

VISITOR FROM HOLLYWOOD

JESSE + MURIEL~~(Sitting on the bench.)~~

(The front doorbell rings. JESSE crosses to answer it, checking his hair in the mirror over the mantle as he does. He is finally ready. Taking a deep breath, he opens the door. MURIEL TATE stands there. MURIEL is in her late thirties and is extremely attractive. She wears a bright yellow spring coat and a simple, demure, high-necked grey dress which shows off her swete, still girlish figure. Her hair falls simply to her shoulders, held back by a wide, white band. MURIEL is a warm, easy-smiling woman who seems as naive and vulnerable as the day she graduated from Tenafly High School. When the door opens, the two of them greet each other with enormous smiles. JESSE throws out his arms.)

Muriel!

MURIEL. (Smiles, cocks her head.) Jesse?

JESSE. It's not.

MURIEL. It is.

JESSE. Muriel, I can't believe it. Is it really you?

MURIEL. It's me, Muriel.

JESSE. Well, come on in, for Pete's sakes, come on in.

MURIEL. (Enters with a rush and crosses below sofa to far side of sofa.) I can only stay for a few minutes.

JESSE. (Closes door; follows to below near side of sofa.) My God, it's good to see you.

(They stand and confront each other.)

MURIEL. I just dropped in to say hello. I really can't stay.

JESSE. You sounded good on the phone but you look even better.

MURIEL. Because I've got to get back to New Jersey. I'm parked in a one-hour zone. Hello, Jesse, I think I'm very nervous.

JESSE. Hey! Hello, Muriel.

MURIEL. Same old Muriel, heh?

JESSE. What do you mean, same old Muriel? You look fantastic. (Arms outstretched, moves to her.) Come here, let me take a good look at you.

MURIEL. (Evading him, crosses below coffee table.) Oh? don't, Jesse. Don't look at me. I've been stuck in the Holland Tunnel for two hours. What time is it? Tell me when it's three o'clock. I can't stay. (Sits in armchair.)

JESSE. (Moves towards her.) Muriel, I can't get over it. You look absolutely wonderful.

MURIEL. Well, I feel absolutely wonderful.

JESSE. (Sitting on arm of sofa.) I really, sincerely mean that. You simply look incredibly fantastic.

MURIEL. Well, I feel incredibly fantastic.

JESSE. Well, you look it.

MURIEL. Well, I feel it.

JESSE. And how are you?

MURIEL. (Without enthusiasm.) I'm all right... I don't know why I'm so nervous, do you?

(*Shrugging coat off shoulders, and arranging it over back of chair.*)

JESSE. No. I can't imagine why you should be so nervous.

MURIEL. Neither can I. I just am... Should I be here?

JESSE. Why not? Is there anything wrong in it?

MURIEL. Oh, no. No, of course not. There's nothing wrong in it. My God, no. I don't see anything wrong. I just dropped by from New Jersey to say hello. What's wrong with that? ...I just don't think I should be here. (*Getting up, and moving towards mantel.*) Is it three o'clock yet?

JESSE. (*Moving towards her.*) Little Muriel Tate, all grown up and married. How many kids you got now?

MURIEL. Three.

JESSE. No kidding? Three kids... What are they?

MURIEL. A boy and a girl.

JESSE. A boy and a girl?

MURIEL. (*Breaking away to other side of sofa.*) And another boy who's away in camp. I can't even think straight. Isn't this terrible?

JESSE. (*Moving to sofa. Good-naturedly.*) What's wrong?

MURIEL. I don't know, I can't catch my breath. Well, it's you, that's the simple explanation. I'm nervous about meeting you.

JESSE. Me? Me? Jesse Kiplinger, your high-school boy friend from Tenafly, New Jersey. Ohh, Muriel.

MURIEL. You know what I mean, Mr. "Famous Hollywood Producer" staying at the Plaza Hotel.

JESSE. Mr. Farnous Hollywood Producer. (*Sitting on sofa.*) Muriel, you know me better than that. I haven't changed. I made a couple of pictures, that's all.

MURIEL. (*Moving to sofa.*) A couple of pictures? The Easter show at the Radio City Music Hall? I stood on line with my children for three hours in the rain.

JESSE. What did you do that for? You could have called my office in New York. My girl would have gotten you right in. Any time you want to see one of my pictures -

MURIEL. Oh, I couldn't do that.

JESSE. Why not?

MURIEL. I couldn't. I couldn't impose like that.

JESSE. You're not imposing.

MURIEL. I am.

JESSE. I want you to.

MURIEL. What's the number?

JESSE. I'll give it to you before you go. (*Getting up.*) But first you're going to sit down and have a drink. There's a million things I'm dying to ask you.

MURIEL. Oh, no drinks for me.

JESSE. One little drink.

MURIEL. No, no, no. You go ahead and have a drink. I have a five o'clock hairdresser's appointment.

JESSE. You don't drink?

MURIEL. Oh, once in a great, great while. Anyway, I've got to get home. I shouldn't even be in the city. The kids will be home from school soon and I've got to make dinner for Larry and I haven't even done my shopping in Bonwit's. No, no, I just dropped by to say hello.

JESSE. What'll you have?

MURIEL. A vodka stinger.

JESSE. Conning right up. (*He crosses to the bar setup.*)

MURIEL. (*Sitting on sofa.*) And then I've got to go... Whoooo, I finally took a breath. That felt good.

JESSE. (*Pouring liquor into shaker.*) Will you relax? Will you, Muriel? Come on now. I want you to stop being so silly and relax.

MURIEL. (*Chiding.*) Is that how you talk to your stars when they're nervous? Is that what you say to Elke Sommer?

JESSE. I don't talk to the stars. I have directors for that... For God's sakes, Muriel, what are you so nervous about?

MURIEL. Oooh, there's that famous Hollywood temper I read about... You want me to be frank?

JESSE. Please.

MURIEL. I feel funny sitting here drinking in a hotel room...

I mean, I'm a married woman.

JESSE. (*Having finished making and pouring drinks, moves to her.*) Would you feel better if we had our drinks down in the Palm Court?

MURIEL. We're here, we might as well stay.

JESSE. (*Handing her drink.*) Okay. Then will you sit back and relax? (*Sits down next to her on sofa.*)

MURIEL. Just for a few minutes. I've got a six o'clock hairdresser's appointment.

JESSE. I thought it was at five?

MURIEL. It's flexible... Is it warm in here? (*Putting down drink on coffee table.*)

JESSE. Why don't you take off your gloves?

MURIEL. (*Shaking finger at him.*) Oh, no...! Let's not have any of that, Mr. Jesse Kiplinger of Hollywood, California... My gloves will stay where they belong, if you please.

JESSE. (*Putting drink down on coffee table.*) Muriel, you are delightfully and incredibly unchanged. How long has it been now? Fifteen, sixteen years?

MURIEL. Since our last date? It'll be seventeen years on August Sixth.

JESSE. You remembered that?

MURIEL. I still have the swizzle sticks from Tavern on the Green.

JESSE. (*Learning in to her.*) No, time hasn't changed you, Muriel. You're still so fresh and clean. (*Sniffs about her.*) You even smell the same way.

MURIEL. Ohhh?

JESSE. (*Sniffs her ear.*) Like cool peppermint... Clear, cool peppermint.

MURIEL. (*Pushes his nose away with her finger.*) Now, you and your nose just behave yourself... I did not come to the Plaza Hotel to be smelled.