

Arriving Today

by Michael Olsen

Characters: KITTY (F, 20's–30's), Occupation unknown; probably a cleaner
 SCAMP (F, 20's–30's), Queen of Fruits and Seasonal Vegetables
 FINLEY (M/F, 20's–30's), An assistant, we think

Lights come up on an old market. A pile of rubbish lies upstage.

KITTY is down close on her hands and knees, using a toothbrush to scrub a spot on the floor. She is dressed in a collection of rags, and has one bare foot. She moves around the spot. Intense. Determined. She tears off a rag from her dress and rubs the spot with it.

SCAMP pushes herself out of the rubbish, stretching. She wears a ragged second-hand suit. She pulls out a walking stick. She has a deep smudge of the dandy about her.

SCAMP: Morning, Kitty.

SCAMP pulls out a banana, peels it, and takes a small bite. KITTY continues her cleaning.

KITTY: Is it morning, Scamp? I hadn't noticed. This sun, you know. High? Low? It seems to make no difference.

SCAMP: Incontrovertibly.

KITTY: Have I told you this market is in-credibly dirty? *(throwing her arms around in desperation, then continuing cleaning)* There is dirt upon dirt upon dirt. There are layers of living in this dirt.

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

KITTY: Layers you don't want to *know* about.

SCAMP: Layers that don't want to know themselves, I'm sure. *(Pause)* It fills me with joy no end to see you have already started. *(with a wave of her hand)* Continue.

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

KITTY: Scamp, where on Earth did you get a *banana*?

SCAMP: B Shed of course. Have you forgotten I am now Queen of Fruits and Seasonal Vegetables? (*louder, with a wave of her hand*) Continue.

KITTY has still not resumed cleaning.

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

SCAMP: Not now. It's very warm, isn't it? Haven't you noticed? (*waving and pointing her walking stick around everywhere and up and down*) I mean, here is a July sun shining hot in a hot hot sky. It's this new climate, you know. (*Pause*) Don't let my words or presence stop you. (*with a wave of her hand*) Continue.

KITTY: How long has it been since we had a cooler sun and all sorts of different vegetables here?

SCAMP: Who can remember? I can't. (*with a wave of her hand*) Continue, I say.

KITTY resumes scrubbing. SCAMP peels off the banana skin and hurls it far away.

KITTY: What are you doing?

SCAMP: Doing?

KITTY: Yes. *Doing*.

SCAMP: I just—

KITTY: Yes, I can see you just—

SCAMP: Yes, I just threw it away—a banana skin that no-one wanted. Do you want it?

KITTY: No. Well, obviously not right this very *second*, but you didn't even *ask*.

SCAMP: Well do you want it? Yes—or no? The question is a totally binary one. If you beg I can still get it if you—

KITTY: No. No. That moment—

SCAMP: What moment?

KITTY: That moment—that one that saw a banana skin fly through it—that moment has passed. I wanted a banana skin *then*, but I don't want it *now*. Do you see?

SCAMP: Well there you go. No foul no harm as they say. Thank goodness for that.

KITTY: Why?

SCAMP: I don't think I'd be able to find it again. It's—it's lost. Forever. Like so many things.

KITTY: Yes. Lost forever.

Pause.

SCAMP continues eating her banana. She finally takes the last big mouthful of banana and swirls it around inside her cheeks.

KITTY sighs.

KITTY: So many things are lost forever. Like my shoe. Do you see?

KITTY holds up her bare foot. SCAMP nods in acknowledgement, keeps chewing.

KITTY: It should make a difference if you have a shoe—or not—but those days are gone, too, aren't they?

SCAMP nods, chewing.

KITTY: *(louder:)* Aren't they?

Again, SCAMP nods, this time pointing at her cheeks.

KITTY: You never say anything encouraging.

Pause.

Finally, SCAMP has finished chewing. She finally swallows. She lets out a big sigh and a burp.

SCAMP: Yes yes yes. One shoe can make a difference between a good day and a day not so good, but two shoes, well, two shoes always absolutely guarantees that a day will be good, because you can walk through it without pain coming upwards from underneath.

KITTY: Indubitably.

Pause

SCAMP: So, tell me, what are you doing?

KITTY: What do you *think* I'm doing?

SCAMP: Same as you do every day?

KITTY: Ah, but today is *very* different. Totally different.

SCAMP: Same sky. Same smell. Same rats. Definitely same rats. I'm beginning to give them names, you know. Like Schwackhammer. Wimplesnatch. Sackrider. Splern.

KITTY stops scrubbing, sighs, and looks at SCAMP.

KITTY: She's *coming*!

SCAMP: She isn't, is she?

KITTY: She *is*!

SCAMP: How do you know?

KITTY: She sent me a telegram.

SCAMP: A *telegram*?

KITTY: It was most unexpected.

SCAMP: A telegram? A telegram? I didn't think you *could* send telegrams anymore, let alone *receive* one.

KITTY: I know.

SCAMP: Well well well. *(Pause)* That's *very* unexpected.

Pause

KITTY: Here. You can read it.

KITTY pulls out the telegram and hands it to SCAMP.

SCAMP: *(reading:)* "Arriving today." *(SCAMP checks both sides of the telegram.)* Nothing more?

KITTY: What more *needs* to be said?

SCAMP: That sounds very...

KITTY: Definite?

SCAMP: Yes. Definitive, I would have said.

KITTY: Definitely.

SCAMP: Yes.

KITTY: In fact, you couldn't be any more *definitive* if you tried.

- SCAMP:** Yes. Most definite. Whether we like it or not.
- KITTY:** Well I like it.
- SCAMP:** You do?
- KITTY:** Because it *is* so definite. Something to rely on. Something...*solid*. I would go so far—
- SCAMP:** Yes? How far would you go?
- KITTY:** I would go so far as to say that its definiteness is its first guiding *virtue*. It's other virtue is that—
- SCAMP:** Yes?
- KITTY:** It's other virtue is that it almost gives one...hope?
- SCAMP:** Yes. Hope is such a small word but in contains multitudes of beneficence.
- KITTY:** You are definitively using such big words today! Are you sure you had no idea that she would be coming today?
- SCAMP:** How could I?
- KITTY:** That's true. That is something we can rely on: you not knowing she was coming. A point from which so much can circle.
- SCAMP:** I suppose.
- KITTY:** You are correct.
- Pause*
- SCAMP:** You would like me to—
- KITTY:** Yes?
- SCAMP:** You would like me to do—something?
- KITTY:** You?
- SCAMP:** Who else is there?
- KITTY:** You?
- SCAMP:** That is who I am proposing.

KITTY: Well, I never!

SCAMP: Or is it all in hand? Under and over control? Nothing large nor small still needs to be done? From my perspective up here—

KITTY: Everything always needs to be done once and twice three times. To be sure.

SCAMP: To be absolutely sure.

KITTY: Absolutely.

SCAMP: So what—

KITTY: You see this rag?

KITTY tears off another rag from her dress and hands it to SCAMP.

SCAMP: Yes?

KITTY: Simplicity itself. Do as I do. Imitation is the basis for all life.

KITTY returns to scrubbing the floor.

KITTY: You see? Round and round till you can see your face in the floor.

SCAMP: That is very shiny.

KITTY: My face or the reflection?

SCAMP: They are the same. Surely.

KITTY: No. One is real, and one is fake.

SCAMP: Which one is which?

KITTY: The reflection is real. Always. A reflection never lies.

SCAMP: Ah.

KITTY: So—

SCAMP: Yes.

KITTY: Start.

SCAMP: Yees.

SCAMP puts her rag on the floor and slowly rubs it around using her foot, as if she is afraid to touch the rag.

KITTY: You see? We are together! In a unison. Preparing.

SCAMP stops and looks at KITTY.

SCAMP: Is this all there is?

KITTY: All what is?

SCAMP: I mean—all that is asked. Of us. From her telegram.

KITTY: Yes. And all that we can ever ask of ourselves.

SCAMP: It means...today. Only for today. For her.

KITTY: Yes. Today. All day. We should prepare!

SCAMP: This is—"preparing"?

SCAMP stops her foot-scrubbing, walks around, inspecting KITTY's work.

KITTY: I tell you now: she will notice.

SCAMP: Who cares?

KITTY: I care! I don't want to be caught out. She has high standards, you know. It was *very* clear last time—

SCAMP: She didn't *say* anything.

KITTY: She didn't *need* to. It was her look.

KITTY pulls a disdainful look.

SCAMP: Oh. I must have missed it. What a shame. *(Pause)* You think she was angry with us, don't you?

KITTY: This is why I'm preparing.

SCAMP: I see I see I see. *(Pause)* You didn't expect this news, then?

KITTY: I thought last time *was* the last time. Because she said—

SCAMP: And you said—

KITTY: And it all got very—

SCAMP: Yes.

KITTY: But then . . .

SCAMP: What?

KITTY: For some reason I am not *totally* surprised by her news, which means her news is not *totally* unexpected.

SCAMP: But you had absolutely no expectation of this news, did you?

KITTY: No, but—

SCAMP: Therefore, *ipso facto*, this news *is* unexpected, isn't it?

KITTY: Hmm. I suppose, but that just means we circle wind our way back to a starting point that there is such a lot to *do*!

SCAMP: Do? I don't think you can "do" anything. She informs you—unexpectedly—she is arriving—today—therefore you will just have to—as you have done before—you will just have to—

KITTY: What?

SCAMP: Cope. Yes. Cope. It's a word, isn't it?

KITTY: It's a word, yes, but not a good one.

SCAMP: A good one would be . . . ?

Pause

KITTY: "Manage"? Yes—manage.

SCAMP: "Manage" sounds so weak. Indefinite. How about "handle," or "guide," or "steer," or "administer?"

KITTY: No no no. None of those. But then again...

SCAMP: Yes?

KITTY: "Cope" may be the best. Yes. We neither completely triumph nor totally capitulate. We stay the course.

SCAMP: Endure?

KITTY: Make do.

SCAMP: In other words...cope.

KITTY: Yes. If I remember—and that is all we have to ever rely upon—"cope" has done me wonderfully for many years.

SCAMP: As it has me.

KITTY: 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.

SCAMP: As compromise's promise to you, I would say that we will be able to manage her. Like you do with a—with a wave. Yes. Just like with a wave. You dive down under a wave and come out other-side-safely. We will "manage her."

KITTY nods.

SCAMP: *(with a wave of her hand)* Continue.

Pause.

KITTY shakes her head.

KITTY: And you think *you* will be safe when she eventually arrives?

SCAMP: As safe as one *can* be, I presume.

Pause

KITTY: Remember how it all happened *last* time?

SCAMP: Don't remind me.

KITTY: How quickly one forgets!

SCAMP: Kitty!

KITTY: When she—

SCAMP: I know! I know!

KITTY: And you had to—

SCAMP: Yes!

KITTY: And then she said—

SCAMP: Omigod!

KITTY: I *tried* to—

SCAMP: Yes you did.

KITTY: But it didn't work.

SCAMP: Of course not!

KITTY: It *should* have.

SCAMP: But it didn't, did it?

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

SCAMP: Perhaps a day or two?

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

SCAMP: Yes.

KITTY: It's thrown me *right* off.

SCAMP: It's off-putting.

KITTY: Yes.

SCAMP: Unsettling.

KITTY: Very.

SCAMP: One could almost go as far as to say—unfair?

KITTY: Maybe.

SCAMP: I think it *is* very unfair. Because it is very unexpected. How are you to prepare?

KITTY: Well *I* am preparing. You're not.

SCAMP: But think: how long should "unexpected" last? I mean, now that we know it's expected, it becomes...not expected at all, doesn't it?