

Majesty Deleted Scenes: Beatrice's Bachelorette Party

Nina

Phil's had never been Nina's scene. She could count the number of times she'd been here on one hand, and certainly never when the whole club had been rented for a private event.

Contrary to popular jokes, which claimed that Phil's was an abbreviation of philistines or philanderers, the full name of the club was actually Philadelphia House—after the Duke and Duchess of Philadelphia, who operated as British spies during the War of 1812. They managed to escape arrest and flee to London, but were forced to leave all their wealth and property behind in America. Including this old Georgian townhouse.

It wasn't until the 1950's that a hotel magnate bought the property at auction, and decided to turn it into a chic members-only club that would cater to the aristocracy. He'd named it for the traitorous duke, in a clever reference to the past.

Or, Nina thought, as a reminder that when you went up against the Crown, the Crown always won.

When Sam invited Nina to her sister's bachelorette party, Nina had been a little surprised. "Are you sure?" she'd asked, to which Sam said simply, "Nina, you're one of the only people she actually chose to invite."

Nina had always looked up to Sam's sister. And in many ways Beatrice was like the older sister she'd never had, full of advice on practical matters like choosing a college major or applying for an internship. Not that Beatrice had ever done either thing. Her major, American studies, had been chosen for her. And of course, she was born with a job.

Nina sighed and walked into Phil's, passing the dance floor—which looked uncanny this early in the night, all empty mirrors and soft pulsing music—and heading up three flights of stairs, to the grand dining room on the top floor.

It looked like the sitting room of an aristocratic manor house, its wallpaper hand-painted with trellises of green roses. At the center of the room, a massive dining table had been covered in a cascade of white orchids. The domed ceiling overhead was entirely mirrored, as if the diners might inexplicably need to glance up and see themselves.

Almost twenty guests were gathered toward the front of the room, all of them dressed in sequins or leather or expensive silk ruffles. At least three of them wore tiaras atop their glossy curls. Beatrice nodded, tucking one of those short bachelorette veils behind her ears, as they jostled for position around her.

“Come on, Beatrice,” one of the girls whined. “Can’t you please tell us something about your gown?”

Beatrice laughed diplomatically. “Why, so you can go place a bet on it? You know that’s insider trading.”

The other girl didn’t take the hint. “I keep thinking you’ll do an empire-waist column dress—that cut looks so good on you, because you’re so skinny, obviously,” she gushed. “Then I think you might do something more dramatic and full-skirted, with lots of tulle...”

Nina tried not to roll her eyes as she edged past them. She’d made it most of the way across the room when a tall, painfully glamorous Black girl held out an arm to stop her.

“Have we met?” The girl asked, her brow drawn together in confusion. “You look familiar. Did you go to St. Ursula’s with us?”

“I’m Nina Gonzalez,” Nina offered, holding out a hand to shake.

The girl and her friends tossed out their names, Leonora and Camilla and Henrietta and Blair. They were all Lady Something-or-Other, daughters of various dukes and earls. Nina blinked; no way would she would keep them straight.

“So, how do you know Beatrice?” one of them—Camilla?—demanded, a hand on her hip.

“I’ve known Beatrice forever. Well, since I was seven,” Nina clarified. “I’m Samantha’s best friend.”

Camilla’s eyes narrowed in sudden comprehension. “That’s right! You’re that girl who dated Jefferson at the beginning of the year.”

She’d said it loudly enough that the noise in the room momentarily ebbed.

“Yep. That’s me,” Nina replied, with forced levity. “But—”

“I heard Samantha set you up with her brother,” Camilla cut in. “Is that true? Because I know a lot of people who would be open to that kind of set-up. Myself included.”

Nina didn’t laugh. “No. Sam didn’t even know that Jeff and I were together.”

She knew instantly that she shouldn't have said it; Camilla seized ravidly on that morsel of gossip. "Ooh. You kept it a secret from her? Was that because you knew she wouldn't approve?"

"I heard that Jeff and Daphne are back together," one of Camilla's friends chimed in, watching Nina for a reaction.

And even though she didn't want to, Nina flinched.

It hurt, hearing that Jeff had boomeranged from her back to Daphne. Why was he so stubbornly blind to Daphne's faults? Why hadn't he realized that his girlfriend was a backstabbing social climber who just wanted to be a princess?

"Nina? There you are," Samantha cut in. With a dismissive nod to the other girls, she took Nina's arm and led them across the room. "Were those girls bothering you?" she added, in a softer voice.

Nina snorted derisively. "If you think I can't handle myself around some gossipy, snobbish brats, you're underestimating me."

"I wouldn't dream of it." Sam smiled, then cast a nervous glance back at Beatrice. "What do you think of the party, though? I bought all the decorations and gear on Bachelorette.com."

"I didn't know that was an actual website."

Nina realized that the table had been set with plastic wine glasses, their pink stems shimmering with flecks of gold glitter. On each plate was a notecard from some bachelorette party game, that said things like Let a stranger draw a tattoo on your arm (in pen!) or Photobomb a group of guys and get their number!

"I don't know if we'll be able to actually do your bachelorette dares, since we're the only ones in the entire club," she observed.

"I know!" Sam bit her lip. "I just... I've never been to a bachelorette party before, let alone thrown one. I wasn't really sure what Beatrice expects."

They both looked at Sam's sister, who was wearing a plastic pink tiara with a veil attached, and a white sash that said BRIDE.

"It is funny, seeing Beatrice in a fake tiara when there are women here in real tiaras." Nina was struggling not to laugh. "Who are all these people, anyway?"

“Well, you probably recognize Princess Louise of France.” Sam gestured to a blonde in the corner, who wore a chic black jumpsuit with a plunging neckline. A diamond tiara glittered atop her casually disheveled updo.

Nina nodded. Louise was the only foreign royal she could have picked from a crowd: she was a few years older than Beatrice, and the tabloids constantly compared the two of them, stacking Louise and Beatrice against each other in those Who Wore It Better? features.

“That’s Blair Barrington—she used to play field hockey with Beatrice in high school. Or maybe she was on the swim team?” Sam amended, then pointed to a girl who looked younger than the rest of them. “And that’s Charlotte, Teddy’s sister.” She kept rattling off other names, all aristocrats that Beatrice had gone to high school or college with, but Nina had stopped really listening.

There was a stir of excitement near the staircase, and they both looked over. Nina’s eyes widened when she saw who had entered the room, and she grabbed Samantha’s arm.

“Why is Daphne here?”

Nina wasn’t sure what she expected Sam to say—that Queen Adelaide had insisted on it, or Robert Standish; or even that Daphne had gate crashed, and was about to be escorted out by force.

She never dreamed that Sam would say, with surprising nonchalance, “Oh, I didn’t tell you? I invited her.”

“You—what?”

“Sorry.” Sam winced. “I know it’s a little awkward, given the whole Jeff thing, but it can’t be that weird, right? I mean, you and Daphne have been on plenty of trips together with my family. I know you’ll never be best friends, given your history, but surely you can handle one night at the same party.”

“But...”

Nina had never told Sam the full story of her breakup with Jeff: how Daphne had confronted her in the ladies’ room at the palace, and confessed that she’d outed Nina’s secret relationship to the press. Daphne had threatened to make Nina’s life a living hell unless she broke up with Jeff.

She’d wanted to tell Samantha everything, but Sam’s dad had died the next day; and after that, Nina couldn’t bring herself to talk about. It felt inordinately selfish to complain about

a breakup to a friend who'd just lost her father. Besides, by that point Nina and Jeff were broken up anyway; what good would it do to talk about it?

"I know I always complained about her," Sam was saying, obvious to Nina's inner turmoil, "but she's really not that bad. She's been a huge help to me lately, training me for all this stuff I have to do, as heir to the throne."

"Wasn't Robert supposed to train you?" Nina asked weakly.

Sam shrugged. "I'm still meeting with him twice a week, but it's different. Daphne actually knows what it's like to be under the microscope of the press. She's really good at teaching me the right thing to do and say."

Nina stiffened. She knew Sam hadn't meant to be cruel; but it felt like she'd swept back in time, to those dark weeks in January when she'd been the target of so much hatred.

Nina certainly hadn't known the right thing to do or say. Which was why the media had despised her, and adored picture-perfect Daphne.

"You're seated at opposite ends of the table. You don't even have to talk to her all night, I promise." Sam looked from Daphne to Nina, and seemed to realize how upset Nina was, because she quickly glanced aside. "I should go over and say hi... I'll be back here in a couple of minutes, okay?"

"Sure. Whatever."

Nina watched as Sam cut through the clusters of high-heeled aristocrats. When she reached Daphne, she threw her arms around the other girl and hugged her. Daphne said something, and Sam gave a bright, exuberant laugh.

The sight of her best friend trusting Daphne made Nina feel cold and queasy.

Above them, the mirrored dome of the roof began to retract like a sports stadium, revealing the dusky purple sky, its last rays of sunlight quietly fading into darkness. A few stars already sparkled like gemstones overhead. The girls all gave a low ooh of approval.

Nina wished she could leave. But that would be the cowardly thing to do, and her parents hadn't raised her to be a coward. She forced herself to lift her head.

Daphne looked up, as if she felt Nina's gaze on her. Then she smiled, slowly and dangerously.

Nina held her gaze, unblinking. In the battle of wills between her and Daphne, she refused to back down. Not this time.

Beatrice

Beatrice bounced through Phil's in a bright, buoyant haze. If she didn't look at Sam, she could almost pretend this was a normal bachelorette party: that her friends—or at least, a bunch of women she knew—had all come to celebrate her marriage to Teddy.

Except that her sister, the maid of honor, had once had feelings for Teddy. For all Beatrice knew, Sam might still have feelings for him, even though she was dating someone new.

And now Beatrice had fallen for Teddy, too.

So, like a coward, she tried to avoid making eye contact with Sam. It was easy enough; there were plenty of squealing girls at this party, though Beatrice didn't consider any of them a true friend, except maybe Nina.

At her parents' suggestion, Beatrice had invited all the foreign royals near her age, though only a few had made the trip: Princess Louise of France, who stood near the staircase, smoking a cigarette with polished nonchalance; Princess Sade of Nigeria, who was currently braiding one of the glowsticks into her hair; and the Italian and Spanish princesses, who, incidentally, were both named Maria. Several of Beatrice's acquaintances from high school and a few scattered aristocrats completed the group. And of course, Teddy's younger sister Charlotte, Nina, and Daphne.

The ultraviolet lights of the dance floor dipped even lower, controlled by the shaggy-haired DJ who kept playing all their song requests. Atop the bar sat a box of glow-in-the-dark sunglasses and necklaces that flashed a bright pink. Sam's idea, obviously.

When Beatrice thought of her sister, scouring the internet for glowing bachelorette gear and researching bachelorette party games, her eyes stung. In her own way, wasn't Sam trying to make things right between them? Why couldn't Beatrice just open her mouth and tell Sam that she was sorry?

"Beatrice! Come dance!" Teddy's sister Charlotte grabbed her arm and dragged her into the center of the group. Beatrice smiled and tried to join in, but she couldn't sing along like everyone else, because she didn't know the words to this song.

A thunderous pounding at the front door made them all fall still, and the music abruptly cut off.

Suddenly a young man in a security uniform was hurtling into the room. “We’ve received a security threat. Please, everyone, remain calm!”

Before Beatrice could protest, the unfamiliar guard had taken her by the arm and led her to a chair on the side of the dance floor. “Your Majesty, I’m taking you into custody for your own safety.”

“Where’s Jake?” Beatrice’s eyes darted toward the entrance, where her Revere Guard had been standing all night, but he’d vanished. Her uneasiness crept into full-fledged panic.

When he’d wrangled Beatrice into the chair, the security guard took a step back. He was grinning now, with eagerness and excitement. The other party guests formed a semicircle around them, not bothering to suppress their squeals of excitement; and Beatrice’s fears melted away as she realized what was going on.

This was precisely why no phones were allowed at this particular bachelorette.

When the music started back up, the young man tore off his shirt in a single, fluid motion, revealing a chiseled six-pack. The motion sent a few popped buttons flying. The room erupted in cheers as he began to gyrate around the queen.

Beatrice’s breath hitched. For a second there, he’d reminded her of Connor.

But he wasn’t Connor. When Connor smiled at her, it was a soft, slightly crooked smile that acknowledged a shared joke—not this stranger’s wide, easy grin. Connor’s blue-grey eyes were textured, the type of eyes you could fall into forever and never reach their hidden depths.

The young man dancing before her was as much like Connor as the flat, Beatrice-shaped paper dolls they sold at the palace gift shop were like her.

Most of all, he wasn’t Connor because he couldn’t be Connor. Because she’d told Connor to leave and never come back.

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An hour later, Beatrice retreated upstairs to one of the lounge rooms on the second floor. She collapsed onto the couch with a sigh.

There was an oil painting on the opposite wall, a massive thing in a heavy gold frame. Staring at it, Beatrice realized this was of the Treaty of Paris in 1783: also known as the Meeting of the Georges. On the left of the canvas stood George I of America, Beatrice’s many-times-great uncle, the one she (and all members of the royal family, each of them George or Georgina) had been named for.

The painting depicted George I watching with regal solemnity as the other George, George III of England, signed the official treaty recognizing America's independence. In the background stood Louis XVI, King of France, who had hosted the meeting in Paris. You could tell him by his foppish oversized hat and high-heeled shoes.

"Hey. You okay?"

Beatrice looked up to see Samantha in the doorway. She looked taller than normal in a black leather dress and impossibly tall red heels. Her hair was mussed, color still high in her cheeks from the dance floor.

"I just needed a minute."

Sam lingered in the doorway, shifting her weight. "Bee—I'm sorry."

Bee. It was such a small thing, just a single syllable, but Beatrice heard it for the peace offering it was. Sam hadn't used that nickname in months.

"I clearly overstepped, hiring the stripper," Sam was saying, her words tumbling over one another. "But I looked through a lot of wedding magazines, and it seemed like something normal people do. And I thought, you're about to have the least normal wedding of all time; you deserve to be like every other bride in this one ridiculous and silly way. Please don't be upset," she added, seeming concerned by her sister's silence. "He signed a trillion NDA's, and there are no photos, and—"

"Sam," Beatrice cut in, with weary amusement. "It's okay. I thought the stripper was funny."

"Then why are you hiding from your own bachelorette party?"

Beatrice patted the cushion next to her, and Sam came to sit down. The light from the glass lamp fell in a warm glow over her face, making her look surprisingly young.

I'm in love with Teddy, she imagined saying. I'm confused because I love him, but I think I might still love Connor. I don't know if there's something wrong or broken about me, to love them both at once.

Except she wouldn't know how to begin saying something like that to Sam. The two of them had never talked that way, with that kind of openness or frankness. Or at least, they hadn't talked that way in a long time.

She wondered if these things were ever simple. Maybe for other people they were. But nothing about Beatrice's life had ever been simple or uncomplicated.

“There’s a lot going on,” Beatrice said at last. “I guess I just needed a breather.”

“I know the feeling. Marshall...”

Sam broke off, twisting her hands in her lap.

“Marshall?” Beatrice prompted gently.

She hadn’t been all that surprised when Sam announced that she was bringing Lord Marshall Davis as her date to Beatrice and Teddy’s wedding. It was the sort of flippant, impulsive thing that Beatrice expected from her sister.

“There’s something you don’t know about me and Marshall.” Sam was babbling now, almost incoherent. “Our relationship isn’t—I mean, the way it started—it’s not what you think. I don’t know what to do, because of Kelsey, and I’m scared to tell Marshall that I—”

She broke off at the sound of a loud crash from downstairs, which made them both jump. It was followed by a string of voluble curses in French.

“Sam, I don’t understand. What’s going on with Marshall?” Beatrice tried to ask.

But the moment of temporary closeness between them was gone. Sam shook her head, rising to her feet.

“We should get back down there. From the sound of things, Princess Louise knocked over a vase. Or maybe she knocked over one of the Princess Maria’s.”

Beatrice smiled hesitantly. She wanted to fix things between her and Sam, but maybe this wasn’t the time—not now, not while she was wearing a plastic tiara and had glow-bracelets woven around her wrists. She and Sam could figure this out later, in daylight, when they were alone.

“You’re right. Let’s get back to the party,” she agreed, and followed her sister down the stairs.