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SF PERUSALS

# Veronica's Room

## A Thriller

Ira Levin

*Samuel French – London*
*New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood*

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## VERONICA'S ROOM

First presented by Morton Gottlieb at The Music Box Theatre, in New York City, on 25th October, 1973, with the following cast of characters:

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Woman** | Eileen Heckart |
| **The Man** | Arthur Kennedy |
| **The Girl** | Regina Baff |
| **The Young Man** | Kipp Osborne |

Directed by Ellis Rabb

The action of the play takes place in a room in a house about half an hour's drive from Boston, Massachusetts.

Time—an evening in spring, 1973

ACT I Susan

ACT II Veronica

# ACT I

*A bed-sitting-room in a turn-of-the-century Victorian house, ornate and somewhat ominous. An evening in spring, 1973*

*The door is large and solid. The bed, a single one, is in an angled alcove. A window in the wall beyond it is lightly curtained like the other window. There are doors to a closet and a bathroom. Later the room will be seen to be feminine and attractive within the framework of its heavy architecture. Its decor is of the 1930s, though most of the furniture is a generation older. A chaise-longue, the round game table, a desk before the window, a Victrola next to the desk, an artist's easel, a dresser, chairs, bookcases, etc.—all sheeted now*

*A Woman and a Man come into the dim, sheet-shrouded room. In its lighted doorway, a Girl stands waiting. A Young Man stands behind her. The Woman and the Man move familiarly among the sheeted shapes, the Woman lighting a wall bracket and a lamp, the Man partly raising a window without drawing its pale breeze-stirred curtain. The Girl comes into the room, looking about with interest as the Woman uncovers and lights another lamp. The Young Man follows the Girl; he too looks about, but with an air of misgiving. The Man lights a wall bracket. The Woman lights a hanging glass-shaded lamp over a round table*

*The Woman and the Man are pleasant looking, in their early or middle sixties. The Woman is neatly and plainly dressed, the Man a bit rumpled in a worn blue suit. The Girl is twenty, slim and engaging, with long straight hair. She wears flared pants, a heavy turtleneck sweater, several necklaces. The Young Man, stocky and in his late twenties, has a bushy moustache and wears old sports clothes. The Woman lifts the cover carefully from the game table, on which lies a partly completed wooden jigsaw puzzle*

**Woman** (*with a slight brogue*) Here's the puzzle she was workin' on, *exactly as she left it.* "Hunters in the Black Forest" is the name of it. Eight hundred pieces. And no picture on the box for assistance!

*The Girl comes closer to the table. The Man is uncovering the desk. The Young Man wanders over to look briefly at a painting on the wall*

She did two or three of these a month, and just before Christmas, Mr Brabissant would take all the ones she'd done the year before—they were kept in that chest on the landin'; did y' notice the oak chest there?

**Girl** Yes, I did.

**Man** That's a val'able antique, that chest is. (*He too has a slight brogue*)

**Woman** And he would give them—give all of them puzzles costin' *ten and twelve dollars each*—to the Walpole firemen, to give to the children. She didn't like to do one she'd done before. A new one was like a new world to move into, she used to say. And of course . . . (*a tender smile*) . . . they *did* indulge her in that.

**Girl** They knew she was going to die?

**Woman** Oh yes, oh yes. There was no hope at all in those days. Not for bad cases like hers. *They* knew it, and *she* knew it too, from when she was fifteen years old.

**Girl** Oh wow. (*Looking at the Young Man*) It must be awful, knowing it, at that age. Ooh! (*She winces and shudders*)

*The Young Man nods. The Girl looks again at the Woman, who is gathering the dust cover together*

**Woman** She never let it get her down though. Used to sit here hummin' a melody, happy as could be.

**Man** (*lighting a lamp on the desk*) Susan dear, if you'd look over here . . . This is where she made the pins and bracelets we told y' about.

*The Girl goes towards the desk. The Young Man moves towards the game table, hands in pockets, looking about. The Woman puts the dust cover aside*

All her tools, her silver wire, bits of coloured glass . . . Here's a pin she made just a day or two before. (*He gives it to the Girl*) Just look at that work, will y'?

**Girl** Wow, this is *beautiful!* Larry, come look! (*She holds the pin in the lamplight*)

*The Young Man goes towards her. The Woman begins uncovering a bookcase*

**Man** She made bracelets, ear-rin's, all kinds of things.

**Girl** (*showing the pin to the Young Man*) Isn't it beautiful?

**Young Man** (*looking and nodding*) Yeh, it is. It really is.

**Girl** (*taking an arm's-length look*) She could sell these on the street today and make a *fortune!* (*She gives the pin back to the Man*)

**Woman** Here's some of her books and magazines . . . There are more by the bed, her favourite ones. And these are her paintin' things. She did that castle there. From her imagination, believe it or not; not copyin' anythin'.

*The Girl goes towards the painting on the wall*

**Young Man** Did she do anything else, like make ships in bottles?

*The Woman looks sharply at him*

**Man** Ah well, she had a lot of time to fill, y' know, stuck in the room here seven whole years.

**Girl** (*looking at the painting*) What sign was she born under? (*Turning, looking at the Woman*) Do you know?

**Woman** Sign?

**Girl** You know, of the zodiac. Gemini, Capricorn . . .

**Woman** (*thinking for a moment*) June eighth was her birthday . . .

**Girl** That's Gemini. That's *my* sign. I'm June thirteenth.

*A pause. The Woman, the Man, and the Young Man look at the Girl*

**Man** Well now. Isn't *that* a coincidence . . .

*Another pause, the Girl uncomfortable, having been reminded of something*

**Woman** Everythin' is how it was. Her clothes are in the closet, her comb and brush and all are in the bathroom. There's a half-done paintin' on that easel there . . . The Brabissants wouldn't change a *thing*, rest their souls. After she died they used to come in here almost every evenin' and just sit for a while, her over there and him over here, not sayin' *anythin'*. I had to keep the room as clean as any of the others.

**Man** I had to keep the trees by the window cut back, like as if she still needed the light to paint by!

**Woman** Oh, they adored that girl . . . And John and I did too.

**Man** She used to wave to me when I was workin' this side of the house, as cheerful as if—as if she'd never even *heard* of TB, as if it was someone's *initials* or somethin'!

**Girl** (*looking about approvingly*) It was lovely of them to keep everything . . . Like making a *shrine*.

**Young Man** *I* don't think it was lovely. I think it was—unhealthy.

*The Girl looks at him with curiosity, the Woman and the Man resentfully*

I'll bet this is why . . . (*a movement of his head towards the door*) . . . Cissie wound up the way she is.

**Man** Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Cissie was *always* the . . . (*a waggle of fingers near his temple*) . . . peculiar one of the three.

**Girl** But maybe Larry's right. If the room had been changed, had been *used*, if—Veronica's things had been put away, maybe it would have been easier for Cissie to, you know, *understand*. This must have just *reinforced* everything.

**Woman** You've got it all *wrong*, dear. She *did* understand, in the beginnin'. It's only these past few years, when she's near dyin' herself, that she's come to think Veronica's alive.

**Man** She's *gone back in time*, that's what Cissie's done. She's in nineteen thirty-five now; Veronica's alive, *she*'s goin' to the Boston Secretarial School—she does her shorthand every night, mind y'!—and Conrad's in his room at the end of the hall.

**Woman** The three of them was close as fingers.

**Girl** Where's Conrad really?

**Woman** He died in World War Two. In Japan.

**Man** Lieutenant in the Air Force. That was what finished the Brabissants, him gettin' killed. First their oldest was taken, and then their youngest . . .

*A pause. The Woman, the Man, and the Young Man watch the Girl, who remembers again that she has a decision to make*

**Woman** Will y' do it, Susan? Please? It'll make Cissie so happy.

**Man** It'll only take half an hour or so, and then I'll drive y' right back to town! You'll still have plenty of time for your walk by the river, and the . . . (*he winks at the Young Man*) . . . moon'll be nice and high to shine on y'! (*To the Girl again*) What d'y' say, dear? Will y'?

**Woman** Y' see the way the room is; we only have to take off the rest of the covers.

**Girl** (*Looking indecisively at the Young Man, and at the Woman again*) I—don't know . . .

*The Woman and the Man look anxiously at each other*

**Young Man** Does she *really look* that much like Veronica?

**Woman** / **Man** (*together*) { Oh Lord, yes! / She could be her *twin* practically! I never *seen* anythin' like it!

**Woman** When the two of y' came into that restaurant I thought I was seein' a *ghost*, so help me! (*To the Girl*) And the more so, the closer y' got.

**Man** I thought Maureen was havin' a stroke or somethin'! I had me back to y', remember, and didn't see till y' sat down. (*To the Woman*) Remember, dear. I grabbed your hand and asked if y' was all right? (*To the Young Man*) I really thought the old girl was dyin' on me! (*He looks at the Girl*) And then *I* saw . . . Oh yes, she really looks that much like Veronica. Enough to fool *anyone*, not just poor Cissie.

**Girl** You said you'd show us a picture.

**Woman** That's right, of course; go get it, John. Sneak in there without wakin' her. The big one the photographer took. *You* know.

*The Man goes out*

She's got 'em all lined up, on the mantel and the tables; pictures of all of 'em. (*She moves closer to the Girl*) You'll see. It's yourself, standin' right here, with your hair brought back and gathered behind . . . (*she takes the Girl's hair in both hands, arranges it*) . . . and a nice bright smile on your face. There . . . (*She bites her lip, awed*) Oh Lord, seein' y' in this room of hers, it scares the daylights out of me! (*She lets go of the Girl's hair and moves away, rubbing her hands distressfully*)

*The Girl, combing down her hair with her fingers, looks helplessly at the Young Man, and at the Woman again*

**Girl** I guess I have a common face. There was a girl back home who looked like me. (*To the Young Man*) She was a year ahead of me, in school I mean, and kids were always stopping me and asking me about assignments I never heard of! (*To the Woman's back*) And the same thing used to happen to her.

**Young Man** Did you ever purposely trick anyone?

**Girl** No. But we could've, if we'd wanted to. We weren't friends though. She was kind of a creep. (*She smiles at him*) *Gorgeous*, but kind of a creep.

**Woman** (*turning to the Girl*) Are you *sure* no part of your family's from here?

**Girl** Positive. My parents were born in Ohio, and my grandparents are from Poland and Germany.

**Woman** (*throwing off her discomfort*) Well, maybe over there then; who knows? Mr Brabissant's folks were from Belgium originally. All them places are in there together, aren't they?

*The Girl nods, smiling*

**Young Man** It's a continent, Mrs Mackey. It's pretty big.

*The Man comes in, a small framed picture in his hand*

**Man** She's up, workin' on her *shorthand.* (*He closes the door most of the way. To the Woman*) Didn't even know we was back. (*To the Girl*) I couldn't think of an excuse for the big one, but I sneaked this one out. (*He gives the picture to her*)

**Woman** Oh that's no good! She's twelve or thirteen in that one!

**Man** I couldn't pick and choose, Maureen; it was nearest me hand.

*The Young Man joins the Girl looking at the picture. The Woman goes to them*

**Woman** There. And that's Cissie and Conrad and *Mrs* Brabissant. On the swing on the porch. It's gone now.

**Girl** She does look like me at that age ... Except for the braces. On me I mean, not her.

**Young Man** Braces?

**Girl** On my teeth.

**Young Man** Oh.

**Woman** She had lovely teeth. Nice and straight.

**Girl** So did I, but my father's a dentist. (*She looks for another moment, then makes sure the Young Man is through and gives the picture to the Woman*)

**Woman** Later on, while Cissie's in *here*, John'll go in and get the *good* picture. We'll show it to y' after.

**Young Man** Now just a second; Susan hasn't said she's going to do it.

**Woman** Oh y' must, Susan! Please! All she keeps sayin', mornin' and night, is "Why is Veronica angry with me? Why won't she let me come visit no more?"

**Man** The doctor says she felt *guilty when Veronica died.* Sometimes a child'll *do* that, he says, even when it's natural causes. And now she's a child again, eighteen in her head, not—fifty-six or whatever.

**Woman** We're askin' so little of y'. Y' put on a dress, y' pin back your hair. Y' say "Hello, Cissie, I'm glad you're lookin' so well. No, I'm not angry with y', Cissie, it's just I don't want y' to catch the TB." It's so little, and it'd be such a blessin' for her.

**Girl** I'm—not sure it's a good thing to do.

**Man** / **Woman** (*together*) { What are y' talkin' about? / How could it *not* be, when it's the one thing she's longin' for?

**Girl** (*Gathering her thoughts*) Look, I—I know you *mean* well, and you think we'd be doing her a favour ... But—I've studied some psychology.

I'm a *sociology major*. It's not good to—play along with somebody's delusions. It just makes them *more* dependent on——

**Woman** (*interrupting her*) She's *dyin'*, Susan! She is *dyin'!* Didn't we make that clear in the car? She's dyin' of cancer! It's too *late* to get rid of her delusions! All we can do now is—make her a little *happy* when we've got the chance! (*Upset, she turns from the Girl, moves to the game table and puts the picture down on it*)

**Man** (*touching the Girl's shoulder gently*) A few weeks is all she's got now. A month or two at the most. That's quotin' the doctor now.

*The Girl looks at the Young Man; he shakes his head doubtfully, rubbing the back of it*

(*Looking angrily at the Young Man*) What are your objections, Larry? Perhaps you'll tell us.

**Woman** (*having steadied herself, she turns to the Girl*) Susan . . . We've never gone to that restaurant before. We go to a place on State Street, where John has a cousin who's a waiter. Tonight, walkin' from the parkin' lot I suddenly felt we should go someplace different this week. Don't ask me why 'cause I don't know. "Let's go in *there*," I says to John, "it'll be a change." "We'll have to tip," says John. "What the hell," says I . . . So in we go. And five minutes later *you and Larry come in.* And sit down next to us. Now don't you think—that someone, somewhere, was guidin' our steps tonight? *Your* steps, *our* steps? *Puttin'* us together so we could do this kind thing for Cissie?

**Young Man** Making us not have any plans for the evening?

**Woman** Yes! Even that! Maybe even that. Yes! (*She pins him with an angry stare, then looks at the Girl for her answer*)

**Girl** Could Larry and I talk together please? Just for a minute or two?

*The Woman stays looking at her*

**Man** Sure y' can. Of course. (*Taking the Woman's arm*) Come on, Maureen, let's let 'em talk it over.

*The Woman lets the Man take her towards the door*

We'll look in on Cissie. Y' can't blame 'em for hesitatin', dear. It's not everyone that wants to involve themselves in—oops! (*About to draw the door closed, he leaves the Woman outside it and goes quickly to the game table and takes the picture. He smiles apologetically on his way back to the Woman*) Better slip this back before she misses it; eyes like a hawk! Come on, dear.

*He draws the door closed and they exit*

*The Girl looks at it for a moment, and turns to the Young Man*

**Girl** She *is* dying, and it *would* make her feel better . . .

**Young Man** Oh, I *guess* so . . . But maybe they've got other reasons. Did you think of that?

**Girl** What do you man? *What* other reasons?

**Young Man** (*crossing the room*) Well . . . it's not hard to imagine some . . .
**Girl** It's hard for *me* to. Like what?
**Young Man** (*turning to face her*) All right, the parents are dead right? Mr and Mrs Brabissant?
**Girl** Yes.
**Young Man** And Veronica's dead, and Conrad is dead . . .

*The Girl nods*

Only Cissie is alive, and she's dying.

*The Girl looks at him*

Maybe she knows something, where some money is hidden, or—some papers or something, and *she'll tell Veronica*, but she won't tell—(*a thick brogue*)—the kindly old family servants, bless their darlin' shamrock hearts!

*The Girl stares at him*

It's possible, isn't it? Or maybe they want her to sign something.
**Girl** Man, you really *are* a lawyer, aren't you!
**Young Man** Did you think I wasn't?
**Girl** Well, guys' bullshit. (*She moves towards him*) You don't look like one, with that moustache.
**Young Man** It's fake. I take it off before I go into the courtroom.
**Girl** *All* they want me to *say* is that I'm not *angry* with her.
**Young Man** That's all they've told you *so far*. Maybe they'll have some other suggestions later on. (*The brogue again*) "An' by the way, dear would y' ask her t' tell y' where she's hidin' the old lady's *joolery?*"
**Girl** Shhh! Not so *loud* . . .
**Young Man** You're right; they're probably listening.
**Girl** Oh man. Look if you're so suspicious *now*, how come you were so *un*suspicious in the restaurant? I don't remember you kicking me under the table or anything.
**Young Man** We were just going to look at a picture; they weren't saying anything then about—you putting on an act.

*The Girl moves away from him*

And I was afraid if I said no you'd think I was in too much of a hurry to get down to the river.
**Girl** Oh great. (*She turns to him*) *I* was afraid you'd think *I* was in too much of a hurry!

*They look at each other. He smiles*

**Young Man** I guess we should have been more open.
**Girl** (*looking around dispiritedly*) You can say *that* again . . . (*She decides, and looks at him*) I'm going to do it. I am. It'll be fun. I was Cordelia in *King Lear*.
**Young Man** High school?

**Girl** (*nodding*) It'll be a good deed too. If they tell me to ask her anything, I just *won't*, that's all.

**Young Man** I . . . *guess* they're on the level. They could twist her arm and *make* her tell, if there was something she was—keeping from them.

**Girl** Do you *always* mistrust people? I hope not. Oh wow, they forgot about my voice; what if I don't *sound* right?

**Young Man** You must or they wouldn't think you could do it.

**Girl** I can do a Baaston aaccent. For a few minutes, at least.

**Young Man** Can you keep from saying "oh wow"?

**Girl** Oh wow. Oh—something. What did they *say* in nineteen thirty-five.

**Young Man** (*shrugging*) *I* don't know. Boop-boop-a-doop.

**Girl** Oh wow. *Ooh!* (*She slaps her forehead, and winces and smiles at him*)

*He smiles at her*

**Young Man** Should I call the leprechauns?

**Girl** (*raising her hand*) No, wait a moment. (*She moves closer to him, and stands before him*) Touch me.

*He looks at her, not moving*

You haven't touched me yet, do you know that? I mean not even my elbow crossing the street. Let alone my more interesting features.

**Young Man** It's—only our second date.

**Girl** Our first. Sunday doesn't count.

**Young Man** So?

**Girl** *Touch* me; I'm promiscuous.

*He touches her shoulder, and withdraws his hand. She looks feelingly at him*

She really bugged you, didn't she. That *mother* of yours, I mean. You're very uptight.

**Young Man** (*uncomfortably*) No I'm not . . . Jesus Christ, we're in a house out past Walpole, in a room covered with sheets, where a dead girl did jigsaw puzzles—all right, yes, I'm uptight . . . ! I'll touch you later. Everywhere.

**Girl** (*smiling at him*) OK. (*She goes towards the door and turns back and looks at him*) If not, we'll just talk! (*She opens the door and calls into the hallway*) You can come in now! (*She smiles at the Young Man*)

*The Man and the Woman enter*

(*Nodding happily to them*) I'll do it!

**Woman** (*clapping her hands*) Oh thank y', darlin'! (*She hugs the girl*) Bless y'! You're an angel!

**Man** I knew y' would! I knew it all along! I just now made a dollar bet with her; "She'll *do* it," I said. "She has a *warm heart!*" (*He snaps his fingers at the Woman*) Come on Maureen, pay up! Come on, come on, where's me dollar? Hand it over.

**Woman** (*waving her hand at him*) Oh shut up, you and your bets. (*She moves to the door*)

**Man** You're welshin' on me? (*To the Girl*) Y' see what she is? She's a

welsher! (*To the Woman*) Come on now, Maureen! Y' made a bet, y' gotta——

**Woman** (*her back to the door, closing it; interrupting him*) Shut up, John.

*The Man falters to silence. The Woman looks steadily at him*

We've got to get the covers off, and Susan fixed up.

*A pause. The Man nods*

**Man** Of course, of course . . .

**Girl** Can I help? With the covers, I mean.

*The Man goes towards the bed*

**Woman** Of *course* y' can, dear! The more *hands* there is the less *work* there is! Get that one there. (*She begins gathering the cover from a chair*)

**Girl** (*moving to the desk chair*) Oh listen, is my *voice* all right? Do I *sound* like Veronica?

**Woman** Y' do near enough! The sight of y' 'll be so perfect, I'm sure Cissie won't pay much mind to the sound!

**Man** (*gathering the bed's dust cover*) Her hearin' ain't that good anyway; it's her eyes that're sharp, not her ears.

*The Girl begins gathering the desk chair's cover. The Young Man, having been looking on with an air of lingering disapproval, turns and begins gathering the cover from the dresser. The Woman puts her cover on the chaise*

**Woman** Put 'em all on the chays here; then we'll bundle 'em up in the one.

**Girl** I can do a Boston accent a little; should I? Veronica must have had one.

**Woman** Yes, that'd help y' sound right . . . (*She takes the cover from a side table*)

**Girl** (*putting her cover on the chaise*) I'll paak my caa in Haavaad Yaad.

*She starts towards the Victrola as the Young Man brings his cover to the chaise*

**Woman** We're grateful to y', Larry, for lettin' Susan *do* the favour for us.

**Girl** (*turning*) *Letting* me? He didn't *let* me; I make my *own* decisions.

*The Young Man goes around the game table*

**Man** Oho, so you're a liberated woman, are y'!

**Girl** Bet your—*life* I am.

**Young Man** (*taking the cover from the chair before the puzzle*) How come I paid for dinner?

**Girl** (*taking the cover from the Victrola*) Because *you asked.* When *I* ask, *I'll* pay.

**Man** (*to the Young Man; bringing the bed's cover to the chaise*) *I'da* paid if y'da let me.

**Girl** Hey, what *is* this?

**Woman** (*picking up the desk's dust cover from the floor*) The Victrola.

**Man** Record-player, phonograph.

**Girl** Oh wow. (*Turning to the Woman*) Hey, that's something else: what did Veronica say instead of "oh wow" and "oh man" and things like that?

*The Woman takes the cover from the Girl's hands and brings it with her own to the chaise. She considers as she puts them down*

**Woman** I believe she kept silent.

*The Girl is given pause. The Young Man smiles, gathering another cover. The Man is uncovering a bookcase on the far side of the bed. The Girl opens the Victrola's top, looks inside, twists her head*

**Girl** "Shuffle Off to Buffalo" . . .
**Woman** (*gathering a cover*) Oh, that was real popular then. It must have been the last record she played . . . Tsk-tsk. (*She shakes her head and sighs*)
**Girl** Does this work? Can we hear it?
**Woman** I guess it does; try it and see.
**Man** (*on his way to the chaise*) Y' wind it on the side there, the handle.
**Young Man** We want to get this over with, don't we?
**Girl** (*winding the Victrola*) I want to hear it; it'll help me get in the mood.

*The Young Man gives an oh-God look. The Man having put his cover on the pile, reaches for the ones the Young Man holds. The Girl fiddles in the Victrola's top*

**Woman** John, get the one off the mirror there.
**Girl** It's turning, but the arm doesn't move.
**Woman** / **Man** (*together*) { Y've got to do it yourself. / Just pick it up and set it down there.
**Girl** (*doing it*) That's not very handy . . .

*We hear a nineteen thirty-three or thirty-four recording of "Shuffle Off to Buffalo," with vocal. While the record plays, the restoring of the room is completed. The Man and the Young Man gather the last of the dust covers, while the Woman sets out various decorative objects that she takes from drawers in tables and the dresser. The Girl helps some, but her interest is mainly in the song. "Oh, I've heard* this! *" she says after a few bars, and she hums along and sings, "Off we're gonna shuffle, shuffle off to Buffa-lo," sharing her enjoyment with the others in looks and smiles. The Man, enlisting the Young Man's help—"Gimme a hand here, will y'?"—encloses the heap of dust covers in the cover of the chaise*

*The Young Man opens the door for the Man, who carries the bundle from the room*

*The Man exits*

*The Young Man closes the door after him*

*A few moments later, the Man returns with a towel which he takes into the bathroom. He then comes back on stage*

*The Woman gives various instructions throughout: "This goes on the night table. John, get a towel from the closet! Will y' put these on the bookcase*

*there?" etc. As the record nears its end, the room looks warm, attractive and thoroughly lived-in. Another lamp may have been lighted, or secondary bulbs in the lamps already lit. The only jarring note is the unfinished painting on the easel, an agony of twisted tree branches, bare and black. The Girl becomes aware of it, and moves from the Victrola to stand before it. The Man, watching her from the side of the chaise where he sits resting, sings along with the final "Off we're gonna shuffle, shuffle off to Buff-a-lo!" The Young Man, leaning against the dresser with his arms folded, watches him. The Woman, at the side of the Victrola, lifts its arm, switches it off, and closes its cover*

**Young Man** They don't write them like that any more.
**Man** (*turning to him*) Ain't it the truth! The *junk* they call *songs* now! Honest to God!

*The Girl does not turn. The Woman watches her, and looks uncomfortably at the painting*

**Woman** She was—kind of downhearted at the end, I guess.
**Girl** That's not *downhearted*, ooh, that's—*anguished. Ooh!* (*She turns from the painting wincing and hugging her arms*)
**Man** Well, y' can't blame her, poor thing, knowin' what was ahead.
**Woman** (*with a hand movement*) Turn it around, John; Cissie may not like it. (*An inviting gesture to the Girl*) Come on, dear. Now that the *room* is fixed up, it's *your* turn! (*She goes to the closet*)

*The Man rises and starts towards the easel, watching as the Woman opens the closet. It's filled with colourful garments, most of them light and silken, and a rack of shoes hangs on the door. The Girl approaches slowly. The Woman takes out an attractive nineteen thirties-style dress on its hanger, and another one*

This is one she liked a lot, and this here one too. (*Displaying them both*) What d'y' like, dear? Choose. Whichever y'want.

*The Girl looks and turns coolly to the Young Man*

**Girl** I did not, you will notice, say "oh wow."

*The Young Man smiles*

(*Turning to the closet*) I sure *felt* like it though . . .

*The Man carefully turns the easel and painting around to face the wall, while the Girl looks at the garments in the closet*

It's the Walpole branch of Paraphernalia!
**Woman** Of what?
**Girl** This boutique in Cambridge that has all kinds of marvellous far-out things. (*She takes a dress out and inspects it at arm's length*) You know my poncho? That's where I got it.
**Woman** Oh.

*The Girl goes before the mirror over the dresser and holds the dress against herself*

I was wonderin' . . .
**Girl** It's Peruvian. Shepherds wear them. (*She takes one of the dresses from the Woman and compares it with the other she's holding*)
**Woman** Well, these are what Veronica wore. Which'll it be?
**Girl** (*showing them to the Young Man, moving towards him*) Which do *you* like?
**Young Man** The one that goes on and off the quickest.
**Girl** (*making a face at him and going back to the Woman*) *This* one.
**Woman** I'da chose it too! It's a good colour for y'. (*She takes the other dress from the Girl*)
**Man** Well. I guess it's time for Larry and me to be gettin' out.
**Girl** (*to the Young Man*) Sorry about that.

*The Woman is hanging away the unchosen dresses. The Young Man stands straight*

**Young Man** Can I come back and watch from somewhere, while Cissie is here?

*The Woman turns from the closet; she and the Man look at the Young Man*

**Man** / **Woman** (*together*) { Oh no. / No, y' can't do *that*.
**Man** There's no place to watch from.

*The Young Man starts to gesture towards the bathroom*

**Woman** She's liable to want to *use* the bathroom.

*A pause*

**Man** She goes a hell of a lot.
**Woman** And she might even want to—see somethin' in the closet. No I really don't see how y' can——
**Man** (*interrupting her; beckoning to the Young Man*) Susan'll tell y' the whole story! Come on, I'll make y' comfortable downstairs. I'll even give y' a sip of Irish whiskey, what d'y' say to that?
**Young Man** (*going to him*) Oh faith an' begorrah, that'll be a treat.

*The Man laughs. The Young Man looks across the room at the Girl. She waves her fingers at him; he smiles*

Have fun.
**Girl** I expect to. It's a bigger part than Cordelia.
**Woman** Have y' acted in plays?
**Girl** In high school.
**Woman** Oh, *that'll* help us . . .

*The Young Man goes to the Girl, looks at her, and puts his hand to her cheek. She smiles at him, and puts her hand to his cheek. The Woman watches, surprised. The Young Man turns and goes back to the Man, who, opening the door, throws a fatherly arm about the Young Man's shoulders*

**Man** Come along, son, and I'll show y' where there's a nice comfortable chair in front of a TV set!

*The Man and the Young Man go out, the Man drawing the door almost closed after them*

*The Girl's smile lingers, as does the Woman's puzzlement*

**Woman** Y' belong to a *lodge* or somethin'?
**Girl** (*turning to her with a broader smile*) No. He's—shy about touching me.
**Woman** Oh. (*A glance towards the door*) He seems to be gettin' over it.
**Girl** (*nodding*) I think he will. (*Taking the hanger from the dress she holds*) He had this awful rejecting mother. She told him right to his face that she never wanted him. (*She gives the hanger to the Woman*)
**Woman** Oh dear.
**Girl** She probably never touched *him*, so now *he* can't touch. At least not easily.
**Woman** (*hanging the hanger in the closet*) Can that be?
**Girl** Oh yes. Yes . . . (*Undoing the back of the dress*) Kids should be touched like crazy. All the time.
**Woman** (*a pair of shoes in her hands*) Can y' wear size—(*she looks in them, squints*)—seven B? (*She goes to the Girl*)

*The Girl takes them and looks*

**Girl** I guess so. I may *moan* a little.
**Woman** (*smiling*) It won't be for long. (*She fixes the Girl with a frank, steady, moment-of-truth gaze*) Y're not wearin' a brassière, are y'.
**Girl** God no! Nobody does.
**Woman** Speak for yourself. (*She turns to the dresser and opens a drawer*) Y' better have one with that; it's kind of clingy. Are y' wearin' stockin's?
**Girl** No.
**Woman** (*finding them in the drawer*) Stockin's . . . Garters . . .
**Girl** *Garters?*
**Woman** (*turning, looking at her*) Y' ain't goin' to keep 'em up by prayin'. (*She turns back to the drawer*) A slip . . . Here's a nice slip for y' . . . (*Looking at the Girl again*) Y' *are* wearin' *pants* . . .

*The Girl nods*

Saints be praised. (*Turning, she tucks the handful of lingerie into the crook of the Girl's arm*) Now go on in there and put 'em on. I'm goin' to dust around a little.

*The Girl goes into the bathroom*

Oh, wait a minute, there's a belt that goes with that dress. Go ahead, I'll get it for y'. (*She turns to the dresser, closes the open drawer, opens another, lifts out a skein of belts*) Narrow satin belt . . . Here it is. (*She puts the others in the drawer, closes it, and brings the belt to the bathroom doorway*) Here y'are.

*The Girl comes to take it*

**Girl** (*taking it*) Thanks.

*The Girl goes back into the bathroom*

*The Woman closes the door partway, and standing in the lee of it, draws a neckchain from her dress. Taking in her hand something attached to the chain, she lifts it off over her head*

**Woman** Have y' known Larry long?
**Girl** (*off*) No, we just met Sunday.
**Woman** (*trying to open the chain and having difficulty*) Y' seem to know a lot about him.
**Girl** (*off*) I'm good at drawing people out. And picking up clues.
**Woman** Clues? What d'y' mean? (*She uses her teeth on the clasp*)
**Girl** (*off*) Oh, like the fact that he's got a big moustache and short hair. That means he's *trying* to be open and self-accepting, but part of him is still kind of closed and defensive.

*The Woman has the chain open now and is drawing it up from the object in her hand*

**Woman** Oh, that's *interestin'* . . . Can y' do that with everybody?
**Girl** (*off*) More or less, when I'm not all wrapped up in *myself.*
**Woman** (*tucking the chain in a pocket and going towards the door to the hall*) My oh my, you're a very smart girl! (*Standing before the almost-closed door, she draws it to her and puts the object, a key, into the outside of it. She tries it; the bolt, a large one, slides smoothly out and in*)
**Girl** (*off*) Mrs Mackey?
**Woman** It's Maureen, dear! Call me Maureen! (*She puts the door as it was, leaving the key in it, and moves away*)
**Girl** (*off*) I ought to know more about people and things that Cissie is liable to mention. Who was Veronica's doctor, for instance?
**Woman** (*looking critically at the chaise*) Dr Simpson, that was. He was everybody's doctor, the whole family's. (*She moves the chaise a little further away from the lamp table by it*)
**Girl** (*off*) Simpson?
**Woman** That's right. And there was a cook then named Henrietta, with a little boy Morgan who used to hang around and make a pest of himself. (*She adjusts the position of a decorative pillow on the chaise*)
**Girl** (*off*) Were there any friends or relations?
**Woman** (*taking a handkerchief from a pocket, moving about flicking it at various surfaces, blowing dust from things*) None that Cissie's likely to mention. The Brabissants was above most of the folks around here, and they weren't that close with their families neither. *He* hated hers and *she* hated his. From what I seen at the funerals they were *both* of them right. (*She flicks and blows*)

*The Girl comes out of the bathroom, fastening the belt of the mid-calf-length dress; it's quite becoming to her*

Oh isn't that nice now!

**Girl** It fits perfectly.
**Woman** (*a small pause*) I knew it would; you're just the right size.
**Girl** Even the shoes are all right. Either my *feet shrank* or they made sizes bigger in those days.

*She takes a heavy bracelet from her wrist and smiles at the Woman, who stands looking at her*

What do we do with my hair?
**Woman** (*looking for another moment*) I don't suppose y'd—let me cut a little, would y'?
**Girl** Oh no. No. No way.
**Woman** Well, we'll just have to make it *look* shorter, then. (*Pocketing her handkerchief, going towards the bathroom*) Sit down, I'll get pins.

*The Girl moves towards the desk*

*The Woman, passing her with a touch on the arm, goes into the bathroom*

*The Girl puts her bracelet on the corner of the desk and sits in a chair*

**Girl** If she notices I'll just say I'm letting it grow. She hasn't *seen* Veronica in a long time. I mean even by *her* standards.
**Woman** (*off*) That's right; it'll be fine, don't worry. I pay too much mind to little details; John's always tellin' me that.

*The Woman comes out of the bathroom shaking dry a comb. She gives the Girl a handful of hairpins*

Hold these and give 'em to me, all right?
**Girl** Sure.

*During the following, the Woman combs the Girl's hair back loosely over her ears and pins it up at the back of her neck in as close an approximation of a nineteen-thirties' hairdo as she can manage. The Girl hands back pins when the Woman reaches or asks for them*

**Woman** I rinsed the comb . . .
**Girl** It was clean; I saw it. The whole bathroom is.
**Woman** Oh, I come in and clean around once in a while . . .

*A moment of silence, the Woman working with great concentration. The Girl puts her hand to her mouth and coughs. Another moment goes by*

**Girl** Was that all right?
**Woman** Was *what* all right?
**Girl** My cough.
**Woman** Oh! Oh *yes*, that was very good, very good. Just like hers. That was very good . . . Real little actress . . .

*Another pause, the Woman working, the Girl thinking*

**Girl** How come Veronica wasn't in a sanatorium? The Brabissants could have afforded it, couldn't they? This *house*, and all the *land* . . .

**Woman** Oh yes, they were *loaded.* He had a big mill over in East Walpole. Textile mill. Even in the Depression they were sittin' pretty.

**Girl** Then why didn't they send her——

**Woman** (*interrupting her*) Well y' see, it was that they *loved her so much*; they couldn't bear to have her away from them.

**Girl** But wouldn't she have lived longer, in a place like in *The Magic Mountain?* A sanatorium in the Alps . . .

**Woman** May*be*; I don't know. All I know is they kept her here . . .

*Another pause, the Girl thinking and looking down at herself uneasily*

Another.

*The Girl puts a pin in the Woman's hand*

**Girl** Maureen?

**Woman** Mm?

**Girl** These clothes, and the room and all; it's—safe, isn't it?

*The Woman looks at her, suddenly wary*

(*Turning*) There's no danger of . . .

**Woman** (*understanding, relieved*) Oh of *course* it's safe, darlin'! The whole room was fumigated and all the clothes was taken out and cleaned! No, no, no, no, don't worry about *that!* Of *course* it's safe! I wouldn't be in here meself if there was any danger, would I? Oh no, no, no. Everythin' was cleaned and made all right again. (*She comes around in front of the Girl, lifts the Girl's chin, and looks judiciously at one side of her head and the other*) And germs don't live thirty-five, forty years anyway, do they?

**Girl** I don't know; I don't *think* so . . .

**Woman** (*fixing a strand of the Girl's hair*) No, I'm *sure* they don't. Everythin's clean; don't you worry. Tell me, d'y' have any brothers and sisters? (*She goes around in back again*)

**Girl** One brother.

**Woman** Older or younger?

**Girl** Older. He's in Portugal. Wait till I write him about—oh wow! Wait till I tell my *room-mates!* They're going to think I made the whole thing up!

**Woman** *Are* they? Oh, they wouldn't doubt your——

**Girl** (*interrupting her*) *Fact*, absolute *fact!* This *one*, Diane, is the complete sceptic! I tell her I found a *penny on the sidewalk*, she doesn't believe me!

**Woman** Oh my goodness . . .

**Girl** You're going to have to give me a *note* or something, some kind of *proof* that this whole thing *happened.*

**Woman** (*smiling at her, leaning close to share a secret*) It's *fun* dressin' up and playin' a part, isn't it?

**Girl** (*nodding, smiling*) Yes, it is. At least when there's a good reason for doing it.

**Woman** Mmm, yes!

**Girl** You can rationalize it then; otherwise it's just—kid stuff. But kid stuff's OK once in a while; I don't think people ought to *not* allow themselves to——

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