

# Room for Rent

by Ann Snead

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# Room for Rent

## CHARACTERS

CELIA DAVENPORT	The landlady. In her sixties.
BILL O'NEILL	A (Maritimer) down on his luck. Also in his sixties.
GEORGE and DOTTY	A yuppie couple.
SERENITY CHINN	A woman in her late thirties-early forties.
OFFICER	A policeman. Old enough to have seen it all.

## SETTING

A front door, kitchen, corridor and bedroom in a run-down old house.

## TIME

The present.

Words in brackets may be changed to reflect local conditions, but please inform me.

EPISODE 1: BILL

PRELUDE

(BILL, clutching a piece of paper, goes along the street, looking for the right address. From time to time he takes a swig out of a bottle in a brown paper bag.)

SCENE 1

(As the lights come up, CELIA is dusting old photographs in the hall. She seems to be talking to unseen people. Towards the end of the conversation, it becomes obvious she's talking to the pictures.)

CELIA

'Morning, mother. 'Morning, father. You'll be happy to know I got rid of that deadbeat tenant I was complaining about. You warned me...

(pauses as if listening to someone)

I know, I know! But I felt sorry for her. Mental illness is a terrible thing... You were right, though. She was a taker and she took me for three months' rent. Next time I'll follow your advice. I'll be firm. No pay, no stay.

(The doorbell rings.)

CELIA

Just a minute!

(CELIA tosses the feather duster aside. She smooths down her hair, then surreptitiously raises the lace curtain at the window and looks out. A middle-aged man, somewhat down-at-heel, looks back at her. They both recoil.)

CELIA

(To a picture on the wall)

Oh, no! Another one.

(She opens the door—but not too far.)

CELIA

Yes?

BILL

(looking at his feet)

I've come about the room.

CELIA

Pardon?

BILL

(looking up; louder)

I was told you had a room to rent.

CELIA

Who told you that?

BILL

The man at the variety store.

CELIA

Ken?

BILL

The big guy with the ponytail. Told him I needed a cheap place to stay for a while. He suggested I try you. Said it was (\$100) a week.

CELIA

It is, to the right person. And maybe, if Ken sent you here, that's you. We'll see. Got money?

BILL

Some. I'm on disability.

CELIA

You don't have a job?

BILL

I'm willing to work. But there's not much for guys like me, 'cept what I can get under the table.

CELIA

Small jobs nobody else will do.

BILL

Yeah. Those.

(Beat)

Can I see the room?

(She hesitates, then opens the door wide and lets him in. They size each other up.)

CELIA

Don't think I'm gonna give it to you for free!

BILL

No, ma'am.

CELIA

Mrs. Davenport.

BILL

No, Mrs. Davenport.

CELIA

(shutting the door)

And who might you be?

BILL

Bill. Bill O'Neill.

CELIA

From (the Maritimes).

BILL

(Cape Breton).

CELIA

My husband was there once. Said it was beautiful.

BILL

Yeah. But that don't put food on the table.

CELIA

This way, Mr. O'Neill.

(She ushers him along the corridor. The walls are covered with framed photographs of people of various ages.)

BILL

You must come from a big family.

CELIA

No, Mr. O'Neill, I'm an orphan. As far as I know, I have no relatives.

BILL

Then who're all these people?

CELIA

Everyone asks me that. Actually, I have no idea.

BILL

No idea?

CELIA

I collect pictures. I buy'em from flea markets, garage sales, junk shops...wherever I see a face calling out to me, asking to be taken home.

BILL

What kinda face would that be?

CELIA

I can't explain, but I know. I know the moment our eyes meet. And I confess: I think of them as family. I've named them all, and I like to talk to them, and find out their stories. We have very interesting conversations.

BILL

You mean the pictures talk back to you? How's that work?

CELIA

I don't know, exactly. Except you have to really listen. Be quiet, and listen. They're a real help to me. When I don't take their advice, I usually regret it.

BILL

Ever give you lottery numbers?

CELIA

No.

BILL

Too bad, eh?

(Beat)

Haven't you got family of your own? I mean, real family?

CELIA

I said I was an orphan. There used to be a big convent down the street—I was left on the doorstep there. On Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>, St. Cecilia's Day. That's how I got my name.

BILL

Crazy.

CELIA

Isn't it? Growing up, I always envied other people their families.

BILL

If you'd'a asked, I'd'a given you mine.

CELIA

Sounds like you didn't get on.

BILL

Oh, we got on all right. Just not with each other.

CELIA

Well, at least you know who you are.

BILL

Sure do. Bill, the bootlegger's son.

(Beat)

Can I see the room now?

(She leads the way.)

CELIA

I tried to find my parents, but I couldn't. Finally I decided to take matters into my own hands. Make my own family. Choose who I was going to be related to.

(pointing)

Father.

(to Maria)

Mother. Brothers. Sisters. Cousins. They've been a great comfort to me. Given me a real sense of belonging.

BILL

And they're all made-up, eh?

CELIA

Except for my husband. He was real enough. And my son. He's in an institution.

BILL

What'd he do?

CELIA

When he's on his meds, he's good. Wouldn't harm a fly. When he's not...

BILL

Know a lotta guys like that. So you live all alone, then?

CELIA

Yes.

BILL

Must be lonely.

CELIA

Sometimes it is. But as I said—

(gesturing towards the pictures)

I've got company. And when I want more, I rent the room. You meet the most interesting people that way, Mr. O'Neill.

BILL

I suppose. Gotta say everybody seemed pretty ordinary at my last place.

CELIA

And where would that've been?

BILL

(The Russell.)

CELIA

(The Russell Hotel?) Burnt down, didn't it?

BILL

Almost. Landlord didn't rebuild. He'd been trying to get us out for years.

CELIA

I thought the city was gonna find all of you a place to stay.

BILL

We're on the waiting list. You know how it is.

CELIA

Yes. Pity the city councillors aren't on the list.



(They enter the bedroom. CELIA opens the window.)

CELIA

I'm afraid the room's a bit musty. It needs an airing—I'll leave the window open for you.

BILL

Reminds me of my grandmother's house. The high ceilings, the wooden floors, that piece of carpet...

CELIA

I got it at a garage sale. A bit threadbare here and there, but so what?

BILL

(Uneasy)

Who's the guy in the picture?

CELIA

My son. This used to be his room.

BILL

He doesn't come to visit, does he?

CELIA

Well, he needs a pass to come home, and he can't always get one.

(An awkward silence.)

BILL

Can I try the bed?

CELIA

Certainly. But don't put your feet on it.

(He lies down on the bed, careful not to dirty it with his boots.)

CELIA

Comfortable?

BILL

Umm.

(He gets up reluctantly.)

BILL

How much did you say you were asking for the room, Mrs. Davenport?

CELIA

You said you were gonna stay “for a while.” How long’s that?

BILL

Till the weather warms up enough so’s I can camp out.

CELIA

Seventy-five dollars a week, then, shall we say?

BILL

Seventy-five?

CELIA

In advance. You can pay me the other twenty-five by doing odd jobs around the house. Garden needs cleaning up. You can start there.

BILL

Could I give you \$50 today, and the rest on the 28<sup>th</sup>? That’s when my cheque comes in.

CELIA

(Beat)

Alright. But see that you do pay me, hear?

BILL

I promise, Mrs. Davenport.

CELIA

Promises are only good if you keep them, Mr. O’Neill.

(She puts out her hand. He takes out a crumpled wad of bills and hands her \$50, which she pockets.)

CELIA

Now we’ve done our business, come and have tea with me. You look as if you could use some.

BILL

Thanks.

(He follows her out of the room. The lights fade behind them)

## SCENE 2

(And brighten in the kitchen, which is, like the rest of the house, rather shabby and old-fashioned. There's a plain wooden kitchen table with three plain wooden kitchen chairs, and a counter. A kettle's whistling.)

CELIA

Sit there. Tea or coffee?

BILL

Tea, please.

(She busies herself at the counter, putting tea bags in mugs. She takes out a bag of cookies and puts some on a plate. They chat as she prepares, and then brings everything over to the table.)

BILL

When did you start collecting the pictures?

CELIA

'Bout ten years before I met my husband.

BILL

(Gesturing)

Is one of these him?

CELIA

No. He's on the wall, opposite my bed.

BILL

Bet you talk to him every night, 'fore you go to sleep.

CELIA

How'd you guess?

BILL

(starting to take a picture out of his pocket)

'Cause I got—

(He puts it back in as CELIA goes to get the sugar bowl. When she returns with it, he pours an alarming amount of sugar in his tea, and stirs.)

BILL

How'd you get started?

CELIA

(pointing to the wall)

Maria...I mean, I call her Maria...was my first. I was at an auction with a friend. Nobody else wanted her. The picture didn't have a nice frame, you see. I felt sorry for her, so I bought her.

BILL

And it all started there?

CELIA

Umm. Here. Have a cookie.

(She pushes the plate in his direction. He eats as if he's hungry.)

BILL

I got someone, too.

(He takes the picture from his pocket and hands it to her.)

CELIA

What a doll! Who is she?

BILL

My wife.

CELIA

May I see?

BILL

(handing it over)

Sure.

CELIA

How come the edges are charred?

BILL

It was on my bedside table at the (Russell). When the alarm went off, I rushed out with everybody else. But when I realized I didn't have it, I went back.

CELIA

That was foolish of you, Mr. O'Neill. You could've been killed.

It's the only thing I got left of her. BILL

What happened? She dead? CELIA

She left me. BILL

Why? CELIA

Dunno. BILL

(Beat) CELIA

Have another cookie.

(He takes one, then another.)

Did she run off with someone? CELIA

How'd you guess? BILL

Women who look like this... CELIA

Every guy in town wanted her. BILL

But she chose you. CELIA

We were married for two years. Then... BILL

She left. CELIA

(He nods miserably.)

Any kids?

CELIA

No.

BILL

Where'd she go?

CELIA

Dunno. I stuck around for a while, then I came here. First it was O.K. Got a job in construction, got my own place. But things...

(He makes a downward spiral with his hand.)

CELIA

(Beat)

I told you pictures talk to me. Tell me things.

(He looks at her skeptically.)

CELIA

First I hold them, like this. Then I wait.

BILL

Wait for what?

CELIA

For whatever they want to say to me. For example, she's telling me... that she's sorry she left you. That the guy she ran off with dumped her. That she was too ashamed, too scared, to come home. She thought you'd never take her back.

BILL

I'd've probably killed her!

CELIA

I thought you loved her!

BILL

After what she did to me? Everyone knew! Everyone snickered behind their hands! I seen'em.

CELIA

She paid. She ended up hustling. Lost her looks. Lost...everything.

BILL

Is she dead?

CELIA

(closing her eyes; fingering the edges of the picture)

Can't tell.

(She gives the picture back; notices his cup is empty.)

CELIA

More tea?

BILL

No, thanks. I usually spend the afternoon with some of the guys from the (Russell). Front of the library, if the day's nice, or at the drop-in centre.

(He gets up to go. While she has her back turned, he snatches the leftover cookies.)

CELIA

I'm going out to bingo tonight. Here's the key to the front door. Bedroom's got a bolt. And here—take these.

(She hands him the bag of cookies..)

BILL

Thanks!

(She shows him out the door, then turns to her pictures.)

CELIA

What do you think of this one, Mom, Dad? A bit rough around the edges, but I like him, don't you?...Really? Why not?...No money and a drinking problem. I know, but he's had a hard life—wife ran off on him...That's unkind, Dad! He loved her...Of course I'm no social worker, but maybe, with a place to stay—...When will I ever learn? You think I've done it again, then? Well, it's too late. I've given him the key already.

(She goes off to the kitchen. Lights remain on the wall of pictures, darkening as evening comes on.)

SCENE 3

(CELIA enters the hall, flicks on a light, puts on her coat and shoes and leaves the house with her bingo dabber.)

(Night falls. BILL, who's been drinking all day, appears and tries to open the front door. Eventually, he succeeds. Once in, he shows his wife's picture the ones on the wall.)

BILL

Mrs. Davenport's family.

(pointing)

Mother. Father. Sisters. Brothers. Cousins. All made up, but she talks to them and they tell her things... Gotta be quiet, and listen, she says. Shhh!

(He looks at the pictures, looks at his wife. Nothing. He gives up and starts down the corridor.)

BILL

Look at them all. Hundreds of people live here.

(entering; holding up the picture)

This is my room.

(turning it on)

My light. My bed.

(He lies on it, then suddenly remembers.)

BILL

Whoops! Don't put your feet on it!

(He fumbles in his jacket pocket, takes out a mickey of vodka and begins to drink. He starts talking to the picture of his wife, which he's placed on the bedside table.)

BILL

Nice of the lady to rent me this place, wasn't it, Irene?

(Swigs)

She says you didn't have no luck. Your fancy boy dumped you. Had to work for a living.

(He looks triumphant, then his face crumples.)

Why?! I loved you! Why wasn't that enough? Why'd you have to throw yourself at every guy who looked at you?

(He suddenly swivels his head from her to the picture of the landlady's son, suspicion rising.)

BILL

Don't you look at her like that, you bugger!



(He lurches off the bed towards the photograph, taking a knife from his pants' pocket and opening it.)

BILL

Didn't you hear me? I said, Don't look at her like that!

(He lunges at the picture and pokes out first one, then the other eye. He stands back, satisfied.)

BILL

That'll teach ya.

(He tosses the knife on the bed. As he passes the bedside table...)

BILL

And you—hey, Irene!—you don't look at him like that, either! Gonna turn you around. You bin a bad girl. Gonna make you face the wall.

(He turns the picture to face the wall, goes over to the bed and flops on top of it. He cries out—he's cut his wrist on the open knife. Suddenly sober, he begins to laugh loudly and hysterically. Just then, the front door opens.)

CELIA

(From the hall)

Mr. O'Neill? Mr. O'Neill, are you alright?

(CELIA, in her overcoat, hurries to the bedroom and pounds on the door. No result, so she throws it open.)

CELIA

What've you done to yourself?!

(Without waiting for an answer, she grabs the edge of the sheet.)

CELIA

Press on it—like this.

(He does.)

CELIA

Keep still. I'll call an ambulance.

(She takes out her cell phone and dials.)

CELIA

Emergency! 22 (Duke) Street. ..Tenant cut his wrist...Suicide? I don't—

(Beat)

Oh, wait. Yes. Could be... Of course I'll stay with him...I already did that...OK, thanks.

(She turns off the phone.)

BILL

It wasn't suicide. It was an accident. I forgot the knife was on the bed.

CELIA

(picking up the bottle)

You were drinking.

(BILL reaches for it, but she ignores him. She sights her son's picture and rushes over.)

CELIA

Oh, poor boy! What has he done to you?

(She looks at BILL reproachfully.)

BILL

Sorry.

(Beat)

I feel kinda dizzy.

CELIA

Lemme see your wrist.

BILL

Ow!

CELIA

It's not as bad as it looks.

BILL

You a nurse?

CELIA

No, but you're not the first tenant to need an ambulance.

(propping him up)

I'll sit with you till they come. Should be here soon.

(settling herself beside him)

If I can give you some advice: tell'em if I hadn't interrupted you, you'd've killed yourself.

BILL  
I would've? Why?

CELIA  
'Cause you'd lost hope of ever getting to the top of the city housing list.

BILL  
(Beat)  
Dunno if I can do that.

CELIA  
'Course you can! You want your own apartment, don't you?

BILL  
Yeah.

CELIA  
That's how you get it.

(They hear the siren approaching, then the paramedics pounding on the door.)

CELIA  
(getting up)  
There they are.

BILL  
Mrs. Davenport...

CELIA  
Celia. Yes?

BILL  
Could you please put her  
(motioning with his head to his wife's picture)  
in my jacket pocket? Left side?

CELIA  
Sure.

(She picks up the picture and holds it for a moment.)

CELIA  
She's upset, Mr. O'Neill. Very upset.

She is?  
BILL

I can feel it. And she has a message for you.  
CELIA

What?  
BILL

She wants me to tell you to take it easy. Things'll work out.  
CELIA

Thanks.  
BILL

No problem, Mr. O'Neill.  
CELIA

Bill.  
BILL

(She puts the picture in his jacket pocket.)

Now remember. You tried to kill yourself 'cause you didn't think you'd ever get to the top of the housing list. Got it?  
CELIA

(No reply.)

Try.  
CELIA

(looking around)  
BILL  
Sorry about the mess.

I'll deal with it in the morning.  
CELIA

(The lights fade as she leaves the bedroom.)

## SCENE 4

(And come up on the kitchen. CELIA enters, yawning. She tosses the knife and mickey on the kitchen counter and starts to make herself some tea.)

CELIA

(turning to the pictures)

‘Morning, Mother. Father. Enough excitement for you, last night? What a hubbub, eh? I was so stressed out, I couldn’t sleep afterwards... I had to nudge Bill along when the ambulance came, but he did O.K., don’t you think? Just hope he kept it up at the hospital...A question for you—

(The doorbell rings. She checks who it is behind the lace curtain, then throws open the door.)

CELIA

Bill! They let you out already?

BILL

Guess they needed the bed.

CELIA

You mean you got one?

BILL

Had to sit up in emerg most of the night, but after they sewed my wrist, they took me off to the mental health wing and let me lie down till the psychiatrist came.

CELIA

Didn’t he keep you in for observation?

BILL

Couldn’t get rid of me fast enough.

CELIA

Give you any trouble?

BILL

Wasn’t very sympathetic. Said it was usually teenage girls who slashed their wrists. Said she didn’t recommend it, ‘cause it takes too long, and half the time, it doesn’t work.

CELIA

Lucky you're not her full-time patient.

(Beat)

I was just about to make a late breakfast. Come and join me.

BILL

I already ate.

CELIA

Have some tea with me, then.

(She leads him to the kitchen, hides the mickey under her chair cushion while he's not looking, and bustles about, organizing things.)

CELIA

Anything else happen in the hospital?

BILL

Wasn't hardly through the door when a reporter came and interviewed me! Dunno how he found out I was there...

(CELIA smiles to herself; he sees her and knows.)

CELIA

Never mind that. What'd he write?

(BILL holds up a newspaper. His picture's on the front page.)

CELIA

Lemme see! "The mayor says it's a scandal that homeless men such as Mr. McNeill should have to wait, sometimes for years, until public housing becomes available."

BILL

Didn't know she cared.

CELIA

Must be an election year.

BILL

I got a personal call. I'm meeting her later. She's gonna see what she can do.

CELIA

Oh, Bill, that's wonderful!

BILL

(reaching for her hand)

Thank you.

CELIA

There, there, Mr. O'Neill! Enough of that!

BILL

I wanna give you some money.

CELIA

What for?

BILL

For the picture of your son. So's you can have it repaired.

CELIA

(touching him)

Don't need to.

BILL

(touching her back)

Wanna.

CELIA

Don't need to.

BILL

(touching her)

Wanna.

CELIA

I still have your fifty bucks.

BILL

Keep it!

CELIA

Fixing the picture won't cost that much. I'll have it done, then give you the change.  
(handing him the knife)

By the way—why'd you poke the poor boy's eyes out?

BILL

Can't remember.

CELIA  
Must've been drunk out of your mind.

BILL  
Wouldn't've fallen on my own knife, otherwise.

CELIA  
How's your wrist? Does it hurt?

BILL  
Not anymore.

CELIA  
What a fright you gave me!

BILL  
Gave you? Gave myself!

(He pulls out a crumpled plastic bag.)

BILL  
I got something for you. A gift.

CELIA  
You don't have to give me anything!

BILL  
I wanna.

CELIA  
What's inside?

BILL  
Look 'n' see.

(She pulls out a picture and beams at him.)

BILL  
Thought you'd like it.

CELIA  
Where'd you get her?



BILL

From the hospital. She's a nurse.

CELIA

(reading from the bottom of the picture)

"Employee of the month."

BILL

You can cut that part off.

CELIA

I've been searching for her for a long time. She's Al's third wife.

BILL

Want me to hang'er up for you?

CELIA

Soon's we finish our tea.

(Lights fade.)

## EPISODE 2: GEORGE AND DOTTY

### PRELUDE

(A yuppie couple, GEORGE and DOTTY, stroll down the street, Starbucks cups in hand. They pause from time to time to point at a house and confer, heads together.)

### SCENE 1

(Lights come up on CELIA, in the hall.)

CELIA

(turning to the pictures)

A question for you. Should I rent the room right away, or wait and see if Bill really does get his own place? You know what politicians are like.

(Pauses, listens.)

Yes. That's just what I was thinking. OK.

(She puts the ROOM FOR RENT sign in the window, then goes to the bedroom.)

(When they see the sign, GEORGE and DOTTY point, stop, and hold a (silent) discussion.)

(CELIA tosses the bloodstained sheet in a hamper, and starts to re-make the bed. The doorbell rings.)

CELIA

Now who's that?...Just a minute!

(She hurries to the hall, surreptitiously raises the lace curtain at the window and looks out. GEORGE and DOTTY are standing there.)

CELIA

(To herself)

Too clean, too well-dressed—

(She opens the door.)

CELIA

Not today, thank you.

(She starts to close the door.)

DOTTY

(putting a hand out to stop her)

We've come about the room.

(CELIA hesitates. They take the opportunity to walk in.)

GEORGE

We were just walking by...

DOTTY

Checking the real estate signs—

GEORGE

When we saw your sign.

DOTTY

We've bought a house on (Wellington) Street.

GEORGE

Number 35.

CELIA

One of the ones that're being tarted up?

GEORGE

Renovated, yes. You're lucky—this area's being gentrified, which means properties are increasing in value.

CELIA

All I know is somebody's making a bundle. I remember when you couldn't give those places away.

DOTTY

The decorators promised us our house would be ready on the first, but now they say the 8<sup>th</sup>.

GEORGE

We need a place to stay till then.

DOTTY

May we see the room?

CELIA

Of course, hon.

(closing the door)

So we're going to be neighbours, are we?

GEORGE

I guess.

CELIA

How nice!

(Beat)

Come this way, please.

(She ushers them along the corridor, with all its pictures.)

DOTTY

You must come from a big family.

CELIA

I may, my dear, I don't know.

GEORGE

You don't know?

CELIA

I grew up in an orphanage. I've never been able to trace my parents.

GEORGE

Then who are these people?

CELIA

Beats me. I collect pictures. I buy 'em from flea markets, garage sales, junk shops...

GEORGE

So they're not related to you.

CELIA

Not as far as I know, but you never do know, do you, who you're related to?

DOTTY

Of course you do!

CELIA

Really? What was your great-great grandfather's name?

DOTTY

Well...uh...uh...

CELIA

What did I tell you? Who knows, we may be cousins.

(DOTTY looks horrified. They continue on.)

CELIA

I like to think of them as family. I've named them all.

(pointing)

That's Herbert, and Roger, and Norman. They're brothers.

GEORGE

But they don't look the same!

CELIA

Do you look the same as your brother?

GEORGE

No, but—

See?  
 CELIA

But at least we're the same race!  
 GEORGE

CELIA  
 Their father—he's over here—had three wives. I've collected pictures of two of them, and I just got the third this morning. I call her Mabel. She's black.

DOTTY  
 (Sarcastically)  
 With a Chinese daughter.

CELIA  
 Genealogy's fascinating, isn't it?

DOTTY  
 Could we see the room, please?

CELIA  
 Certainly. Right this way.

(She elbows DOTTY out of the way and sets off with GEORGE. They enter the room.)

CELIA  
 This is it. Come on in.

(They do, and look around with some consternation. CELIA is blocking the picture of her son.)

CELIA  
 It used to be my son Glen's. Now he's gone, I rent it out for a bit of pocket money.

(As GEORGE checks out the room, she steps out of his way. DOTTY sees the son's picture on the wall. He looks like a real thug.)

DOTTY  
 Is that your son's picture?

(She and GEORGE exchange uneasy glances.)

CELIA  
Isn't he handsome?

GEORGE  
He's not in town, is he?

CELIA  
Not at the moment. He needs a pass to come home, and he can't always get one. Now—how do you like the room?

DOTTY  
It's...unique.

CELIA  
I thought you'd like it, since you bought something similar.

DOTTY  
We gutted—

(Her husband digs her in the ribs and she stops.)

GEORGE  
(pacing out the size of the room)  
I prefer older houses, myself. I like the high ceilings and all the woodwork.

CELIA  
Old houses have character, that's for sure.

GEORGE  
And big lots. What size is yours?

CELIA  
45 X 150.

GEORGE  
(looking out the window)  
On a corner, too. Nice.

CELIA  
What do you two do?

DOTTY  
I'm a marketing dir—I work at the market!

And I'm a devel—  
 GEORGE

(DOTTY digs him in the ribs.)

What?  
 GEORGE

What's that...odour?  
 DOTTY

That's the smell of age, dearie. Don't you have a grandfather?  
 CELIA

He smells of after-shave.  
 DOTTY

He's too young, then. He won't, in ten years. He'll smell a bit musty, like this room.  
 CELIA

How much is it?  
 GEORGE

I've taken a fancy to you. It's been so long since I've had young people in the house! (\$200) a week, shall we say? In advance?  
 CELIA

We'll take it.  
 GEORGE

Excuse us.  
 (To CELIA)  
 DOTTY

(CELIA leaves them and finishes the bed.)

(pulling him aside)  
 DOTTY  
 George, have you gone crazy? This place is a dump!

You were the one who wanted to check it out!  
 GEORGE

DOTTY

Well, now we have, let's go!

GEORGE

You want to stay at (Inn on the Twenty), at \$200 A NIGHT?

DOTTY

There's surely something in the middle!

GEORGE

If it hadn't been for you changing your mind and insisting on real marble—

DOTTY

The contractor said nobody could tell the difference. He was wrong. I could.

GEORGE

Well, taking the old stuff off and putting new on is costing us a fortune! Our accountant says our financial situation is critical.

DOTTY

And you think it's all my fault? If you hadn't tied up our money in those houses down the block—

GEORGE

They'll sell! Meanwhile, our credit cards are maxed out, our current account is low, and we have to pay our property taxes next week. We've got to economize.

DOTTY

How?

GEORGE

By staying here! The price is right. Luckily the landlady doesn't know how much places rent for in this city.

DOTTY

I don't think she has all her marbles.

(CELIA clears her throat. They lower their voices.)

GEORGE

So what? With both of us working, how much will we see of her? We'll only be here to sleep.

DOTTY

I suppose.



GEORGE  
We won't find anything cheaper!

DOTTY  
OK, OK.

GEORGE  
(turning to CELIA)  
It's a deal.

(They shake hands; he opens his wallet and gives her two \$100 bills.)

CELIA  
(holding one up)  
A hundred dollar bill! Is that what they look like...

GEORGE  
Don't worry—it's real.

CELIA  
I don't doubt it, dearie.

DOTTY  
Could you give us a receipt?

CELIA  
Of course.

GEORGE  
For three hundred dollars?

CELIA  
(Beat)  
Tax deduction?

GEORGE  
Yes.

CELIA  
I imagine I could. Let's go to the kitchen..

(She leaves, followed by GEORGE, who turns and gives DOTTY a thumbs-up. The light fades in the room and follows them as they head along the corridor.)

CELIA

You said you were a developer. Are any of the houses around here, yours?

GEORGE

The two for sale on the next street.

CELIA

Those?

GEORGE

Classy, eh? I love to take tired old houses and make them something new and special.

CELIA

From what I've seen, you take a house with character and make it like all the others. When you don't just tear it down.

GEORGE

Gotta give people what they want—bright and white, not dark poky little rooms. And if a house is too far gone, then I have to build new.

CELIA

Two houses on a lot meant for one.

GEORGE

We're running out of land. Gotta intensify. Reclaim brownfields. Revitalize old neighbourhoods. Build up instead of out.

CELIA

That's all well and good. But what about the people you push out with these new schemes? Where are they supposed to go?

GEORGE

Wherever they want.

(looking around)

I could do something with this place.

CELIA

If it was for sale. But it isn't.

(They arrive in the kitchen.)

CELIA

Got your bags with you?

GEORGE

We'll bring them later, if you don't mind.

CELIA

I may be out. I'll give you the key now.

(She gives them a key from her pocket.)

CELIA

This is for the front door; the room has a bolt. And...

(She writes out a receipt on a yellowed pad. As she does so, GEORGE scans a letter posted on her fridge.)

CELIA

Here's your receipt.

GEORGE

Thanks.

(They head for the door.)

CELIA

Would you like some tea?

DOTTY

No, thanks!

GEORGE

We have an appointment—

DOTTY

At one.

GEORGE

With a client.

CELIA

Perhaps another time.

(She opens the door for them to go out.)

DOTTY

OK, bye-bye.

GEORGE lingers.

GEORGE

You know, this is a big house for one person.

CELIA

Suits me fine.

GEORGE

Maybe, but the place's old, with a sizable garden. Bet it's a lot of upkeep. And what with taxes rising every year—it must be hard to afford. I could give you a good price for it. And I like you, so I'll even help you find somewhere else to live. I've got some condos in the (north end). Perfect for a senior all on her own, like you.

CELIA

I told you—I'm not interested in selling.

GEORGE

I notice you've got a letter from the city on the fridge. Something about back taxes, I think. You should be careful. If you can't pay them, the city will foreclose and you'll get next to nothing for the house.

CELIA

Don't worry—I'll find the money!

GEORGE

Why not let the money find you? This is your chance to cash in on your home's equity. At least think about it. We could make a deal that's good for both of us.

(She pushes him out the door, closes it, and begins to chat to the pictures.)

CELIA

I don't think I like either of them, Mother. And don't worry—hell would freeze over before I'd sell them this place...

(pauses; listens)

I knew you'd say that, Dad, and I agree, but I really do need the money. Anyway, it's only a week, and they're both working, so how much will I see of them?... They didn't bat an eyelash when I said two hundred. Lucky they don't know how much places rent for in this city...

(looking over the \$100 bills)

I can give Bill back his money, and use part of this to get Glen's picture fixed tomorrow. I hate to think of the poor boy without any eyes...

(pauses; listens)

I knew you'd feel the same. Fortunately you can hardly notice it, except in a certain light. Bill shouldn't've taken a knife to him— though when you're that drunk, I suppose you don't know what you're doing...

(After making sure nobody can see her through the kitchen window, she puts the money in a tea caddy. Lights down on her)

SCENE 2

(And up on the bedroom. It's night. GEORGE and DOTTY enter in pajamas, clutching their toiletry bags. Their lone suitcase lies open on the floor; DOTTY'S big purse is on the side table.)

GEORGE

You know, this place has potential. I could split the lot, make the new house pay for renos on the old.

DOTTY

This old dump?!

GEORGE

When I'm through with it, people will be lining up to buy it. The location's right—close enough to walk downtown. A few minutes to the highway, if you need to commute.

DOTTY

She doesn't want to sell.

GEORGE

I'll ask her again. Maybe she'll change her mind. In any case, I'll keep an eye on the property. You saw the overdue tax notice. Where's she going to get the money?

(While DOTTY puts the toiletries away, GEORGE flosses his teeth; does a few quick exercises, then jumps into bed and starts reading a book on how to sell (The Art of the Deal?). DOTTY joins him and sits, slathering on night cream.)

GEORGE

(putting his book by)

You know, there's some good advice in this.

DOTTY

I told you you should read it.

(GEORGE sniffs her cheek.)

Like it?

DOTTY

Smells expensive.

GEORGE

DOTTY

It was. Very. But don't you think it makes my skin look much smoother?

(GEORGE knows a trap when he hears one.)

GEORGE

Oh, definitely!

(She gives him a big kiss, before picking up her book, a horror/mystery which she reads at breakneck speed. GEORGE tries to interest her in a bit of nooky, but no luck, she ignores him.)

GEORGE

What's so interesting?

DOTTY

I need to find out whether or not she dies.

GEORGE

It's late.

DOTTY

OK, OK.

(She puts the book down, and dives under the covers.)

DOTTY

'Night, darling.

(They tussle over the blankets until they get them right.)

DOTTY

At least the bed's comfortable.

GEORGE

See? I told you it wouldn't be so bad.

(She snuggles down; he switches off the light, then joins her.)

GEORGE

Good night.

(For a moment all is quiet, then a scrabbling begins.)

DOTTY  
(sitting bolt upright)

What's that?

(The noise stops.)

GEORGE

What?

DOTTY

That noise!

GEORGE

It's nothing. Go to sleep.

DOTTY

It sounded like somebody trying to get into the room!

GEORGE

If anybody wants to get in, they'll use the door.

DOTTY

Is it locked?

GEORGE

Yes.

(She reaches over him and turns on the light.)

DOTTY

Check.

GEORGE

C'mon, sweetheart! What's the matter with you?

DOTTY

I like to feel safe.

GEORGE

Don't you trust me to protect you?

(She looks at him and points to the door; he gets up, goes to it and flicks the bolt open and closed.)

GEORGE

See? Locked!

DOTTY

Check the window, too.

(GEORGE shakes his head. As he walks to the window, the wallpaper at the side, unseen by him, bulges. DOTTY screams.)

DOTTY

The wall! It moved!

GEORGE

The wall moved?

DOTTY

It bulged. Like something was moving behind it.

GEORGE

Sure, darling.

(He checks the window.)

GEORGE

Maybe, just maybe, you shouldn't read horror stories before bed.

(He comes back and lies beside her. As he goes to turn off the light, she grabs his hand.)

DOTTY

Leave it on!

GEORGE

I won't be able to sleep with it on!

DOTTY

I won't be able to sleep with it off!



(She looks around the room nervously.)

How old do you think this house is?  
80-90 years. Why?  
Is that old enough to have ghosts?  
Are you serious?  
I wonder if someone was murdered here.  
(Sarcastically)  
Maybe in this very bed.  
(She jumps out.)  
Why don't you check for bloodstains on the floor?  
(She jumps into bed again, as if the floor had suddenly become hot.)  
Honey, we are perfectly safe.  
(A sound, like somebody trying to claw through the walls. DOTTY whimpers, and grabs him around the neck.)  
What was that?  
A ghost!  
Don't be silly! They don't need to claw through walls—they can walk through them.

The son! The landlady's son!

DOTTY

She said he needed a pass to come home!

GEORGE

He's in prison!

DOTTY

He's escaped!

GEORGE

He's here! The house is honey-combed with secret—

DOTTY

(She looks at his picture on the wall and screams. GEORGE jumps.)

He's looking at me! He's behind the picture!  
(half-strangling her husband)  
Do something!

DOTTY

(The wall below the picture bulges.)

The wall moved!

GEORGE

I told you! He's there!

DOTTY

(collecting himself)  
He can't be, unless he's only six inches wide. And in that case, I won't have any trouble handling him.

GEORGE

(He strides to the wall and jerks off the picture. There's a hole behind it. He looks at the picture.)

The eyes've been poked out!

GEORGE

(DOTTY wails. GEORGE looks at the hole, then thrusts his hand in.)

There's not enough space for—  
 GEORGE

(He yells with surprise and jerks back his hand.)

I felt something furry!  
 GEORGE

He's wearing a fur coat!  
 DOTTY

There are rats back there!  
 GEORGE

(He jams the picture back into place and stands panting.)

Rats? Well, that's OK., then.  
 DOTTY

What?!  
 GEORGE

I worked as a lab assistant one summer. We had hundreds of them.  
 DOTTY

These are not lab rats!  
 GEORGE

They're small enough to kick—that's enough for me.  
 DOTTY

(yawning)

Come to bed, sweetheart. We've had enough excitement for one night.

(She snuggles down and closes her eyes. GEORGE backs up to the bed, keeping his eyes on the picture the whole time. He gets in, sitting bolt upright.)

Turn out the light, please.  
 DOTTY

No!  
 GEORGE

Why not?  
DOTTY

I want to see them when they come for me.  
GEORGE

Oh, George, that only happens in horror stories.  
DOTTY

(She gives him a peck on the cheek, then snuggles down again.)

Wake me if you get attacked. I'll protect you.  
DOTTY

(She pulls the blanket over her head. He continues to sit upright, his eyes darting around the room. He licks his lips.)

My mouth's dry as a bone.  
GEORGE

(Muffled)  
Have a drink, then.  
DOTTY

Of what?  
GEORGE

(A big sigh.)  
Water. There's a bottle in my bag.  
DOTTY

(He crawls over her to get it out of the bag. Just as he puts it to his lips, there's a scrabbling noise. He drops it with a cry and leaps onto the bed. DOTTY sits up.)

Now what?!  
DOTTY

(GEORGE points a trembling finger to the wall, but DOTTY'S eyes go to the bottle spilling water.)

Grab the bottle before our suitcase gets wet!  
DOTTY

(He doesn't move. She scoops it up.)

DOTTY  
We'd better dry the floor.

GEORGE  
In the morning.

DOTTY  
Don't be ridiculous! Now.

GEORGE  
No.

DOTTY  
I can't believe this is happening!  
(Beat)  
Tell you what. You clean up, and I'll stand guard, O.K.?

(She stands on the bed, fists up.)

GEORGE  
OK.  
(Beat)  
Got any paper towels?

(Giving him a resentful look, she picks up her bag and fishes through it.)

DOTTY  
Two pieces of kleenex.

(He uses them, then holds them up to show her. They're sopping wet—and filthy. They grimace. DOTTY looks around.)

DOTTY  
Get something out of that hamper.

(He opens the lid and starts to pull out a sheet. His eyes bug out when he sees—blood-stains! He and DOTTY exchange horrified looks, then, like characters from a speeded-up old-time movie, they leap into their street clothes, grab their stuff, run down the corridor and out the front door. Silence, then a chittering noise, like rats laughing. Lights down on the room.)

## SCENE 3

(And up as CELIA enters the kitchen. She stops, puzzled because the front door's open. She closes it, then returns to the kitchen and starts making breakfast. She stops in the middle and goes to the bedroom. It's empty, the bedclothes are scattered around—and the floor's wet. She takes a towel out of the hamper and swipes at it halfheartedly. She looks at Glen's picture.)

CELIA

What happened, Glen? Why've they gone?...Don't know? Can't say?...Well, never mind. I wasn't keen on them, anyway.

(The doorbell rings. She goes down and finds BILL, dangling some keys in his hand. He flashes the newspaper, with its picture of the mayor handing them over to him.)

CELIA

Oh, Bill! You got it! You must be so happy!

BILL

You betcha! My own place!

CELIA

I hope it's nice. I hope you like it.

BILL

It's mine, that's what counts. And I wouldn't have it, 'cept for you.

CELIA

I told you it'd work. Government moves, when you get the media on its back.

(Beat)

Come and have tea and tell me all about it.

(As they move to the kitchen...)

CELIA

I got new people staying in the room. Rich ones.

BILL

Rich people wanna stay in your place?

CELIA

For a week, 'till their own's ready. They're round the corner. Developer bought all the houses 'long there a few years ago.

BILL

The ones they're fixing up.

CELIA

Yeah. He's selling'em off, one by one. Making a killing.

BILL

There's a name for that. Gen...gen...something.

CELIA

Gentrification.

BILL

They move in, we move out.

CELIA

That sums it up pretty good. Anyway, this young couple came yesterday, all clean and nice and trying to pretend they were just ordinary folk so's I wouldn't charge'em too much.

BILL

What did you do?

CELIA

Doubled the price, of course.

BILL

And they took it?

CELIA

After some discussion.

BILL

Two hundred bucks' nothing to them!

CELIA

Should've seen the way they were looking at me. So condescending. Like being poor meant being stupid, too. Should've heard what they were whispering.

BILL

What?

CELIA

That I was crazy.

(looking at her picture)

Imagine that, Maria!

BILL

Shouldn't've let them have the room.

CELIA

I need the money. Gotta pay the back taxes on the house before they mount up so high, I lose the place.

BILL

How much do you owe?

CELIA

This year? Five hundred.

BILL

Maybe your new guests will stay for another week. That'd help.

CELIA

Funny thing is—they're gone. When I got up this morning, the front door was wide open—and when I went to the bedroom, no trace of them.

BILL

Did they take anything?

CELIA

No. Left it in a bit of a mess, though.

BILL

Guess the room wasn't what they expected.

CELIA

Think they'll be back?

BILL

Doubt it.

(Getting up)

Gotta go move some stuff into my new place. Soon's I get settled, I want you to come and see it.



CELIA

My pleasure!

(The doorbell rings.)

CELIA

Now who?! Wait here..I wanna get your new address before you leave.

(CELIA opens the door to GEORGE and DOTTY.)

DOTTY

We want our money back!

GEORGE

Plus two hundred dollars, which is what it cost us to stay in a decent place last night.

CELIA

Why didn't you stay here?

GEORGE

You didn't tell us about the rats!

CELIA

Why should I? They're my problem, not yours.

DOTTY

So why haven't you done something about it?

CELIA

Exterminators cost money.

GEORGE

So do lawsuits, if people get bitten.

DOTTY

You're lucky we didn't call the cops last night.

GEORGE

You're lucky we wanted to sleep, not spend our time filling out forms.

CELIA

What do you think the police would've done for you? It's not a crime to have rats in your house. Everybody around here does.

DOTTY

We don't.

CELIA

Not yet, maybe, with all the construction, but you're only around the corner, aren't you? It's just a question of time.

GEORGE

What do you mean?

CELIA

Tell you what. You paid me for a week, and nothing's stopping you from staying that long. But we're gonna be neighbours, so, just for you, I'll keep the money—

DOTTY

We'll sue!

CELIA

For two hundred bucks? I don't think so. So as I said, I'll keep the money and if you give me—oh, lemme see—another three hundred—I'll hire a guy to put down some poison.

DOTTY

You're joking! Why should we pay for your exterminator?

CELIA

'Cause I can live with the wildlife. You're the ones who can't.

GEORGE

Dotty...

DOTTY

What? Pay her \$300 on top of the \$200 we've already given her? Exterminators are expensive, but not that expensive!

CELIA

It's a big house. And a big garden. He's gonna have to come God knows how many times.

DOTTY

Nothing doing. C'mon, George.

(She starts out.)

GEORGE

Wait.

(To CELIA)

Here.

(He hands the money over.)

DOTTY

What're you doing?!

GEORGE

You know how I feel about rats. I'm not having them in my house!

(CELIA gives DOTTY a smile and a shrug as she stuffs the bills into her pocket. DOTTY turns to go, but GEORGE lingers.)

GEORGE

Think about what I said.

CELIA

How many times do I have to tell you—I'm not interested in selling!

GEORGE

We could do a deal that's good for both of us.

CELIA

Read my lips: I DON'T WANT TO SELL!

(Hearing her raised voice, BILL comes from the kitchen.)

BILL

You leave her alone, you hear?!

DOTTY

Come on, George.

GEORGE

OK, OK.

(As DOTTY pulls him away)

Maybe now's not the right time, but if you ever decide to sell...

(He presses a business card into her hand.)

BILL

(Shoving GEORGE through the door.)

Out!

(CELIA slams the door closed.)

CELIA

Thanks, Bill.

(She rips up the business card. She smiles as she waves the money at BILL. Lights fade.)

### EPISODE 3: SERENITY

#### PRELUDE

(SERENITY walks along the street, adjusting her backpack. She looks up and sees the Room for Rent sign in CELIA'S window. She stops dead, then goes and rings the doorbell.)

#### Scene One

(Lights up on CELIA, in the kitchen, having tea. As she goes to the door...)

CELIA

(To the pictures along the corridor)

Hope that's somebody for the room, guys. It's been almost a week.

(She checks who it is through the curtain.)

Looks promising.

(Opening the door)

Yes?

SERENITY

'Scuse me. I saw your sign... I'm new in town. Just moved here. I need a place to stay.

CELIA

Come on in, hon.

(SERENITY enters.)

CELIA

What's your name?

SERENITY

Serenity Chinn.

CELIA

I'm Celia. Celia Davenport.

SERENITY

(Shaking hands)

Nice to meet you, Ms. Davenport. Can I see the room?

CELIA

Of course. Leave the backpack by the door. It looks heavy.

SERENITY

It's got everything I own in it.

CELIA

That's all you have?

SERENITY

It's all I need.

CELIA

Guess you've never owned a house. Stuff expands to fill the space available. And then you find you can't let go of it.

(Beat)

How long were you thinking you might stay?

SERENITY

Just till I get a job and get established.

CELIA

A few months, maybe?

SERENITY

'Bout that, maybe longer. Depends how fast I can save for my own apartment.

CELIA

Looks like you don't spend much. That'll help.

SERENITY

May I see the room now?

CELIA

This way.

(They move off down the corridor.)

SERENITY

All these family pictures?

CELIA

Sort of. I think of them as family, anyway. They give me a real sense of belonging.

SERENITY

Pictures can do that.

CELIA

I have conversations with them.

SERENITY

Beats talking to yourself all the time.

CELIA

Is Serenity really your name? I mean, the one your mother gave you?

SERENITY

No. It's the one I chose for myself. She calls me Elsie.

CELIA

You were right to change. You're definitely not an Elsie.

(They enter the room.)

CELIA

This is it. Used to be my son's. That's him over there.

(She points to his picture. He has long hair, and looks like Rasputin.)

SERENITY

Good looking guy. Reminds me of Jesus.

CELIA

Now that you mention it...there is a resemblance. I think it's the long hair.

SERENITY

His eyes are haunting.

CELIA

I just had them fixed.

SERENITY

Pardon?

CELIA

One of my former tenants poked them out. He was drunk; didn't know what he was doing.

SERENITY

How come your son doesn't live with you?

CELIA

He's in a psychiatric hospital.

SERENITY

He's mentally ill?

CELIA

Among other things.

SERENITY

I'll pray for him. And you.

CELIA

Thanks.

SERENITY

(Looking around the room; testing the bed)

This looks fine. How much is it?

CELIA

A hundred bucks a week.

(SERENITY opens her wallet and takes out some neatly folded bills.)

SERENITY

Can I give you eighty now and the rest at the end of the week, when I get a job?

CELIA

You think you can find a job that fast?

SERENITY

There are always jobs, if you're not picky about what you do.

CELIA

Like?

SERENITY

Working in a greenhouse. Dish washing. Cleaning offices. I don't mind that kind of work. I find monotony relaxing.

CELIA

You can zone out.

SERENITY

Or sing. Or think. Or pray.

CELIA

None of those jobs are gonna make you rich.

SERENITY

I don't need to be rich. I just need to get by.

CELIA

(Beat)

You're sure you don't have another twenty?

SERENITY

I gave it away.

CELIA

You gave away twenty dollars?!

SERENITY

There was this girl in a sleeping bag, in front of (Timmie's). She asked me for money. She looked so miserable—

CELIA

You handed over twenty bucks? That must've cheered her up.

SERENITY

I think it did. Anyway, I didn't have anything smaller. The bank machine only gives out twenties.

CELIA

Well, give me the money you've got, and make sure I'm first in line when you make some more.

(She puts out her hand. SERENITY hands over the cash.)

CELIA

Now we've finished the business part, come and have tea with me.



SERENITY

A quick cup would be nice. But I can't stay for long—I wanna check out some restaurants I saw. See if they've got anything for me.

(CELIA leads the way to the kitchen.)

CELIA

You said you were new in town. Where did you come from?

SERENITY

(Sault Ste. Marie).

CELIA

'Supposed to be nice there. Why'd you leave?

SERENITY

Jesus told me to.

CELIA

Pardon?

SERENITY

I was sitting on a park bench, not doing anything special, just eating my lunch, when I heard Jesus tell me to pack up and move here.

CELIA

And you did?

SERENITY

Yes. And now he's sent me to you.

CELIA

What makes you think that?

SERENITY

I got off the bus this morning. I was walking around, wondering what I should do next, when I saw your sign. The sign was a sign.

CELIA

It was?

SERENITY

God led me here.

CELIA

How come he didn't consult me first?

SERENITY

Maybe he did, but you just couldn't hear him. You have to really listen. Be quiet and listen.

CELIA

That's what I say about my pictures. They tell me things, you know. Give me advice.

(SERENITY takes out a prayer card.)

SERENITY

I have a picture I ask for advice.

(Showing it to CELIA)

It's Mary, Untier of Knots.

CELIA

What's the prayer on the back?

SERENITY

Holy Mary, Mother of God and our Mother,  
Take into your hands the ribbon of my life  
And undo the knots that keep me bound.  
Blessed Mother, I place my problems before you.  
Mary, Untier of Knots—

SERENITY and CELIA

Pray for us.

(They cross themselves.)

CELIA

All that devotion to Mary reminds me of Sister Joan. She's the one who gave me my name.

SERENITY

A nun gave you your name?

CELIA

Well, you see, I'm an orphan. I was dropped off at a convent as a baby.

SERENITY

And your mother never came back for you?

No.

CELIA

That's so sad.

SERENITY

I used to fantasize that she'd appear one day and take me away to live with her, but it never happened.

CELIA

Did you try to find her?

SERENITY

When I was older, but I couldn't. All the nuns had was a blanket. From (Eaton's), like a thousand others.

CELIA

What about the birth records?

SERENITY

Without a name, they didn't help.

CELIA

So you had to give up.

SERENITY

At a certain point, I realized, if I wanted a family, I'd have to make my own. Which I did, through the pictures.

CELIA

(Beat)

Is your son real?

SERENITY

Yes, and my husband was, too.

CELIA

Weren't they enough?

SERENITY

Yes and no. I was so used to the relations I'd lived with for years, I wanted to keep them around.

SERENITY

They were like old friends.

CELIA

That's it exactly.

SERENITY

I would've done that, too.

(Getting up)

Well, gotta go. Thanks for the tea.

CELIA

Wait a sec. Lemme give you the key to the front door, in case I'm out when you get back.

(She hands it over. SERENITY picks up her backpack and exits.)

CELIA

(Turning to the pictures)

Well, what do you think? I like her...Maria, that's unkind! Just because we wouldn't move, not even if Jesus asked us to... OK, yes, Dad, another one who wants the room on credit, but I trust her. She'll pay. Anyway, I like her. She's generous, even when she doesn't have much herself. Self-reliant. Ready to tackle new challenges. I feel like she's a kindred spirit.

(Lights fade on her)

Scene Two

(And come up on the door. SERENITY, humming (Make me a Channel of your Peace?), lets herself in. CELIA goes to welcome her.)

SERENITY

I got a job!

CELIA

Wow. That was fast! What doing?

SERENITY

Waitressing. I think, with the tips, I'll do OK. I can eat there, too. For free.

CELIA

And you'll pay me when?

SERENITY

End of the week. From my first cheque.

(Putting down her backpack)

After I got the job arranged, I went for a walk. I found a real nice park.

CELIA

Which one?

SERENITY

I don't know its name. It has a (totem pole) in it.

CELIA

And a path alongside an (old canal)?

SERENITY

Exactly. Strange thing, though—there wasn't a soul around. I was the only person there.

CELIA

I'm guessing that's (Centennial) Park. And there's a reason you had it all to yourself. If you want to dump a body or score a deal, that's the place.

SERENITY

Well, somebody with a dog must've been there, too, because I found this hanging in a tree.

(She produces a black doggie bag from her backpack. CELIA recoils.)

CELIA

And carried it all the way back here? Why?

SERENITY

I couldn't find a garbage can. I hate it when dog owners don't pick up after their pet. It's so... ignorant. Anyway, can you toss it out for me?

(She hands it to CELIA, who takes it with distaste. On her way to the garbage...)

CELIA

Strange. Are you sure it's dog poop? It isn't...lumpy the way it should be. And  
(Sniffing)  
it doesn't smell.

SERENITY

I didn't look. I mean, who'd want to? I just assumed—

(CELIA unties the top and looks in.)

Oh, my God.  
CELIA

What?  
SERENITY

It's cocaine.  
CELIA  
(Showing her)

Is that what it looks like.  
SERENITY

(She licks her finger and goes to dip it in. CELIA stops her.)

Don't.  
CELIA

(She takes the bag and ties it closed.)

You're sure that's what it is? I mean, you've seen it before?  
SERENITY

My son's an addict.  
CELIA

Oh. But why would somebody put cocaine in a tree?  
SERENITY

So somebody else could pick it up, of course.  
CELIA  
(Handing her back the bag.)  
You better dispose of this. If the cops catch you with it—or worse, the dealer—

Where can I put it?  
SERENITY

In the cupboard, behind the rat poison. No. Wait. Tomorrow's garbage day. Can't remember. Is cocaine organic?  
CELIA  
(Pointing)

SERENITY

I think so.

CELIA

We'll put it in the green bin, then.

(She hauls the bin over and pours the powder in, then tosses the empty bag into a recycling bin.)

(A banging at the door. CELIA takes a quick look out the window.)

CELIA

Police! Hide!

(SERENITY looks around in a panic.)

CELIA

The cupboard!

(She pushes SERENITY into the cupboard under the sink. The knocking gets more insistent.)

CELIA

Coming, coming!

(She opens the door. An OFFICER is there.)

CELIA

Yes, sir, what can I do for you?

OFFICER

(He flashes his ID.)

I'm looking for a woman. A (white) female.

CELIA

Not me, I hope.

OFFICER

Younger. And thinner.

CELIA

You must be mistaken. No one here like that.

OFFICER

You're lying.

Pardon me? CELIA

I know she's here. We followed her from the park. OFFICER

What park? CELIA

(Centennial). OFFICER

What was she doing there? CELIA

You know. OFFICER

I do? CELIA

Don't play games with me! OFFICER

I don't know, and if you're not going to tell me, I don't see how I can help you. CELIA

A dealer left a bag in the park. OFFICER

A bag of what? CELIA

Drugs, of course! We were watching to see who would pick it up. A woman did. We followed her here. OFFICER

Can't be. I'm alone, as you see. CELIA

We saw a woman come in. OFFICER



CELIA

That was my friend Jenny. She's gone now.

OFFICER

Gone where?

CELIA

Shopping.

OFFICER

We didn't see her go out.

CELIA

Couldn't have been watching the back door, then.

OFFICER

It's behind a hedge!

CELIA

Exactly.

OFFICER

You don't mind if I have a look inside, do you?

CELIA

Got a warrant?

OFFICER

No.

CELIA

Come back when you do.

(She starts to close the door. He prevents her.)

OFFICER

Ever been inspected by the Health Department?

CELIA

No, why should I have been?

OFFICER

You rent rooms. That makes you a boarding house. There are rules. And while we're at it—

(Looking around)

Can't see a smoke alarm. Fire guys might have something to say about that.

CELIA

Thank you for reminding me—I'll get one next time I'm out.

OFFICER

Don't make this more difficult than it has to be. Where is she?

CELIA

I told you—there's nobody here but me

OFFICER

Gonna let me in so's I can see for myself?

(She shrugs and lets him in. He sees the backpack.)

OFFICER

Whose is this?

CELIA

I got a new tenant.

OFFICER

Where is she?

CELIA

Out looking for a job.

(He looks in the pack; a missal and a rosary fall out.)

OFFICER

She religious?

CELIA

Very.

(He roots around, then puts everything back and closes the pack. He goes along the corridor, stopping at one of the pictures.)

OFFICER

Where'd you get this?

CELIA

I cut it out of the paper.

OFFICER

I remember him. Victor Orinsky. Stole some sandwiches 'cause he was hungry. Told the shop owner to call the police and waited for us to come. It was cold out, you see, and he didn't have a place to stay. Poor guy. Wonder where he is now.

(Beat)

Is he related to you?

CELIA

No.

OFFICER

Are any of these people?

CELIA

I doubt it.

OFFICER

Then why...?

CELIA

I just like their company.

OFFICER

Oh.

(He gives the kitchen a once-over, then heads to the bedroom. CELIA follows. He looks under the bed, then, seeing the hamper, opens it. He pulls out one sheet after another, finally tipping the hamper out. Nothing.)

CELIA

I told you. You're wasting your time.

OFFICER

OK, OK.

(He starts to leave. As CELIA turns to see him out, he catches sight of her son's picture. He looks from one to the other.)

OFFICER

Your son?

CELIA

Yes.

OFFICER

Ended up in (Brockville), didn't he?

CELIA

Three years ago.

OFFICER

Ever come home?

CELIA

Hasn't for a long time.

OFFICER

But you visit him.

CELIA

At first I did. But he got too agitated. Always wanting me to take him home. Anyway, he's better off there. I couldn't handle him here. The moment he's back, all his old pals are at the door.

OFFICER

I remember him. Before the drugs, when he was still playing soccer. He was a good kid.

CELIA

I couldn't save him. I tried.

OFFICER

Pity he didn't think of what he was doing to you, as well as himself.

(Beat)

You're right. There's no one here. Sorry to have bothered you. I'll see myself out.

(He starts to exit. Just as he reaches the corridor, a muffled scream. The cupboard door under the sink flies open and a dead rat flies out, followed by SERENITY.)

(The OFFICER heads for the kitchen.)

OFFICER

Well, what have we here? Name?

SERENITY

Serenity Chinn.

OFFICER

Real name?

SERENITY

That is my real name!

OFFICER

Alright, SERENITY, wanna tell me what you were doing in Centennial Park earlier today?

SERENITY

I was just stretching my legs.

OFFICER

You were there to score some drugs.

SERENITY

I don't use drugs!

OFFICER

No, you sell them.

SERENITY

I do not!

OFFICER

Really? How come you know where to find them, then?

SERENITY

I didn't know what was in the bag. I thought it was dog poop.

OFFICER

Hanging in a tree?

SERENITY

Some dog owners don't seem to care where they put their shit.

OFFICER

And you can't tell the difference between shit and coke.

SERENITY

I didn't look!

OFFICER

What did you do with the bag?

CELIA

It's in the recycling bin.

(She points to it. He pulls out the empty bag and shakes it upside down.)

OFFICER

Where's what was in it?

CELIA

The green bin.

(He opens the bin and reels back from the smell.)

OFFICER

I can't see anything.

SERENITY

Look closer. See that kind of white dust on the tea bags?

(He peers down, but doesn't bring his nose any closer.)

OFFICER

How do I know it's all there?

CELIA

(Offering him a trowel)

Wanna check?

OFFICER

Not without a haz mat suit, no.

SERENITY

I swear to you—it all went in.

(He looks at her.)

SERENITY

You're not really going to arrest me, are you?

CELIA

Tell you what, officer. You forget you ever saw Serenity and I'll forget you barged in here without a warrant.

OFFICER

Now why would I do that?

CELIA

'Cause it's not worth the time and effort to take things further.

(The doorbell rings.)

OFFICER

Stay where you are.

(He goes to the door and opens it. BILL is standing there.)

OFFICER

Bill! Long time, no see.

(Beat)

Keep out of this.

(He closes the door in Bill's face. BILL loiters around outside while the OFFICER goes back to the kitchen. He looks from one to the other of the two women. Finally...)

OFFICER

Guess you're right. Not worth it.

(SERENITY sits down with a thump of relief.)

SERENITY

Thank you!

(CELIA moves as if to let the OFFICER out.)

OFFICER

Never mind. I can see myself to the door.

(The two women watch him leave.)

CELIA

You must've been praying real hard.

SERENITY

I was!

OFFICER

(To BILL)

You can go in now.

(He exits; BILL enters.)

BILL

What was that all about?!

CELIA

It's a long story. But tell me first, what're you doing here?

BILL

Just wanted to make sure you was gonna come tonight. Everything's ready.

CELIA

How come the cop knows you?

BILL

(Looking at his feet)

Picked me off the sidewalk a few times.

CELIA

(Beat)

Come into the kitchen. I need a drink.

SERENITY

(Coming up behind her)

Me, too.

(They move off.)

CELIA

Bill, this is my new friend, Serenity. Serenity, Bill.

SERENITY

Hi.

BILL

Hi.

(In the kitchen, CELIA takes out BILL'S mickey of vodka and pours three shots. They sit at the table, click glasses and down them.)

CELIA

Crazy day, eh?



Stressful. SERENITY

Gonna tell me? BILL

Well, it was like this... CELIA  
(As the lights fade...)

(Blackout. The End.)