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The Room

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The Room

Abstract

She was sitting on the edge of the ottoman; her feet curled up underneath her; her black shoes placed neatly on the carpet below. She was sitting perfectly still. She was listening to the quietness of the room. She listened intently. Her head cocked first to one side, then to the other. The room lay all around her; quiet and still. Like a huge waiting animal - all eyes, and ears, and knowing. She couldn't keep out of it. How could she? It attracted her ... It beckoned to her through its closed door. .. 'Come in,' it said. 'Come in ... Come and see my secrets.' So today she had opened the door and gone in - timidly and carefully - placing her shoes on the floor so as not to soil the ottoman. And there she sat. And the room was waiting and watching.

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So today she had opened the door and gone in — timidly and carefully — placing her shoes on the floor so as not to soil the ottoman. And there she sat. And the room was waiting and watching.

Facing her, was a walnut dressing table. It had stocky legs and a long silvered mirror. A silver hairbrush lay on one side of the table. A silver comb on the other. In the middle, sat a squat, taunting, jewellery box.

The room was waiting for a decision. But she didn't give one. Not immediately. She sat on the ottoman a few minutes longer. The room waited patiently. But at last, it could wait no more; it urged and pleaded and prodded at her. It loomed up and all around her — until she was forced to decide.

She stood up and padded over to the dressing table. She pulled back the cushioned stool. She sat down. Her hand hovered momentarily in the air... Then it came swiftly down, and the brush was grasped.

The room relaxed. It flowed gently away from her. It curled up contentedly in a corner. It pretended to go to sleep.

She looked down at the brush and relaxed her grip. She traced along the silver handle with her fingertips. She lifted the brush up in her hands. She pressed it firmly against her face. Her eyelids dropped softly onto her cheeks. The silver was cold. It was hard. It was unyielding. But it was beautiful.

She opened her eyes and looked in the mirror. Soft grey eyes stared encouragingly at her. So she turned the brush over and started to drag it

through her hair. The bristles bit into her scalp as she tugged... But that didn't matter at all.

When she had done, she put the brush down on the exact spot it had come from. Her eyes lingered on it for a moment, then moved on to the jewellery box. She looked at the little gold handle, the tiny keyhole.

She reached out and tried the lid. It was locked. She lifted the box up. No key. She set the box down and looked long and hard at the keyhole.

'There must be a key somewhere,' she whispered. 'But where?'

Under the mirror, there was a wooden knob. She stretched out an arm and touched it. A drawer slid open. She slipped her fingers into it. She lifted up the silk handkerchiefs... There was no key there.

She banged the drawer shut and scowled in the mirror.

Then her eyes caught sight of the silver comb. She reached out and picked it up... The room stirred gently at her feet... Underneath the comb, lay a tiny black key.

She lifted it up and jammed it into the keyhole. A quick jerk; and the lid sprung open.

A solitary strand of pearls nestled inside. Her fingers crept over to touch them. They were smooth, and white, and inviting.

She picked them up and ran them over her hand. She fastened them around her neck. She jumped up and stared defiantly at the mirror. Grey eyes laughed mockingly back. At her throat, the white pearls snuggled, smooth and warm.

She tossed back her head and threw her hands to her throat.

Suddenly, there were white pearls everywhere: in her hair; tumbling down to the floor; rolling under the dressing table; trickling silently towards the door.

She threw herself onto her hands and knees and tried desperately to pick them up. But her fingers were clumsy. And her hair got in her eyes. And, over there, in the corner, the room gave out a low, throaty, laugh.

She sat down defeated. Her cheeks burned hot and red. Her hair clung wetly to her forehead. She had only found ten pearls. What would she do now.

Tears started to sting at her eyes and she stabbed at them with her fists. The door opened. She looked up through her tears and saw two faces staring down at her. One was contorted. Beyond recognition. The other was inquisitive. Like a mouse.

'Look what she's done now!' screamed the contorted face.

'You can't really blame her,' said the inquisitive face. 'You'll have to be more careful... You'll have to keep your things out of her reach, that's all.'

'B...But,' fumed the contorted face. 'I had locked them up... They were locked up safe and sound... What more could I do?'

But the inquisitive face wasn't listening. It was looking at the child on the floor. 'Come on Amy,' it was saying. 'Give the pearls back to your sister.'

The little girl stood up. She tiptoed over to the contorted face. She held out a shaking hand and offered up the ten pearls.

The sister looked down at the wet hair and the tear-stained face, and she relaxed. She wiped the child's brow and she took the offered pearls.

The mother picked up the black shoes with a sigh. She took the little girl by the hand and they left the room. The sister followed.

Half way down the stairs, the little girl turned to look back. Behind the door, the room was curling up; it was closing its eyes; it was falling asleep... Was the waiting and watching over now?