

BERTIE

by
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BERTIE

TIME: 1990 – Pre-cell phone

PLACE: The home of Marcia Jameson, divorcee

AT RISE,

DOORBELL

MARCIA JAMESON, age 38, comes to the door from a back room of her house.

She opens the door.

A MAN (BERTIE SULLIVAN), 50, is at the door.

BERTIE

Mrs. Jameson?

MARCIA

Yes?

BERTIE

Bertie Sullivan. I've come regarding your ad for room and board. I sent you a letter with an application and references.

Marcia is clearly taken back.

MARCIA

But I thought you were...

BERTIE

Female? I hope being male doesn't disqualify me. I'm very handy around the house. I know plumbing, electrical, landscaping. I helped build several houses for college mates. Would it be okay if I came in?

MARCIA

Oh, forgive me. I was so surprised to see a man.

She opens the door for Bertie, who enters.

BERTIE

You have a very nice house.

MARCIA

Thank you. Please sit down. I don't think it will work, Mister...

BERTIE

Sullivan.

MARCIA

Sullivan. I mean, I was hoping for a companion.

BERTIE

I'm companionable.

MARCIA

But I meant someone I could go to the theatre with, or shopping or the museums.

BERTIE

I did community theatre on the east coast. Love museums. Love shopping. Love interior decorating, fashion, musicals, music in general, all kinds, rap to the classics. But I'm most happy at home with a good book and Mozart.

Marcia smiles patronizingly. How to let Mister Sullivan down easy?

MARCIA

I have your response to my ad, but I actually thought with your passion for the arts that you were....

BERTIE

Yes. Female. If you have any concern about me, I'm very tidy. I do my own laundry, cook, work five days a week for a publishing house in town, and enjoy long

BERTIE (cont'd)

walks and reading on week-ends. If you're looking for

someone to, as the kids, say, “hang’ with, I’m certainly up for that as well.

MARCA

You offer an interesting option, Mister Sullivan. You said you cook. The room and board provides breakfast and lunch or dinner on week-ends, but I work in town and I’m frequently late to provide dinner. I eat out most nights.

BERTIE

Very nice arrangement, I’d say. I’d be happy to cook when you feel like it. A nice hot meal when you come home. I’m known for my beef bourguignon and chicken crepes, if either of those appeal to you.

MARCIA

Yes, of course. We can talk about it. The rent and board is \$350 a week, but I can make an adjustment on the meals. It sounds as though you will be on your own, which is actually a great relief to me. I confess that I don’t like thinking of what to make for dinner or for that matter grocery shopping or cooking after a long day. You have your own room and bath. There’s a television in your room and, of course, kitchen privileges.

BERTIE

I hope you will accept me as your roomer, Miss Jameson.

MARCIA

It’s Missus. I’m divorced.

BERTIE

Sorry.

MARCIA

No need to be. I'm quite happy alone. I believe
I wasn't meant to marry.

BERTIE

Many of us aren't. Fortunately, I realized that about
myself years ago. I'm not gay, mind you, but I adore
my alone time.

MARCIA

I know what you mean. Well, Mister Sullivan...

BERTIE

Please... Bertie.

MARCIA

Bertie. You come with excellent references.

Let's give it a go, shall we. If either of us
believes it isn't working, we can say so. Is
that acceptable?

BERTIE

Perfectly! I'd like to pop on home and pack
up if you agree. I'll be back in two hours. May
I bring dinner?

MARCIA

Well, I had some meat loaf I was going to thaw.

BERTIE

Save it. There's a lovely little Italian restaurant
that I know that makes the most divine scallopini
that holds up very well on take away. I'll be back
by seven, if that isn't too late to wait.

MARCIA

Not at all. I usually eat at that hour.

Bertie takes Marcia's hand, kisses it, bowing.

BERTIE

I am so very happy we're going to be companions.

It feels like home already.

Bertie starts to head for the door.

MARCIA

You can park your car in the driveway for now. I

have to move some things in the second garage

before it's available.

BERTIE

I'll do it this week-end. I love tidying up and organizing

things. This will be such fun.

He bows again and exits.

Marcia stands there staring at the door wondering what just happened.

MARCIA

(repeating Bertie's word)

Divine?

LIGHTS DIM

TELEPHONE

Marcia comes in from the back rooms. She's in the middle of putting on nail polish. Picks up the phone carefully..

MARCIA

Hello?

(listens)

Shelly... I was going to call you. I have the

most wonderful news. Wait.

She hits the speaker button, sits down and takes off the nail polish cap. While she talks she "does" her nails.

MARCIA

I rented my spare room. To a... are you ready

for this? I rented to a man!

SHELLY

(on speaker)

WHAT? You fox you. What will the neighbors say?

MARCIA

Who cares. He's older. About fifty, I think.

Very nice looking, well mannered, dresses impeccably.

I'd say he was gay, but he says not.

SHELLY

When does he move in?

MARCIA

Tonight

SHELLY

(screams)

I'm absolutely green with envy. Tell me everything.

LIGHTS DIM as Marcia, continuing to paint her nails, tells Shelly about her new "companion".

LATER...

IN THE HALF LIGHT, DOORBELL

LIGHTS UP

Marcia straightens her skirt as she walks to the door.

BERTIE

Here I am, warts and all.

Bertie is carrying a suitcase, a duffle bag over his shoulder, a backpack and a white paper bag.

MARCIA

Let me help you.

BERTIE

You might take this to the kitchen.

Bertie hands Marcia the take out bag from Emilio's.

MARCIA

Your room is at the top of the stairs to the right. Next to the library. Feel free to help yourself to any books you like.

BERTIE

Wonderful. It just keeps getting better and better. Be right back. You might put the scallopini in a warming oven or on a low heat.

Bertie goes under the arch to the upstairs.

MARCIA

I will.

(calls upstairs)

Fresh towels in the bathroom and a linen closet in the hall.

BERTIE

(O.S.)

Marvelous.

Marcia walks into the kitchen to keep the scallopini warm.

When Bertie comes down again in a very few minutes Marcia has returned with a cocktail shaker.

MARCIA

Martini?

BERTIE

Delighted. Did I put on my application that martinis are a love?

MARCIA

I think I read something of the sort. Do you prefer stirred or shaken?

BERTIE

I prefer whatever I'm offered. Shaken seems best at the moment.

As Marcia hands Bertie a martini, DOORBELL and knock, simultaneously.

Another knock before Marcia can answer the door with a martini in her hand.

SHELLY is at the door looking frantic.

SHELLY

Are you all right? I've been frantic that I didn't stop you.

MARCIA

Stop me from what? Come in and meet Bertie.

Reluctantly, seeing Bertie standing there with a martini in his hand, Shelly enters.

BERTIE

How do you do? You must be Shelly.

SHELLY

(taken back)

I'm... May I have one of those.

BERTIE

Of course. Forgive my manners.

Bertie pours another martini from the shaker for Shelly and hands it to her.

MARCIA

Shell... what are you doing here? Is something wrong?

SHELLY

Is something wrong? You shack up with a man you met this afternoon, someone you don't know at all, and he's sleeping over.

MARCIA

(correcting Shelly)

He's rooming in my house. A paying guest. There is a difference.

The two women are talking as though Bertie is not in the room.

Bertie sips his martini.

SHELLY

But you don't know him.

Shelly accepts a martini from Bertie.

MARCIA

Let me introduce you. Shelly Browne this is Bertie
Sullivan. Bertie, Shelly Browne, a dear friend.

SHELLY and Bertie shake hands, left hands, the ones not holding ice cold martinis.

MARCIA

Sit down, Shell, and tell us why you're here.

SHELLY

I'm here, dear child – and you are a child – because
you can't just accept a stranger into your home,
sleeping in your home, that you haven't the foggiest
idea about. Where does he come from?

MARCIA

Maine, now Boston.

SHELLY

What are his references?

MARCIA

Impeccable.

SHELLY

You checked?

MARCIA

Well....

SHELLY

You didn't. And yet you let this stranger move in.

Bertie has remained quiet. He picks up the martini shaker to top off Marcia and Shelly's drinks.

SHELLY

(to Bertie)

What do you do?

BERTIE

You mean my profession? I'm a senior editor at Marshall's Publishing House. What do you do?

SHELLY

I... never mind what I do. I think if my dear friend insists on having a male roomer, she should at least wait until she sees the police report on you and the...

BERTIE

I'm afraid there isn't one. I've managed to avoid that. Lead a very quiet life, actually.

MARCIA

Shell... sit down. I'll get some canapes.

BERTIE

Shall I help?

Bertie is actually hoping to be rescued.

MARCIA

No. You convince my doubting friend here that you have no intention of putting a knife in my heart

MARCIA (cont'd)

when I'm asleep. Incidentally, I always keep my door locked in case you need something.

BERTIE

Good information.

After Marcia leaves, Bertie turns to Shelly.

BERTIE

What may I tell you that will ease your concern, Mrs. Browne? Mrs. Jameson is very lucky to have such a caring friend who runs over to make sure she isn't in any danger.

SHELLY

I'm not convinced of that yet. But I'll have another one of these.

Shelly holds up her glass.

Bertie gets up to pour Shelly another martini while Shelly looks him over.

SHELLY

You're from Maine?

BERTIE

I was raised there and worked my way up the ladder at Dunhill Publishers before accepting the job with Marshall's here in Boston. Olive?

SHELLY

Two. I haven't had dinner.

Bertie stirs the shaker with the glass stirrer Marcia brought in earlier.

He pours what's left in the martini shaker into Shelly's glass.

BERTIE

What do you do, Mrs. Browne?

SHELLY

I'm a sculptress.

BERTIE

How wonderful. Do you show?

SHELLY

Pardon me?

BERTIE

Might I have seen anything you've done? I frequent the galleries.

SHELLY

Really? I'm getting ready for a show.

BERTIE

Please keep me informed. I'd love to come.

SHELLY

I will. It's this Saturday actually.

BERTIE

At Sotheby's?

SHELLY

(surprised that he knows Sotheby's).

Yes, as a matter of fact.

BERTIE

I have a friend who frequently displays his paintings there.

SHELLY

What's his name?

MARCIA returns with a tray of canapes.

BERTIE

Jon Cummins.

Shelly nearly spills her drink.

SHELLY

JON CUMMINS! You know him?

BERTIE

Yes. We went to Yale together. I planned to look
him up after settling.

Bertie smiles at Marcia, accepts a canape.

Shelly is aghast at this information.

SHELLY

If I give you an invitation to my showing, will you
see that he gets it?

BERTIE

Of course. And I am invited as well, I hope.

SHELLY

Well, of course. Any friend of Jon Cummins...

MARCIA

What about me? A friend of a friend.

SHELLY

You are part of the team helping me.

MARCIA

Oh. I was hoping to wear something spectacular and
blend in with the opening night crowd.

Shelly finishes her drink in one gulp and stands.

SHELLY

Well, I should be going. Call me if you...Or just
call me.

MARCIA

You give Bertie your stamp of approval?

SHELLY

He runs in excellent company. I'll say that. Be a
good boy, Bertie, won't you.

BERTIE

Indeed.

SHELLY

I'll pop over tomorrow with three invitations. I could
use some help arranging the pieces at the gallery if
you're available.

MARCIA

Shell... they're frightfully heavy.

SHELLY

I just wanted his advice on placement. I've hired three
movers who work for the gallery. They know how to
transport art.

MARCIA

Good night, Shelly. Thank you for checking on me.

