

Diamond in the Rough

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INT. WEALTHY COUNTRY HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The HUM of a party - fully underway. PARTY GOERS mingle, savor wine. Jewelry twinkles in dim, artfully framed light.

The wealth of this crowd is obvious. Designer clothes. Classy tones. Not a hair out of place.

BETH (30s) lingers at the door. Dressed in jeans, she wears no makeup. Hair cinched back in a ponytail, she looks unfinished. Out of place.

By her side: MARILYNN (30s, dressed better than her guests).

Marilynn grins, points out fine details of the scene.

MARILYNN

Check out the hardwood floors. And the new couch. I had it custom made!

BETH

Uh, kind of hard to see, but I'm sure it's fab. You've been wanting to renovate.

MARILYNN

Ta-da. Mission accomplished. Time to show it off!

Shrugging off a small TRAVEL BAG, Beth sets it on the floor.

A WAITER cruises by with drinks. Marilynn snags one, presses it gently but firmly into Beth's hand.

MARILYNN

This is the good stuff. Drink up, girl. Unwind and... rest.

Beth sniffs the liquid; shoots her friend a cautious look.

MARILYNN

What, you think I'd slip YOU a roofie?

BETH

No, but we're not freshman anymore. This can't be an all-nighter.

MARILYNN

Sure it can! I hereby grant you permission to crash on my brand new - and very comfy - couch!

BETH
Can't. The flight tomorrow's early -

MARILYNN
Sleep off the hangover in First
Class. One can't hurt!

Beth sighs. Submits. Takes a sip. And relaxes as the warmth hits - a smile growing on her weary face.

Marilynn waves to a COUPLE across the room.

MARILYNN
Ooooh - there's Roger and Anita.
Roger's in real estate. Anita's Wall
Street. Don't let her tiny shape fool
you; she's quite the shark - a sharp,
smart peach. Her stock tips and
Roger's... connections... are why we
found this hideaway. Enough with all
your jet setting! You've got to look
into investing in a country home.
I've been wanting to hook you up with
them for years!

She tugs on Beth's arm. Beth won't budge, digs in her heels.

MARILYNN
Now what?

Beth nods down at her clothes.

BETH
I don't fit in.

MARILYNN
Yes, you do. You're my guest!

BETH
Marilynn, look at me. Then look
around. I'm not dressed for the
occasion-

MARILYNN
(huffs)
And whose fault is that? Let's go
upstairs. For old times' sake, you
can borrow something small, sleek and
sassy. Your pick.

Beth pats her stomach. Snorts.

BETH

Thanks to your yoga obsession, you're still good.

MARILYNN

Credit to Ozempic, where it's due.

BETH

But I'm not size six any more!

Marilynn laughs, pulls Beth deeper into the room.

Beth obediently follows, slipping shyly between glamorous partiers. Botox, nose jobs, liposuction and immaculate makeup on display.

Reaching the couch, Beth drops down... nestles into one corner, as far away from the socializing as she can get.

Downing her glass in a gulp, she grabs another from a plate.

Marilynn waves furiously towards Roger and Anita. Alas, they're too far away to see.

Standing over Beth, Marilynn glares down.

MARILYNN

You came a thousand miles to play wall flower?

BETH

I thought you were planning a quiet dinner. Not...

(waves a hand)

All this!

MARILYNN

If you insist on being antisocial -

BETH

I'm not "anti-social." This just isn't my type of crowd!

Beth's eyes scan the "crowd". Across the room, she spots: An OLD WOMAN and a MODEL engaged in conversation.

The old woman's Karen-esque blonde bob is tended to by a THIN MAN in stylish - but threadbare - clothes. He fluffs her hair. Applies gel and a STRAIGHTENING IRON "just so".

BETH

(points)

I mean, seriously?!? People who bring personal hairdressers to a party?

(MORE)

BETH (cont'd)
 I swear, we're not even the same
 species. What small talk could I have
 with her?

Marilynn looks. Dismisses Beth with a wave.

MARILYNN
 Psssst. That's just Philip Bentley.

BETH
 Bentley who? Someone I should know?

MARILYNN
 Of course not! He's just a local I
 met, back when we moved. A quaint
 man. Odd, but good to know. He owns
 an antique store on the outskirts of
 town. It's a little hole in the wall,
 but with hidden treasures if you peek
 inside.

BETH
 He's got treasures? Doesn't look it.

MARILYNN
 Appearances can be deceiving. Some of
 the trinkets I've found at his shop
 made my renovation project shine!

Beth eyes Philip as he finishes fluffing "Karen's" coif.

BETH
 Speaking of renovation work... he
 does hair, too?

MARILYNN
 Bentley makes a living off the books.
 Lots of locals do - little jobs here
 and there. He may not be much to look
 at, but Philip's got quite the eye
 for fashion. I invited him to the
 party as a favor. Both to him. And my
 guests!

Beth watches Philip move to the model, touch up rouge.
 Eventually, other PARTY GOERS block her line of sight.

Marilynn pats Beth's hand - turns to go.

MARILYNN
 Well, hosting duties call. Huddle in
 your corner of solitude if you must.

Marilynn waves to other guests, hisses back to Beth.

MARILYNN

No judgments, Darling. But keep it light on the appetizers. I've ordered Creme Brule for dessert. Size Six or Twelve, you must leave room for that!

MONTAGE:

Time passes. PARTY GOERS mix and mingle.

Beth checks the FLIGHT SCHEDULE on her cell: Four AM check-in time! She winces at the thought.

BETH

Four? Oof!

Over her shoulder, a man's voice intrudes:

PHILIP (O.S.)

I've never seen your face before.

Startled, Beth spins around. Her drink splashes.

BETH

Uh... oops!

Philip Bentley smiles down at her - hair iron in one hand. Digging in a pocket, he hands her an EMBROIDERED ANTIQUE CLOTH HANDKERCHIEF.

PHILIP

Quick. Dab that before it stains.

Beth does. Fumbles. Philip watches, smile unwavering. Holds out a hand to shake.

PHILIP

Hi. I'm Philip Bentley.

Busy with the spill, Beth keeps dabbing.

BETH

Philip? Oh. Yeah. So I've heard.

Philip's hand remains extended. Waiting for reciprocation.

PHILIP

And you are?

Beth glances up quickly.

BETH

Oh. My name's Beth. I'm an old, old friend of Marilynn's...

PHILIP

(chuckles)

Not that old. In comparison to present company, at least.

BETH

(beat)

Well, not physically. But we've known each other since we were kids.

Done with clean-up, Beth turns to Philip - apologetic.

BETH

Sorry if that sounded rude. But you know Marilyn; she likes everything to be fancy.

PHILIP

And perfect. Yes, I know.

BETH

And this couch is brand new! If I fucked it up...

Philip squints. The stain's gone.

PHILIP

But you didn't. Emergency averted, no?

He sits down. Together, the two peer out at the crowd. Side by side, they're an odd match - the only two in the room who don't resemble refugees from a Vogue photo shoot.

Philip breaks the silence first.

PHILIP

No offense... but why are you here?

BETH

Um, Marilyn's a friend? And she invited me. So -

Philip eyes her outfit. The lack of makeup. Frizzed hair.

PHILIP

But you didn't think to dress up?

BETH

I had no idea this was in the cards. A last minute trip, traveling on business. Leaving tomorrow morning for a conference, in fact.

(MORE)

BETH (cont'd)
 Marilyn found out and begged I
 detour to, well, here.

Phil takes in Beth's look. Maybe a little too close. But sincere, nonetheless.

PHILIP
 A shame. You're a natural.

BETH
 A... a natural? For what?
 (snorts)
 Traveling? I get jet-lag constantly.

PHILIP
 No: those cheekbones. Clear
 complexion. Natural highlights, too.
 Even if you're a fright now-

BETH
 Hey!

PHILIP
 Just a turn of phrase. With a bit of
 TLC, you'd look better than any
 socialite in this room!
 (beat)
 Including Marilyn. Maybe. Though
 don't tell her I said that. Please?

Digging in a pocket, Philip pulls out a COMB, BOBBY PINS,
 various styling implements.

PHILIP
 Mind if I... experiment?

BETH
 On me?!?

Philip waves at the party beyond the couch.

PHILIP
 As long as you're sitting here, why
 not?

MONTAGE

Philip removes Beth's ponytail. Uses the iron to zap out the frizz.

Applies shadow to her cheeks. Dabs on creme foundation.

Sitting still as she's "practiced on", Beth downs another glass of wine.

BETH
 (mutters, slurred)
 Haven't done makeup parties since
 Junior High. But if it works, knock
 yourself out!

Marilynn breezes by, balanced between Roger and Anita.
 Seeing Beth, her jaw drops. Philip's done amazing work.
 Beth's stunning: what a change!

MARILYNN
 Oh. My. Stars. Beth, he took fifteen
 years off you!

BETH
 (giggles)
 And hid it where?

Philip blushes - a study in "humble".

PHILIP
 Oh, all I did is honor the original
 material. Hair styles and makeup can
 hide flaws, but if a girl's got a
 good foundation, she's sure to shine!

Shooting a dismissive glance towards other women in the
 room, Philip turns to Beth and her "after" look - proud.

PHILIP
 Beth's a diamond in the rough. I only
 wish I had a few days to try out
 other looks. Variety's the spice of
 life. And the sky's the limit when
 you look THAT good!

Beth and Philip share an awkward smile. Until...

Beth's eyes slip to the clock on her cell: ELEVEN PM.

BETH
 Oh my God!

She jumps to her feet, alarmed. Sways, slightly drunk.

BETH
 I can't stay. My flight's at four AM!

PHILIP
 But -

Beth storms for the door. Scoops up her travel bag. Marilyn
 and Philip trail in her wake.

MARILYNN

Honey, don't leave yet. Remember the
Creme Brulee?

Philip steps in Beth's path - looks concerned.

PHILIP

Marilynn's right, Beth. And you had
four glasses of wine.

BETH

(slurred)
Bullshit. I had three!

PHILIP

I'm certain it was four.
(to Marilynn)
I made a point to count.

He steps towards her, gentle.

PHILIP

All we're saying is - perhaps you
shouldn't drive?

BETH

No big. I took the bus. I'm fine!

Philip stops, puzzled.

PHILIP

You're catching the bus? Here?

BETH

(nods vigorously)
Uh huh. Back in town. That's why I
have to leave now. The last one's in
half an hour.

MARILYNN

Honey, it's dark. And you'd be alone.
I'll call you an Uber.

BETH

There's no time. I can walk!

Gently pushing the two aside, Beth beelines out -

EXT. WEALTHY COUNTRY HOME - PORCH - NIGHT

Philip follows. Behind them, the party continues to hum. But
out here, wind whistles around them in the dark.

BETH

Uh, thanks for the makeover. Don't know what to say, but... this party would have been way more boring without you.

PHILIP

I was about to say the same. Thank YOU for the honor of letting me work my magic. But before you go -

Philip lays a gentle hand on her shoulder. With a few quick moves, he sweeps her hair back into a bun.

Beth recoils instinctively. A hair snags.

BETH

Ow!

PHILIP

Oh. Sorry. I just wanted to see how it looked with your hair up. That is, something *better* than that ponytail.

Beth blushes.

BETH

So - how'd I do?

PHILIP

Fantastic! You're such a glamor chameleon!

An awkward moment. This time, Beth's the one who sticks out her hand, waits to shake.

BETH

Thanks, Philip Bentley. It's been - fun.

She shoulders her bag, steps out into the night.

Waves back at Marilyn, lingering at the front door.

BETH

Give Roger and Anita my condolences. Maybe next time I'll meet them, too!

EXT. RURAL ROAD - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Beth speed walks down a deserted dirt path. In the distance, lights twinkle - the bus stop and town within reach.

Pulling out her cell, Beth admires her reflection in the glass. The way her hair frames her face is -

BETH
Philip's got the touch. This looks
gooood.

Suddenly, the world SWAYS.

Beth drops her phone. Almost vomits. Doubling over, she staggers. Moans.

BETH
Beth, you fucking lightweight. I
didn't drink that much -

Another gut heave.

She scrambles to pick up the phone. Dials 91-
Vision BLURS.

BETH
(faint, weak)
Help?

BLACKOUT.

INT. KNICKKNACK SHOP - LATER - NIGHT

More moaning. Sick to the core.

Beth's eyes flutter open, revealing -

A claustrophobic little shop - a motley assortment of goods on shelves. Hardware. Knickknacks. Beauty supplies. Antiques.

Nearby, a RADIO crackles a jazz tune: Bessie Smith's "No-one Knows You When You're Down and Out".

BETH
What the -

She tries to turn her head and look - hits something hard to her right. Beth strains to see what... can't.

She gags. As Bessie sings:

RADIO
(sings)
Once I lived the life of a
millionaire.
(MORE)

RADIO (cont'd)
 Spent all my money, didn't have a
 care. Took all my friends out for
 mighty good time. We bought bootleg
 liquor, champagne and wine -

Beth attempts to stand. Her eyes widen; shocked.

BETH
 I can't move. Why?!?

She looks around wildly. Oddly creepy FIGURINES stare back
 from dark shelves.

BETH
 This isn't the bus stop. Where am I?!

RADIO
 (sings)
 Then I began to fall so low. Lost all
 my good friends, had nowhere to go.

Beth squirms to her left. BLUE VACANT EYES stare back - just
 millimeters from her face.

She freaks, until realizing: it's the face of a WIG
 MANNEQUIN. Eyes level with her. Which implies...

BETH
 What is happening?!? Help!!

A dark SILHOUETTE emerges between store aisles. Bessie
 croons as it approaches Beth.

RADIO
 (sings)
 Because nobody knows you when you're
 down and out. In your pocket, not one
 penny. And as for friends, you don't
 have any. When you get back on your
 feet again -

The figure walks into the light. It's Philip. Who lays a
 gentle finger across Beth's lips.

PHILIP
 Shh. You're safe. Don't cry.

BETH
 (sputters)
 What the fuck? Let me out!

Philip looks hurt.

PHILIP
I though we had... a bond.

Beth twists, can only move her head side to side.

BETH
What have you done?

EXT. WEALTHY COUNTRY HOME - PORCH - FLASHBACK

Philip sweeps Beth's hair into a bun. Pricks the back of her neck with an antique needle studded RING.

BETH
Ow!

INT. KNICKKNACK SHOP - PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

Philip gently smooths Beth's hair.

PHILIP
Don't fight so hard. You'll get tangled. All that artistry - undone.

Bessie sings as he tucks Beth's hair back behind an ear.

RADIO
(sings)
I said it's mighty strange, without any doubt. Nobody knows you when you're down and out.

Philip pulls out a HAND MIRROR from a shelf. Holds it out:

PHILIP
There. Better now. Look.

Beth recoils at the image: she's trapped in a LINE OF WIG MANNEQUINS. Her head above the table. The rest of her body unseen, below.

BETH
Oh my God!

She struggles, causing Philip to frown.

PHILIP
You'll smear your makeup. That's not right.

Fishing out his handkerchief from before, he dips it in liquid - presses it to Beth's mouth.

Ether? Almost instantly, Beth swoons.

Philip steps back, smiles at his handiwork.

PHILIP

There. See, I know you pretend to like to be alone. But you'll love the companionship my girls provide. They're better than anyone Marilyn invites to her rich "shin digs". Together, we can experiment more. You'll like that. Won't you, Beth?

Bessie belts her heart out. Beth's too.

RADIO

(sings)

Oh, nobody knows you when you're down and out. In your pocket, not one penny. And as for friends, you don't have any.

BETH

(moans)

Marilynn will find me.

Philip smiles, shakes his head "no."

PHILIP

Everyone thinks you went to the bus. Then that flight. Why would they look for you? They think you're going home. Which you are.

He pulls out a CURLING IRON, turns it on. Steam rises. Beth's vision splits, then blurs.

The light on the iron GLOWS.

PHILIP

Let's try some more styles. You're a diamond in the rough, Beth. And we've got all the time in the world....

FINAL FADE OUT.