

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.
INT. NIGHT. TIME CONTINUOUS.

STUDIO A

[DOT ENTERS THE KITCHEN, SHE FILLS THE KETTLE AND TAKES TWO CUPS AND SAUCERS FROM THE DRAINING BOARD.

A TAPE RECORDER SET OUT ON THE KITCHEN TABLE.

A MOMENT, DOT LOOKS AT TAPE RECORDER, IT SITS THERE, ACCUSING...

SHE'S NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS, BUT IT'S BEEN PUT OFF TOO LONG.

A MOMENT BEFORE SHE SLOWLY SITS AT CHAIR, TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND PRESSES "PLAY" AND "RECORD" BUTTONS...]

DOT: Hello Jim....It's me. Dorothy.

[A MOMENT, CAN'T SAY THE LINE SHE'S REHEARSED...RALLIES]

[BEAT]

I'm sitting here in the kitchen and I'm talking to you... You won't be able to see me, just hear me... So I suppose I could be anywhere really, but I'm not... I'm in the kitchen. At the table. Now the doctors they think it would help you you see, to hear the sound of friendly voices... So everybody's done a bit and it's just me left. So here I am. I don't think I've ever dreaded anything more, I mean it's bad enough talking to a machine without worrying about what it is you got to say... But here goes.

[BEAT]

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 swearing... But
they're thinking about you, and they're
wishing you well, which come to think
would very well be the same thing...

[BEAT]

I'm praying for you of course... Well as I
can... I find it's best when you're
praying to quote back at him, you know...
The things he said, just to jog his memory
a bit... Children are easy... "Suffer the
little children"... And then there's the
meek... And them what hunger and thirst
after righteousness...

[BEAT]

But that ain't you is it Jim? So it's
difficult to know what to pray for for
you, so I've just done the bits about
general sinners.... I'm sure he'll know
who I mean...

[BEAT]

You're not really a believer are you Jim?
I know you only pretend you are 'cause of
me... But I don't think he worries too
much about that... I mean he didn't ask if
the Centurion's daughter believed in him
did he? Before he... before he cured her.
It was enough for him that her father
did...

[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]

DOT: [cont] I can remember the first time I saw her, I was just a little girl and I was in my front room and I was peering over the window sill and there she was across the road with her skirt hitched up, stocking tops showing, wolf whistling at a Lance corporal with bright red hair and a limp.

[BEAT]

"Show us your war wound" she cried out. He blushed, went as red as his hair, just like Bradley, he looked like a Swan Vesta.

[BEAT, SMILES]

He fled and she fell about laughing...

[BEAT]

I thought she was dreadful. I saw her later. I was sitting on the step outside the Vic waiting for me mother I caught a glimce of her through the door. There she was sitting on top of the piano her legs spread showing next weeks washing and balling out "Roll out the barrel" just like a navvy...

[BEAT]

DOT: [cont] I stared at her. She didn't seem to have a care in the world...

[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 loved the idea of sending them back all free with a smile on their face... And was that such a bad thing to do... when some of them might never come back?

[BEAT]

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 told I was special... I was just there. Talked about, not to...

[BEAT]

When I was on a train being evacuated, all the children was crying cos they didn't wanna leave their Mothers.

[BEAT]

I didn't cry. I think I'm gonna have a cigarette Jim. I expect I'll be forced to give 'em up soon. Can't smoke nowhere these days without catching pneumonia.

[DOT TAKES OUT A CIGARETTE AND LIGHTS HER CIGARETTE]

You see, Auntie Gwen was like them Mothers that you see in picture books, I didn't think they was real.

[BEAT]

It's hard to explain, but, I'd never seen anyone happy like that. Her and Uncle Will, they couldn't have children of their own, so that made me special... I was their little girl. It meant everything to me.

[BEAT]

I didn't understand that I was only there for a little while. Well not really. I thought I'd got a new Mother, the old one didn't want me no more.

[BEAT]

DOT: [cont] And I was in a family. A real family. I'd never had that before...

[BEAT]

I remember sitting between them on the sofa listening to the wireless, right in the middle, snug as a bug in a rug... And I wasn't in the way. And they gave me toys and crayons to do my drawings. And they talked to me.

[BEAT, SMILES]

I remember one day. One perfect day. I woke up early and I could hear Uncle Will's tractor in the bottom field and I looked out the window and I saw the sun coming up over the hill, and it was the brightest red I've ever seen... Brighter than me Mother's lipstick... And little wisps of clouds round it. Looked like a painting... And the birds were singing with no stops in-between... And there was the smell of new bread coming up the stairs... And I remember thinking this is my home. I live here.

[BEAT]

And I knew when I went down Auntie Gwen would be smiling. And there wouldn't be no man at the table, looking at me Mother, touching her as she walked past. Grinning at me. "Cat got your tongue"? "Oh take no notice, it's only Dot, she don't say much"

[BEAT]

That moment I was the happiest I'd ever been... And I went downstairs and Auntie

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 me 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]

I know what they're thinking of me... Old battle axe... Why don't you cheer up a bit? But they don't understand that I can't be like Ethel, I'm frightened of showing me emotions, I'm frightened of letting anyone in 'cause every time I do, I lose 'em...

[BEAT]

And how do I explain that?

[BEAT]

So I leave them to it, I let 'em poke fun at me... The miserable old bag, always quoting from the bible... And I wanna tell them, that's all I've got. If I didn't believe that there was something better to come what would my life be for? It's all I've got left.

[BEAT]

Hope... Of something better...

[BEAT]

Oh, I'm so tired Jim... And I've been all round the houses but what I wanna tell you is... They wanna send you home. They want me to have you here and they want me to cope... To be strong, when I ain't got no strength left...

[BEAT]

And I can't. God forgive me, but I can't. You see I nursed Ethel and I watched her die in me arms... And I buried me husband...

[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.
INT. NIGHT. TIME CONTINUOUS.

STUDIO A

DOT SUDDENLY LOOKS OLD AS SHE
SHUFFLES ACROSS THE FLOOR TO THE
SIDE.

SHE PICKS UP JIM'S CUP AND SAUCER AND
RETURNS IT TO THE DRAINING BOARD.

SHE WALKS OUT OF THE KITCHEN AND
CLICKS OFF THE LIGHT.

FADE OUT

"PRETTY BABY" OVER CREDITS