



THE VESTAL VIRGIN ROOM

C. W. Smith. Atheneum, \$13.95 ISBN 0-689-11494-X

Two smalltime entertainers—a husband-and-wife team from St. Louis—whose turf is a string of Holiday Inns finally have a chance to make it, to play Vegas in the Vestal Virgin Room on New Year's Eve. Don's a wiseacre and Dottie's a wonderfully plump, corn-fed woman whose not-great voice still manages to send shivers up Don's spine. Indeed, their marriage appears to be blessed with a bounty of humor and good sex. But what belies their fun and their Bacharach love songs is the anguish each of them feels over the loss of their little daughter few years back. Though they are unable to discuss their pain, it presages the highs and, more recently, the lows in their relationship. For Don, it causes him to focus blindly (and selfishly) on Vegas, and it ultimately leads Dottie to carve out a wedge of independence from her mate. Smith's affection for these simple people is contagious and wholly believable.

That Don and Dottie manage to ride out the turbulence in their marriage and emerge as survivors makes this a lovely and tender book. [September 26]

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