

SANDERSON and VETA

SANDERSON. (*Looking at slip in his hand. Crosses to C.*) Mrs. Simmons?

VETA. (*Startled—she jumps.*) Oh—oh dear—I didn't hear you come in. You startled me. You're Dr. Sanderson?

SANDERSON. (*He nods.*) Yes. Will you be seated, please?

VETA. (*Sits chair L. of table R.*) Thank you. I hope you don't think I'm jumpy like that all the time, but I—

SANDERSON. (*Crosses in front of table to chair R.*) Of course not. Miss Kelly tells me you are concerned about your brother. Dowd, is it? Elwood P. Dowd?

VETA. (*Twisting her handkerchief nervously.*) It's what Elwood's doing to himself, Doctor—that's the thing. Myrtle Mae has a right to nice friends. She's young and her whole life is before her. That's my daughter.

SANDERSON. (*Sits R. of table.*) Your daughter. How long has it been since you began to notice any peculiarity in your brother's actions?

VETA. I noticed it right away when Mother died, and Myrtle Mae and I came back to home from Des Moines to live with Elwood. I could see that he—that he—(*Twists handkerchief—looks pleadingly at SANDERSON.*)

SANDERSON. That he—what? Take your time, Mrs. Simmons. Don't strain. Let it come. I'll wait for it.

VETA. Doctor—everything I say to you is confidential? Isn't it?

SANDERSON. That's understood.

VETA. Because it's a slap in the face to everything we've stood for in this community the way Elwood is acting now.

SANDERSON. I am not a gossip, Mrs. Simmons. I'm a psychiatrist.

VETA. Well—for one thing—he drinks.

SANDERSON. To excess?

VETA. To excess? Well—don't you call it excess when a man never lets a day go by without stepping into one of those cheap taverns, sitting around with riffraff and people you never heard of? Inviting them to the house—playing cards with them—giving them food and money. And here I am trying to get Myrtle Mae started with a nice group of young people. If that isn't excess I'm sure I don't know what excess is.

SANDERSON. I didn't doubt your statement, Mrs. Simmons. I merely asked if your brother drinks.

VETA. Well, yes, I say definitely Elwood drinks and I want him committed out here permanently, because I cannot stand another day of that Harvey. Myrtle and I have to set a place at the table for Harvey. We have to move over on the sofa and make room for Harvey. We have to answer the telephone when Elwood calls and asks to speak to Harvey. Then at the party this afternoon with Mrs. Chauvenet there—We didn't even know anything about Harvey until we came back here. Doctor, don't you think it would have been a little bit kinder of Mother to have written and told me about Harvey? Be honest, now—don't you?

SANDERSON. I couldn't really answer that question, because I—

VETA. I can. Yes—it certainly would have.

SANDERSON. This person you call Harvey—who is he?

VETA. He's a rabbit.

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SANDERSON. Perhaps—but just who is he? Some companion—someone your brother has picked up in these bars, of whom you disapprove?

VETA. (*Patiently.*) Doctor—I've been telling you. Harvey is a rabbit—a big white rabbit—six feet high—or is it six feet and a half? Heavens knows I ought to know. He's been around the house long enough.

SANDERSON. (*Regarding her narrowly.*) Now, Mrs. Simmons, let me understand this—you say—

VETA. (*Impatient.*) Doctor—do I have to keep repeating myself? My brother insists that his closest friend is this big white rabbit. This rabbit is named Harvey. Harvey lives at our house. Don't you understand? He and Elwood go every place together. Elwood buys railroad tickets, theater tickets, for both of them. As I told Myrtle Mae—if your uncle was so lonesome he had to bring something home—why couldn't he bring home something human? He has me, doesn't he? He has Myrtle Mae, doesn't he? (*She leans forward.*) Doctor— (**SANDERSON inclines toward her.**) I'm going to tell you something I've never told anybody in the world before. (*Puts her hand on his shoulder.*) Every once in a while I see that big white rabbit myself. Now isn't that terrible? I've never even told that to Myrtle Mae.

SANDERSON. (*Now convinced. Starts to rise.*) Mrs. Simmons—

VETA. (*Straightening.*) And what's more—he's every bit as big as Elwood says he is. Now don't ever tell that to anybody, Doctor. I'm ashamed of it. (*Crosses to C., to chair R. of desk.*)

SANDERSON. (*Crosses to VETA.*) I can see that you have been under a great nervous strain recently.

VETA. Well—I certainly have.

SANDERSON. Grief over you mother's death depressed you considerably?

VETA. Nobody knows how much.

SANDERSON. Been losing sleep?

VETA. How could anybody sleep with this going on?

SANDERSON. (*Crosses to back of desk.*) Short-tempered over trifles?

VETA. You just try living with those two and see how your temper holds up.

SANDERSON. (*Presses buzzer.*) Loss of appetite?

VETA. No one could eat at a table with my brother and a big white rabbit. Well, I'm finished with it. I'll sell the house—be appointed conservator of Elwood's estate, and Myrtle Mae and I will be able to entertain our friends in peace. It's too much, Doctor. I just can't stand it.

SANDERSON. (*Has been repeatedly pressing a buzzer on his desk. He looks with annoyance toward hall door. His answer now to VETA is gentle.*) Of course, Mrs. Simmons. Of course it is. You're tired.

VETA. (*She nods.*) Oh, yes I am.

SANDERSON. You've been worrying a great deal.

VETA. (*Nods.*) Yes, I have. I can't help it.

SANDERSON. And now I'm going to help you.

VETA. Oh, Doctor...

SANDERSON. (*Goes cautiously to door—watching her.*) Just sit there quietly, Mrs. Simmons. I'll be right back. (*He exits C.*)