



FUR ELISE

by Tim Kenny

EXCERPT

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Für Elise

A Black Comedy

By

Tim Kenny

Characters (in order of appearance)

EDMUND Dickens (40): Embalmer and living in Dennis's semi-basement

DENNIS Simmonds (late 40's). Dour personality. presence.

VIRGINIA Harris (30's): Social Worker.

Dr. HENDRY (50's): Alcoholic medic.

ALMA Hopkins: (28-38): Effervescent, optimistic, garrulous.

Rev JOE Rudge* Religious enthusiast.

MONIKA Steinmeir German Student

INSPECTOR Parsons: Impersonal policeman

*Can be a Lady Vicar ('Jo')

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ACT ONE

Scene 1: Morning

A living room in a middle-class house. USC is a sideboard in front of which is a dining room table. On the top of the sideboard are mugs, glasses, a whisky bottle, a table lamp and a telephone. Inside the sideboard drawers are knives, forks and serviettes. The table is laid for breakfast including a small glass coffee pot. DSR is a long sofa (with cushions) set at an angle. Opposite (DSL) and facing the settee is a comfortable chair and a small side table. The rest of the set can be dressed to reflect middle class values. CSR is hall and front door. CSL is kitchen. USC near sideboard is exit to upstairs.

The stage is dark and we hear the music of Beethoven's Fur Elise. As the stage lights come up, we see DENNIS sitting USL at the table. He is about to eat a croissant. On the settee is EDMUND who is trying to do a crossword.

EDMUND: Welsh! What do they mean 'welsh'?

DENNIS: *(Putting down a croissant he was about to eat).* What's the clue again, Edmund?

EDMUND: *(Searching crossword).* Here it is, Dennis. 18 across. 'Sounds like Mrs Wagner is to renege on a national pastry.'

DENNIS: *(Wearily)* Mrs Wagner means Winifred Williams who spent much time in Wales. She was married to Siegfried Wagner, the son of the composer Richard Wagner. To renege on someone is to welsh on them and a national pastry of Wales is the Welsh cake. Easy really.

EDMUND: You're just a fund of useless knowledge that's what you are. Comes from teaching useless languages like German. *(Pause)* Talking of funds....only a Freudian slip there Dennis, you know I'm not pushing.

DENNIS: I don't want to....

EDMUND: ...what?

DENNIS: talk about it, Edmund.

EDMUND: But Elise ... just before she died.....

DENNIS: I don't want to discuss it.

(DENNIS picks up coffee but puts it down again as EDMUND continues)

EDMUND: With all that premium bond money we could have a nice cruise you and me. Cheer you up. And don't you need it! Old Mr. Misery. Round the world. Shows every night. Places to see. Waited on hand and foot.....you going to see your wife up at the parlour?

DENNIS: I doubt it.

EDMUND: I've done her up nice. She came up real pink with a bit of massage. Embalming is so good these days. I mean you can't really see where the tubes have gone in and out.

(Tilts head to one side and puts index finger against one side of the neck and other hand he cups and holds against other side of the neck)

DENNIS: I don't want to know the details of your embalming, thank you very much.
(Picks up croissant again)

EDMUND: I mean there's some we get in – especially after a post-mortem – when it's much more tricky. You got to open them up.....

DENNIS: *(Putting croissant back on the plate).* Edmund! Please.

EDMUND: Anyway, I'm glad you came to Croxleys for your arrangements. Mountfords charge you for loads of extras.

DENNIS: What extras?

EDMUND: Coffin for a start Dennis! *(Laughs then stares at DENNIS who doesn't react).* Can I see just a little smile there, a trace? First I've seen since poor Elise when skywards. Please yourself.

(EDMUND returns to newspaper and DENNIS is about to drink coffee when EDMUND speaks again)

Two drunks are doing the crossword and one says to the other: 'This is a hard one. Old McDonald had one. Four letters. And the other says. Now let me think. I've got it. E.I.E.I.O.

DENNIS: Heard it.

EDMUND: Funny though.

(Pause while DENNIS stirs coffee idly and EDMUND continues to read paper.)

They still haven't found the murderer of those two women – both blondes. Says here. *(Searching and then reading)* "Police believe the murders were done in one place by stabbing with a long knife and the bodies taken to the site where they were beheaded with their faces turned to the ground. *(Reading more closely)* A police psychologist says beheading is the ultimate crime by the psychotically disturbed..oooh!. It is related to perverted sense of not wishing to be recognised – the eyes – or spoken about – the mouth". We had a corpse in once with its head all askew. Car accident.

DENNIS: D'you have to...?

EDMUND: Head came off when the bloke went through the windscreen. Not wearing a seat belt. Terrible sewing job at the hospital mortuary. No pride these days. Had to sort it out myself.

DENNIS: I'm eating!

EDMUND: The whole thing kept lolling to one side. (*Demonstrates and sticks tongue out*). Used superglue in the end. Relatives didn't notice.

DENNIS: (*Putting down croissant again*). You're a great Job's Comforter.

EDMUND: Coffee's getting cold. That'll never do. Nothing worse than cold coffee.

(*Gets up and picks up coffee pot and plate with croissant as DENNIS was about to eat it again*)

I'll redo the coffee and stick this in the micro for a few seconds. You do want this croissant I bought for you don't you? Count to fifty.

DENNIS: I was about to eat.....

(*EDMUND exits CSL with coffee pot and DENNIS's croissant*)

EDMUND: (*Off*) Murdered over Sheffield way. Those women.

(*Phone rings. EDMUND enters*)

EDMUND: Want me to get it?

DENNIS: No. Leave it me.

(*Rises and goes to phone. EDMUND exits CSL again*)

Dennis Simmonds.....Oh Di, thanks for the card.....Yes, it was a shock.....merciful when the end came.

(*EDMUND re-enters eating a croissant and holding another. DENNIS covers up mouthpiece. EDMUND puts croissant on DENNIS's plate*)

EDMUND: Eat it while it's hot and buttery. Count to fifty and I'll be back with coffee.

(*Exits*)

DENNIS: Di? Sorry about that....my neighbour in the flat downstairs.... Edmund. He brings me in croissants and makes coffee these days..... An embalmer... .yes, he did prepare her.....wants me to go up and see her. ... I don't think so....yes, to remember her as she was..... I see.....your mortgage..... they will repossess if you don't keep up the payments.....in what way, help? Look Di, Elise is not yet buried and I'm all at sixes and sevens andyes, I know she won the Premium Bonds but I haven't got the money: it was in her name and some is for Billy. I have to go on working you know what with one thing and another.....what d'you mean, when will it come through? I don't know.....okay, okay, I'll try. Maybe a little monthly support until you're back on your feet.

(EDMUND re-enters carrying coffee. DENNIS covers up mouthpiece)

EDMUND: Did a fresh pot for you.

(Picks up coffee mug and exits)

EDMUND *(Off)*: I'll just give this a rinse Dennis and put the grounds around the hostas. Marvellous for keeping the slugs off.

DENNIS: *(On phone)* Di, it's the best I can do as I'm thinking of going away.....Oh, I don't know. Just away...you know from all this lot. Now, if you'll forgive me I want to finish my breakfast and get rid of Edmund. Bye.

(Settles down. Fills mug with coffee. Toys with croissant. EDMUND returns)

EDMUND: That your sister on the line again?

DENNIS: You listening?

EDMUND: Couldn't help. You tell her you and I might do a world cruise?

DENNIS: I promised nothing of the sort.

EDMUND: Separate cabins. Don't want people to think....oolala. Anyway, there might be a personable young steward who might like to share a rubber or two – of bridge naturally.

DENNIS: I don't know why you don't settle down with a nice boy friend.

EDMUND: Happy on my own. Don't want other people using my loo, rattling my toilet roll. I'm a very particular person. Made my own way in life. You know, Dennis, a doctor once said to me once that I could have been a pathologist with a bit more learning.

DENNIS: You've told me many times Edmund.

EDMUND: Forensic would have been my style but ..well...people like me.....bullied in school. Teased. It wasn't fair. They never give you a chance do they? Hopes went down the stream like a Pooh stick. So about this cruise.....

DENNIS: What about it?

(Door bell rings. EDMUND turns as though to answer door)

I'll get that.

EDMUND: I'll slip out through the kitchen then. See you later. By the way. You know that thing across the street. The one in the tube dress short enough to see where she posts her letters? Why is she always waving over here from her window? It's not me she's waving at that's for certain. I'm always out of luck with bedrooms across any street from me. *(Does body builder pose with bent upper arms)* Oh well!

(Door bell rings again. DENNIS answers door. VIRGINIA enters CSR)

DENNIS: Come in. Who did you say you were?

VIRGINIA: Virginia Harris, Social Services. I am sorry to drop in on you like this. We heard about your wife's sad death.....

EDMUND: Well, I'll be popping along....

DENNIS: Yes. Do sit down.

EDMUND: See you later then. Want anything down the Metro?

DENNIS: Nothing, thank you, Edmund.

EDMUND: Well I'll just nip down the street. Pick up a few extras. Toodle-loo then.

(Exits CSL)

VIRGINIA: ...and as is usual in these cases.....*(Whispers loudly)* Who was that?

DENNIS: My downstairs neighbour Edmund..... Brings me breakfast and stuff..... by the way, do you have any identity?

VIRGINIA: *(Producing card)* Yes, of course. Surprising how many people don't ask for it these days. Far too trusting. No wonder there are so many daylight robberies. I thought I'd just pop by.

DENNIS: No one from your place ever came when.....

VIRGINIA: I know but there are cases when someone dies and the significant other is left alone when we feel we should....

DENNIS: She was my wife. More than a significant other. Where d'you get this social jargon from?

VIRGINIA: In this day and age with so many people not married, different sorts of gender relationships....

DENNIS: Same sex, you mean.

VIRGINIA: Yes. A death – no matter who - is often a matter for social workers. I heard that you had cared for her for a long time

DENNIS: It was a long struggle

VIRGINIA: It must be a distressing time for you.

DENNIS: Frankly, I resigned myself to this a long time ago. Why are you turning up now? Nobody from Social Services came while I was nursing my wife these past three or four years. And now she's dead, here you are. Bit late aren't you?

VIRGINIA: I've only just opened your case. We do go back on them from time to time.

DENNIS: Case? What case?

VIRGINIA: The case. *(Pause)* How is your son Billy?

DENNIS: University. Why?

VIRGINIA: Is he enjoying his time there?

DENNIS: He's in his first year so he's not really settled down yet.

VIRGINIA: The death of his mother will not have helped.

DENNIS: He's coming back for the funeral next week.

VIRGINIA: I've a daughter about to go. £10,000 a year they reckon it'll soon be. I mean that's £30,000. Such a lot of money. Expensive business, university these days.