

EASTENDERS

EPISODE ONE THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED AND
SIXTY NINE

"PRETTY BABY...."

BY

TONY JORDAN

SCENE 1369/1. BRANNINGS' HOUSE. EXT.
NIGHT. 23.31.

LOT

[DOT WEARING DRESSING GOWN AND
SLIPPERS, COMES OUT OF THE FRONT DOOR
TO PUT AN EMPTY MILK BOTTLE ON THE
DOORSTEP.

SHE PAUSES, LOOKS OUT ACROSS THE
SQUARE, LIGHTS IN WINDOWS, CURTAINS
BEING DRAWN....

NOISE FROM ACROSS THE SQUARE, PUB
KICKING OUT TIME, HIGH JINX IN BRIDGE
STREET.

NOTHING UNTOWARD, JUST THE ODD SHOUT,
A GIRL SCREAMING, LAUGHTER. THE
SOUNDS OF THE NIGHT...

SHE GOES BACK INSIDE]

CUT TO:

SCENE 1369/2. BRANNINGS' HOUSE - HALLWAY.
INT. NIGHT. TIME CONTINUOUS.

STUDIO A

[PICK UP DOT AS SHE ENTERS, CLOSING
THE FRONT DOOR BEHIND HER.]

[SHE BOLTS IT AND HEADS DOWN THE
HALLWAY TOWARDS THE KITCHEN]

CUT TO:

SCENE 1369/3. BRANNINGS' HOUSE - KITCHEN.

Everybody is missing you and they're
praying for you... Well, not
everyone...not the praying bit... That
don't come easy to some round here as you
know Jim, and I think there's one or two
what would burst into flames if they so
much as mentioned the name of Jesus,
except when they were smhen they were smhen t two

[BEAT]

This makes a change don't it? Me sitting here talking about the bible and you not looking over your glasses tutting and saying give it a rest woman you're giving him ear-ache... He's only human... hmm... only human. I'm stuck now, first time you can't answer back and I dunno what to say.

[SHE SMILES, WARMED BY THE MEMORY.
THE KETTLE BOILS - click]

I ain't good with me feelings. I don't have to tell you that do I?

[DOT LAYS THE TEA TRAY. DURING THE FOLLOWING DOT PREPARES THE TEAPOT]

[A BEAT, SHE STARES INTO SPACE,
THEN;]

I've always envied people who could show their emotions...just say something on the spur of the moment without thinking too much...

[BEAT]

I suppose...

[BEAT - DOT REALISES SHE HAS MADE TEA FOR TWO PEOPLE]

I suppose it was the way they was brought up. I see it all the time in the Launderette you know... How mothers are different with their children... Some of them hold them, tell 'em they love 'em. And for others they might just as well not be there. Only take notice of them when

they've done soemthing wrong and then they scream and shout at them and tell 'em what they're gonna get when they get home...

[BEAT]

It ain't hard to see how they'll turn out is it? Why don't people understand that how you feel as a child is how you're gonna feel when you're grown up? I suppose that's why I find it hard to show my feelings, 'cause I never had much love not when I was a little girl... Except me Auntie Gwen... I never had much as a woman neither.

[BEAT]

Charlie never told me that he loved me, well maybe if he wanted something. You know? Money out of the rent jar to put on the horses, or make amends when he come staggering home from the pub...

[BEAT, SMILES]

You told me though... And I know that you wanted me to say it back to you but... I don't... Well I did... I do... It's... just difficult to say. I dunno know why.

[BEAT]

I think that was why I was friends with Ethel all that time... People couldn't understand it, because we was chalk and cheese. But... You see, Ethel was a free spirit... Not like me. All bottled up. She'd just come out and say whatever she wanted.

[BEAT]

[BEAT]

I had enough for both of us... If I ever got shot of one problem I just went looking till I found myself some more. So as I'd have something to moan about...

[BEAT]

Well, I had to moan you see. To explain why I wasn't happy...

[A MOMENT]

I loved Ethel...

[BEAT]

That wasn't so hard to say was it? Not if you say it quick..

[BEAT]

Mind you. I didn't approve of her morals... I mean if she got up to half the things that she said she did during the war, it's a wonder them soldiers had the strength left to go back and fight.

[BEAT]

DOT: I asked her why she did that, much later on of course, and she said that she
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I mean she weren't no better when she was older... Many a time I saw her in the Post Office chatting up the old men... Ooh, you are such a flippety jibbet Ethel Skinner I used to say. Brazen she was, I couldn't tell you half the things she said... Make you blush...

[BEAT]

But I reckon, if she had a pound for every smile she put on peoples faces, she'd have died a rich woman... Doubt they'll say the same about me.

[BEAT]

Then, I didn't have much to smile about.

[BEAT]

DOT: I read this thing in the paper, it said if the whole of time since the world began, was a toilet roll.... And you unrolled it and laid it out, your life would be less than the width of a hair, right at the very end... Shows you where we are in the scheme of things. Less than the width of an hair?

[BEAT]

And how do we spend that time?

[BEAT]

So I reckon that Ethel had the right idea... Enjoy the time you got... It's over in the blink of an eye... It's no use worrying...

[BEAT]

I hope you're alright...

[BEAT]

I can hear your voice now... "What you blathering on about woman...?"

[BEAT, SHE LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM]

I suppose it's 'cause I'm on my own, and I have lots of time to think about things...

[BEAT]

It ain't the same with you not here... It's the little things... Dirty clothes on the bedroom floor, and your razor and stuff in the bathroom sink... And the smell of bacon...

[A MOMENT, DOT A LITTLE EMOTIONAL]

I feel cold. It's chilly in here. I think I'll go in the front room. Warm myself up.

[DOT PICKS UP HER TEA AND THE TAPE MACHINE AND HEADS DOWN THE HALLWAY TO THE LOUNGE]

CUT TO:

SCENE 1369/5. BRANNINGS' HOUSE - LOUNGE.
INT. NIGHT. TIME CONTINUOUS.

STUDIO A

[DOT ENTERS THE LOUNGE AND turns the fire on]

DOT: Ooh, that's better.

[BRIEFLY LOOKS AT HER WEDDING PHOTO ON THE SIDE]

Do you realise that Jim, we'll have been married six years soon... Who'd believe it? But you've been a very good husband, there's no denying it and I dare say I ain't been too easy a person to live with. 'Cause, er, I've got me ways.

[BEAT]

Good job you come along when you did, restored me faith in men... 'Cause I haven't exactly been blessed in that department. I remember coming back from burying Pauline's ashes and feeling all empty... and you lit candles for me. And you put that record on... It was a lovely evening... And you held me so tight, I remembered thinking... I'm gonna be alright, I don't need no body but my Jim... My husband... And that you was right! I could be happy... But I know it's not your fault, but that's only a memory now... I'm on me own again...

[BEAT]

DOT: [cont] After a while you'll come to accept it... And you think that that is

how things are supposed to be. Well
there's no use fighting it...

[BEAT]

"Which of you by taking thought can add
one cubit unto his stature?"

[BEAT]

I remember hearing that as a little girl
in Wales... I was coming home with Auntie
Gwen from chapel and I asked her what it
meant and she said it was Jesus' way of
telling us not to worry... That what will
be, will be...

[BEAT, SMILES]

It's funny isn't it? How much easier it
is if don't expect nothing out of life.
Back then it was a kiss from Auntie Gwen,
whether it was sunny enough to go in the
fields.

[BEAT]

Not like now, with their ear pods and
PPS's or what ever they are... [cont]

[BEAT]

DOT: [cont] All I had could fit into one
tiny little suitcase. The whole world was
at war and I was the happiest I'd ever
been. Well, I'd never had much love you
see as a little girl, I was never held or
tols I was special... I was just there.
Talked about, not to...

Gwen was setting the table. And there was warm bread and a boiled egg for me. And a big brown pot of tea. And Uncle Will come in and we sat eating our breakfast. Uncle Will laughing at me bed socks sticking out under me nightie... We was laughing. At breakfast! Just like in the books.

[BEAT]

The sun was so strong that day I could hardly breathe... I ran in the fields, and I laid down and I looked up at the sky... I was so happy I felt that I burst. I must have been there nearly an hour or more. The sky was the bluest I'd ever seen... So... Perfect... On me way home, I drank from a stream... The water was so cold it hurt me head...

[BEAT]

It was the best day. So perfect it was over in a flash and I was in the kitchen and Auntie Gwen was washing me in the tin bath and then I was on me way up to bed. And I lay there wondering if life was really like that... If everybody lived like this and if I was just catching up. Cos everything I'd ever known was ugly. Smoky pubs. Men spitting in the streets, swearing.

[BEAT]

And here I was...Laying in bed after the best day ever. Crispy sheets and the smell of me new washed nightie...

[BEAT]

And Uncle Will come up to tuck me in. The first time I was frightened. I thought he'd come to tell me off cos I'd never been tucked me in before, so I hid under the covers... And he pulled 'em back and he smiled at me and said I looked like a frightened rabbit... Which I was I suppose.

[BEAT]

And after that I waited for him every night.

[beat]

"Would you want a song little pearl"? Cos that's what he called me, his little pearl.

[BEAT]

And I could feel the grin squeezing me cheeks and he kicked off his old slippers and he lay on top of the bed beside me... And sang to me...

[BEAT]

So softly, I could only just hear it... I laid me head on his chest and could feel it going up and down... And I held onto him while he sang to me...

[BEAT]

He sang "Pretty baby"... "Everybody loves a baby, that's why I'm in love with you... Pretty baby... Pretty baby"

[DOT TAILS OFF, LOST IN THE MEMORY
FOR A MOMENT]

I know it's silly. Remembering such a little thing... But when I look back, I know that from that moment on... Everything I ever cared about, I've lost...

[BEAT]

Uncle Will was killed in a car accident less than a month later.

[BEAT]

Auntie Gwen had to take care of the farm and I was sent back to London... To her.

[BEAT, DISTASTE]

And her new man... And a new little brother... Sister, Rose. And I was in the way... I wasn't Uncle Will's little pearl, or his pretty baby... I wasn't wanted. I was back amongst the filth, people snarling at each other, drunkards fighting in the streets...

[BEAT]

I'd drunk from a stream and I'd run through the fields and I'd felt arms about me and love... And here I was, back in this house, on my own. And I know, from the day that Uncle Will sang to me, life has taken away everything I've ever cared about. Uncle Will and Auntie Gwen. Charlie. Nick. My best friend. And now it's taken you... And it's not fair! It's not fair, what did I ever do? What

did that little girl ever do to live a life of losing everything she ever loved? She didn't do nothing. She just wanted someone to love her, to care for her, to pin her drawings on the wall...

[BEAT]

And I'm sitting here and I'm still alone and out there there's lights and behind the windows little girls being tucked up by their Mummy's and told stories and sung to and they feel happy and safe and wanted... And I'm still here!

[A MOMENT]

And I have to go out that door and face the world... And everyone I see has got someone... But the worst part is seeing 'em complaining and fighting amongst themselves and...

[BEAT]

They don't know what they've got. Or what I wouldn't give...

[BEAT]

And I pretend that I don't care, that I'm better on me own... And I sit in that Launderette and I watch them Mothers with their children... And I don't know which is most painful. Them that are loved, or them that are ignored and shouted at...

[BEAT]

[BEAT]

And me grandson and I doubt I'll ever see
my Nick again...

[BEAT]

But what I'm saying is... I can cope with
losing you... I never expected anything
different. I know how to be on my own.

[BEAT]

But to have you here... And not here... I
don't think I've got it in me.

[BEAT]

Not anymore.

[A MOMENT]

I'm better on me own.

[BEAT]

Where I've always been.

[A MOMENT, DOT LOOKS DOWN AT THE TAPE
RECORDER.

SHE PRESSES "STOP" BUTTON.

A BEAT, THEN SHE STANDS, turns off
the fire AND EXITS THE LOUNGE]

PLAY MUSIC; "PRETTY BABY" BY AL
JOLSON.

CUT TO:

SCENE 1369/7. BRANNINGS' HOUSE - KITCHEN.