired her without ever hearing her sing. She was told to meet him at his studio in Brentwood, near Bel-Air.

PAM GRIER: And it was him in the glasses and everything. And I went, Oh my God, I'm going to sing backup for you!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: In 1969, Bobby Womack was 25 - just a bit older than Pam. He wore big sunglasses and had thick manicured sideburns that stretched well into his cheeks. And he commanded rooms with his soulful baritone voice. Pam sang for Bobby.

PAM GRIER: (singing) That's the way I feel about ya. Oh, that's the way I feel about ya. Oh, well, that's the way I feel about ya.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: You can sing.

PAM GRIER: "Sang." We call it "singing."

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Not if you're Jewish kid from Washington, D.C.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Bobby paid Pam \$300 to sing back up for him. And then he told her he knew someone else who needed a backup singer.

PAM GRIER: And he says, you know what, you're a student & you need the money? Well, you know, my friend, he's doing a session. Maybe he needs more background singers.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Who is the friend?

PAM GRIER: The friend was Sylvester Stewart.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Sylvester Stewart, as in Sly from Sly and the Family Stone, one of the biggest R&B and Soul bands in the nation. At first, the name didn't register with Pam. She didn't realize Sylvester Stewart was Sly. The gig was at the CBS Recording studios on Sunset Boulevard. Pam headed over there the next day.

PAM GRIER: I go up the stairs, he says go up to this floor, sign this and you'll meet with the manager of the session and sign in and you'll get this scale, triple scale. It's going to be an all-nighter. OK, I can, I can stay awake. And we walk in and the young man runs up to me, the white guy, hippie. And he says, "Here, sign this. You're here to sing with Sly Stone."

BEN MANKIEWICZ: There were other singers too. Pam felt like an outsider who finally found her way in.

PAM GRIER: I'm not from here. I don't look like I'm from here and I'm like, OK. This is what this is. This is. What they talk about, Hollywood, entertainment. I'm in the bowels, I'm in the arteries I am now in where things are created.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam peered through the glass that separated the control room from the studio. There he was. Sly. Head-to-toe in leather and suede. He had the biggest afro in the room and a huge smile. He was writing lyrics while the band played.

PAM GRIER: And in the background are set of drums and a big, dark, burly guy with a fro named Buddy Miles.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Buddy was an amazing drummer and singer. At the time, he was a member of what would become Jimi Hendrix's Band of Gypsys.

PAM GRIER: I'm hearing genius.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Then they called in Pam to join them.

PAM GRIER: It's awesome. Pinch me, I'm really singing here with Sly and the Family Stone? And then, OK, we're going to do that. We're going to multiply what you sung several times, so it feels, sounds bigger. So I'm learning studio technique, engineering technique on a song.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They recorded until about two in the morning. Sly and the others decided it was time to take a break. They were in the outer hallway of the studio when the elevator doors opened. Three guys with long hair walked out. The one in the middle was wearing a black hat. Pam smelled patchouli oil, as he walked by. And then she realized who he was.

PAM GRIER: OK. This is Jimi Hendrix. Sly Stone. Buddy Miles. I'm like, I'm fucked up, I'm just totally messed up, I'm like, OK.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Word got out that Jimi Hendrix was in the house. People started milling around from other studios to catch a glimpse of him. Someone asked Pam if she could keep singing. They wanted her to stick around.

PAM GRIER: Next thing you know? There is a big ass bowl of cocaine that comes out of from somewhere.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam and the other backup singers were offered the coke - but they passed. And then the guys started to play.

PAM GRIER: They start just plucking the bass, playing the music. Buddy's playing some awesome funk. It was like, everybody's just grooving, like, Oh man, this is going to be amazing. Sly Stone, Jimi Hendrix on a session. Where in the hell are those tapes? Because all I know? We couldn't sit down. And I said, this is this is the genius you hear about. These are the people that uplift us, give us escapism, that inspire us, it was my first eye-opener on the creative process and who the people are and where they come from.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam didn't know it yet but she was on her way to becoming one of those people too.

On a hot night in L.A., Pam learned that her new friends liked to cool off in the exclusive clubs along Crenshaw Boulevard. In the 1960s, the Crenshaw area was the heart of Black Los Angeles.

PAM GRIER: And so some of my friends that I had met through friends, they were all college students, we would, you know, put together ten dollars' worth of gas money in a Volkswagen and go to the clubs. And I felt uncomfortable because they dressed so cool and I didn't.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That night, Pam and her friends parked the car in front of Maverick's Flat. The L.A. Times once called Maverick's "LA's Apollo Theater." Acts like Parliament-Funkadelic, The Supremes, and The Temptations performed there. Celebrities came too, people like Muhammad Ali and the Rolling Stones.

PAM GRIER: And everyone is so cool, afros big, they just wear the right clothes. My friends were talking to their friends, and I was just a wallflower with a white blouse that I wore to APA and a black skirt. That's how horrible I dressed at a club.

And I was watching everyone, and there was this tall person with sunglasses on in a dark club and a cane, and I was like, God, he's tall.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam watched him for a while - he could really dance. And that surprised her for someone so tall. She didn't expect him to have rhythm. But he did. And then the tall guy spotted her.

PAM GRIER: And I felt intimidated because the closer he got, the taller he got.

And he came over and said "Hi. So you're not from here." "No, I'm not, but I'm here trying to get into school at UCLA." So he said, "I went to UCLA, played basketball. You like basketball?" "I don't know." And I wanted to say, I'm poor, I don't go to basketball games. And I didn't say that, but I said, I don't know. He said, "You should come to a game sometimes." OK.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: He gave Pam his number. And one day, not long after, she called him. His name was Lew Alcindor Jr. When Lew and Pam met in 1969, Lew was 21 years old and in his final year at UCLA. And by the luck of a coin toss, he'd just been drafted first by the Milwaukee Bucks.

NEWS REPORT: With the flip of a coin today, the Milwaukee Bucks have won the most important draft pick in the history of the NBA. The prize is the sensational Lew Alcindor from UCLA.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lew grew up in Inwood, in upper Manhattan, raised Catholic by his parents Cora and Lew Alcindor Sr. By the time he was 12 years old, Lew had grown to seven feet tall. Kids in the neighborhood and at school would tease him. Despite his height he often found himself losing schoolyard fights. But his parents understood that his height was a gift.

CORA ALCINDOR: He wanted to play football but he was too tall and stringy, so we convinced him that he should play basketball.

LEW ALCINDOR: I didn't know anything about basketball, I was a complete novice.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It took Lew a few years of fumbling around the court in middle school before he really got the hang of the game and became a pretty good center. So good, that college recruiters compared Lew - still in high school - to basketball giants in the NBA.

TV CLIP: Seven foot quarter-inch Lew Alcindor. 15 year-old sophomore at New York's Power Memorial Academy who reminds everybody of Wilt Chamberlain.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: By the time he got to UCLA to play for the Bruins, Lew was seen as a near lock to be an NBA star. Yet still, even with America's eyes on him, Lew kept to himself. He wasn't great at talking to girls or making new friends.

As a city kid, Lew saw how police brutality was affecting Black neighborhoods, including his own.

LEW ALCINDOR: I found my voice after Dr. King was assassinated. The whole idea of non-violence and pointing out the weakness of people of racist philosophies and things like that. The truth will set you free.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lew may have been the most coveted young basketball player in the country, but to Pam, he was just Lew from New York City.

She liked listening to him talk about anything from the Black Power Movement to his New York childhood. He gave Pam a lot to think about. And he could relate to Pam's upbringing and the things she'd seen. He listened to her talk about farming, horses and Daddy Ray.

They must have watched Kurosawa's Seven Samurai a dozen times together. They even bonded over Bruce Lee films

PAM GRIER: I knew the difference between karate and jiu jitsu and kung fu and qigong, and white tiger. There's two different forms, external and internal. And he was very impressed with that. He said, I want you to meet my friend Bruce Lee. And I knew who he was. And I went, "You know Bruce Lee?" "Yes. And we're going to do a movie together." "You are?" I was like I was the country bumpkin.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam was mesmerized by Lew. The way he was able to move with such grace despite his size.

PAM GRIER: To see him at 7' 2" with his legs and his body and his energy. I was like, Oh! He's amazing. He's tall and fast and athletic at such size and grace. And I was athletic. So we had this athleticism, and intelligence and music. He loved Miles Davis. He talked to me about jazz and we played Stanley Turrentine and all the jazz horns, because I grew up with it. So we had a lot in common and I felt comfortable and it lured me in.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam began spending nights at Lew's Malibu apartment. Sometimes she'd stay for most of the week. That apartment was her favorite place to go after a long night of DJing. Sometimes when Lew would come to watch her at the club, she would play one of his favorite bands, Tower of Power. She'd watch him dance through the crowd.

It didn't take long for Pam to fall in love with Lew. And like the rest of America, she loved watching him on the court too.

PAM GRIER: I'm watching the greatest center in the world in basketball and seeing what he did. And I was just in awe. He was teased as a child, he was criticized for his height and his gawkiness or whatever, but he was just going to be an outstanding human being at what he did.

NBA ANNOUNCER: This is his first professional basketball game and the whole country has been waiting for it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The Milwaukee Bucks drafted Lew Alcindor after their first NBA season. It wasn't a good one. They went 27 and 55. They were easily overlooked that first year. That was until Lew Alcindor stepped onto the court as their new center. As a rookie, Lew almost single-handedly flipped the team's record. Lew won Rookie of the Year and became a household name. But as Pam watched Lew's games on TV, she got anxious. His fame grew so fast. Going toe to toe with some of his childhood idols on the court. She worried that if he made the wrong move, one misstep, one full-body hit – that he'd get hurt.

PAM GRIER: And he would talk about it. It could end his career if he did something wrong or something, you know, off the court or on the court. So he highly valued the theory of being in great shape. Being responsible. He took it very seriously.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: By now, she felt like Lew's partner, they were a team. And she was protective of him.

PAM GRIER: What would I do to keep him safe? What am I going to do to help him?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: It all came back to the same thing for Pam: education. She needed to go to school to secure her independence so that if something happened to Lew, they'd be able to count on her. Then that summer, Lew told Pam he wanted to talk to her about something important.

LEW ALCINDOR: I started to investigate Islam after I read The Autobiography of Malcolm X while I was a freshman at UCLA. I was really taken by what he said about Islam and I started 's autobiography to investigate it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: When they first started dating, Lew told Pam that he was converting from Catholicism to Islam. But now, he was taking another step.

LEW ALCINDOR: And I became interested in Islam and became Muslim. But that was my thought process. It was a position for myself, for my own identity, that I wanted to assume. Not something that was imposed on me.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: As part of his conversion, he told Pam he was changing his name. He asked her to start calling him Kareem. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR: I was a Muslim. As such I was given a new name by my teacher. Abdul, "servant of Allah." Kareem, "the generous."

PAM GRIER: We didn't have cute names. We didn't have that. I had to get out of calling him Lew. I was always calling him, you know, Lew Alcindor, a lot of people did, still. And I said, I really like Lew. I was getting used to it. And he says, Well, I'm Kareem now. And then I have Abdul and then I'll get Jabbar. And if we marry, you'll be you can choose your name or someone will choose- someone's gonna choose my name?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: This new name told Pam that things were about to change.

THEME MUSIC

BEN MANKIEWICZ: When *The Plot Thickens* returns, Pam and Kareem get serious. And Pam ends up auditioning for the king of low budget cult movies.

-----AD BREAK-----

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam and Kareem had been dating for a year when they started talking about getting married. At first, Kareem told Pam that she wouldn't have to convert to Islam. But after a while, it became clear that he did expect her to convert. And soon he made another ask - he wanted her to give up working along with her dream of going to school. It was a discussion that was making Pam more and more uncomfortable.

After all, it was 1970. Feminist leaders like Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug were demanding equal rights for women. Shirley Chisholm had been elected the first Black woman to the US Congress two years earlier. Pam was paying attention. Women could do more, should do more. And Pam wanted to know what Kareem expected from her.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: When you pushed him what would he always end up saying?

PAM GRIER: He'd say (laughing), you know, he'd say, "It is written."

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam imagined what her future might be like married. What it might be like to have kids, to be the one who stayed at home and took care of them. It wasn't just about being married to Kareem. It was about being married, period.

PAM GRIER: When you've had those kids and you have stretch marks and you don't have them tiny little hips that you used to have, and you're tired, and then all you can do is lie there and they want you to make love to them. And it's not even love. I could see that future. I could see me living in his shadow and his income and being at home watching him. Is that showing my love to him?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: After months of back and forth, Kareem gave her a book. It was about becoming a Muslim woman. Their relationship began to change. And so did Pam.

In the fall of 1970, Pam was still juggling several jobs. Including the one at APA, the talent agency. One day an agent asked her if she had ever considered acting. It just so happened that Roger Corman was holding a casting call down the street for a movie called *The Big Doll House*. Pam recognized Roger Corman's name from her other job. He produced low-budget films. The agent said he was working on a new film, about women in prison.

PAM GRIER: He says "Well, you'd be perfect because you're kind of raw and unpolished." And I'm like, okay. "You're perfect for a natural, rugged, whatever." I said, I don't know. He said, "Well, you can work for tuition". I said, "Yeah, but I don't know, I don't know anything about acting, so let me just do this here, do my other jobs and stay focused. And he says, "Well, do you want to meet him?" I said, no. He said, "Come on, let's walk." We walked down from APA office, down literally a block to Roger's office on the corner. And there's these erotic posters of women on the walls. I'm like, OK, where am I?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: There were other women waiting to audition too. Black women, White and Latina. Some of them looked like models. The agent pulled her past the line and spoke to someone at the door.

PAM GRIER: Hey, tell Roger, I'm here and they take me in, and we go in close the door.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: On the other side of the door were Roger Corman, a few studio execs, and the director.

JACK HILL: My name is Jack Hill. I have always been called a grunge auteur, a titan of exploitation films and stuff like that.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Back then, Jack was 37 years old with a decade of experience working on film crews. Jack and Roger had been introduced by a mutual friend, Francis Ford Coppola.

JACK HILL: He was in class with me and we worked on each other's student films. And then at one point he got in somehow with Roger Corman, and then he brought me in there to work with him on various things. Oh, but he, he was making these nudie cuties. I don't know if you're familiar with that genre.

VINTAGE TRAILER: Sex crazed women, driven by desire!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: "Nudie cuties" were adult entertainment films. They were low budget and played in cheap theaters. Now, Roger wanted to make a "women in prison" movie, a genre that was becoming popular at the time. So Jack found him a script, and here they were, in Roger's office holding auditions.

JACK HILL: We were just having a kind of, I hate to use the word, but that was common: a cattle call. Where we told agents to bring in their, what they think was talented people, you know?

I was looking for a black actress, though the role was not written specifically for a black actress. I was looking for players that I thought would go together as an ensemble, different types that would work together. And so I wanted a black actress as part of that.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: And for Jack, that actress had just walked in the room.

PAM GRIER: Roger's looking at me, he says, You were right, she's raw. I was kind of, Yeah, OK. "So Pam, sit down. Where are you from?" Colorado. "Really?"

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam thought about leaving the audition. But before she could back out, Roger asked her to read the script.

PAM GRIER: Nothing made sense to me. Didn't know what an audition was. Was it a meeting? He asked me, Can you read it? I went, Yeah, I read a lot. He said, No, no, read. In the audition, you play the character, you read. I was totally fucked up. I had no idea what he's talking about. Oh, I'm sure I

can read. So they hand it to me to read and I'm like. And then he goes to the those, it was like I told you, I can't read and they're like, OK,

BEN MANKIEWICZ: You're reading the stage directions.

PAM GRIER: I'm reading everything. I'm reading everything.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Jack can't recall what Pam read that day, or if she even read at all, but he knew he wanted her in his movie.

JACK HILL: All I knew is that she just impressed me with what we used to call authority.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They offered Pam the role on the spot, \$500 a week for five or six weeks of filming in the Philippines. Pam did some quick math: she was only making \$150 a week. Accepting this gig would make saving for school so much easier.

PAM GRIER: I said, but first, you have to call my mom.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Pam knew her mom would want to make sure she'd be safe. The second demand was that after filming, Pam could return to her job as a receptionist at APA. Roger and the agent agreed.

PAM GRIER: So, I got the confidence to go to the other side of the world to figure out who I was.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: At 21 years old, Pam Grier was set to star in her first movie.

THEME MUSIC

BEN MANKIEWICZ: On the next episode of *The Plot Thickens*, Pam goes to the Philippines to make movies and jumps out of a moving plane.

PAM GRIER: There was no landing strip, so I'm like, I'm going to die here in the Philippines. I can see that - being bitten by a cobra, fall out of a plane, get hit by my luggage. I can see that.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: And Kareem gives Pam an ultimatum.

PAM GRIER: He says, well, if you don't commit to me today, then I'm going to marry someone who was prepared for me

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Angela Carone is our Director of Podcasts. Story Editors are Joanne Faryon and Shari Okeke. Audio Editing and Sound Design by Mike Voulgaris. Scriptwriting by Yacov Freedman, Rachel Pilgrim, Angela Carone and me. Yacov Freedman is our Senior Producer. James Sheridan is our Researcher and Fact Checker. Mixing by Glenn Matullo and Tim Pelletier. Production support from Julie Bitton, Mario Rials, Susana Zepeda, Liz Winter, Allison Firor, Phil Richards and Reid Hall. Web support by Betsy Gooch.

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Our executive producer is Charlie Tabesh.

TCM's general manager is Pola Changnon.

Check out our website at tcm.com/theplotthickens. It has info about each episode and photos from throughout Pam's life. Again, that's tcm.com/theplotthickens.

I'm your host Ben Mankiewicz, thanks for listening. See you next time.