

An excerpt from

## **VERONICA'S POSITION**

a comedy by Rich Orloff

### *Characters*

VERONICA FAIRCHILD, 50's, a screen superstar since childhood

PHILIP WILDER, 50's, British star of stage and screen

ALAN CROFT, 30's, Veronica's personal secretary

HARVEY JOHNSON, 50's, a United States Senator

MALLORY DASCOMB, 30's, a rising hot stage director

EZEKIEL BARROWS NORTH, 30's, a photographic artist

### *Setting*

The living room of a posh hotel suite in Washington, D.C.

December 1989 – January 1990

In this excerpt from the play, it's the beginning of the final scene of Act One. It's New Year's Eve leading into 1990 and also the opening night of movie stars Veronica Fairchild and Philip Wilder starring in the Washington, D.C., pre-Broadway tryout of a new production of HEDDA GABLER.

In Veronica's hotel suite, ALAN, her personal assistant, and ZEKE, Alan's friend and a controversial photographic artist, sit on the couch, drinking champagne. Veronica has invited Zeke to her suite not knowing that her fiancé, Senator Harvey Johnson, has denounced Zeke's photographs on the Senate floor.

ZEKE

How long did tonight's performance last, anyway?

ALAN

Two-and-a-three-quarter hours.

ZEKE

Are you sure your watch didn't stop at some point during the evening?

ALAN

I'm sure. I checked it. 47 times... More champagne?

ZEKE

Sure. I could use the fortification.

Alan fills both their glasses.

ALAN

To Ibsen, who was lucky enough to have died before seeing this... Oh, and to the one gallery in town courageous enough to present your exhibition after the "whatchamacallit" museum turned it down.

ZEKE

Let's hope censorship of the arts ends with the eighties.

ALAN

I'll drink to that.

They toast and drink.

ZEKE

So when Veronica and the Senator come up, it's really okay with you if I –

ALAN

I have no idea what you're talking about, and I'll be shocked shocked shocked when you bring it up.

ZEKE

I appreciate this, cowboy. If there's any way I can repay you...

ALAN

Don't mention it. Munchies?

ZEKE

Nah, I got filled up enough downstairs.

ALAN

Some opening night party, huh?

ZEKE

I've never been in a room where so many people lied through their teeth about their true opinions.

ALAN

That's 'cause you're new to Washington.

The door opens. VERONICA and HARVEY enter.

ALAN (cont'd)

Hi.

VERONICA

Oh, good, it's you. People I don't  
have to smile at.

HARVEY

(to Zeke:)

I don't think we've met.

ALAN

Senator Johnson, this is Ezekiel North.

HARVEY

Ezekiel Barrows North?

ZEKE

In the flesh.

HARVEY

(to Veronica:)

What is *he* doing here?

VERONICA

This is the friend of Alan's I said  
we might see the D.C. nightlife with.

HARVEY

You didn't tell me his name.

VERONICA

I said he was that talented artist, what's-his-face.

ZEKE

It's a pleasure meeting you, Senator.

HARVEY

Don't push it.

ZEKE

I can't tell you how much I've been looking forward  
to meeting the man who denounced me on the floor  
of the Senate today as a threat to the republic.

ALAN

(shocked, shocked, shocked)

Zeke, you promised!!

VERONICA

Is that true?

HARVEY

If I'm to be quoted accurately, I said that the public display of his photographs amounted to the moral equivalent of a public health emergency.

VERONICA

Are they that bad?

HARVEY

Have you ever *seen* his photos?

VERONICA

No.

ZEKE

You know, I just happen to have a portfolio of my work with me.

ALAN

Zeke, you promised!!

VERONICA

Please, everyone! It's been a most trying day. Boys, I'm sorry, but I don't have the strength to go out tonight. In fact, I don't have the strength for anything but *friendly* conversation.

There's a knock on the door.

ALAN

Who is it?

PHILIP (o.s.)

It is we.

VERONICA

Drop dead!

HARVEY

Darling, I invited Philip and Mallory to join us.

VERONICA

You what?!

HARVEY

Look, you're going to be stuck with them for another month here and God knows how long on Broadway –

VERONICA

Broadway, don't remind me.

HARVEY

For your own benefit, I thought that if we could all just sit and talk, maybe it could help things out.

VERONICA

You've been spending too much time on the Labor Relations Committee.

HARVEY

I see a problem; I deal with it.

There's another knock on the door.

PHILIP (o.s.)

You don't have to let us in, but a decision one way or another would be appreciated.

HARVEY

Well?

VERONICA

Oh, hell, let 'em in.

Harvey opens the door. We see PHILIP.

HARVEY

You promise to be on good behavior?

PHILIP

We promise.

(to Mallory:)

After you.

MALLORY, the play's director, enters, wearing a low-cut evening gown that is so sexy she could make eunuchs horny. Philip follows.

MALLORY

Good evening.

VERONICA

I didn't see you downstairs.

MALLORY

Oh, well, I probably just blended into the crowd.

ALAN

Philip, Mallory, I'd like you to meet my friend,  
Ezekiel North.

PHILIP

Oh, yes, I've heard of you.

MALLORY

I love your work.

ZEKE

I want your dress.

MALLORY

Oh, this? Some men find this sexy.  
Others are contractually prohibited  
rom doing so.

HARVEY

Look, we're all a little tired...

VERONICA

I'm not. My adrenaline has started  
pumping like never before.

MALLORY

It's too bad you wouldn't let me see  
you before the show. I could've gotten  
your adrenaline pumping for the play.

VERONICA

Are you giving me notes on my hormones?

HARVEY

*Ladies* – can I fix anyone anything?

VERONICA

No, thank you.

MALLORY

Champagne would be nice.

HARVEY

What would you like, Philip?

PHILIP

I would like to drown out my sorrows  
and forget this night ever happened.

HARVEY

Then what shall it be?

PHILIP

A club soda.

Harvey fixes the drinks.

VERONICA

You don't have to be so melodramatic.

PHILIP

I don't? I overheard someone at the party say this was the biggest bomb he'd ever seen.

VERONICA

That's one opinion.

PHILIP

He happened to be the Secretary of Defense.

VERONICA

It's still one opinion.

PHILIP

It's mild compared to the critics.

VERONICA

I never read the critics.  
They've ruined too many diets.

ALAN

Isn't it too early to know what –

PHILIP

Some friends at the *Post* are old drinking buddies of mine. Almost anyone who's ever had a drink is an old drinking buddy of mine. Anyway, they were able to access the computer and get a copy of tomorrow's review.

MALLORY

Isn't technology wonderful?

Philip takes out some scraps of paper.

PHILIP

"Veronica Fairchild and Philip Wilder, two of Hollywood's dimming stars, have decided to soil Washington with a production of HEDDA GABLER that is so vacuous Ibsen should sue them for defamation of his characters."

VERONICA

That's one more opinion.

PHILIP

Here's another.

VERONICA

Give me that.

(takes the paper, reads:)

Well, this one isn't that bad.

PHILIP

Ronnie, when a critic says "they found meanings in Ibsen he never dreamt of putting there," it isn't a compliment.

VERONICA

Well, what do they know? What concerns me is the opinion of the average, run-of-the-mill person.

PHILIP

So what did *you* think of the play, Congressman?

HARVEY

(noticing the dig)

Well, since you asked so nicely, I thought the play was excellent.

VERONICA

Did you?

HARVEY

I never imagined that Hedda could be portrayed as a sweet, lovable kitten who just melted my heart.

VERONICA

Oh God, I stunk.

PHILIP

Maybe we should advertise this as "HEDDA – the cute version."



VERONICA

Oh, shut up.

HARVEY

I'm sorry, darling. I thought –

VERONICA

It's okay.

HARVEY

I didn't mean to –

VERONICA

It's *okay*. I was lousy; I know it.

HARVEY

Look, I know how you feel.

VERONICA

No, you don't. If you ever lose an election four million to 12, then you'll know how I feel.

HARVEY

Ease up, darling.

VERONICA

I can't "ease up".

HARVEY

It's only a play.

VERONICA

(livid)

*Only* a play?! *Only* a play?!!

MALLORY

Was what happened tonight a play?  
It felt more like a three-day bus trip.

PHILIP

Oh, no. Three-day bus trips actually  
o somewhere.

VERONICA

Please! Can we not discuss the play anymore?  
Can we discuss *anything* but the play?

Philip lifts up an artist's portfolio.

PHILIP

What's this?

ZEKE

They're some prints of my work.

PHILIP

Including the ones that are supposed to be in absolutely despicable taste?

ZEKE

You betcha.

PHILIP

Oh, goodie. Let's have a look.

HARVEY

I don't think this is the time to –

VERONICA

No. Let's look. After all, they're *only* photographs.

Philip opens the portfolio and takes out some photographs.

PHILIP

(looking at the first few in mock horror:)

Oh my God!... Oh my God!!... Oh my God!!!

These are the most disgusting pictures of tulips I've ever seen.

VERONICA

Tulips?

MALLORY

Didn't you know? North has been acclaimed for his black-and-white studies of flowers.

ZEKE

(to Harvey:)

I also do portraits if you'd ever like to pose for me.

HARVEY

Thanks, but I'll pass.

MALLORY

Don't be so quick. North is considered one of the most brilliant portrait photographers of the last decade.

ZEKE

Thank you, ma'am.

HARVEY

But your exhibit that was cancelled, an exhibit to be subsidized with government money, that wasn't all pretty little flowers and portraits, was it?

PHILIP

Oh, I think I've found the naughty ones...  
I've never seen a man's penis covered  
with a banana skin before

HARVEY

And perhaps, Mr. North, you can explain to us the purpose of such a photograph.

ZEKE

I hate to throw out a good banana skin.

\* \* \*