

Arriving Today

by Michael Olsen

Characters: **SCAMP (F)**
 KITTY (F)

Lights come up on the Queen Victoria Market. Light streams through a broken shed roof in circles of light and dark onto a black floor. A pile of rubbish lies upstage.

SCAMP is on her hands and knees, scrubbing an illuminated circle of floor with a toothbrush and rag. She is dressed in a collection of rags. She tears off another rag from her dress and continues scrubbing with it. She is very determined.

KITTY pushes herself out of the rubbish, stretching. She wears a ragged second-hand suit. She pulls out a walking stick she never uses to support herself. She has a deep smudge of the dandy about her.

KITTY: Morning, Scamp.

KITTY pulls out a banana, peels it, and takes a bite.

SCAMP: Kitty! Have I told you this morning this market is in-credibly dirty? There is dirt upon dirt upon dirt. There are layers of living in this dirt.

KITTY: And layers of dying, don't forget!

SCAMP: Layers you don't want to know about.

KITTY: Layers that don't want to know themselves, I'm sure.

Pause. SCAMP stops scrubbing, looks at KITTY chewing on her banana.

SCAMP: Kitty, where on Earth did you get a banana?

KITTY: B Shed of course. Have you forgotten I am now Queen of Fruits and Seasonal Vegetables?

SCAMP: I thought it was too cold to grow bananas down here.

- KITTY:** Not now. It's very warm, isn't it? Haven't you noticed? (*putting her hand into the light*) I mean, here is a July sun shining hot in a hot hot sky. It's this new climate, you know.
- SCAMP:** How long has it been since we had a cooler sun and all sorts of different vegetables here?
- KITTY:** Who can remember? I can't.
- SCAMP resumes scrubbing. KITTY throws the banana skin away.*
- KITTY:** What are you doing?
- SCAMP:** What do you think I'm doing?
- KITTY:** Same as you do every day?
- SCAMP:** Ah, but today is very different. Very different indeed.
- KITTY:** Same sky. Same smell. Same rats. Definitely same rats. I'm beginning to give them names, you know.
- SCAMP:** She's coming!
- KITTY:** (*frowning:*) She isn't, is she?
- SCAMP:** She is!
- KITTY:** How do you know?
- SCAMP:** She sent me a telegram.
- KITTY:** A telegram?!
- SCAMP:** It was most unexpected.
- KITTY:** I didn't think you could send telegrams anymore, let alone receive one.
- SCAMP:** I know.
- Pause*
- KITTY:** That's *very* unexpected.
- Pause*
- SCAMP:** She said she is arriving. Today! Here. Read her telegram.
- SCAMP pulls out the telegram and hands it to KITTY.*

- KITTY:** (*reading:*) "Arriving Today." Nothing more?
KITTY checks both sides of the telegram.
- SCAMP:** No. And today is today. All day. We should prepare!
- KITTY:** Is this what you're doing—"preparing"?
- KITTY walks around the circle of light on the ground, inspecting it.*
- SCAMP:** I tell you now: she will notice.
- KITTY:** Who cares?
- SCAMP:** I care! I don't want to be caught out. She has high standards, you know. It was very clear last time—
- KITTY:** She didn't *say* anything.
- SCAMP:** She didn't need to. It was her look. (*SCAMP pulls a disdainful look.*)
- KITTY:** Oh. I must have missed it. What a shame. (*Pause*) You think she was angry with us, don't you?
- SCAMP:** This is why I'm preparing.
- KITTY:** I see I see I see. (*Pause*) You didn't expect this news, then?
- SCAMP:** I thought last time *was* last time. Because she said—
- KITTY:** And you said—
- SCAMP:** And it all got very—
- KITTY:** Yes.
- SCAMP:** But then . . .
- KITTY:** What?
- SCAMP:** For some reason I am not *totally* surprised by her news, which means her news is not totally unexpected.
- KITTY:** But you had absolutely no *expectation* of this news, did you?
- SCAMP:** No, but—
- KITTY:** Therefore, ipso facto, this news *is* unexpected, isn't it?

- SCAMP:** Hmm. I suppose, but that just means there is such a lot to do!
- KITTY:** Do? I don't think we can "do" anything. She informs us—unexpectedly—she is arriving—today—therefore we will just have to—as we have done before—we will just have to—
- SCAMP:** What?
- KITTY:** Cope. Yes. Cope. It's a word, isn't it?
- SCAMP:** It's a word, yes, but not a good one.
- KITTY:** A good one would be . . . ?
- Pause*
- SCAMP:** "Manage". Yes manage. We will just have to manage her. Like you do with a—with a wave. Yes. With a wave. You dive down under a wave and come out other-side-safely. We will manage her. Do you honestly think it is OK to merely "cope"?
- KITTY:** "Cope" has done me wonderfully for many years. I have "coped" all over this market and beyond measure. In this situation perhaps consideration should be given to all things, and there should be a weighing up of all cons and pros in time's fullness.
- Pause. SCAMP shakes her head.*
- SCAMP:** And you think you will be safe doing all this? When she eventually arrives?
- KITTY:** As safe as one can be, I presume.
- Pause*
- SCAMP:** Remember how it all happened last time.
- KITTY:** Don't remind me.
- SCAMP:** How quickly one forgets!
- KITTY:** Scamp!
- SCAMP:** When she—
- KITTY:** I know! I know!
- SCAMP:** And you had to—

KITTY: Yes!

SCAMP: And then she said—

KITTY: Omigod!

SCAMP: I tried to—

KITTY: Yes you did.

SCAMP: But it didn't work.

KITTY: Of course not!

SCAMP: It should have.

KITTY: But it didn't, did it?

SCAMP: No. *(Pause)* I just wish this time she had given us more *notice*.

KITTY: Perhaps a day or two?

SCAMP: Exactly. It's just all very—*unexpected*.

KITTY: Yes.