

# A Cuppa

## A One Act Play

By

**Daniel R. Harris**

### Scene

An old-fashioned diner in present day Brooklyn. The set is minimal:  
A small table with two chairs, a napkin holder, salt and pepper shakers.  
Only the table area is lit. The rest of the performance space is dark.

### Players

**DAVID**, a middle-aged successful artist with an eagerly anticipated solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He's a tall man wearing paint-spattered jeans, a wool shirt, work boots. He sits at the table, drawing in a sketchbook. A distressed leather jacket hangs on the back of his chair. His head is shaved, he wears a neat goatee and rimless glasses.

**PORTIA**, a woman of wealth and class, is ten years younger. She is medium height with a trim figure, excellent posture and diction. She wears a Burberry trench coat over a Chanel suit and stylish shoes. She and **DAVID** have known each other for a decade.

---

[**PORTIA** enters from stage right and begins her lines as she crosses to the table.]

**PORTIA**: Sorry I'm late. Traffic was brutal on the Brooklyn Bridge. There was a protest march on the walkway.

[**DAVID** rises, embraces **PORTIA** then helps with her coat.]

**DAVID**: What! You *drove* here?

P: Yes, in my new Tesla. I hope it's safe parked on the street.

[**DAVID** holds the stage-right chair for **PORTIA** to sit.

*She sits and crosses her legs. DAVID sits at his stage-left chair opposite her.]*

D: It should be fine. I was worried you'd changed your mind about coming to Brooklyn.

P: I would have texted you if I were going to cancel.

D: Glad you made it. It's been ages since we've had a cuppa.

P: Only two weeks. But over a year since we've met for coffee in Brooklyn.

D: Really? Yes, I guess it's been that long. I've been so busy preparing for my upcoming Whitney show I barely know what day it is. It's getting close to crunch time, and my best assistant is down with the flu.

P: Sorry, when is your show again?

D: In six weeks. The opening is Friday, April 3. I must deliver everything to the Whitney by March first. It's all new work.

P: Only paintings, or are some of your sculptures also on view?

D: Only new paintings which are like sculptures, or outsized reliefs.

D: So ... coffee? Afternoons, there's no table service here. I'll get you what you wish.

P: As I remember, they have real French *café crème* here. I'll take that, otherwise a regular coffee, but with room for two creams, no sugar.

[**DAVID** leaves the table and goes to the darkened upstage.

**PORTIA** opens her book and begins reading.

**DAVID** returns with two coffees on a small tray.]

D: *Café crème* for you and a double espresso for me. What's the book?

P: A Mark Helprin novel, *Paris in the Present Tense*.

D: Strange title.

P: He's an impressive writer. This is a book about an older cellist in Paris. I'm only a third of the way in, but I'm hooked.

[**PORTIA** tastes her coffee.]

D: How's your *café crème*?

P: Perfect.

D: I see you've changed your hairstyle. There must be a change in your life. In my experience, women change their hairstyle when their life changes.

P: Maybe. Well ... do you like it?

D: It's a nice mix of sass and flair. But completely different than your earlier style.

P: Here, look at the back. Do you like the layers?

[**PORTIA** turns in her chair so **DAVID** can get a better view]

D: Very youthful, hip, and well sculptured. You look younger and very sophisticated.

[**PORTIA** turns back and faces **DAVID**]

P: Do you think it's too short?

D: Not at all. The beauty of hair? It never *stays* short.

P: Exactly. I must get it cut every two weeks, or it will look shaggy. With long hair, I could pile it on my head no matter how long it got and be done with it. After losing all my hair five years ago, I positively luxuriated in my long hair when it grew back in. These days, I needed a change.

D: Me, I shave my head every day.

P: Well, there you have the long and the short of it!

D: Ba-dum — tshee.

[**DAVID** imitates the sound of a drum and cymbal as he mimes a drummer]

Yikes, Portia! And you tease me about my puns.

[*They both sip their coffees smiling*]

D: You look terrific. How are you?

P: How am I? I'm fine. I received a clean bill of health at my last checkup.

D: Terrific news. So, no cancer?

P: None they could detect. This was my five-year checkup. I should be good for life, but one never knows what malignant rogue cell lurks somewhere.

D: That was one of the saddest days of my life when I took you to the hospital for the mastectomy.

P: I think you were more upset than I was. I just wanted the cancer out of my body. But we did have fun dining, seeing *Hamilton*, and dancing the night before, didn't we? I still have the push-up bra I bought to tease you on my last night of cleavage.

D: You looked delicious. You had the eye of every guy in the place. Such good memories.

P: Yes, but let's change the subject.

D: Sure. How is your drawing coming?

P: I don't like my drawing teacher. She never says anything but "Good, keep doing what you're doing."

D: The drawing you made of the orchids was excellent. I don't think I could draw orchids that accurately. They were almost scientific illustrations.

P: That's my problem! I can draw accurately, but my drawings lack life or emotion. They're too scientific. Those were *living* orchids, but they look dead in my drawing. Your drawings are so alive and engaging, even your big abstracts emote.

D: You know the French call still-life *nature morte*, dead nature. Have you ever taken a life-drawing class? It's just the ticket for putting life into your drawing. Pun intended. Ba-dum — tshee.

[DAVID imitates the sound of a drum and cymbal as he mimes a drummer]

P: Hah! Your cornball humor again. Well, I want to take a life-drawing class at the Art Students League. But there's a catch: one must first enroll in three elementary drawing classes to be eligible, and I don't want to pay for courses I don't need. Have I ever told you about my experience drawing nudes in high school?

D: Did you take a class?

P: I wanted to study art at the High School of Music and Art, but my mother wouldn't allow it. Back then, it was a long subway ride up to West 135<sup>th</sup> Street. Stuyvesant High School admitted me in the first class that accepted girls. Only twelve of us. My mom demanded I go there because I could walk from our apartment in the East Village and I could study *real* subjects, not waste my time on frivolous art. She was terrified of the subway, feared for my safety, and so on. So, what's a girl to do?

D: Well? You *are* a math genius and well-known Wall Street econometrician. So, where did you study art?

P: I was sixteen and a junior at Stuyvesant. On Saturday mornings, I would go to the American Museum to take a course in paleontology. I drew hundreds of bones. Afterward, I would walk across the park to the Metropolitan Museum and visit the Greek and Roman statuary collection and sketch male nudes. It was my introduction to male genitalia. Of course, I couldn't take my drawings home, so I pitched them in a trash can.

D: Well, those guys were hard as a rock. Ba-dum — tshee.

[DAVID imitates the sound of a drum and cymbal as he mimes a drummer]

P: David! Puh-leese.

D: I couldn't resist.

P: To continue. When you're an only child in a small New York City apartment and your mom is a writer working from home, there are few places to get intimate with boys. I knew some things from seeing graffiti but had never encountered the real living item. Imagine my surprise when the first penis I held in my hand was circumcised. I was mortified and thought the poor boy was deformed. But that's ancient history. Let's see your sketchbook.

[DAVID hands her his sketchbook. She opens it and studies the drawings.]

P: Do you always sketch in ink?

D: Usually. There is no eraser, so you must concentrate on the line. I also practice drawing left-handed and right-handed. Verso pages I draw with my left hand and recto pages with my right hand. It's an excellent discipline. You should try it.

P: These drawings look like Prospect Park.

D: Good guess. Yes, I go there to sketch people, animals, landscapes ....

P: I can't imagine it's too comfortable in February.

D: It was a warm day, I sat in the sun.

P: David, your paintings are these massive three-dimensional abstracts. Why do you go to the park and draw trees, people, and dogs?

D: First, it's good discipline. Second, I like drawing trees, people, and dogs. And third, I enjoy sketching.

P: But I still don't understand how drawing nature inspires your big industrial 3D abstract pictures with all the attached pipes, gears, wheels and cloth. That's your realpolitik sensibility. Not trees, people or dogs.

D: Drawing doesn't inspire. Totally unrelated. I'm a bi-polar Gemini, when my personalities switch, my art changes. I prefer being a manic abstractionist. Depressed drawer is my down time.

P: I know your flip-flop nature! Could drive a person mad.

[PORTIA seems a little upset and flips through the sketchbook faster  
without really looking at the drawings]

D: You seem a little distracted. Did I say something to upset you?

P: Yes and no. Yes and no.

[PORTIA says this very detached and fast.]

D: Well?

P: Okay, David. [*She pauses*] I'm moving to San Francisco.

D: Ah! That explains the haircut. So, are you moving for work, love, or adventure?

P: As you know, I can always get a job. So, no, not for work. Besides, I'm a wealthy widow. As for love, well, I'm getting married.

D: Really? Who's the lucky guy? [*DAVID tries to hide his disappointment*]

P: You don't know him. He's the new principal cellist for the San Francisco Symphony. He was the cellist for twenty-five years with the New Art String Quartet. When the quartet broke up, he wanted a change. He auditioned and won the position. We're both excited about the move.

D: Did *he* change his hairstyle, too?

P: David, don't be catty.

D: Sorry, I guess *I* was hoping to be *that* lucky guy.

P: I like you and respect your work. You and I have had a lot of fun together. But you're too volatile and unstable for marriage material. Too many ugly scenes where you lost it, and ... you drink way too much and become unmanageable.

[*There is a longish uncomfortable silence. DAVID appears chastised*]

D: Does that mean you won't attend my Whitney show?

P: Oh, no. I wouldn't miss your show. My fiancé, Raphael, doesn't start at the SFO until next fall. His brother works as a software engineer for Google and is relocating to Frankfurt. We're buying his brother's three-bedroom condo.

D: Sounds sweet. [*Delivered sarcastically*]

P: I'm sure you'll like Raphael. He has a quick wit, likes to pun, and tells stories like you do. He's been all over the world and has a fund of funny stories. He absolutely adores me, always shows up with flowers and a chocolate treat. You know how much I enjoy classical music. Now, we go to concerts three or four times a week. He gets comps for many concerts.

D: I must confess, I'm jealous. Sounds storybook. Congratulations.

P: David, we'll always be friends. Think of all the ups and downs we've shared. There will always be a special place in my heart for you.

D: And you in mine. I will miss our coffee klatches and museum trips. I can't get my head around losing you. I thought between your brilliance and my talent, we'd be a world-class couple.

[**DAVID** slumps in his chair, fighting back overwhelming sorrow.

**PORTIA** hands the sketchbook back to him and stands up]

P: Sorry, dear friend, I must be going. I didn't think you'd take it so hard. Please don't. Life changes. We all adapt and move on. Cancer changed my life. I adapted, I moved on. You helped me heroically through those difficult months. Your humor and bonhomie put life back into me. How can I ever forget that?

[**DAVID** stands and helps her with her coat. He hands her the sketchbook.]

D: You can have it. Keep it as a memento of our last cuppa in Brooklyn.

P: Don't be so morose, David. Raphael and I are not leaving until summer. I'll see you at your Whitney opening, and I'm sure there will be more klatches, drinks, and celebrations before we leave New York.

D: Portia, why did I lose you?

P: David, you're like the beautiful pair of shoes I have in my closet. I love them above all others, but they don't fit right. They hurt my feet. So, I don't wear them. But I still love them.

[They embrace. **PORTIA** exits stage right. **DAVID** sits at the table. Devastated.]

[Lights fade to black.]

The End