

Companionship

Written by

J.E. Clarke

Copyright
janetgoodman@yahoo.com
917-328-5253

INT. DARK SHOP - NIGHT

Between the crackles of a RADIO, music lilts. The tune: "The Way You Look Tonight." Style and sass, all in one:

RADIO

(singing)

Someday, when I'm awfully low. When
the world is cold, I will feel a glow
just thinking of you. And the way you
look tonight...

MALE HANDS run a comb through a blonde bang. Whoever it is takes care to arrange shining strands "just so."

Below bangs: cold plastic EYES stare. Not at anything in particular. Just cold, dead, dark air. The song continues:

RADIO

(singing)

You're lovely, your smile so warm.

The hands drift over to a different head and hairstyle. This one Brunette.

Fingers fuss with a curl, glide a gentle hand down a plastic cheek. Clearly, it's a WIG MANNEQUIN...

...one of TWENTY more, lined across a counter in perfect rows. All stare in unison into some dark void.

RADIO

(singing)

And your cheeks so soft. There is
nothing for me but to love you -

The human hands scoop the "brunette" up. THEY belong to...

PHILIP BENTLEY (30s): a thin strip of a man, pale skin draped in threadbare clothes. He may not have much budget for a wardrobe, but artistry and taste glows from his pores.

PHILIP

May I have this dance, Beautiful?

Holding the brunette mannequin head at eye level, he twirls "her" around like a human partner, belts out the last line:

PHILIP

(singing)

And the way you look... tonight!

The wig slips off - flutters to the ground.

Horrorified, Philip sets the mannequin down, scoops up the wig. It's tangled... now covered with lint from the floor.

Reaching under the counter, Philip retrieves a NEW WIG - sealed in a clear plastic bag. Ripping the bag open, he fit it on the Brunette.

PHILIP

There. Good as new! Better perhaps -

He nestles the head back into its slot in the row. Seeking perfection, he fusses with its hair more.

PHILIP

(sings)

Lovely, never never change. Keep that
breathless charm. Won't you please
arrange it? 'Cause I love you... just
the way you look tonight!

Apologetic, he caresses the mannequin's cheek again.

PHILIP

(singing)

And that laugh that wrinkles your
nose. It touches my foolish heart.
Just the way you look... tonight!

He steps back. Winks at the row of heads.

PHILIP

And I'm not playing favorites. I mean
that sincerely. For you all!

The song ends. Silence and gloom descends. Looking up from his "companions", Philip gazes around the....

Small dusty SHOP. A sign on the sales counter reads:
"Bentley's Wigs and Winsome Oddities."

Next to the radio, a chipped COFFEE MUG declares: "Warning:
this Shop Owner Bites!"

Beyond the counter - shelves. The inventory seems eclectic.

In one section: Trinkets, typewriters, gold-plated mirrors
that look Victorian.

In another aisle: Modern hardware supplies - cans of paint,
floor sealer, chains and bags of twist ties.

Something TICKS. Philip glares at a GRANDFATHER CLOCK across
the room. Reading the time, his face falls.

PHILIP

Two more hours? I... I just can't.
Yet - I must.

Picking up a RAG, he steps away from the wigs.

PHILIP

Pardon me, Lovelies. Duty calls.

And begins the chore of dusting shelves. Over his shoulder... a girlish FEMALE VOICE SIGHS.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

You can't leave us, Philip!

Eyes widening, Philip whips around. Frozen, he stares at the line of heads. None moves - thank God. Philip shakes his head. Digs a pinkie in his ear to "clear it out".

Turning away, he takes a few fearful steps.

After a few moments of silence, he relaxes back into dusting. Wipes down the shelves. Approaches the counter, and reaches for his coffee mug...

SEVERAL MORE FEMALE VOICES GIGGLE behind him! Philip whirls around. The coffee mug sloshes - a useless shield.

At this angle, it's impossible to see if the heads are "talking". Their faces point away, towards the shop door.

Eyes locked on the heads, Philip reaches a trembling hand towards the radio. TAPS IT. Holds it up against his ear.

Barely heard through static, an old tune plays. The relief on his face says it all: maybe that's what he heard?

Setting the radio down, Philip twists dials. Reception doesn't improve, so he turns it off.

And plunks himself down behind the counter. Facing the shop door. The Grandfather Clock.

PHILIP

An hour and forty five minutes left.

He slurps coffee from the mug, eyes glued to the line of heads... all facing away from him.

PHILIP

Not too long. I can make it again.
Just... don't.... move... Please?

Despite himself, Philip's eyes droop.

MOMENTS LATER

GIGGLES wake Philip up with a JOLT. One look at the line of heads freezes him in horror.

ONE OF THE HEADS has turned around. Now she stares straight at him... cold eyes now burning into Philip's soul. And more giggling. Though "her" lips don't move.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
(plaintive)
Philip, you left us alone. In the
dark. In the cold -

A thin line of BLOOD trickles from the Mannequin's eyes. Philip chokes.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Come make us pretty again. Please?

A second FEMALE VOICE chimes in:

FEMALE VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Or do you like how we look now?

Horrifically, another head slowly starts to turn...

As a THIRD VOICE interrupts:

LAURIE (O.S.)
Hello?!?

Philip JUMPS! Finds himself slumped at the counter.

Customer LAURIE NEWEL (30s) waves a hand before his face. Pretty in a plain way, Laurie's human - and concerned.

LAURIE
Hello? Sorry to disturb you. But the
door was open, so I thought -

Panicked, Philip angles AROUND Laurie to gawk at the wig heads. They're all facing towards the door again. So - what he saw was just...

PHILIP
(snorts)
A dream?!?

LAURIE
Listen, if you're closed I can leave.

Detecting something in the air, she stops. Sniffs.

Philip angles around her OTHER side, reads the clock again.

PHILIP

Uh, one more hour before closing
time. No. Please. Stay. You're fine.

Pulling himself together, Philip sits up straight. Plasters a "professional shopkeeper" look on his face.

PHILIP

Customers are always welcome.
Especially in these late hours.

Laurie stops sniffing, raises an eyebrow.

LAURIE

Really? How so?

Grabbing the dust rag, Philip polishes the counter with renewed vigor - a hasty attempt to improve appearances.

PHILIP

Well, it's not that I'm *lonely*. But
staying open for nothing's such a
waste. Of electricity. Time. Labor.
But, if I don't at least try...

He tucks the rag under the counter, shrugs sheepishly.

PHILIP

You know what they say?

LAURIE

Um, sorry... I don't?

PHILIP

"A sale not attempted can't be rung
up"! And these days, with the economy
on bust... every penny earned counts.

He flashes a charming smile Laurie's way.

PHILIP

So, dear customer - I'm all yours.
What can I help you with tonight?

LAURIE

The sign on your door says "Wigs" -

Laurie stares around the shelves: at the trinkets, hardware bits and parts... Philip chuckles at her confusion.

PHILIP

It says "Oddities" too. These days, I carry a bit of both. This shop's worn a lot of hats - and wigs - over the years. Once it was... well, I mean, when I first bought the place and fixed it up, my big dream was to create a local showcase for antiques!

Hopping from behind the counter, Philip guides Laurie past shelves, towards the center of the store.

Along the way, a few knickknacks catch Laurie's eye.

LAURIE

But the paint, tools and hardware?

PHILIP

That's just me being practical. Shilling necessities to pay the bills. But ANYONE can hawk a hammer. Turns out, who can compete in that retail space? What this town needs - has ALWAYS needed - is a space for style. And a lot more flair.

He reaches the counter with the wigs. For a second, he remembers the dream. And SHUDDERS. Hiding that, he gestures dramatically at the row of "heads".

PHILIP

Ta-da! Here's what I have in stock. Some synthetic. Others genuine human hair. And all imported, from other... parts.

Laurie circles the counter, squints at the "menagerie".

LAURIE

Imported? There aren't good wigs, made here at home?

PHILIP

(beat)

Some are. But here -

(points)

That one's from China. More or less. And that blonde wig: the Scandinavia. Consider yourself in luck. That's a style quite hard to find. Trust me, it took forever -

LAURIE

It *does* look pretty.

Picks up the head, thrusts it towards Laurie.

PHILIP

It'd look even prettier on you.
That's my professional assessment.
Try it on!

Laurie takes the prop. Plastic eyes bore into hers.

LAURIE

Um, on second thought... I'll pass.

She puts it down. Philip looks crestfallen.

PHILIP

Are you sure? That's what you came
for, didn't you? It won't bite...

He cringes for a second at the visual that invokes. But
recovers with a salesman smile.

PHILIP

C'mon. Give it a try!

LAURIE

Nope. Too flashy. Not my style.

Laurie's eyes drift to the "Brunette" head. She picks it and
tilts it back and forth, growing interest on her face.

LAURIE

But this one...

PHILIP

Is "calling" to you? I can *almost*
hear it myself!

He leans towards Laurie, whispers like a confidant:

PHILIP

No-one else has to see. You know you
want to. Try it on!

Laurie grins like a kid. Plucking the wig off the mannequin,
she slips it on. Shoots an insecure look Philip's way.

LAURIE

Well?

PHILIP

Well.

He nods in approval. Gives her "Thumbs Up."

LAURIE

Don't you have a mirror?

PHILIP

Absolutely. I sell those, too.

LAURIE

(beat)

Can I borrow one? I need to see how I look.

PHILIP

Oh!

Realizing his gaffe, Philip darts to the shelves - plucks out a gold-trimmed mirror. He hands it to Laurie, proud.

PHILIP

Whatever you do, don't drop this!
It's from my antique collection.
You'll find my wigs quite affordable.
My keepsake classics, not so much!

Laurie admires herself in the reflection. Plays with the wig's bangs, enraptured by how they frame her face.

LAURIE

This is -

PHILIP

So you.

LAURIE

You don't know me. And I was going to say "pretty nice."

PHILIP

(shrugs)

Two ways to make the same point, no?

Laurie blushes, fusses with the wig some more.

LAURIE

This makes me look so different. So dramatic!

PHILIP

That's what makes wigs magical.
They're a cost free, fun and quick way to slip on new personalities. A way to change into a different person - POOF! Whatever skin you wish, just for one night!

Grabbing a hair pin, he tucks a strand back, shows Laurie how that alters her look.

PHILIP

Lemme guess. You're planning a big shindig on the town?

LAURIE

Oh no, not at all! A.. friend's getting married tomorrow, and I just want to look good for her big day!

PHILIP

And impress someone else too, I've got a hunch. A boyfriend?

LAURIE

(laughs)

Who, me? Uh - no.

PHILIP

A husband, then? Adding new fire to old chemistry?

LAURIE

Gimme a break. I'm going stag, as usual. No big whoop.

Well, that's awkward. Philip and Laurie exchange looks. What does a person say after *that*? Laurie breaks the silence:

LAURIE

Listen, it's just been awhile since I've seen my high school crew. A few years of doing my own thing solo. While gaining a pound or two.

She pats her stomach to make the point.

LAURIE

I just want to show up looking GOOD.

(beat)

Not so much I upstage the bride, of course!

Whipping off the wig, she fumbles for the mannequin head.

But it tumbles off the counter. CRACK. Onto the floor.

Lying face up, cold plastic eyes stare towards the ceiling.

Philip and Laurie loom over the fallen prop. Cast dark shadows on its face, as they peer down.

Philip hastily retrieves the head - slips the wig back on, puts the assemble back.

Laurie steps backward - reluctance growing.

LAURIE

Maybe this was a mistake. This isn't my day to shine. It's hers.

PHILIP

Wait!

Afraid of losing the sale, Philip grabs Laurie's arm. Shoves the mirror back into her face.

Seeing her recoil, he quickly shifts his tone - and gently touches *her* hair... like he did the wig before.

PHILIP

Maybe this is just.. the wrong path for you? What about highlights instead? Punch up your original color, frame your face as all beautiful artwork deserves?

LAURIE

Highlights? You do those, too?

Philip grins. Shrugs.

PHILIP

An artist of all fashion trades and trends. Guilty as charged.

He juts a thumb towards a CLOSED BACK ROOM - just past the sales counter.

PHILIP

Thanks to hardware contacts, I get my bleach in bulk. And not to sing -
(eyes the radio)
My own praises, but with practice I've gotten rather quick. And good.

Laurie glances towards the back room, wrinkles her nose.

LAURIE

I *thought* I smelled something before.

PHILIP

A chemical aura? Yes, I know. And before I built my "Antique Emporium", this place was... well... a mortuary.

(MORE)

PHILIP (cont'd)
That's the bad news. The good news: I
got it cheap!

Laurie's eyes widen - what?!

LAURIE
There were dead people here!?!

Philip blushes - places a finger to his lips.

PHILIP
Shhhh! I shouldn't have let that cat
out of the bag. Whenever I forget, it
tends to creep customers out.

Laurie inches towards the exit.

LAURIE
Listen - highlights seem so...
permanent.

PHILIP
Not at all. Wigs get changed. Even
natural hair grows out.

LAURIE
Not immediately. I should sleep on
it.

Philip reaches for her, but Laurie slips from his grip. He
trails after her, intent on the night's last sale.

PHILIP
Sleep on it? You said the wedding's
tomorrow. Wouldn't that be too late?

LAURIE
It's not until the afternoon.

PHILIP
But you don't look familiar. Exactly
how far away do you live?

Laurie reaches the door, flings it open. Outside - it's even
darker; pitch black night.

LAURIE
Pretty far. And you've got some
rural, winding roads out here.

Philip realizes he can't push his luck. Droops.

PHILIP

If you must go - don't drive too fast. And please stay safe.

(beat)

The economy's pretty... depressed these days. In rougher spots, crime's way up. A woman driving must take precautions. Especially now. On the road alone. In the thick of night.

LAURIE

I know. I've heard. I will. And thanks?

She backs out the door. After a guilty glance at the Grandfather clock, she adds:

LAURIE

Maybe you'll get another sale before you close? There's no rule that says I have to be "the one"...

Philip reads at the clock, waves back.

PHILIP

Maybe. One more hour. If you change your mind - don't forget I'm here!

The entrance bell jingles. The door closes. And with that... Laurie's gone.

Behind Philip, the ticking of the clock GROWS LOUDER.

Or is that the "clucking" of a tongue? The disembodied female voice intrudes once more:

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

You can't hide, Philip Bentley. I saw that look on your face. You liked that wig on her, more than ME!

Philip whips around, stares -

At the Brunette Mannequin Head. It's rotated in a different direction than when Laurie put "her" down.

And its wig has slipped sideways: a very ugly, sloppy look.

Terror gives way to anger. Storming over, Philip snatches the head up. Rips off the wig.

PHILIP

Stop doing this to me!

FEMALE VOICE (O.S)
 Asking for your love? Is that so
 wrong?

PHILIP
 Can't you at least be silent? Look at
 the pretty things I give you. Don't I
 treat you right?

Grabbing a NEW WIG from a bag, he jams it on the Mannequin
 head. A different style - this one firebrand red.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
 Take that off. It's tacky.

PHILIP
 Deal with it, dammit! Wigs let you
 try on different personalities. Don't
 you know by now? Variety's the spice
 of life.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
 "Life"? What do you know of that?
 This makes me look fake. Just like
 that bitch customer of yours.

Philip JAMS the head down onto a peg - reaches around to
 make sure the wig's on right.

Something out of sight BITES DOWN.

PHILIP
 You bit me? Ow!

He flings the head - wig and all - across the room. It HITS
 a mirror, fractures the glass.

Then smashes to the floor. CRACK. The wig falls off, lies
 like flattened roadkill besides that plastic face, which
 stares blindly up at the ceiling.

Another trickle of blood runs down the cheek?

Philip gasps in horror, then realizes: it's NOT blood -
 rather a crack in the plastic itself!

Contrite, he rushes to the head - scoops it up.

Then darts into the back room, crades the head like a
 wounded child.

INT. BACK ROOM

A stockpile of CHEMICALS on shelves. Strange furnishings in one corner: A stained BATHTUB. A GURNEY. Saws, straps and garbage bags on top.

Philip races to a counter, gently lays the head down.

Retrieving a MAGNIFYING GLASS from under a FOLDED NEWSPAPER, he examines the crack. It's deep.

PHILIP

Oh my.

From a drawer, he fishes out LIQUID RESIN and a PAINT BRUSH. He spreads out the newspaper, sets the head on top.

PHILIP

I'm so, so sorry. My temper just...
got out of hand. You know how it
sometimes is.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

(whines)

You hurt me, Philip.

Philip pulls a KNIFE from his pocket, chips away at broken plastic parts.

PHILIP

It's not MY fault this place is built
on evil things. I'd leave all of you
here if I could, but -

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

(turning nastier)

But you're lost, broke and forgotten,
Philip. Just like this whole cursed
town. And you belong here with us.
Where else could you go?

PHILIP

Shhhh. Stay still. I'll fix you up. I
promise this won't hurt. Much.

CHIPS. A large chunk of the plastic breaks free.

Revealing: a stomach churning glimpse of what's beneath:
VERY real human bone and amateurishly embalmed flesh.

Lifting the head, Philip kisses it's "wound."

Opens the liquid resin bottle - pours it on.

PHILIP

Give it an hour to dry, you'll be good as new. Even prettier than before!

Outside in the shop - the door entrance bell JINGLES. And an unseen Laurie calls:

LAURIE (O.S.)

I changed my mind. I'm back. Hello?

Philip leaps to his feet; shoots a quick look to the head.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

You're leaving me again. For her?

PHILIP

I'll just be a moment. Excuse me.

He races out the door, towards Laurie.

On the newspaper, the head rolls to the side, revealing a lurid headline:

"Fourth Girl Missing in a Month, Twenty This Year. Causing Some to Fear: Does a Serial Killer Haunt Dearborn?"

INT. IN THE SHOP

Philip closes the back door; makes sure it's not ajar. And hurries over to Laurie. Out of breath, he hides his nerves.

PHILIP

Oh. Hi. You're -

LAURIE

Back. And... no more lies. Surprise. It's true confession time.

Philip gapes at her. What's that imply? Laurie continues:

LAURIE

I admit I DO want to show my old "friend" up. I can't drop twenty pounds overnight. But my hair... no reason we can't spruce that up?

Philip stares at her, too numb to talk. Laurie glances down at the row of heads.

LAURIE

What happen to the one I tried on?

PHILIP

I - uh...

(rolls eyes)

Took her in the back for some...
work. You know - superficial
presentation stuff. The wig she had
on got damaged. I tossed it out.

LAURIE

Oh.

Awkward silence. The two exchange looks. Somewhere behind
them, heads GIGGLE... heard only by Philip, of course.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

She came back to you, Philip!

FEMALE VOICE #2 (O.S.)

She wants to stay? Are you going to
invite her in?

FEMALE VOICE #3 (O.S.)

Does SHE deserve YOUR love?

FEMALE VOICE #4 (O.S.)

Did you get bored with us again?
We're not companionship enough for
you anymore?

Laurie shrugs.

LAURIE

Then - highlights it must be. When I
was driving, that road's so lonely
all there is to do is think. And I
realized-

PHILIP

What?

LAURIE

Ever since I was teen, I always
wanted to go for broke, try a frosted
look. Is that still an option?

She eyes the Grandfather Clock.

LAURIE

Or did I fuck it up? Am I too late?

Philip grins, spreads his arms wide:

PHILIP

Half an hour. For you? Time enough.
Follow me - my bleaching chair's in
back.

He drifts over to the radio, turns it on. This time, the
Mill's Brothers' You Always Hurt the One You Love plays.

RADIO

(singing)

You always hurt the one you love. The
one you shouldn't hurt at all.

LAURIE

Ooooh, Golden Oldies? I love that
song!

Philip nods, leads Laurie towards the back door. Plastic
cold eyes watch, knowing what's about to occur.

PHILIP

I love songs like that, too. Out here
in the boonies, you can't get many
stations. So it gets pretty quiet.

(beat)

Sometimes.

He opens the back door, guides her in. In his hand: the
knife he used to chip the plastic.

Even in this dim light, it glints.

Philip shuts the door after them. At the counter, the Mills
Brothers and radio croon on:

RADIO

(sings)

You always take the sweetest rose.
And crush it till the petals fall.

The heads whisper and giggle among themselves. A soft,
eerie, gruesome sound.

FINAL FADE OUT: