

# THE VICTROLA

by Sharon Reynolds & Anna Deavers

Mouse shifted from foot to foot, nervous. His friend's eyes were wide with the excitement of his find. Though Catherine looked a bit skeptical, Vincent chuckled, noting her expression.

"You *'found'* this, Mouse?" Vincent asked.

"Yeah," the blonde-haired young man replied. His crooked smile widening. " *'Did'* find!" He defended himself to Catherine's look. "Really!"

"You're absolutely sure about that," Catherine chided.

"Sure," Mouse nodded vigorously. "Trash." He looked at the scratched and battered cabinet that stood nearly as tall as himself. "Pretty... huh," he smiled.

"Very pretty," Catherine agreed.

"Broken," Mouse lamented. "Won't go... Tried."

"Perhaps...." Vincent offered. "It works in a way you don't understand."

Catherine's eyes lit with an idea. For a moment, she stood and studied the metal stump sticking out of one side of the dark wood. "It looks like an old Victrola," she announced.

"A Victrola?" Vincent puzzled.

"Ah... a record player," Catherine grinned.

"Not just," Mouse put in. A mischievous grin spreading across his boyish face. "Look." From behind his back, he pulled a large black disk. This he handed to Catherine. It was heavy in her hands.

Carefully she examined the one-sided grooves, the black almost faded beyond reading label in its center.

"Where did you get this?"

"In box," Mouse laughed. "Lots more but...."

"But...." echoed Vincent.

"Mostly broke."

"Were there any more like this one?" Catherine continued. "Ones that aren't broken?" Her green eyes had become very curious. Vincent leaned up against his chamber wall. One foot up against it, one on the floor, watching them contentedly.

"Are they of any value, Catherine?" he asked, in his soft gravel filled baritone.

Catherine shrugged. "It depends on which ones are still intact."

"I'll go see," Mouse said, tripping over the words and his feet to race from the chamber. Vincent shook his long tawny mane chuckling. Mouse was still very much the child.

"Vincent, have you ever heard a Victrola before?" Catherine asked as she carefully ran her hands over the front of the cabinet. Though there was a filigree of carvings halfway up its length, there didn't seem to be

any knob she could find to open it. She pressed on. At last, under a high relief carved unicorn, her long fingers brushed a clasp. She pushed harder on the metal button until she heard a sharp click.

To Vincent she explained. "My nanny used to have one of these. It was an antique passed down in her family. There were special times when she would take me to her apartment and we would giggle, eat small cakes and play old records. I got quite good at operating it."

"You... do well in all that you do... Catherine."

She grinned, blushing profusely at the compliment.

"There." Carefully she pulled the tall door open. Vincent moved closer to see what might be inside. His curiosity getting the better of him. "More records," Catherine announced happily.

"So I see."

Inside, on four well built shelves, sat four of the 78 rpm records. Some still in their faded, mold-shrouded covers. Catherine pulled the top stack out and blew off the dust at Vincent who sneezed loudly. She giggled, her face pink. "Sorry," she giggled again.

Vincent only looked at her. A smile slipping across his cleft mouth.

Sitting the records on the stone floor, Catherine knelt down and began to go through them. Vincent watched as her face changed with each title she picked up. Quietly, he crossed the room and sat down in one of his chairs. Still eyeing her.

"You won't believe some of these titles!" Catherine laughed. "Listen. '*The Blue Danube Waltz, Comin' Through the Rye,*' and this one...." She held it up in front of her. " '*Hearts and Flowers!*'" She laughed at his puzzled look. "Don't tell me you haven't heard that one."

Vincent's brow furrowed as much as it could in consternation. "I don't recall that title."

He was still puzzled at her, but enjoying the pleasure this exploration was bringing her. Catherine went back over to the cabinet. Another snap and the top came back.

"This is incredible!"

Setting the arm to keep the top from falling back down, Catherine began to examine the capped metal walls. From one she drew out a small needle. It reminded Vincent of one of Sarah's sewing machine needles, but it was thicker. From a drawer just beneath the turntable, Catherine pulled a handle that was bent at an odd angle. He watched in silence, washed by Catherine's joy through their bond. The handle clicked securely over the metal stump.

Picking up the playing disk and its metal arm, she inserted the needle into the hole and tightened the small screw. Once done, Catherine checked to make sure the disk was on tight enough.

"Catherine?" Vincent questioned as a puzzled look crossed her face.

"I don't know," she sighed. "This piece looks pretty rickety. It might work, it might not."

"We.... '*must*' try," he said smiling, humoring her. He came closer to check on what she had done.

Gently, Catherine dusted off the worn green felt pad on the turntable and set the record onto the spindle. grooved side up. She reached down to turn the crank, but found that it held fast.

"Oh," she lamented. "That's probably rusted through. That's why it was thrown out."

"Here," Vincent offered. "Let me help." His large hair-covered hand gripped the crank firmly. One tug and a loud crunch later, the crank was free. He turned it eight times around and stopped as Catherine had directed. Vincent watched as she pressed a silver metal lever to one side. To his amazement the turntable

began to move. It went faster and faster, building up to playing speed.

Catherine set the needle on the record's edge and watched in silence, as the arm moved into the first of the grooves. Music filled Vincent's chamber. Catherine threw her arms around his neck, laughing.

"We did it!" she cried.

Suddenly, the orchestra music became 'very' loud. Vincent pulled away, holding his ears as Catherine dived for the player arm. The music died abruptly. "Are you all right?" she worried.

Tears laced Vincent's eyelashes. "I... will be." He tried to laugh.

The sound of feet echoed down the tunnel. A heartbeat later Mouse burst into the room. "Works good! Better than good!" he said happily.

" 'What' in the name of 'Heaven' is 'going on' here!" Father's voice drifted down from the library arch above them. Vincent looked up at him. His father was standing angrily on the stone platform between his metal ladder entrance and the office chamber's upper deck.

"Father....I...."

"Oops," Catherine chuckled under her breath. In Vincent's ear she whispered. "I had forgotten how loud those were." She looked up at Father. "Mouse found it."

Father did not look at all pleased. "You frightened me half to death!" he complained.

"Catherine...." Mouse beamed. "Fixed it!"

"So I heard," Father scowled. "Do you think you could find a way.... to tone it 'down' a bit?"

Vincent smiled at the slightly built woman next to him. Mouse's face had taken on the look of a puppy who had just been caught where he shouldn't have been.

"Needs work." Mouse said almost to himself, looking up at Father.

"Why don't you take it to your chamber, Mouse," Catherine suggested.

"That would be a great help," Father agreed. "Or even further...." He was clearly bothered, but only Vincent's keen eyesight picked up on the wet tea stain down the front of Father's tunic coat.

"How far?" Mouse asked Vincent. Watching Father return to the library area.

"How about the Great Hall?" Catherine added.

"Yeah," Mouse agreed excitedly. "Good place. Away from rest. Wind. Music. Wind. Won't bother!" He grinned at Vincent. "Till can fix it."

They gathered the records and shut the cabinet. It was not heavy for Vincent, but its awkward size made it a burden to carry. At last they made the stairs in the Cave of the Winds. Mouse stood with Catherine and the Victrola, as Vincent opened the massive doors.

Safely inside, Vincent set it down again, and closed the doors against the howling winds. Mouse lit the candles in a candelabrum on the single table that was set up there.

"Get more records," he said, dashing through the kitchen entrance in the back.

Catherine reset the Victrola and stuffed part of the echo chamber with one of the woolen sweaters that Vincent had thought to bring with them. Her eyes lit with happiness as he came to her. The strains of the '*Blue Danube Waltz*' just beginning. This time at a tolerable volume.

Hands entwined as they began to move together. Only their shadows across one wall to mark the moment.

