

PRIDE BEFORE THE FAIL

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FADE IN:

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

CHARLES BEASLY (40), bowtie, bifocals, the consummate nerd, sits with perfect posture at a small table. His hands interlocked, resting on his stomach - weirdly calm.

A cup of coffee and a microphone in front of him.

Across from him, DETECTIVE MANN (50), scribbles some notes on a pad of legal paper.

DETECTIVE MANN

And when did your relationship with Mr. Monroe begin?

BEASLY

As I already stated, we were not engaged in a relationship. It was a business arrangement. A contractual obligation.

DETECTIVE MANN

Same difference. How long?

BEASLY

It is clearly not the same. I am surprised how little value you place on precision.

DETECTIVE MANN

How fucking long!?

BEASLY

One year.

Mann scribbles a note on the legal pad.

BEASLY

Aren't you concerned with motive?

DETECTIVE MANN

We'll get there. I'm just trying to get the details down first.

BEASLY

I'd like to speak to it now.

Mann leans back - stretches, it's been a long day.

DETECTIVE MANN

Fine. Go ahead.

BEASLY
You should ask the question first.
(re: the microphone)
For the record.

A roll of the eyes from Mann.

DETECTIVE MANN
Why did you do it?

BEASLY
Pride.

DETECTIVE MANN
Explain.

BEASLY
Have you heard of Alex Haley?

DETECTIVE MANN
What does that have to do with --

BEASLY
He authored Roots.

DETECTIVE MANN
And...?

BEASLY
Which never would have been
published had he not first received
the proper due for his work on the
autobiography of Malcolm X.

DETECTIVE MANN
You're losing me.

BEASLY
Malcolm X hired Haley as a
ghostwriter. Never to be credited
with his own work. He would have
never sold Roots. He would have
remained an unknown had events
transpired differently.

DETECTIVE MANN
What fucking events?

BEASLY
Malcolm X was assassinated before
the book was published.
(MORE)

BEASLY (CONT'D)
Had he not been, the book would
have simply been titled the
autobiography of Malcolm X.
Instead, it became... *As told by*
Alex Haley.

DETECTIVE MANN
What does that have to do with --

BEASLY
A writer must take pride in their
work. And there can be no pride in
the absence of credit... My motive
was pride.

INT. MALIBU MANSION - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Built and furnished for the very wealthy. Glossy redwood
beams glisten under a vaulted ceiling.

SUPER: ONE YEAR EARLIER

RYAN MONROE (40), Hollywood handsome, leans against a
majestic GRAND PIANO in the center of the room.

He has a MANUSCRIPT in hand, rubs his chin as he reads under
the watchful eyes of --

Beasly, perched on a chair near an antique desk. A laptop
computer in front of him.

BEASLY
What do you think?

RYAN
You're not capturing my... My
essence. The energy of my life.
Your writing... it's boring.

BEASLY
I think it is nuanced.

RYAN
It's uninspired, Chuck.

BEASLY
I've told you, I prefer Charles.

RYAN
Sorry, I keep forgetting that
you're a pretentious little fuck.

A clench of the jaw and a grimace from Beasly.

RYAN

I've got a fucking Oscar. I've dated every starlet under the age of thirty. I've been to the God damn Whitehouse.

Ryan tosses the manuscript at Beasly.

RYAN

I want more of that. Fuck your purple prose. I want less of you. More of me. Understood?

Beasly, eyes frozen in anger - nods.

RYAN

Where are we on the final chapter?

BEASLY

Have you thought about my request?

RYAN

What request?

BEASLY

A writing credit.

RYAN

I hired you as a ghostwriter. Christ, you should be happy I haven't fired your ass.

BEASLY

It's only appropriate that I am credited for my work.

RYAN

If you didn't want to be a ghostwriter, then you shouldn't have cashed the fucking check now.

BEASLY

Perhaps a co-writing credit.

RYAN

It's an autobiography. You do understand the meaning of the term - yes?

BEASLY

It's only fair.

RYAN

Nobody gives a shit about you. If they did, you wouldn't have to be ghostwriting in the first place.

Beasly grimaces - vibrates with tension.

RYAN

Now, do you want to keep at it or would you like me to hire someone else? Guys like you are a dime a dozen. What'll it be?

BEASLY

I wish to continue... I need to use the restroom first.

RYAN

Whatever. Make yourself useful and grab me a beer on your way back.

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Beasly bursts in, shuts the door behind him, slides to the floor - muffles a scream in his hands.

He removes a prescription bottle from his pocket - XANAX.

Beasly pops the top off - taps out two pills, stares at them in the palm of his hand.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Beasly at the counter carefully dropping a dozen XANAX pills into the neck of a beer bottle.

RYAN (O.S.)

Let's move it. Time's a wasting.

BEASLY

Coming...

GARAGE - AN HOUR LATER

Beasly rummages through boxes and shelves. Finds a ROPE and a box of large ZIP TIES.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

An empty beer bottle sits on a small end table. Next to it --

Ryan sprawled on the floor - out cold.

His hands behind are behind his back, wrists bound together with several large ZIP TIE. There's --

A NOOSE around his neck.

The rope attached to that noose has been swung over a large ceiling beam. The loose end coiled around Beasley's hand.

Beasley bends down near Ryan's ear.

BEASLY

Are you ready?

He SLAPS Ryan's face.

BEASLY

Wake up, my prince.

RYAN

(muttering)

What....? Happened...?

Beasley stands, removes the XANAX bottle from his pocket.

BEASLY

Xanax abuse.

Beasley pours several pills onto the table. Then --

Moves to the Grand Piano and curls the rope around the leg.

He pulls the rope with a steady tension.

Ryan's groggy head is forced upwards - panic fills his eyes as he feels the zip ties on his wrist.

His face reddens as the noose pressed into his neck.

BEASLY

Get to your feet.

Ryan manages to right himself, relief from the choking. But it's only temporary as Beasley continues to pull the rope.

RYAN

Stop!

Beasley pulls the rope. Ryan attempts a step towards him - no good - the rope presses into the flesh of his neck.

Ryan, now on the tip of his toes, fighting for air.

Beasley slides the piano bench towards him.

BEASLY

Save yourself. Use the bench.

Ryan struggles to his feet, sits on the bench and finds a moment of relief. But only a moment as Beasly --

Pulls the rope tighter.

Ryan stands, struggles to find air. Beasly --

Pulls the rope tighter. Then wraps and knots the end of the rope on the leg of the piano.

The only thing between Ryan surviving or hanging - the piano bench.

RYAN

What the fuck are you doing!?

Beasly returns to the antique desk and his laptop.

BEASLY

I need to complete the final chapter... There are two ways we could go. I'd like to get your thoughts. It is your autobiography after all.

RYAN

What the fuck are you talking about!?

BEASLY

We could go with suicide or autoerotic asphyxiation. Personally, I favor the latter. Suicide's been done to death, no pun intended. And it's not nearly as interesting as sexual deviation. Your thoughts?

RYAN

Why are you doing this?

BEASLY

All you had to do was allow me credit for my work.

RYAN

You can have it.

BEASLY

Too late I'm afraid. I'm in a little deep, don't you think?

Beasly rises from his seat - approaches Ryan.

RYAN

I have tons of money. I'll pay you
whatever you want.

BEASLY

I don't want money. I need
recognition. I need to feel proud
of my work. Why couldn't you
understand that?

Beasly kicks the piano bench away from beneath Ryan's feet.

Ryan swings his feet wildly as his neck veins bulge and his
face reddens. Saliva foams on his lips.

Beasly observes with all the passion of a man watching a
documentary.

INT. MALIBU MANSION - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In the wee hours...

Beasly at the antique desk, laser-focused on the screen of
his laptop, his fingers feverishly tapping the keyboard.

SQUEAK... SQUEAK... SQUEAK...

BEASLY

Could you hold it down!? You're
making it impossible to focus.

SQUEAK... SQUEAK... SQUEAK...

BEASLY

For Christ's sake.

Beasly turns towards --

The RED-PURPLISH FACE of Ryan's corpse, suspended by a rope
from the beam above him.

His dead hands, now free from the Zip Tie, dangle at his
side.

As Ryan's body gently sways, the rope creates a SQUEAK....
SQUEAK.... SQUEAK as it rubs against the ceiling beam.

Beasly steadies the body.

BEASLY

That's better.

Beasly unbuckles Ryan's belt, then lowers Ryan's slacks and underwear down to his ankles.

BEASLY

Since you failed to weigh in, I decided to go with autoerotic asphyxiation.... I'm going to need to sell that though. So, and I know this goes against a biographer's creed, I inserted some fictional material in the earlier chapters to reflect your struggles with porn addiction... As well as the Xanax, of course.

Beasly returns to the antique desk - opens a drawer and retrieves Ryann's laptop.

He sets it on the grand piano facing Ryan's dead eyes.

He searches for porn sites - boots one up and hits play.

BEASLY

I hope it's something you fancy.

Beasly returns to the antique desk.

Taps away at his keyboard.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - PRESENT DAY

Beasly and Detective Mann at the table.

DETECTIVE MANN

And you have provided these details without coercion or duress?

BEASLY

Indeed.

Detective Mann looks towards a dark glass mirror.

DETECTIVE MANN

(at the mirror)

I'm ready for the transcript.

(at Beasly)

You're sure you don't want an attorney present for this.

BEASLY

I do not.

An OFFICER enters, a printed transcript in hand. He gives it to Detective Mann - then exits.

DETECTIVE MANN
This is a transcript of your
confession. You need to sign and
date it on the last page.

Mann slides the transcript and a pen towards Beasly. He immediately goes to the last page - scribbles his name.

BEASLY
There you go, Detective... Oh, I
nearly forgot.

Beasly retrieves a briefcase by his side, opens it and removes a BOOK --

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RYAN MONROE, AS TOLD BY CHARLES BEASLY.

BEASLY
I thought you might like a copy.

Beasly places the book on the table.

BEASLY
Would you like me to sign it?

Detective Mann, transcript in hand, stands.

DETECTIVE MANN
Naw, I already got the signature I
needed.

BEASLY
Very well.

Detective Mann goes to the door - grabs the handle.

DETECTIVE MANN
Why?

BEASLY
Pardon?

DETECTIVE MANN
You got away with it. Everyone
bought the story. Why confess now?

BEASLY
I thought it was obvious.

Detective Mann shakes his head.

BEASLY

The book hasn't been selling. What use is a writer's credit if no one reads your work? I believe a trial is just the thing to boost interest. Maybe even a film. I do write scripts as well.

DETECTIVE MANN

(turns the door handle)

You're fucking nuts.

BEASLY

You obviously don't understand pride, Detective.

DETECTIVE MANN

Pride is basically about who is right. I'm more of a - what is right - type of guy.

Detective Mann opens the door.

DETECTIVE MANN

(as he exits)

I think most people are.

As Detective Mann slips out the door, Beasly picks up the book from the table. He glides his hand over the cover and --

Beams with pride.

FADE OUT.