

Adamant

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Characters

Nella	Geologist.
Stuart	History Professor.
Malcolm	Jewelry Shop Clerk.

MALCOLM stands behind the counter at an elegant jewelry shop. NELLA and STUART enter.

NELLA

That's just because of its incredibly high index of refraction.

STUART

So in a way bright radiance *is* collateral light?

NELLA

I suppose so.

MALCOLM

How may I help you?

NELLA

A reasonable person can recognize the many properties of a diamond. For example, many people know that it is the hardest natural substance on Earth.

MALCOLM [*admiring his own ring*]

And, honey, it's one of the most brilliant substances on Earth.

NELLA

Some people, mostly geologists like myself, know a diamond is carbon in crystalline form and that, due to the small critical angle for internal reflection, light bounces around inside the gem before popping out as one of the many glimmers you see when you hold one under a lamp.

MALCOLM

You get a much better radiance in the afternoon sun. Or candlelight.

NELLA

My boyfriend, who is not a geologist, would have you believe that none of these qualities are relevant. To him, a diamond only has one property.

MALCOLM

Retail value?

NELLA

Honesty. Rather, he believes that under the proper conditions a diamond can inflict honesty upon its wearer.

STUART

Let me make an honest woman of you, Nell.

MALCOLM

Ah, so you're looking at engagement rings. These are exquisite. And there are more traditional settings in that case.

NELLA

Brilliant fellow, my boyfriend. Stuck in the late Sixteenth Century, but brilliant nonetheless.

STUART

Hey nonny nonny, what have we here?

NELLA

He's an expert on Elizabethan culture and has a hard time separating himself from his work.

MALCOLM

My Kevin's just as bad. What can you do?

NELLA

What can you do, indeed?

STUART

How now, fair maid?

NELLA

I think the anachronisms are kind of cute.

STUART

Come hither, wench!

NELLA

Cute, but only to a point.

[to Stuart] Stuart. Wench?

STUART

It's not as insulting as you think. It just means "woman." "Prithee, how many boys and wenches must I have?" *Anthony and Cleopatra*.

NELLA [to MALCOLM]

When Stuart is nervous, he's never more than two sentences away from Shakespeare. It's his most obvious defense mechanism.

MALCOLM

Trust me, dear, there are lots of worse things he could do.

NELLA

Still, it's terrible sometimes, always dreading the soliloquies. I've completely eliminated certain words from my vocabulary, so as to avoid encouraging him. It was easy to get rid of "spot," "bodkin," and "wherefore," but God forbid the words "to be" ever slip out of my mouth.

[*to Stuart*] "Wench" means a woman all right, a woman of ill repute.

STUART

No, that's a recent development, probably in the last century.

NELLA

Frankly, that's the century I'm the most concerned about.

STUART

Then come hither, gender-neutral person of good repute!

NELLA

That's more like it.

STUART

Let's not focus on centuries past, but on today and tomorrow. [*catches the hook and starts the soliloquy*] And tomorrow, and tomorrow... [*backs down*] And the days after that, too.

NELLA

I'm glad. Me, too.

STUART

I meant it when I said I want to make an honest woman out of you.

NELLA

But I am an honest woman.

STUART

You know what I mean. I want to marry you.

NELLA

Yes.

STUART

I wasn't expecting you to frolic about the shop, but some reaction might have been nice, a little hint as to what you think of the proposal.

NELLA

That was your proposal?

STUART

Well, yeah.

NELLA

Let's look at the facts here. You said that you want to marry me, which is not the same thing as asking me to marry you.

STUART

The results are the same.

NELLA

Let's ask our unbiased witness.

[to *MALCOLM*] Did you see him propose?

MALCOLM

He does look earnest. I'd marry him in a heartbeat.

NELLA

Perhaps, but the question at hand is: did he propose? I saw no evidence of a proposal.

STUART

When she's nervous, Nella argues semantics. It's her most obvious defense mechanism.

MALCOLM

Lots of people get nervous when they start talking about weddings, sweetness. It's only natural. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't go through with it. Even Kev and I were out of our minds the week before our big day.

STUART

Still, it's terrible sometimes, how she picks apart the slightest ambiguity in anything you say. The only way to make her stop is to quote Shakespeare. Chaucer doesn't work, not even Marlowe, but for some reason, she can't argue semantics with the Bard.

[to Nella] Let's try again, and I'll be specific. Do you want me to ask you to marry me?

NELLA

That's still not a proposal. That's more like hedging your bet.

STUART

Okay. Say I got down on bended knee, and pulled out one of these diamond rings, what would you say?

NELLA

A diamond? You know I think they're preposterous.

STUART

Is this about the ring or the proposal?

NELLA

Look, I'm not the only geologist who thinks the diamond is a terribly boring mineral. It's just carbon.

MALCOLM

But it's very special carbon. A girl's best friend.

NELLA

Diamonds are a study in contradictions: showy, yet colorless, precious, yet common. What makes a rock truly interesting is uniqueness: give me a chunk of limestone or obsidian any day. Leave the diamonds to the pneumatic drills of the world.

STUART

Okay, say I walked in with a chunk of limestone in my pocket, got down on one knee...

MALCOLM

I'm not sure you want to go with limestone when you're talking rings.

NELLA

Does it have a fossil in it?

STUART

Oh, no. I know a trick question when I hear one. If I say "No, there's no fossil," then you ask me why I brought you an ordinary rock. Do I think of you as dull, lifeless? But if I say, "Yes, there is a fossil," then you'll say, "What kind?" I'll say, "A trilobite," and then you'll ask me which era it's from, and you know I can't tell the Mezzosophozoic from the Paleobloba-toic.

NELLA

Paleo-blob-a-toic? Try Paleozoic.

STUART

I said I don't know them.

NELLA

A really good fossil would be from the Mesozoic era, preferably the Triassic period.

STUART

Fine.

MALCOLM

It would have to be awfully small, if you were going to make jewelry out of it.

NELLA

Jewelry?

STUART

I was proposing with it, remember?

NELLA

Right.

STUART

Generally that's done with a token that can be worn about the betrothed's finger as a symbol of her promise to wed.

MALCOLM

And when you show it to your girlfriends, they'll all fawn over it, positively green.

NELLA

Uh huh.

[to Stuart] Why don't you get a ring to show to all your boyfriends?

STUART

There, I'm afraid, the bias is in your favor.

NELLA

My favor? I get to be socially staked out with a piece of jewelry to ward off the other fellows, and you're free and clear until you get hitched. And even then a wedding ring is still optional for men.

MALCOLM

Actually, we're seeing less and less of that. The gents usually buy rings, too, these days. Even in, um, mixed doubles like yourselves.

STUART

Yes, in your favor. I only wish you had to be in my shoes for a few minutes here, that you had to be the one to ask *me* to marry *you* while I argued about the stupid gemstone so I didn't have to answer the question. "Such an injury would vex a saint." And that, my dear, is from *The Taming of the Shrew*.

NELLA

Subtle. [*to MALCOLM*] He's calling me a shrew.

[*to Stuart*] But if I remember correctly, that line is sympathetic to Katharina. Petruchio's the one who committed the injury.

STUART

But his injury is that he's late to the wedding. She thought he "wooed in haste, and means to wed in leisure..."

NELLA

I know.

STUART

You do?

NELLA

I do pay attention to your work.

STUART

I knew it wasn't the Paleoblobatoic era.

NELLA

Thank God. I couldn't marry a moron.

STUART

So does that mean you will marry me?

NELLA

Are you going to propose?

STUART

"Once more into the breach, dear friends!"

A standoff.

MALCOLM

Just be glad you can get married.

Maybe you should just look at some rings and see what you think. We can set any stone you like. Kevin went for a sapphire instead of a diamond like mine.

NELLA

Corundum? I suppose that's better than diamond.

MALCOLM

Now, may I ask what your price range is? Emily Post suggests three months' salary as a starting place, but of course the sky's the limit.

Nella wanders off to another counter.

STUART

Well, I—

MALCOLM

It's okay if you don't have it all now. We have very convenient financing terms.

STUART

Well, I was—well, here's what I had in mind. [*He whispers to MALCOLM.*]

MALCOLM

Well, viva Las Vegas. [*demonstrating with his own ring*] Okay, see this stone—not the big one in the center, but one of these on the side?

NELLA

Stuart! Stuart! Come quick! They have amorphous silica.

MALCOLM

Pardon?

STUART

Opals, "the queen of gems." *Twelfth Night*.

NELLA

This is an amazing specimen. You seldom see such fire in a stone this color.

STUART

Which one?

NELLA

In the center.

MALCOLM

Let me show you that, sugar.

NELLA

[*examining the ring*] At least seven percent water content. Probably from Australia. Domestic samples don't look like this. Amazing.

MALCOLM

This gemstone has a long history with weddings. A million years ago, Queen Victoria herself gave opals as wedding gifts.

NELLA

Actually, an opal's history goes back to the mid-Tertiary period, when something—probably a change in climate—caused water-soluble silica to be released from the sediment and eventually harden to form opal.

MALCOLM

You learn something new every day.

NELLA

Water mixed with the silica is what causes this brilliance. What should be considered a flaw in the mineraloid is what makes it beautiful.

STUART
"Thy mind is a very opal."

NELLA
Also from *Twelfth Night*.

STUART
That's right!

NELLA
This *is* an interesting gemstone. Peculiar.

STUART
Quirky.

NELLA
Fragile.

STUART
Precious.

STUART
Good sir, where do I sign over my pound of flesh?

MALCOLM
Pardon?

NELLA
Really?

STUART
I think you can start drawing up the loan contract. The lady is in love.

[to Nella] Am I right?

NELLA
Now here is a husband to make me a wife.

STUART
Romeo and Juliet!

*They kiss.
End of Play*