

She let him in at the back door that night, but in the living room the scene was the same. The fire was burning, she made him a drink, and in her company he felt as if he had just worked his shoulders free of a heavy pack. She was coy, in and out of his arms, tickling him and then tripping across the room to look at herself in the mirror. "I want my favor first," she said.

Visceral details, emotional details, and physical positioning of characters sets the scene.

Dialogue in negotiation mode

"What is it?"  
 "Guess."  
 "I can't give you money. I'm not rich, you know."  
 "Oh, I wouldn't think of taking money," She was indignant.  
 "Then what is it?"  
 "Something you wear."  
 "But my watch is worthless, my cuff links are brass."  
 "Something else."  
 "But what?"  
 "I won't tell you unless you promise to give it to me."  
 He pushed her away from him then, knowing that he could easily be made a fool of. "I can't make a promise unless I know what it is you want."  
 "It's something very small."  
 "How small?"  
 "Tiny. Weeny."  
 "Please tell me what it is." Then he seized her in his arms, and this was the moment he felt most like himself: solemn, virile, wise, and imperturbable.  
 "I won't tell you unless you promise."  
 "But I can't promise."  
 "Then go away," she said. "Go away and never, never, come back."

She was too childish to give the command much force, and yet it was not wasted on him. Could he go back to his own house, empty but for his wife, who would be grinding her ax? Go there and wait until time and chance turned up another friend?

Dramatic pause

Dialogue turns into discovery

"Please tell me."  
 "Promise."  
 "I promise."  
 "I want," she said, "a key to your bomb shelter."

The demand struck at him like a sledge-hammer blow, and suddenly he felt in all his parts the enormous weight of chagrin. All his gentle speculations on her person--the mill-town girl ruling her chickens--backfired bitterly. This must have been on her mind from the beginning, when she first lit the fire, lost her checkbook, and gave him a drink. The demand abraded his lust, but only for a moment, for now she was back in his arms, marching her fingers up and down his rib cage, saying, "Creepy, creepy, creepy mouse, come to live in Charlie's house." His need for her was crippling; it seemed like a cruel blow at the back of his knees. And yet in some chamber of his thick head he could see the foolishness and obsolescence of his hankering skin. But how could he reform his bone and muscle to suit this new world; instruct his meandering and greedy flesh in politics, geography, holocausts, and cataclysms? Her front was round, fragrant, and soft, and he took the key off its ring--a piece of metal one and one-half inches long, warmed by the warmth of his hands, a genuine talisman of salvation, a defense against the end of the world--and dropped it into the neck of her dress.

He reflects on the situation and takes inventory of his feelings

He makes a decision

The Pasterns' bomb shelter had been complete that spring. They would have liked to keep it a secret; would have liked at least to soft-pedal its existence; but the trucks and bulldozers going in and out of their driveway had informed everyone. It had cost thirty-two thousand dollars, and it had two chemical toilets, an oxygen supply, and a library, compiled by a Columbia professor, consisting of books meant to inspire hopefulness, humor, and tranquillity...

The next section gives us a wider context - some background to support the foreground of the scene

-"The Brigadier and the Golf Widow," John Cheever