

Tea Time in Limbo

Cast: MEG

MERYL

Setting: A kitchen. A stove. A kettle.

[Lights up. A kitchen. Kettle boiling. Two women. Meryl at the stove. Tableau.]

MERYL: Oo-err.

MEG: Smells lovely

MERYL: Meg! I didn't see you sitting there.

MEG: I've been here all the time.

MERYL: What smells?

MEG: No, I mean the scones.

MERYL: Ahh.

[Pause. Meg looks at the scones. Clock ticks.]

MEG: Do you like a bit 'v butter then?

MERYL: What's that?

MEG: No butter.

MERYL: The arteries, dear.

MEG: I am sorry.

MERYL: The varicose veins.

MEG: Arteries, did you say?

MERYL: No, no, veins Meg, veins.

MEG: Onions?

MERYL: As good for the goose as the gazunder...

MEG: The what?

MERYL: Never mind...Shall I put the kettle on?

[Pause.]

MEG: Put the kettle on will you love?

[Pause. Stillness. Clock ticks.]

MERYL: Where is the kettle?

MEG: You'll recognise it when you see it.

MERYL: It was here a moment ago.

MEG: There. Over there! It's on. Who put it there?

MERYL: Where?

MEG: There. On the stove. Are you blind?

MERYL: Is that what you call it?

MEG: The hob.

MERYL: The element.

MEG: The Cistercian.

MERYL: I suppose I did.

[Pause. Meg fetches tea cups. Meg rises out of her chair, then sits again exhausted.]

MEG: I don't know why I said Cistercian just then. I must have been thinking of something else.

[Pause.]

It just slipped out.

MERYL: I don't want to know about it.

MEG: I know, I know...

[Pause.]

MERYL: What?

MEG: Beg yours?

MERYL: You know what I mean.

MEG: No, I don't.

MERYL: What do you know?...Quickly, quickly.

MEG: I never discuss my personal opinions.

MERYL: Never?

MEG: Well hardly ever.

[Pause. Meg looks for a way out.]

MERYL: How's Ray?

MEG: Who?

MERYL: Ray. Your husband, Ray.

MEG: My God, you ask how, I ask where?

MERYL: Is he missing then?

MEG: My little ray of sunshine...

MERYL: Sun shines brightest.

MEG: When?

MERYL: When what?

MEG: What do you mean? When does the sun shine
 brightest?

MERYL: Just before dawn, I heard.

MEG: The sun shines brightest just before the dawn?
 You're having me on, you really are.

MERYL: I'm not...Another cuppa? have another cuppa.

MEG: You're pulling my leg.

MERYL: I wouldn't do that -

MEG: You are.

MERYL: unless invited -

MEG: You can't pull the wool over my eyes.

MERYL: As if I would want to.
*[Pause. Meryl sits. Meg rises. Meryl rises. Meg sits. Back and
forth.]*

MEG: I have the distinct feeling that my leg is being pulled.

MERYL: Perhaps just a little.

MEG: That's all right then.
[Pause. Kettle whistles furiously. They stare at it.]

MERYL: I'm being ironical...So nice to have a little chat.

MEG: A proverb.

MERYL: A bit of a cliché.

MEG: Over a pot.

MERYL: Discussing the ins and outs.

MEG: Various possibilities.

MERYL: My God! Where's the - what's it called? - where's the
 kettle gone? I've lost the word for kettle again, where did I
 put it? This is the end, Den'll kill me if I've lost another
 word, kill me I tell you, it's...

MEG: It's all right dear, there it is.

MERYL: Where?

MEG: It's on.

[Pause. They look at the kettle. Meg holds one of the tea cups up to the light.]

MERYL: Thank cripey for that...Too much to hope for – I'm always losing the –

MEG: Milk?

MERYL: Just a dollop.

[Meryl fetches the milk from the fridge. Sniffs it. Recoils. Stares at it.]

It's curdled. Gorn orf. Never mind. There's more in the – in the – what's that object?

MEG: Fridge?

MERYL: That's it.

MEG: Good lass.

[She returns the milk to the fridge. Slams it shut.]

MERYL: Sugar or shit?

MEG: I beg your pardon?

MERYL: Something Den says.

MEG: He says that?

MERYL: Not very often.

MEG: It's a handy saying all the same.

[Pause. They both stare into space. Wind.]

MERYL: I often think about nothing at all.

MEG: Mmm...

MERYL: It's a vacuum.

MEG: Lovely china Meryl, it's just lovely.

MERYL: A wedding present.

MEG: Love the rabbits.

MERYL: Forget whose wedding it was now.

MEG: Never mind love, it's the memory.

MERYL: The enzymes.

MEG: The addling of the grey matter.

MERYL: The cruelty.

MEG: The twilight years.

MERYL: You do go on.

MEG: The trials and tributaries.
 [Pause.]
 Think I will have a little sugar.
 [Pause.]
 Given the state of the milk.
 [Pause.]
 Sugar or shit, hey?
 [Pause.]
 Ha ha.
 [Pause.]
 Cistercians.
 [Pause.]
 Nice cups but. Chunky. Nice...Tell me Meryl, what is your
 stance on the predilection for putting the milk in first or
 afterwards?

MERYL: After what?

MEG: After you've poured.

MERYL: Sorry, I was back in the past. I thought you might have
 meant after you'd drunk it.

MEG: No no no...
 [Pause.]
 That'd be silly.

MERYL: Well Meg, I have formed no opinion on the matter of milk
 whatsoever, apart from the usual.

MEG: The usual?

MERYL: Opinion.

MEG: Did you say onion?

MERYL: Ear of the beholder.

MEG: I'm a Wedgwood girl myself...Her Highness over
 the road doesn't put the milk in first.
 [They both sniff disdainfully.]

MERYL: Go on...

MEG: Well hardly ever...

[Pause. Meryl rises, fetches the kettle off the stove, brings it to the table.]

It's a philosophical objection.

[Pause.]

She refuses. I think her curlers are too tight. The people she has in and out of there. All hours of the day and night. It's a disgrace. I think she's up to something. Somebody ought to do something about it.

MERYL: Calm down Meg. It's only a little milk.

[She looks at the saucepan.]

Evaporated.

MEG: Poor folk the like of us dear, real people, always put the milk in first.

MERYL: Do we?

MEG: It's a sign, see?

MERYL: Is it?

MEG: An anthropological signifier.

MERYL: I thought it had to do with the taste.

MEG: Bugger the taste.

MERYL: Ah.

[Pause. She pours water pours into the pot.]

Why's that?

MEG: The milk of course - Don't forget to twirl it three times.

MERYL: I won't.

MEG: Can't stand to drink it unless the pot has been twirled three times. Rotated in an anti-clockwise orbit.

MERYL: I won't for God's sake. Why the milk? Speak English will you? You'll drive me bonkers with your prattling.

MEG: The milk, see, cools the hot.

[Pause.]

The hot water.

[Pause.]

To the requisite temperature.

[Pause.]

The spoon has to be able to stand up in it. Posh nobbs on the other hand like Her Highness over the road –

[They both sniff disdainfully.]

care little for such conventions. They refuse to put the milk in first, because they are fully confident of the ability of their cups to withstand the temperature of the –

MERYL: Boiling water!

MEG: Exactly. Which, if poured into a poor person's cup of inferior quality will burst the thing into –

MERYL: Smithereens!

MEG: Yes. Fucking smithereens, if you must know.

MERYL: Ah...I always thought it was the other way around.

MEG: No no no.

[Meryl twirls the pot three times.]

MERYL: One, two, er, three...And one for luck.

MEG: No no no.

MERYL: Here goes.

[Meryl pours.]

MEG: Use the strainer for God's sake!

MERYL: Sorry.

[Meryl uses the strainer. Tea cup shatters.]

MEG: Oh dear. Cheap, see.

MERYL: Never mind, plenty more fish in the cake shop.

MEG: But the last bunny.

MERYL: Are you casting Cistercians towards my crockery?

MEG: No no no. It's Her over the road what does that.

[They both sniff disdainfully.]

MERYL: A shame. Yes. But there you have it.

MEG: It's because you twirled it too many times.

MERYL: Rubbish.

MEG: Her Highness told me that.

[They both sniff disdainfully.]

MERYL: I see now what you mean by the cracks.

MEG: She speaks to the wrong sort of people.

MERYL: Perhaps she's being friendly?

MEG: I wouldn't spit on her.

MERYL: It'd be a waste of spit.

MEG: We'll iron out our differences. With irons.

[Pause.]

I think I'm having a sugar high.

MERYL: Twelve cups this morning and I'm flying.

MEG: Three before I get out of bed.

MERYL: Who puts the kettle on?

MEG: Plays havoc with the bladder something fierce.

MERYL: Who puts the kettle on, damn you?

MEG: Kettle's always on in our house. Everybody welcome. Come in, wipe your feet. Rain or shine. Cool your heels. Pull up a pew. Welcome mat's always dirty...Funny word, hob.

MERYL: I don't believe this.

MEG: What a pair of giggling Gerties.

MERYL: Now I suppose I'll have to sweep it up.

MEG: That would be the tidy thing to do.

MERYL: Do you know what? I don't think I will. I think I'll just leave it there for a bit. That'll teach him.

MEG: I think I'm having a coronary occlusion.

MERYL: Would a scone fix it?

MEG: A scone? No no, I couldn't.

MERYL: Yes you could. With jam and cream.

MEG: I just had three with Her Highness over the road.

MERYL: Go on...

MEG: If I must.

MERYL: Yes, yes. You must.

MEG: Then that would be - that would be - just - lovely.

MERYL: Yes. I know.

[Meryl proffers the tea pot again. Tableau. Lights fade.]

Mark O'Flynn