

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

BY FRANK J. MORLOCK C 1986

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Etext by Dagny

CHARACTERS:

Virgie Goodrich, a Congressional Aide, good-looking, but rather sexless in demeanor

Paul Horton, a distinguished, intellectual Congressman in his mid-forties

Bill Walton, a Congressman of the poker-playing, hail-fellow-well-met variety in his mid-forties

Man, a bill collector

Arlene, Horton's ex-wife, extremely attractive with an insinuating southern charm, in her mid-twenties

Vanessa Edmonds, a well-dressed, somewhat affected woman in her late-twenties

Diane Brennan, Vanessa's protégé and side-kick, a little younger than Vanessa, she tends to echo whatever Vanessa says

First Sheik, a non-speaking role*

Second Sheik, a non-speaking role*

* The parts of the Sheiks may be doubled since they only appear in burnouses and robes at the end.

The scene is Congressman Paul Horton's bachelor apartment. There is a piano and a couch. Several doors leading into the bedroom and other rooms in the apartment.

Virgie Goodrich is the Congressman's Aide and girl Friday (or as she would have it person Friday"). Virgie is all business, dressed in a unisex style pant suit with a string necktie. She is a model of aggressive dressing. Virgie is

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talking to a fairly well-dressed man who has come to collect a bill.

Virgie

I tell you, you cannot see the Congressman right now. He's in a conference and he won't be available for several hours.

Man (sitting down)

Then, I'll wait.

Virgie

Why don't you tell me what this is all about? I'm his Legislative Aide and I can probably handle it.

Man

It's not the sort of thing

Virgie

You may wind up cooling your heels a long time if you don't.

Man

I'm sure the Congressman will prefer that I not discuss it with anyone but himself.

Virgie

You can leave your name and number with me. I'll have the Congressman call you.

Man

No.

Virgie

I don't like the tone of this. If you refuse to discuss the matter with me, I'll have to ask you to leave.

Man

The matter is personal.

Virgie

Either you explain it to me or you get out. If you don't get out, I'll have the police throw you out.

Man

You really put me in an awkward situation. Here. (giving her some papers) It's self-explanatory and you can see why I thought it best to speak to the Congressman personally.

Virgie (gasping)

Oh, dear, this is too much.

Man

Will you pay it or not?

Virgie

This is more than I can manage. I'll speak to the Congressman.

(Enter Paul Horton from his study. Horton is a well-dressed intellectual-looking man in his early forties.)

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Paul

I'm Paul Horton. Can I help you? (to Virgie) I heard shouting. Is something wrong?

Virgie (giving Paul the papers)

Here, take a look. Two thousand dollars this time.

Paul

Whew! (to the Man) I am going to pay you. (the doorbell rings) Go get that, will you, Virgie?

(Exit Virgie.)

Man

I can wait.

Paul

Will you take a check?

Man

Certainly, Congressman.

Paul

I prefer to pay you in cash.

Man

I understand perfectly.

Paul

You'll have to wait a few minutes. I'm expecting some money shortly.

Man

I can be very patient.

(Enter Bill Walton, also a Congressman, accompanied by Virgie.)

Walton

It's me, old buddy.

Paul

Have you done what I asked you?

Walton

Certainly. (giving Paul a packet of money) Two thousand dollars. Sure you don't need more?

Paul

No, this is all. (counting it and giving it to the bill collector) Take it.

Man

Thank you very much. Here's your receipt. (gives a receipt) Sorry to trouble you Congressman.

(Exit the Man, winking at Virgie, who gives him a frigid look.)

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Paul

I'll repay you by the end of the month.

Walton

I'm not in any hurry.

Paul

It doesn't inconvenience you? At least

Walton

Not at all. I won it at poker from our beloved President.

Paul

You're always lucky.

Walton

Good thing I am. I don't know how I'd manage on a Congressman's salary in this town if I weren't a good hand at poker.

Paul

The fact is

Walton

Congressmen aren't paid enough.

Paul

Nobody makes enough. That's why misery is so widespread.

Virgie (seething and finally bursting out)

Do you know who this money is for, Mr. Walton?

Paul

Virgie, I wish you'd uh leave.

Virgie

I will not leave!

Paul

Then please shut up.

Virgie

I will not shut up!

Paul

I order you to shut up. There's no reason for you to tell Walton.

Virgie

You don't dare! (to Walton) Do you know for whom this money is?

Paul

Please, Virgie, please.

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Walton

I really don't want to know. Paul asked me for a small loan, and what he does with the money, after all, is

Virgie

Just so you'll know where your money's going. It's for the Congressman's wife for his divorced, adulterous wife who, since the divorce, has settled down to a comfortable and secure existence as a call girl.

Walton

For Arlene!

Virgie

Yes, sir, for Arlene! When she needs money which is often who do you think she's cool enough to ask? It started two weeks after the divorce. One fine morning, Paul got a letter. (to Paul) Don't deny it, I've read it! (in a cloying tone) Sweetie, I'm in an awful scrape. It would be so nice of you to send me five big ones. And he did it! After all she did to him. You understand he's got a taste for this woman. Another time, it was a thousand, not five hundred. And I don't know how many other times. All to help her avoid some well-deserved disaster. And today, it's two thousand. (to Paul, who is still trying to shush her) You are not going to intimidate me! I am not going to let you ruin your career and simply hold my peace. When you got married, you were a successful lawyer with plenty of money in the bank, and a career that said you were headed for the Senate and maybe beyond. Now look at you! You've surrendered your fortune and you can't live off your salary as a Congressman. And why? Because you're a spendthrift? Hardly! For a creature who deceived you, who made you a laughingstock, and who totally disrupted your life! It's not just weakness, it's not just submitting to blackmail, it's it's stupidity! And now that I have done my duty, I am going to get some work done.

(Virgie storms out with all flags flying.)

Paul

The only thing that prevents me from strangling her is that she is absolutely right.

Walton

Is it really true, Paul?

Paul

I'm afraid so.

Walton

You've been giving Arlene money?

Paul

What else can I do?

Walton

Just refuse and be firm about it. The divorce decree said no alimony and there were no children. You don't owe her a thing.

Paul

Legally, no.

Walton

Morally, you intend to say? After the life she led you before you divorced her? And if you had any obligation any residual obligation, the life she's been leading since your divorce certainly discharges you of any

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obligation. She's practically damn it, there's no blinking it she's a prostitute.

Paul

Please don't say that.

Walton

Facts are facts, man. Or is she threatening you, blackmailing you?

Paul

No.

Walton

Is she saying that if you don't give her money, she'll let the world know she's your ex-wife, and a happy hooker to boot?

Paul

Arlene wouldn't do that. If there was even an implied threat, I wouldn't have anything to do with her.

Walton

Then, why'd you do it? If you had refused the first time, she would have sorted things out for herself, and wouldn't be bothering you any more.

Paul

It was very difficult. She cried a lot.

Walton

She came here!

Paul

No I begged her never to come here. She met me at the Smithsonian, and we

Walton

She cried at the Smithsonian?

Paul

No, in my car.

Walton

Never mind. This is getting out of hand.

Paul

I am well aware.

Walton

You realize how close you are to being appointed Secretary of Defense? You realize what would happen if the President found out about this? Or the Press? Or Southwick? He wants to be Secretary of Defense so bad he'd feed his mother to the fish to get it. He'd think nothing of dragging your name in the mud.

Paul

I realize, I realize. Still it's finished. I told Arlene this was the last time. That my position wouldn't permit me She understood and after that I didn't hear from her for about six months.

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Walton

Still, she ought to be over her trouble. I saw her recently driving a Mercedes.

Paul

So much the better.

Walton

She gave me a friendly nod. I think she was with some Arab an ambassador or something.

Paul

That must be rough!

Walton

Let's hope. Because she's not really a bad kid.

Paul

No, not at all. She deceived me without any treachery, naively like a child that likes to rob the cookie jar. When I accused her, she admitted it and asked to be forgiven. So I forgave her. Then, the desire to play with the cookie jar came over her again. Just as nonchalantly as before.

Walton

It was a mistake to have married her.

Paul

I came to that conclusion. She's the kind of woman who should never marry. If she likes a man, she wants to go to bed with him. And she likes everybody.

Walton

I know it's hard to dislike her. How did she take the divorce?

Paul

As gaily as she took our marriage she attaches no special importance to it. After the divorce she started working for an escort service, and in a short time she found her vocation.

Walton

And, neither of you bear each other any grudge?

Paul

Look my God. I know what I'm doing is not very smart, or wise, or even moral as morality is understood but what is there to say? Divorce ends the marriage but not the fact you've been married. When you've loved a woman, and lived with her for several years, it's naïve to think you'll be happy by getting rid of her. Whether you like it or not, you retain a certain feeling just as you would for a pet even though it bites you. And if it begs prettily, and wags its tail you give it some sugar.

Walton

Well, ah, Arlene was certainly good at wagging her tail. Ha! Ha!

(There is the noise of a bell ringing.)

Walton

Couldn't help that one, Paul. Forgive me.

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Paul

It wasn't an apt comparison my own fault.

(Enter Virgie.)

Virgie (upset)

Paul

Paul

What is it, Virgie?

Virgie

She is here!

Paul

Who's here?

Virgie

She. Your wife!

Walton

What Arlene?

Virgie

Your wife! She's arguing with a cabby but she's coming here.

Paul

Here? But she promised me. What's she going to do? What has she come for now?

Walton

She's come to beg for some sugar.

(Enter Arlene, a very good-looking woman dressed in the very latest fashion.)

Arlene (kissing Paul)

Darling! It's me. How are you, honey?

Paul (obviously glad to see her in spite of his apprehensions)

What a surprise!

Arlene

Yes, isn't it? (seeing Walton) What! Walton, I didn't see you. (hugging him, too) This is like old times.

Walton (somewhat stiffly, but not unfriendly)

Good to see you, Arlene.

Virgie (under her breath, but seething with venom)

She'd embrace the whole world, the little bitch.

Arlene

My little Virgie, you look great. I am going to get you a present.

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Virgie

You're too good.

(Virgie goes out, frostily.)

Arlene

You can't imagine how happy I am to see you. I said to myself perhaps he's still at his office.

Paul

I took leave.

Arlene

And you, too, Walton. I'm happy to see you again. I read in the papers that you've been reelected. That really pleases me.

Walton

Thanks, Arlene.

Paul

You need to talk to me, Arlene?

Arlene

I have so many things to tell you. (to Walton, who looks as if he's about to leave) But no, no, you're not in the way. You're a friend of the family.

Walton

But

Paul (desperately)

Stay a while. I beg you. (insistently) I beg you, don't go.

Arlene (oblivious to the desperation in Paul's voice)

I've never been in your new apartment. Wow you've bought a piano!

Paul

Fifty bucks a month.

Arlene

That's not expensive. It gives the place a touch of class. Ah, you've reupholstered the furniture. It really needed it. And then, you have a new clock. (laughing) Did you inherit some money?

Paul

No, no. On the contrary, I'm economizing.

Arlene

Well, your affairs are going better, and that's important. (taking his hands) I don't want you to be unhappy. That would make me very sad, you know, Paul.

Paul

I'm not unhappy. But I'm very concerned

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Arlene

Concerned about what?

Paul

Money. Ask Walton. He's the one who loaned me the money so I could pay your bill.

Arlene (puzzled)

What bill?

Paul (wondering how she could have forgotten)

The one I just paid for you. Two thousand dollars.

Arlene

Oh, now I remember.

Paul

The man came here to collect the money a little while ago. I paid him in cash.

Arlene

That was sweet of you. You did well. You always treat me right.

Paul

So now, I owe Walton two thousand dollars.

Arlene

Rest assured, my little Walton, he's going to pay you.

Walton (astounded by her audacity)

I don't doubt it for a minute.

Paul

But, you see the fix I'm in

Arlene

Don't be afraid, darling. I didn't come for money.

Paul (prematurely relieved)

Ah, you didn't come for money?

Arlene

That would be taking advantage, and you know I never take advantage.

Paul

Oh, I can breathe again. That's nice. Isn't that nice, Walton?

Walton

Very nice.

Paul

You said just now that you had so many things

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Arlene

I'm getting to it. Kids, everything's in a mess for little old Arlene right now. You know I've been friends with Paul Hassan?

Walton

The Savaki Ambassador? No, I didn't know.

Arlene

He was the Savaki Ambassador until about a month ago. Now he's prime minister. We really had quite a thing going.

Paul

Very rich, I believe.

Arlene

Oh, you can't imagine. But, he has terrible taste which I've tried to improve. Well anyway, we had quite a thing together until about six weeks ago. Then we had an unpleasant talk.

Paul

What was the little talk about?

Arlene

Stupid things. His Middle Eastern customs just are not civilized. I had supper with a few friends and he wasn't invited. He got angry and said some disagreeable things to me.

Paul

He got jealous.

Arlene

Oh, no. If I hadn't shown him the door, he would have walked out on me anyway. The man is absolutely medieval.

Paul

Go on.

Arlene

So when Hassan left I found myself in a fix. He didn't leave me a penny. I pawned my jewels, but the money didn't last long.

Walton

What! Attractive as you are, you haven't latched on to someone new in six weeks?

Arlene (evasively)

Oh, I've had some dates. But no one serious has come along, and there are certain things I just cannot allow myself to do. In short, yesterday, after several reversals which wouldn't interest you, I had to sell off everything.

Paul

You sold your furniture?

Arlene

All, honey, except my bed.

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Paul (taking her hand)
My poor Arlene.

Arlene
Oh, I don't repent it. I don't care about furniture and I've wanted to replace what I've had for some time.

Walton
You did the best thing.

Arlene
Only now, I have no place to live.

Paul
You haven't rented a place?

Arlene
Not yet. I've seen a very nice apartment for forty-one hundred a month in Georgetown

Walton
Forty-one hundred a month?

Arlene
It's a steal at the price. How much do you pay here?

Paul (rather ashamed)
Eighteen hundred.

Arlene
Well, that's all right for a man, even a Congressman. You don't want the voters to think you live too well. But, for a woman, you understand. Anyway, I'm going to look around some more. I haven't decided.

Walton
That's wise.

Paul (naively)
And while waiting, you plan to stay with one of your girl friends, I suppose?

Arlene
Oh, Vanessa Hughes offered me her apartment for several days, but I refused.

Paul
You should have accepted. You'd have been very happy with her.

Arlene (surprised)
You know Vanessa?

Paul
No, just an idea I had.

Arlene
It's perfectly conceivable you might. She goes everywhere. She's living with an undersecretary or something

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who's madly in love with her and is going to marry her only he can't because he's already married and his wife won't divorce him.

Paul

Oh, I see. We'll have to wait for the wedding bells.

Arlene

She's charming, Vanessa, charming. But I don't want to owe her anything. I hate owing people anything. Then, I had another idea.

Paul (uneasily)

And that was?

Arlene

To stay with you for a while until fortune turns my way again.

Paul (strangling)

With me?

Arlene

Naturally.

Paul

Here? You wish to take up residence here?

Arlene

Hell! You're my husband, after all, and nobody in the world can criticize us.

Paul

But, for God's sake, I am no longer your husband.

Arlene (innocently)

But, you were once

Paul

I was once, that's true. But I am no longer. You understand that? We are DIVORCED officially!

Arlene

So what? What does that mean?

Paul

So what! You take my breath away. Ask Walton what that means.

Walton

The law is very clear.

Arlene

I don't give a damn about the law.

Walton (aghast)

Oh!

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Arlene

So you won't have me?

Paul

I didn't say that! I tell you very gently that it's impossible for me. Quite impossible to hide you here.

Arlene

I have no idea of hiding.

Paul

This house is peaceful. I lead a regular life. I have my bachelor habits most of them bad and besides, I'm in line for a Cabinet position.

Walton (low to Paul)

Don't give her any ammunition.

Paul

If somebody heard a story like this there'd be a scandal and I would be done for. You see how I trust you, I tell you everything.

Arlene

I wouldn't want to hurt your chances for anything, honey, but after our divorce you've been involved with women who aren't half as good as I am. So why?

Paul

I've never let any woman come here. Have I, Walton?

Walton

Not that I've heard of.

Arlene (bitterly disappointed, but not angry)

It's okay, honey, it's okay. I'm going.

(Arlene sits at the piano and plays the scales for a moment. Then she plays La Vie en rose.)

Paul (to Walton)

Ah, great. That's all I needed. That was our song.

Walton

Be firm.

Paul

Do me justice, Arlene. Admit I've always been good to you. But this time I cannot. I swear to you, I cannot.

Arlene

You've always been wonderful to me, Paul. That's why I'll never forget you. I am not saying one word in reproach. You're acting perfectly within your rights. I will go to a hotel. I only want to stay here a short while to wait for my movers.

Paul

Movers?

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Arlene

They're bringing my bed and clothes. I gave them your address. I was a little too sure of you. Don't worry, they won't come in. I'll tell Virgie to watch for them and I'll keep them from coming in.

Walton

My friend, I'm leaving. I have to meet with the President.

Paul

Speak to him about my business, will you?

(Arlene continues playing.)

Walton

That's why I came to see you.

Paul

And don't mention this.

Walton

Never fear.

Paul

I really should have had this appointment months ago.

Walton

I'm well aware of that.

Paul

Do you think I'll get the nomination?

Walton

I have reason to hope so.

Paul

It's my turn. I've earned it.

Walton

That's what's holding you back, you know. Bye, Arlene.

Arlene

Arriverderci, Walton.

Paul

You'll tell me the President's response?

Walton

As soon as I know it. He's cagey. (low) Don't weaken.

Paul

I am weak that's true. But I am not an idiot.

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Walton

Bye-bye, Arlene.

(Exit Walton.)

Arlene

Bye, honey.

(Arlene continues to play. After Walton leaves, Arlene suddenly stops playing and puts her head in her hand.)

Arlene

I haven't a chance that's for sure.

Paul

But if You're not reasonable and you don't manage your life properly.

Arlene (looking up)

You think so?

Paul

You need good advice.

Arlene

Give me some.

Paul

I've already given you plenty. I haven't got any more.

Arlene

You know, I've been looking forward to staying with you for several days, looking forward to taking a rest. I've been embarrassed, been kicked out, had all sorts of nasty things happen. It's no fun for a woman. I said to myself: He's alone, he's a bachelor, he lives like a monk without any girl friend. How would I bother him? And in the end, in spite of everything, he still cares for me. We remain friends. I guess I made a big mistake, that's all.

Paul

I've explained to you

Arlene

That's all right. We won't speak about it any more. (begins to cry)

Paul (to himself)

No, no. It would be too much of a blunder this time. (to Arlene) What's wrong?

Arlene

Nothing, really nothing.

Paul

Why do you cry?

Arlene

Don't pay any attention to it.

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Paul

Look, don't put yourself in such a state. (wildly) You can stay a few days in a hotel, an agreeable hotel. I'll pay. My God, it won't kill you. If you need more money, I'll find some.

Arlene

Hotel rooms drive me to distraction. You know I've always been like that. I have to have beautiful things around me. I'll cry all day.

Paul

Aw, honey.

Arlene

Just four blank walls.

Paul

It just isn't possible for you to be here. And besides, if I let you stay, your little friends would be coming in and out at all hours

Arlene

At first, no one will know I am here.

Paul

Oh.

Arlene

Except Vanessa, who is my best friend.

Paul

Already one too many.

Arlene

And then, I've told her not to come and see me unless she has something very important to tell me.

Paul

And she knows who I am?

Arlene

Oh, no! Vanessa is my intimate friend, but she really knows nothing about my life. I told her I was going to stay with a cousin. That's why I didn't give her the phone number. I have more tact and discretion than you think. (putting her handkerchief to her eyes) I always look out for your interests.

Paul

Listen, Arlene, if you promise me if you swear

Arlene

I swear, darling.

Paul

If I was sure I wouldn't repent this

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Arlene

What must I swear?

Paul

I'll let you live here and I'll give you some time

Arlene

For me to get things together. Oh, it won't be long. Oh, I'm so happy, my little sweetheart. How happy I am.
(kissing him)

Paul

It's absolutely agreed that this is only for a few days.

Arlene

But, of course. I never take advantage, as you know very well.

Paul

I am going to sleep on the couch. You stay in my room.

Arlene

But, I don't want to push you out of your own room, honey.

Paul (horrified)

Then

Arlene (laughing)

Don't be stupid.

Paul (shocked)

Oh

Arlene

What's so strange about that?

Paul

You don't seem to understand that what you are proposing is frightfully immoral?

Arlene

It's immoral?

Paul

Yes. Absolutely.

Arlene (childishly)

Why?

Paul

It would take too long to explain and besides, I'm not sure that I know myself.

Arlene

All right. If you don't want to, I won't insist. I will sleep on the couch. But you know, I'm not an ingrate, and I

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don't take advantage. I just want to show you how much I appreciate all the sacrifices you make for me and how much I still care for you.

Paul (uncomfortable)

No need to talk about all that.

Arlene

Yes, yes, there is. You are a nice guy. Do you know how few nice guys there are left in the world? When I think, you let me get the divorce

Paul

For cruel and unusual treatment.

Arlene (laughing)

People would think you beat me. You might have trouble finding a new wife.

Paul (dryly)

I'm in no hurry to remarry.

Arlene

Don't joke. You know there isn't one man in all the jet set I travel in that's half as nice as you.

Paul

Really?

Arlene

Honest Injun. And that's always been my opinion always, even when I was stupid enough to cheat on you with that Senator. I didn't care for him half as much as I did for you.

Paul

No use recalling all that. What's past is past.

Arlene

It's all so sad when you think about it. I was so stupid. I thought I could have my cake and eat it too. I know better now. We were made for each other in so many ways. Unfortunately, I have a silly nature and never think about anything except the present. Why don't you marry again?

Paul

Oh, nobody wants me.

Arlene

Nonsense! Virgie would marry you in an instant.

Paul

Virgie?

Arlene

Don't you know she's crazy about you?

Paul

Why, for heaven's sake!

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Arlene

You mean, you don't know, you big goof, that she's in love with you?

Paul

No. I guess not. She's very loyal. But I've never even thought of Virgie that way.

Arlene

Well, she's thought of you. I'm almost jealous and I would be if you liked her. Can't you see she's jealous of me?

Paul

Hmmm.

Arlene

Never mind Virgie. I will never forget how good you've been to me. (suddenly sitting on his lap) I hope someday you will get in some terrible trouble and I will be the only one who can save you. I won't hesitate, honey. I'll come right away.

Paul

What am I doing? Where am I heading?

Arlene

What's wrong?

Paul

Nothing.

Arlene (caressingly)

Nothing?

Paul

Get up. I beg you, get up.

(Enter Virgie, who stands and stares at first.)

Virgie

Sir.

Paul (helplessly)

What?

Virgie

There are two movers with some luggage and a a bed.

Arlene

Ah. I'll take care of that.

(Arlene gets up and goes out.)

Virgie

Sir.

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Paul

What? What?

Virgie

What should I do about the movers?

Paul

Whatever Arlene says.

Virgie (exploding)

Wonderful. (going out after Arlene) That's too much!

Paul

What a fool I am! What a fool! Wonderful. I'm in a pretty pickle. Let's see, let's see. Got to be calm. (practically dancing around) If this goes on much longer, I'll marry her again. I can't send her away now. I can't do it. I've got to find another way.

(Reenter Virgie.)

Virgie (holding out her hand)

Some money, please.

Paul

Why?

Virgie (icily)

For the movers.

Paul (giving her some money)

Here.

Virgie

What shall I tell the building manager?

Paul

Nothing you understand? Nothing!

Virgie

Excuse me, Congressman. I must have some explanation about your wife. The manager believes that you are a bachelor and everybody has seen a woman enter here. With a lot of luggage. It's already on it's way to being a scandal. Several neighbors are watching from their windows. What do I say? What answer to I give?

Paul

Tell them whatever you like. I really don't care.

Virgie

Oh In that case, I don't either. I will say that you are divorced, but that you are reconciling with your wife who just happens to be a call girl.

Paul

Virgie, I know you are furious with me, but please, don't make things more difficult than they are. Say never

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mind what say she's my cousin or my niece. Flew in from the coast.

Virgie

Who's just graduated from college.

Paul

That's the stuff.

Virgie

And has come to D.C. for a visit.

Paul

Exactly.

Virgie

They'll never believe it.

(Enter Arlene.)

Arlene

Virgie, they're waiting for you. Ah, Paul, I forgot. Can you give me a twenty?

Paul

Why not? In for a nickel, in for a dime.

Arlene

To buy some flowers. Hurry up. (Paul gives her the money and she gives it to Virgie) Virgie, would you go to a florist and buy us some flowers?

Virgie (incensed)

Twenty dollars worth of flowers!

Arlene

Hurry up. And pay the movers on your way out, will you?

Paul

Go ahead.

(Virgie leaves, vowing who knows what kind of unspeakable vengeance on Arlene.)

Arlene

Really, your place is a little sad.

Paul

I never noticed.

Arlene

Leave it to me to liven it up. You've got a couple of horrid vases by the chimney but with flowers they won't be too bad. Men. Take the piano, for instance. It ought to be in the corner. You just don't know how to decorate.

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Paul

Move it if you like. (to himself) It's starting again. It's happening all over again. She's taking over. (to Arlene) And the sofa? You haven't said anything about the sofa.

Arlene

The sofa. No, it's not right either. I think I'll put it over there. (pointing)

Paul

There! That's where the piano should be. And the piano is in the place of the table. And the table in place of the armchair. Let's change everything everything!

Arlene

Oh yes, oh yes. Let's have some fun.

Paul

Put everything topsy turvy. Upset everything. Go on don't hesitate. You are in your role and I have no objections. Do what you have to do!

(There is a noise of someone entering. Enter Vanessa Edmonds and Diane Brennan, both very good-looking and fashionably dressed.)

Vanessa (hugging Arlene)

Ah, my dear. What a funny little apartment. The doorman tried to stop us from coming in.

Diane

Yes, dear, he tried to stop us.

Arlene

What a surprise! You both look real nice.

Paul (to himself)

Now what's going to happen?

Arlene

In fact (to Paul) Let me present Miss Vanessa Edmonds and Miss Diane Brennan, two good friends of mine.

Vanessa (in stilted French)

Enchante, Monsieur.

Diane

Delighted. Arlene has spoken to us about you.

Paul (strangled)

Has she? How nice of her.

Vanessa

Often. We are close friends of your niece. We have no secrets from one another.

Paul

Then you must have a lot to discuss. I ask your permission, ladies

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Vanessa

Goodbye, sir. Au revoir. Very happy to have made your acquaintance.

Paul (leaving, muttering to himself)

Forward, march. Make a decision or all is lost forever.

Vanessa

Your uncle looks familiar.

Arlene

Really?

Diane

One of your clients, perhaps?

(Arlene looks vexed.)

Vanessa

Oh, no. I never forget a client. No. He looks so distinguished. I think I've seen him or someone who looks like him on TV.

Arlene

Oh, everybody thinks they've seen uncle Paul somewhere.

Diane

He looks like a Congressman or Senator, that's what he looks like.

Arlene

Paul will be flattered.

Diane

I mean it.

Vanessa

Your uncle is kind of cute, honey, but that's not why we came.

Diane

We have some good news to bring you.

Arlene

Well?

Vanessa

We know a man who is crazy in love with you. I mean crazy in love!

Diane

Yes, honey. Crazy in love.

Arlene

Really. Who is he?

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Vanessa

A very wealthy john.

Diane

A sheik.

Arlene

A sheik?

Vanessa

A sheik who is immensely wealthy, and who owns ever so many oil wells.

Arlene

I've had enough of sheiks.

Vanessa

Not this one.

Diane

Kehadi.

Arlene

I seem to recall.

Vanessa

You ought to recall. I introduced him to you once.

Arlene

A little bit fat. Sleek like a greased pig?

Diane

He's charming.

Vanessa

He just may be the richest man in the world.

Arlene

And you say he's in love with me?

Diane

Exactly, darling.

Arlene

Why didn't he tell me himself?

Vanessa

He didn't dare. He's very timid and besides, you were balling Hassan at the time. So he went back to his home or somewhere to pine for you.

Arlene

To his harem, I bet.

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Diane

But in despair.

Arlene

And now he's back?

Vanessa

As soon as he heard you and Hassan had broken up, he came on his personal jet. He flew in yesterday, tried to find you, but couldn't, and came to me to find out what had become of you. In my place some other woman would have told him that Hassan had kicked you out and tried to take over this new little sheik for herself. But not me. I am a good friend.

Diane

And me, too.

Arlene

I thank you both.

Vanessa

You'd really have to see what a state he was in, the poor dear man. After I told him everything, he radiated, my dear, he simply radiated. There isn't any other word for it. Then she's free, he cried. He had such an ecstatic expression on his face, dear like he died and went to heaven. A real chump. But we shouldn't speak evil of chumps. Without them, how could we live so well in this city?

Arlene

And so

Vanessa

And so, he thinks only of you. He begged me to tell him where you were living.

Arlene (uneasy)

I hope you didn't tell him.

Vanessa

Not at first because you told me to be discreet. But he went wild actually started crying real tears in his voice. In the end, I did because I was sure I was doing you a good turn. He's giving me a Jaguar, by the way, to thank me. He'll be here any minute.

Arlene

Here?

Vanessa

Of course here.

Arlene

I really can't receive him. I'm not in my own apartment.

Vanessa

The sheik is a man who is very well brought up.

Diana He can be presented anywhere.

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Vanessa

Why, he goes to the White House.

Diana In short, you've got to

Vanessa

If you don't, I may not get my Jaguar

Diana He can be presented to your uncle, and more than once!

Arlene

But my uncle is not my uncle!

Vanessa

Oh!

Diane

That's the trouble?

Arlene

That's the trouble.

Vanessa

But he's a man you can wrap around your little finger. He's young, he's rich, he's naïve and he's fired up. For you. A naïve, rich man who's willing to do anything for you. It's a dream come true. I've never been able to find a john like that. When I do

Diane

Me either.

Vanessa

Believe me, don't discourage him. I'm advising you as a friend.

(A noise is heard in the hallway.)

Diane

Maybe that's him now.

(Enter Walton, visibly surprised to see the three women together.)

Walton

Oh! Excuse me.

Arlene

Hello again, my dear little Walton.

Walton

I've got to speak to Paul. Is he still here?

Arlene

Of course, of course. Congressman Walton, two good friends of mine.

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Vanessa

Oh, I know this gentleman. I saw him the other day in the House.

Walton

What day, Miss?

Vanessa

The day you were speaking on taxes. You were really giving it to the opposition. Who was that man you were insulting?

Walton

I have forgotten. Probably a good friend.

Diane

You were really great.

Walton

Were you there, too, Miss?

Diana I sure was.

Walton

I wouldn't think a debate on taxes would interest such lovely ladies.

Vanessa

Oh, we weren't there for the debate. We were showing some friends around town, and they wanted to see the Congress in action.

Diane

Goodbye, Mr. Walton.

Walton

Goodbye, Miss.

Vanessa (seductively)

Till we meet again, Mr. Walton.

Walton (troubled)

Till we meet again, Miss.

(Arlene takes her friends out. After a minute, Paul enters.)

Walton

What is going on here?

Paul

Ah, I need you, good buddy.

Walton

What?

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Paul

I've done it I really have done it this time.

Walton

You've done something stupid?

Paul

Arlene cried. And I felt something. I had this stupid feeling this stupid emotion of compassion. I'm letting her stay. Don't chastise me for it. The mistake is made. The question is how to straighten things out. Walton, think of something.

Walton

I really don't know. And I have to leave immediately.

Paul

You are leaving? You are abandoning me? Where are you going?

Walton

The President asked me to undertake a confidential mission for him.

Paul

Walton, I am going to find out if you are a true friend

Walton

You doubt it?

Paul

Take me along.

Walton

I couldn't ask for anyone better.

Paul

Take me. It's the only way. As long as I stay in Washington, I'll never free myself of her I know it.

Walton

You're right.

Paul

I will leave Arlene with Virgie. I don't care so long as I am not here.

Walton

I have to stop at my house to pack.

Paul

That will give me time to pack, too.

(Enter Arlene.)

Paul

Arlene.

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Arlene

Honey.

Paul

Walton has just brought me some news that makes it necessary for me to leave Washington for several weeks. I have to go immediately.

Arlene (taking his hands)

Not bad news, I hope?

Paul

No, on the contrary. Good.

Arlene

That's good, honey. You had me worried for a minute. Where are you going?

Paul

Where are we going, Walton?

Walton

Oh, it's a secret. We're on a special mission.

Arlene

Hey that's great. When will you be coming back?

Paul

I can't say. You can stay here as long as you like. I'll give Virgie some money for you which Walton will loan me.

Walton

Right, right

Paul

I only ask that you don't break anything.

Arlene

I promise.

Paul

And no wild parties okay?

Arlene

What kind of girl do you think I am, anyway? Really I don't think I'll be here very long. There's this gentleman who

Paul

Hell! You shouldn't mention a thing like that to me. When you go simply notify Virgie. She'll let me know.

Arlene

Do you want me to call or write?

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Paul

No use. I don't know where I'll be.

Walton (looking at his watch)

We've got to hurry.

Paul

Give me five minutes. (calling) Virgie!

(Enter Virgie.)

Virgie (frigidly)

Yes, Congressman.

Paul

Virgie, be a dear, pack my suitcase.

Virgie (astounded)

You're leaving?

Paul

Yes, I'm leaving with Congressman Walton on a hush–hush trip. Go on, hurry up. Pack my suitcase, everything for a long trip.

Virgie (going out)

I am going, sir, I am going.

Paul

Walton, will you lend me

Walton (pulling out a check and signing it)

Here. It's blank. Use it as you like.

Paul (giving it to Arlene)

Here, baby (writing in a sum)

Arlene (kissing Paul)

Thanks, darling, thanks.

Paul

Do you have enough?

Arlene

This will be plenty. And I am going to economize.

Paul

Yes, be prudent. With your carefree disposition, all you need is a little prudence to lead a happy life.

Arlene

My God! I've done so many stupid things.

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Paul

True. But you had legitimate excuses. You have even more excuses than you know. Now Arlene, we are going to separate, and it is very likely we won't see each other for quite a long time.

Arlene

That will break my heart, you know, darling.

Paul

Mine also. But what do you want? You have your interests and I have mine. They are too different for us to see each other often. Think of the future, my poor little Arlene. You won't always be young and pretty. Make hay while the sun shines.

Arlene

Where am I going to find another guy like you? If I do, I'm going to marry him.

(Virgie returns, carrying a suitcase and a briefcase.)

Paul

Everything's ready?

Virgie

Would you please check to see?

Paul

No, no. You always do it right, Virgie. It's fine, I know. Virgie while I'm gone you look after madame.

Virgie (totally confused)

What? She's not going with you?

Paul

No remarks, please. Yes, my wife is staying here. And I want you to obey her and look out for her. I'll write or call soon.

Arlene

Don't make such big eyes, Virgie.

Virgie (stalking out in a fury)

As the Congressman likes.

Walton

Have you got everything you need? Let's go.

Arlene

Here, Walton, before you go, I want to ask

Walton

Ask what, Arlene?

Arlene

Did you see the President?

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Walton

Yes, I just got back.

Arlene

Well? What did he say about Paul?

Walton

He said Paul is the most qualified candidate.

Arlene

Wow! Congratulations, honey.

Walton

Not so fast. There are other considerations besides ability.

Arlene

He'd better appoint Paul, or I am going to have some words with him.

Walton

He's cagey, is our President. He hasn't made up his mind yet. Wouldn't tell even me.

Arlene

Paul's going to get it. I know. I have this feeling.

Paul

Anyway, I've got to go. Let's see. My hat. An umbrella, just in case. (noises at the door) Now, who can that be?

Arlene

It's probably a visitor for me.

(Enter Virgie.)

Virgie

Two gentlemen to see the lady. For you, Arlene.

Paul

You see, it's best that I go. We'll go down the back stairs. (hugging Arlene) Goodbye, baby. (grabs his suitcase and briefcase)

Arlene

Goodbye, my darling goodbye, Walton.

Paul

Au revoir, Virgie. I'll write soon. (to Walton) This time I'm going to save myself.

(Exit Paul and Walton hurriedly.)

Virgie

And those gentlemen?

THE CONGRESSMAN'S NIGHTMARE

Arlene

Tell them to come in. I'm going to freshen up first.

(Exit Arlene.)

Virgie (sniffing)

Today, two. Tomorrow it will be four. (the phone rings, Virgie answers) Congressman Horton's. What? No, the Congressman has no statement to make about that rumor. What do you mean it's not a rumor? The appointment is on its way to the Senate? (the phone rings) Just a moment, sir. I have to get the other line. (putting the present caller on hold) Congressman Horton's, can you hold? What? What? Yes, Mr. President, I'll try to get him. (screaming) Paul, Paul, you stupid son-of-a-bitch, you've just been appointed Secretary of Defense!

(Virgie runs to the door yelling. As she turns around she sees two men have entered. They are dressed in white robes with Arabic burnouses. They look puzzled. When Virgie sees them, she screams loud and long. Arlene enters with her make-up only partly on.)

Arlene

Virgie, have you gone mad?

Virgie

Paul is Secretary of Defense, Paul is Secretary of Defense!

Arlene

Well, that's great. I told you I knew he was going to get it. Trust my feelings. (to the Arabs) Excuse me, gentlemen. Be right back.

(Arlene goes out unconcernedly as the curtain falls. Virgie continues to scream. The Arabs salaam.)

CURTAIN.