

'ROOM TO LET'

by

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January 2002

EXT. LONDON STREET - AFTERNOON

PETE CATHALL, a young man in his early twenties, gets out of a bus. He is wearing fashionable clothes and his hair is styled with hair wax to stick out. He has got a backpack on.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

A cake is taken out of an oven.

EXT. LONDON STREET - AFTERNOON

Pete gets a note out of his pocket, reads it and looks at street names nearby.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Chocolate glazing is poured over the cake.

EXT. LONDON STREET - AFTERNOON

Pete strolls down a street looking relaxed and cheerful.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

A huge sharp knife dives into the soft cake.

EXT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Pete stops in front of a cottage. Its walls are overgrown with tendrils and it lies hidden behind tall trees.

As Pete walks through the garden gate MILDRED WHITTLE, a stout lady in her early sixties, is removing a sign saying 'Room to let' from the window.

She looks up and her face brightens as she spots Pete. In a flash she disappears from the window.

Before Pete can ring the bell, the door is flung open, which makes him jump.

Miss Whittle beams at him and looks him up and down.

MISS WHILLTE

So! You must be Pete!

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The living room has got a suffocation atmosphere. It is filled with old-fashioned furniture, carpets, crochet works, knick-knacks and stuffed animals.

Above the fireplace hangs a cheesy oil painting with an ornate golden frame. It shows a black cat with an overfull bowl. The cat looks strangely melancholy.

Pete is sunk in a soft plush couch eating cake. Miss Whittle is sitting in an armchair opposite, knitting. The

knitting needles click quietly and create a rhythmic pattern with the deep ticking of a grandfather clock.

MISS WHITTLE
So what do you study then?

PETE
Economics.

MISS WHITTLE
Ah. (*compassionately*) Is this your first time away from home?

PETE
No. I used to live with my girl-friend before.

MISS WHITTLE
Oh. (*pause - then quickly*) Have you broken up?

PETE
(*indifferently*)
Yes.

MISS WHITTLE
(*seemingly sorry*)
Oh... I'm sorry...

Miss Whittle smiles. Pete does not notice this. He picks at his cake for a while. Then he points at the painting.

PETE
Nice painting.

MISS WHITTLE
(*dreamily*)
Oh yes! You know, Oscar meant everything to me. But one day he left me... (*bitter*) Cats are such ungrateful creatures. You give them a home, feed them, care for them. And what thanks do you get?

(*leaning back in her chair*)
You can have the picture in your room.

PETE
Oh, Miss Whittle, thank you... but... I really couldn't...

INT. PETE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The guest room is simply furnished and very neat and clean. The painting of Oscar is hanging on the wall.

Pete puts his backpack down and takes his disc-man and a nail file out. He sits down on the bed and puts the

earphones in. While he devotedly files his nails he gazes at the painted Oscar.

EXT. UNKNOWN - NIGHT

Something rattles in the bushes. Shiny black fur moves. A tail twitches. Soft paws gently touch the ground. Sharp claws emerge. Yellow eyes sparkle. It's Oscar.

OSCAR

(forcefully)

Run, Pete! Run away as long as you still can!

INT. PETE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Pete wakes with a start. He is lying in bed soaked in sweat.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Pete is sitting at the kitchen table having a sumptuous English breakfast. His name is written on the rim of the plate.

Miss Whittle is sitting opposite watching him, pleased with herself.

It is so quiet in the room that Pete's chewing noises can be heard clearly. He does not know where to look.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Pete stands in front of the mirror, carefully styling his hair with hair wax. He critically scrutinises his reflection, then smiles contentedly.

INT. HALL - MORNING

Pete is about to leave the house when Miss Whittle catches him. She has got a comb in her hand.

MISS WHITTLE

Wait. You can't go out like that!

She quickly combs his hair straight and buttons up his jacket.

MISS WHITTLE

There! That's better!

Pete looks uncomfortable and embarrassed.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

As Pete closes the door behind him his face brightens. He spots his friend DAVE waiting for him at the garden gate. Dave is fashionably dressed like Pete.

PETE

Hey, Dave!

DAVE

(frowning)

What's wrong with your hair?!

PETE

(embarrassed)

Oh!

Pete quickly messes his hair up with his hands and they start walking.

DAVE

So, what did I tell you? Was this a good plan or what? I think you owe me a pint. At least!

PETE

Yeah, let's celebrate my new freedom tonight!
(Pause) God, this woman is getting on my nerves, though! She's worse than my mum!

DAVE

(nudging Pete)

Hey, you can cope with an old woman, can't you?!

INT. HALL - AFTERNOON

The door opens quietly. Pete pokes his head through it, then slips inside.

He starts tiptoeing up the wooden stairs which make slight creaking noises.

MISS WHITTLE (O/C)

Pete! Come here. I've got a surprise for you!

Pete freezes. He clings to the banisters and hits his head against the wall.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Pete is sitting on the couch, a present on his lap. Miss Whittle is sitting opposite, leaning forward eagerly.

The paper rattles as Pete unwraps the present. He reveals a knitted beige cardigan. To hide his horror he holds it up in front of his face.

Then he slowly lowers it, revealing a happy smile.

PETE

Thank you so much Miss Whittle! It is lovely.
But...

MISS WHITTLE
(beaming all over her face)
 Call me Mildred.

PETE
 Mildred... I really appreciate this, but...

MILDRED
 I made it myself! Come on, try it on!

Pete puts the cardigan on reluctantly. It looks ridiculous.

MILDRED
(delighted)
 You look so cute! *(with a wink)* And don't let me catch you without it...

INT. PETE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Pete enters his room and closes the door with a bang. He lets his jacket and bag drop on the floor.

Annoyed, he takes the cardigan off and chucks it into a corner. Then he turns the oil painting around so that it faces the wall.

Pleased with himself he grabs a textbook, a pen and paper, lies down on the bed and starts reading. A distant pitiful miaowing breaks the quiet.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

A hand lifts a huge sharp knife.

INT. HALL - EVENING

A shadow moves up the creaking stairs.

INT. PETE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The miaowing gets louder. Suddenly there is a knock on the door. Pete listens. Another knock.

PETE
 What is it?

MILDRED
(affectionately)
 Can I come in?

PETE
(slightly panicking)
 Just a moment!

As fast as he can, Pete turns the painting back around, puts the cardigan on and sits down behind the table.

PETE

(tensely)

Come in.

Mildred enters and sets a plate with a piece of cream cake on the table.

MILDRED

This one is my favourite. It's an old family recipe. *(looking intensely at Pete)* I only make it for very special people...

PETE

(embarrassed)

Oh, really? *(trying to smile)* Thank you very much.

Mildred picks Pete's jacket up from the floor, gives it a shake, neatly hangs it over a chair and leaves the room.

Pete collapses and lets out an exhausted sigh.

FADE OUT

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Mildred is sitting at the kitchen table sulking. One elbow is propped up and her chin rests in her hand. She is staring at Pete's full dinner plate opposite. His chair is empty.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Pete and Dave are leaning against the bar having pints of beer. Pete is already very drunk.

Two fellow students, ADRIAN and RALPH, approach them. Adrian has got a bold head and is wearing tracksuit bottoms. Ralph's hair is greasy and he makes an altogether scruffy impression.

ADRIAN

(in a mocking tone, looking at Pete)

Oh, look who's here, the mummy's boy!

PETE

What?

ADRIAN

(laughing)

Guess what, Ralph! I saw him today in front of his house. His mum ran after him to tuck his shirt in. Can you believe that?

Adrian and Ralph laugh. Dave looks bewildered at Pete. Pete looks deeply embarrassed.

ADRIAN

(to Pete)

Or was that your granny?

PETE

That's my landlady. But it's none of your fucking business!

ADRIAN

(raising his eyebrows)

Oh, your landlady...! *(nudging Ralph)* I wonder how he pays her. That old lady must be lonely. I'm sure he does her little favours sometimes...

PETE

(raising his fist)

Shut up, you stupid idiot!

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

The iron garden gate rattles as Pete staggers through it. His clothes are ripped, one ear is slightly torn and he has got a bleeding scratch across one cheek.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Mildred opens the door, relieved and worried at the same time. Pete is swaying so much that she has to support him.

MILDRED

(breathlessly)

Oh, Petie! Where have you been for so long? I was so worried about you! Oh, now look at yourself! What are we going to do with you?

Pete can only mumble.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Pete is sitting on the toilet lid. Mildred fixes up his wounds. He is so dazed from the alcohol that he can hardly keep his eyes open.

MILDRED

You silly little thing! It's a dangerous world out there! *(tenderly)* With me you're safe. I'll look after you.

Mildred lovingly strokes his hair.

Pete stands up with difficulty. On his way to the door he throws a glance at the mirror. His eyes widen. Instead of his reflection he sees a cat.

OSCAR

It's a trap, Pete! Find a new place! Quick!

FADE OUT

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Pete and Dave are silently sitting in a corner. Absent-mindedly Pete looks around. Suddenly he spots Adrian by the bar talking to an attractive GIRL in very tight clothes and with high heeled boots on.

Pete jumps up, full of aggression but Dave holds him back.

DAVE

Come on, leave it. Calm down! And look, he's going to the loo anyway.

Pete pauses and watches the scene for a moment. Then a superior smile flashes across his face.

PETE

I'll show him!

Pete quickly checks his hair out in a pocket mirror and leisurely strolls over to the girl. Dave gazes after him with raised eyebrows.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Pete approaches the house arm in arm with the girl. They are both slightly drunk and giggle.

A key is inserted into the lock but not turned around.

Pete leans his back against the door and pulls the girl towards him. They giggle more and start kissing.

Suddenly the door is being flung open. Pete stumbles and can only just prevent himself from falling. Pete and the girl are startled.

PETE

(angrily)

Hey!! What the hell...

Mildred pulls Pete inside and slams the door into the girl's face.

The girl looks blank, then annoyed.

GIRL
(to herself while turning)
Weirdos...

INT. HALL - NIGHT

MILDRED
(furiously)
What on earth do you think you are doing coming home so late, huh?

PETE
(outraged)
Miss Whittel! I've got the right to..

MILDRED
(even more furious)
No girls! Not under my roof!

Pete is perplexed. Then he flings the door open and runs out.

MILDRED
(calling after him)
I'm warning you!

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

PETE
(shouting)
Hey you! Hello? Where are you?

(to himself)
Fuck!!

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Mildred stomps into the living room and slams the door shut.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mildred has got a furious but determined expression on her face.

MILDRED
(calmly)
I've got no choice now...

INT. PETE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pete is asleep. A cat's piercing cry can be heard in the distance. Pete opens his eyes with a start. Mildred is towering over him. She has got a syringe in her hand.

MILDRED
(smiling reassuringly)
Don't worry. Just trust me.

Pete is paralysed with surprise and fear. Quickly, Mildred grabs his arm and pricks the skin with the syringe.

EXT. UNKNOWN - NIGHT

Pete screams. He pants and flails his arms about as if he wanted to run but his legs only twitch. He clenches his fists. He punches the air. A blade flashes. Blood pours down his legs. Everything spins around him. Then there is a glaring light.

Pete lies stretched out on a meadow full of flowers. His eyes are closed. He smiles.

INT. PETE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Pete slowly opens his eyes. Dazed, he starts looking around.

Suddenly he distorts his face in pain. He lifts his blanket with difficulty.

His abdomen has been bandaged in a way that resembles nappies.

Confused he turns his head and recognises Mildred sitting on a chair beside him. She gently touches his arm and smiles.

MILDRED

(softly)

It went well, sweetheart. Everything will be good now.

Pete looks at Mildred for a long time. Eventually he tenderly takes her hand and nestles his cheek against it.

FADE OUT

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

There is an oil portrait of Pete hanging on the wall where the painting of Oscar used to be.

Mildred is sitting on the couch knitting, watching TV.

Next to her on the couch lies Pete, wearing the cardigan. He is curled up like a cat. He has put on weight. He looks somewhat apathetic.

Mildred softly strokes his head. She looks very pleased with the world.