

PARIS IN THE SPRING

A PLAY

by

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THE DINING ROOM OF A MODEST TWO-UP, TWO DOWN TERRACE, ABOUT 1970. TABLE, CHAIRS, SIDEBOARD. A DOOR LEADS TO THE KITCHEN, AND THERE IS ALSO A SERVING HATCH. ANOTHER DOOR LEADS TO THE REST OF THE HOUSE. KITTY IS SITTING AT THE TABLE IN HER COAT AND HAT. A KEY TURNS IN A LOCK AND A FRONT DOOR OPENS. SOME QUIET TRAFFIC NOISE. THE DOOR SHUTS.

KITTY: Oooh-oo! Violet? It's me, Kitty.

VIOLET: (OFF) Oh.

KITTY: I let myself in.

VIOLET COMES IN.

VIOLET: Yes.

KITTY: I put the kettle on. Seeing as you weren't here to do it. You don't mind. (BEAT) It's boiled.

VIOLET: I'll just hang my coat up.

SHE TAKES OFF HER COAT AND GOES OUT TO HANG IT UP. SHE THEN COMES BACK THROUGH AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN, WHERE WE HEAR HER THROUGH THE HATCH, MAKING TEA.

KITTY: Been out?

VIOLET: (OFF) Yes.

KITTY: Oh. I thought you'd be in. Not your usual time to be out.

VIOLET: (OFF) No.

KITTY: Are you going to be making a habit of it?

VIOLET: (OFF) Of what?

KITTY: Of going out at this time. Is it a new time for you to be going out?

VIOLET: (OFF) No.

KITTY: Otherwise, if it is, I won't come.

VIOLET: (OFF) It's not.

KITTY: Just a one off, then?

VIOLET: (OFF) I expect so.

VIOLET ENTERS AND PUTS DOWN A TEA TRAY.

VIOLET: There.

KITTY: Nothing wrong?

VIOLET: No. Why?

KITTY: I just thought. I said to myself, when you weren't in, I said, 'That's not like Violet, to be out at this time.' He's alright?

VIOLET: Stan?

KITTY: Alright, is he?

VIOLET: Why shouldn't he be?

KITTY: No reason.

VIOLET: Stanley's fine.

KITTY: Oh, good.

VIOLET POURS THE TEA.

KITTY: It's alright? Me being here? It's alright?

VIOLET: Of course it is. It's always a pleasure to see you.

KITTY: I don't like to assume.

VIOLET: You're not.

KITTY: We always have a cup of tea at this time.

VIOLET: Well, not quite always.

KITTY: But when we do, it's always at this time. I look forward to it. It's a bright spot in my days. Gives me something to look forward to. (BEAT) That's why I was surprised when you weren't in .

VIOLET: I'm here now.

KITTY DRINKS.

KITTY: Mmm. Lovely. You have a way with tea, Violet.

VIOLET: Do take your coat off, Kitty.

KITTY: Oh, I'm not stopping. Just a quick cup.

VIOLET: You're very welcome.

KITTY: I've got a biscuit here. Would you like a biscuit?

VIOLET: That would be very nice.

KITTY RUMMAGES IN HER HANDBAG AND TAKES OUT A BISCUIT.

KITTY: There.

VIOLET: Are you not having one?

KITTY: I don't like these ones.

VIOLET: Oh.

KITTY: Somewhere interesting, was it?

VIOLET: What?

KITTY: Where you went.

VIOLET: I went to Mr Godbold's.

KITTY: At this time?

VIOLET: I don't know where today went. Here I was, getting on with things and then suddenly, there it was, middle of the afternoon and I hadn't a bit of meat in the house. So I ran down to Mr Godbold's. Got a nice bit of pork. He likes his meat, Stan. Must have his bit of meat.

KITTY: He likes his meat.

VIOLET: Oh, he does.

KITTY: I like a man who likes his bit of meat. I don't know what the world's coming to with all these vegetarians around. It ain't natural. I like my vegetables, I do, but nothing but? I should say not. If God had wanted us only to eat vegetables, he wouldn't have give us teeth. Vegetarians, because their teeth get no proper exercise, they go all rubbery and soft, till they can only have soup. And they have permanent diarrhoea.

VIOLET: Kitty!

KITTY: I'm just telling you what I've heard, that's all.

VIOLET: Where did you hear something like that?

KITTY: It was on Nationwide.

VIOLET: It never was!

KITTY: It was, I saw it.

VIOLET: I never saw it. We watch it every night, Stan and me.

KITTY: You must have missed one.

VIOLET: Every night.

KITTY: Maybe you went out at a funny time again.

VIOLET: (BEAT) Mind you, prices now, we might all have to eat just veg. Meat's got so dear. You can only get a little bit. We might as well still have rationing.

KITTY: Mr Godbold put up his prices again, has he?

VIOLET: It's not Mr Godbold's fault. Prices have gone up.

KITTY: He puts his thumb on the scales.

VIOLET: I've never seen him.

KITTY: You're too trusting, that's your problem.

VIOLET: I can't believe he'd do that.

KITTY: Well, he's a Jew, isn't he?

VIOLET: No!

KITTY: That's what I've heard.

VIOLET: Mr Godbold?

KITTY: Mr Goldberg. Apparently, he came over in the last war, like the rest of them, and changed his name to make himself sound more white. (BEAT) That's why he puts his thumb on the scales.

VIOLET: I'm sure he doesn't.

KITTY: I'm not saying I blame him, Violet. It's part of their culture.

VIOLET: I don't think he can be a Jew.

KITTY: I'm just telling you what I've heard.

VIOLET: He sells pork.

KITTY: So?

VIOLET: Well, they're not allowed it, Jews. They think it's unclean.

KITTY: No wonder he sells it, then.

VIOLET: That doesn't make any sense.

KITTY: Have you ever seen Mr Godbold eat any pork?

VIOLET: No.

KITTY: There you go then.

VIOLET: I don't think I've ever seen him eat anything.

KITTY: (BEAT) Are you going to have that biscuit?

VIOLET: I don't think I am, Kitty. I don't really fancy it.

KITTY: Don't let's waste it.

KITTY TAKES THE BISCUIT AND PUTS IT BACK
IN HER HANDBAG.

VIOLET: Another cup.

KITTY: Oh well. Just a quick one. I'm not stopping. I might walk up to Mr Godbold's myself, when I'm done here. Get myself a nice little bit of something for tonight. You've made me feel hungry.

VIOLET: He'll be closed now. Four o'clock.

KITTY: Oh. Oh well. I expect I'll have something out of a tin, then. They do some quite good tins nowadays. Quite tasty. And it's such an effort. Cooking. When you're on your own. What you thinking of doing with Stan's bit of pork?

VIOLET: I was going to do a casserole -

KITTY: I do enjoy a casserole.

VIOLET: - but I don't think I've got time now. Left it a bit late.

KITTY: They even do casserole in tins now. Dumplings and all. You doing dumplings?

VIOLET: I've just said.

KITTY: I bet Stan likes casserole.

VIOLET: Whether he does or he doesn't, he's not getting one tonight.

KITTY: What you going to do, then?

VIOLET: I shall just fry it up with an onion. Bit o
mashed, greens a a jug of gravy.

KITTY: Very tempting. You couldn't put that in a tin.
Some things you can't. A casserole, yes. You
can't go far wrong with casserole. Even in a
factory. (PAUSE) What about afters.

VIOLET: He's not much of a one for afters. Depends if
he's had a beer or not. I might. Bit of
semolina and jam. Something quick.

KITTY: I love my afters. I never bother on my own.
Can't be fussed with it. (BEAT) I used to love
semolina.

VIOLET: Would you like to stay on for your tea, Kitty?
I can make what I've got stretch, I'm sure.

KITTY: I don't want to impose.

VIOLET: You're not imposing. I wouldn't have asked you
otherwise.

KITTY: Well, if you're sure.

VIOLET: I can't sit here eating a nice bit of pork,
knowing you're next door eating out of a tin.

KITTY: I don't mind. I'm used to it.

VIOLET: I do.

KITTY: But I had my tea here last night. And Sunday
dinner. You'll think I'm taking advantage.

VIOLET: It's no trouble.

KITTY: What'll Stan say?

VIOLET: He'll grumble all night long whether you're here or not.

KITTY: I don't want to be the cause of any trouble.

VIOLET: You'll just be on your own over there, and I might as well be.

KITTY: You've got Stan.

VIOLET: (BEAT) Can you keep a secret?

KITTY: I've never been known to.

VIOLET: He's funny with me.

KITTY: How do you mean, funny?

VIOLET: Just funny. I don't think he likes me very much.

KITTY: Course he does.

VIOLET: He likes having me around. Someone to listen to him. But I don't think he likes me very much as a person.

KITTY: You don't know how lucky you are.

VIOLET: I don't suppose I do.

KITTY: Someone to provide for you. Talk to.

VIOLET: You'll think me wicked for saying this, but sometimes I worry that when I peg out I'll go straight to hell and have to spend all eternity listening to Stan going on about the Tories and the Irish.

KITTY: You're never going to hell.

VIOLET: I expect I am.

KITTY: What have you ever done? To go to hell for?

VIOLET: Well, I don't believe in it. I should think that puts me top of the list.

KITTY: How long?

VIOLET: How long what?

KITTY: Has Stan been funny?

VIOLET: He always has been. I think he's just getting worse as he gets older. I suppose all men get worse as they get older.

KITTY: I wouldn't know.

VIOLET: No. (PAUSE) You know how sometimes you meet a couple and you think to yourself, 'How on earth did they end up together?' I feel that way sometimes about me and Stan.

KITTY STARTS TO CRY GENTLY.

VIOLET: Kitty! Whatever's the matter?

KITTY: Today is my Ronnie's seventieth.

VIOLET: Oh Kitty, how thoughtless. (SHE GIVES KITTY A TISSUE.) Here. Have a good blow. What must you think of me? You poor dear.

KITTY: Don't be nice to me, Violet. You'll only make me worse.

VIOLET: I'll pop the kettle back on. We'll have another cup of tea.

KITTY: I don't think I could. I'm all full up with tea.

VIOLET: Alright, dear.

KITTY: (BEAT) I don't mind a glass of stout, if you've got one.

VIOLET: On this occasion, I don't suppose even Stan would begrudge you a glass of stout. I'm not sure that I won't join you. Now, I need to go and get chopping. He'll be home demanding his tea. You can shout at me through the hatch.

VIOLET GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. WE HEAR A BOTTLE BEING OPENED AND POURED. UNDER THE FOLLOWING WE HEAR THE SOUND OF CHOPPING AND THEN FRYING.

KITTY: He was so handsome, when he was young.

VIOLET: (OFF) Ronnie?

KITTY: Like a film star.

VIOLET: (OFF) Douglas Fairbanks?

KITTY: That's right. How d'you guess?

VIOLET: (OFF) I think you might have mentioned it before.

KITTY: So handsome. Dashing.

VIOLET LOOKS THROUGH THE HATCH. SHE HAS TWO SMALL GLASSES OF STOUT.

VIOLET: Here's your stout, dear. Good health, and Happy Birthday, Ronnie.

KITTY: Happy Birthday, Ronnie. (SHE WEEPS AGAIN.)

VIOLET: You know, Stan looked like a film star, in his younger days.

KITTY: Did he?

VIOLET: Yeah. Lon Chaney.

KITTY: Ooh, don't be wicked.

VIOLET: At least it made you smile. It's nice to see you smile.

KITTY: You're being nice again.

VIOLET: Sorry dear. I'll try not to be. (SHE STARTS SNIFFING.)

KITTY: What's wrong, Violet.

VIOLET: (TURNING AWAY.) Onions.

WE HEAR WATER BEING Poured INTO A SAUCEPAN, AND SOME CLATTERING.

VIOLET: (OFF) That's the spuds on. Should be ready by the time His Lord and Master gets in.

KITTY: What's he do, I wonder, all day long?

VIOLET COMES BACK IN.

VIOLET: I don't know. And as long as he's out from under my feet, I don't care to.

KITTY: You don't suppose he's got a fancy woman?

VIOLET: Who'd take a shine to him? The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

KITTY: Violet!

VIOLET: I expect he spends all day at the Legion. Talking a lot of old rubbish with the other old codgers.

KITTY: What do they find to talk about, day after day? (PAUSE) Do you think my Ronnie'd be up there now? Celebrating?

VIOLET: Maybe he would.

KITTY: Makes me feel funny to think about it. I've tried to imagine what he'd be like as an old man, but I can't. He was only a boy.

VIOLET: I know.

KITTY: There was never anyone else, you know.

VIOLET: No.

KITTY: Never.

VIOLET: I know.

KITTY: From the first moment we were sat next to each other at St John's Infants, we knew. Five years old.

VIOLET: Yes.

KITTY: Of course, he was nearer six. He seemed so grown-up. All the girls admired him. I couldn't believe he even looked at me. Handsomeist boy in the school, even at that age. I came home from school and announced to my mother that I was getting married at the weekend.

VIOLET: 'Scuse me a mo.

SHE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN, AND WE HEAR THE SOUND OF GENTLE FRYING.

KITTY: You never told me. How did you meet Stanley?

VIOLET: (OFF) I didn't really.

KITTY: You must've.

VIOLET: (OFF) I wish I could say he'd saved me from drowning, or a runaway horse or something, but he was just always there. I'm not even exactly sure how we knew him. Friend of the family, I suppose.

KITTY: But he must have romanced you. In his way.

VIOLET: (LOOKING THROUGH THE HATCH.) In his way, maybe. Nobody else had shown any interest, and when the war came, my dad said, 'Looks as though young men are going to be in short supply, so you might as well. At least you'll come out of it with a widow's pension, if nothing else.' Not very romantic, is it?

KITTY: At least you've never been lonely.

VIOLET: (OFF) Not in the way you mean.

KITTY: (PAUSE.) I still talk to him. Every day.

VIOLET: Do you? I don't with Stan.

KITTY: Ask his advice. Tell him my day. (PAUSE.) I sometimes wonder where he is.

VIOLET COMES BACK IN.

VIOLET: Kitty!

KITTY: I know you say you don't believe in hell, but what about heaven?

VIOLET: Heaven?

KITTY: My Ronnie didn't, either. It used to make him so cross, the whole thing. And when he went to France, well, some of the things he wrote about God would've made you blush.

VIOLET: I know it must be a help to you.

KITTY: It's not a help. I have to believe in it. Fifty years I've waited to see him again. I can't let myself think they've been wasted.

VIOLET: No.

KITTY: Will he have aged, do you think?

VIOLET: Will he have aged?

KITTY: Will he still look like he did at nineteen? And what about me? If he's still a lad of nineteen, and I'm me, he'll think I'm his granny. Do you think I might go back to eighteen?

VIOLET: I don't know, Kitty.

KITTY: Well, you don't believe in it. Why am I asking you? You're probably sat there thinking, 'Silly old fool.' But I lie awake thinking about it. (BEAT) What if he's still got his wounds?

VIOLET: I'm sorry, Kitty. I don't know what to say.

SHE GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN AND WE HEAR HER FINISHING THE COOKING, UNDER THE FOLLOWING.

KITTY: I suppose I am silly. But I do want to see him again. I can remember what he smelled like. Isn't that funny? But I just can't remember his voice, try as I might. (PAUSE.) You alright, Violet? Is it the onions again?

VIOLET: (OFF) I think it must be.

KITTY: My Ronnie used to eat onions like there was no tomorrow. I mean..you know what I mean.

VIOLET: (OFF) You know, it's funny, but I don't think I'd ever call him 'my Stan'. Doesn't sound right, somehow. 'My Stan.' No. (PAUSE) He went to Buckingham Palace once.

KITTY: Stan did?

VIOLET: (LOOKING THROUGH THE HATCH.) They won an award. Best kept municipal gardens of the year. Him and some of the other senior gardeners got invited to a party. See the Queen's garden.

KITTY: Not you?

VIOLET: I could've gone. He didn't tell me.

KITTY: No!

VIOLET: First I knew it was all over the Gazette. Big picture of them, stood there pleased as punch. All the wives. Just not me.

KITTY: Violet! How awful.

VIOLET: I never mentioned it. He took to leaving the paper lying around where he knew I'd see it. But I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction.

KITTY: Have you never said?

VIOLET: Never. And I don't mean to. (GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.) It's going to spoil now. I rush around to get his tea done for the time he says and he doesn't come in. The amount of gas I must use up, keeping his meals warm. (POPS HER HEAD THROUGH THE HATCH.) Let's have another bottle.

KITTY: Ooh no. I shall be tiddly.

VIOLET: Good. So shall I. Not your Ronnie's seventieth every day, is it?

KITTY: No.

VIOLET COMES OUT WITH ANOTHER BOTTLE.

VIOLET: I should like to have met Ronnie.

KITTY: You'd have liked him.

VIOLET: I'm sure I would.

KITTY: He was a good man. Kind.

VIOLET: Here you are. Give us your glass.

VIOLET REFILLS THEIR GLASSES.

KITTY: I was lucky to have him. Even for the short time I did.

VIOLET: You were. (PAUSE.) Stan's not a bad man. He's just..given the choice, I don't think he's the man I'd have chosen. I daresay I'm not the woman of his dreams, either.

KITTY: I like him Violet. He makes me laugh.

VIOLET: It's not so funny being on the receiving end for fifty years.

KITTY: I suppose.

VIOLET: Still. Cheers.

KITTY: Cheers.

VIOLET: If I was just his housekeeper, I don't think I'd mind so much. At least I'd be getting paid for my trouble. He hasn't the first idea what I do. Not the first idea. I'll tell you what. Heaven and hell be buggered..

KITTY: Violet!

VIOLET: I wouldn't half mind coming back as a ghost. See him try and run this house without me. That would be funny. (PAUSE.) Honestly, hark at me. Going on. This is your Ronnie's day.

KITTY: (PAUSE.) I've been thinking about going to him.

VIOLET: Kitty! You mustn't! You mustn't think about such things.

KITTY: In France, I mean.

VIOLET: Oh.

KITTY: You can get a coach. I know where he is. I've known a long while. Fifty years on his own in a foreign land, and no-one's ever been. His Mum and dad never did, and I'm all he's got. (SHE WEEPS.)

VIOLET: Oh, Kitty. You should. You really should.

KITTY: I'd like to. Be nice to see where he is. Take him some yellow roses. They were his favourites.

VIOLET: They're mine, too.

KITTY: You could come with me.

VIOLET: Me! Oh no, I couldn't.

KITTY: I don't know I'd be up to it on my own. There's no one else I'd even think of asking.

VIOLET: (SNIFFING.) Now you really have got me going. I don't know what to say. But what about Stan? How long's it for?

KITTY: A week, there and back.

VIOLET: A whole week! He'd never manage a weekend. He can't cook.

KITTY: He can have some of my tins.

VIOLET: (LAUGHS.) I don't know. I don't know what he'd say.

KITTY: It was his idea.

VIOLET: Stan's?

KITTY: Well, he told me about the coach. Saw a thing about it in the Legion. Said I ought to think about it.

VIOLET: Well I never.

KITTY: It was a nice thought, wasn't it?

VIOLET: Well I never. And he said i should go along?

KITTY: Not exactly, in so many words. But he did say i shouldn't do it on my own.

VIOLET: I didn't think he had it in him to surprise me anymore. I really didn't. (PAUSE.) I wonder if he's finally gone and fallen in the canal.

WE HEAR A KEY IN THE FRONT DOOR.

KITTY: I think that's him now.