



"Violine"

By Joe Woodward

**a play
written with reference to diary entries
recording actual events during the period
April 1941 to May 8th. 1945**

**"Violine" is a work of fiction set against
such recorded events.**

c 1995 / 1999 / 2017 Joe Woodward
PO Box 1106
DICKSON ACT 2602
AUSTRALIA

"Violine"
Dramatis Personae

CYRIL (VIOLINE):	aged 80, suffering from a dementia
YOUNG CYRIL	ages 23 to 29. Cyril plays the violin.
TERRI:	Cyril's wife, aged early seventies, a pianist.
CARL ORTER / GUARD:	a social worker, later confused with a German guard at Corinth P.O.W. compound
FRAN / YOUNG GIRL:	aged early twenties, Fran is the former sweet heart, appears as a YOUNG GIRL in Cyril's old age.
YOUNG MAN:	an anonymous young man
MARTINE:	an Italian prisoner of the Greeks who finds himself in the same compound with Australian prisoners
BEN:	Cyril's son aged 40 something.
SISTER BELL:	a Community Nurse.
SISTER BONAVENTURE:	a nun working as a Sister in the Klagenfurt Hospital
HELMUT:	a wounded Austrian soldier.
ANNA:	the Doctor's Assistant aged around 25 from The Rhineland.
NURSING HOME SISTER:	sister from Gardens Nursing Home
NAZI GIRL:	distributor of sweets on Hitler's birthday.
KRIS:	Ben's wife and Cyril's daughter in law.
GERMAN OFFICER:	a wounded soldier in the Klagenfurt Hospital
M.C.:	a German or Austrian soldier in the Hospital.
Silhouetted Violinist:	A glimpse of a young violinist possibly in uniform
VOICE:	An objective voice from outside the scene

"Viole"
Synopsis Of The Original Play

"Viole" is a work of fiction with reference to actual events recording in the war-time diary of a World War Two veteran and ex-prisoner of war: Jack Woodward.

The Play

"I can talk to you can't I!" begins Cyril. Cyril has constructed a "Stage Time" through which to explore with his "audience" some matters that need resolving before he loses it entirely. It is through his inner monologue, largely delivered in a soliloquy, that we glimpse the significance of his World War Two experience in his whole life.

Just before he was captured at Kalamata Bay in Greece and on the day he was released at Klagenfurt Hospital in Austria, Cyril was playing his violin. Throughout the years he was known as The Fiddler or "Viole". Over this time, he kept an accurate diary which plays a significant role in his last years and months on the earth.

"What was lost on that beach?"

Act 1

In Act 1, Cyril establishes his Stage Time where he longs to play music with his wife Terri. But on this particular day, there is something wrong. Terri doesn't play. Instead, there is an ominous visit from a stranger named Carl. This exasperates, Cyril's processing of his diary which he sees as a book of clues for his life and death. It is not a sentimental document for the amusement of an "idiot simpleton". Rather it is the blueprint or text with patterns and clues to be studied. He becomes aware of another "confinement" looming and all that entails. The sense of being abandoned is again current. It is as if the events of 1941 are still real. "Sometimes, there are moments when an event which took place more than fifty years ago can seem more current than anything happening in the past few seconds," he says.

The smashing of his fiddle becomes a motif for his thinking: playing a more central role than even his loss of freedom. The letters of Fran, his former love, crystalize aspects of his own nature and way of dealing with things. This is mirrored in his brief moments with Anna and his confrontation with the spirit of his wife in Act 3. As he is almost lost in his own soliloquy, he sees two young lovers in the street outside his window. There is a sense of something physical that contrasts with Cyril's head in the clouds and seeking of the eternal.

Act 2

Cyril is now struggling to keep control at the moment of having to leave his home to enter an institution. The struggle against humiliation is compounded with the Corinth experience where the Australian prisoners were herded in a compound with Italian prisoners of the Greeks. This was significant because only weeks earlier, the Australians had beaten the Italian armies in Northern Africa. There was much animosity between the two groups. Yet Cyril is befriended by Martine, an Italian. But in these moments of comfort, there is the boding of ill as Cyril's son, along with the Social Worker and Sister Bell try to get him out of the house. For Cyril it brings to mind the image of the time he faced Heinrich Himmler and the humiliation and fear that accompanied the meeting. He turns to the one thing that can act as a comfort: his music. So he plays Stardust by Hogie Charmichael into the interval.

Act 3

Cyril is now a resident of "Gardens" a dementia unit and nursing home. For him, it is Klagenfurt Hospital. Here he suffered from an extremely painful ear infection. He recalls the "Angel of Light" in Sister Bonaventure. Mid the horror, there is light and a sense of hope. Anna, from The Rhineland, offers a sensual possibility that is rejected by Cyril. He becomes more aware of the inner fears within him. He meets Helmut who has to get back to Vienna to find his family. In their loss, the Germans are seen as having unreal expectations for their future. Cyril is more of a realist, but keeps his council while still a prisoner amongst the enemy. Initially without his violin, he is lost. But soon it is delivered to the hospital and on the last day of the war, he plays for the wounded and dying. All of this parallel's his existence at Gardens. But it is only in his wife, Terri's death, that he can directly talk with her about his own experience and hear of hers. "What was lost on that beach?"

The period of April 1941 to May 1945, was to forever affect the life of Cyril Farmer and those who loved him. The means he used to rise above the filth and the obscenity of the time, became the means to approach all his life.

Confinement again. The War resumes from where it left off. Cyril either surrenders again or fights to the death. He is now a captive both in the physical sense and a captive of his own mind: now confined by his growing dementia. The journey from the top of Greece to Kalamata Beach is relived and this time ends in a victory of sorts.

Historical significance

Factual war-time details used in the text are backed up by research and anecdotal reference through the diary of Jack Woodward (P.O.W., 1941-1945). Other than this, any similarity between people living or dead is strictly coincidental.

1

We hear the sound of lapping waves on a beach. A lone violinist is playing.

FADE OUT SOUND

CYRIL

I can talk to you can't I! I believe it is 1995 ... fifty years since the war ended. And now you see my brain is only lucid for about half a second. So you must understand that my speech should not be taken for granted. In the real time, as opposed to our stage time here, others probably view me as a walking vegetable. One doctor actually suggested to my wife, Terri, that I should be locked up in some institution to get me out of the road and let me die. "He's already 'brain dead'," the doctor said ... and he said it in my presence too. That was a bit rough. I mean I had been going to the bastard for years. Now while Terri doesn't believe the doctor's verdict, she does tend to accept, as I suppose anyone would, that my best days are over. It seems they can plot these little dark lines on the surface of my brain: little dark areas that show up on the scan to prove that my thought processes and particularly my memory, and especially my short term memory, is shot. Now even the doctor should know that these dark areas don't mean that I'm brain dead. And as I said before: I do have a fraction of a moment at any given time where these little dark areas in my brain haven't reached yet.

You know what I'm talking about? Don't you! I've been prone since birth to Dr. Alzheimer's confusions. It seems our genes determine so many of life's nasties.

Anyway, I haven't invited you here for some kind of biology lesson. No! But these fractured moments are able to be expanded quite considerably by my picking up an instrument and playing it. I was very fortunate in having good Sister Mary Ecclesiastics tapping my wrist with a ruler in order to make a violinist out of me while I was still very young. (He chuckles) Now, how could I have known that Sister Mary Ecclesiastics would be responsible for my being able to by-pass the dark areas turning me into an idiot simpleton in my final years on the earth? She was such a dragon. I sat with about ten others and she would bellow at me to keep my wrist up. Well "thank you Sister Mary Ecclesiastics".

Solo Piano

Now listen to that ...
It's Terry. She knows I can see her from my door way. Sometimes I see her looking at me and smiling sadly to placate any lingering desires I might harbour. But she knows she might just as well have smiled at a photograph. And perhaps she did: that one of the two young lovers on the dance floor. Terri and I: those two young people our children could never meet. The paradox is that Terri is closer to me now than perhaps she ever was ... She will play something. And I will be tempted to remove my violin from its case. We do this most days now. Terri plays an introduction and I continue.

Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven
... and Faure ... we play them
all. But do you think she
is hesitating? Preoccupied
with something else? I could
attempt to ask her. But what
would that achieve? My
question would be a garbled
mess by the time it was
articulated. Her response
would be to treat my enquiry
as a baby's cry.

MUSIC STOPS

Come on ... Terri, for god's
sake, play. You must play
today. She must. While you are
all here waiting, and being an
audience. The music is what
brings it all together. She
knows that. She speaks about
how amazing it is I can still
play while unable to string
more than a few words
together. Play.

SILENCE

If only she could see you. If
only she knew you were here,
she would play her best and
insist I was properly attired
for the occasion. Oh ...
But like so much in this room,
she cannot see. She does not
hear the voices of audiences
and guests who visit. And
there is so much I ...

PIANO PLAYS AGAIN

See ... She plays. Thank
Christ for that. Hear how well
she plays.

Now I take out my violin case
and open it to remove my
Reichel violin. But there is a
knock at the door.

FX: KNOCK. PIANO STOPS. MUSIC STOPS.

Best laid plans ... And it's
very unfortunate. Especially
with you all here. Who the
hell is this?

CARL ORTNER ENTERS. HE HAS A STRAIN OF A GERMAN ACCENT.

CARL

It must be very hard for you.

TERRI

There is still something here. He plays so well on the violin. And everyday he takes out his old diary and the photos from Austria.

CARL

He was a prisoner of war.

CYRIL

(Listening)

Yeah. Of course I was. But what's your business? I don't know you.

TERRI

Four years. He was captured in Greece.

CYRIL

Kalimata Bay, April 29th. 1941.

TERRI

You can see these photographs (pointing to the wall). Martrei, Wolfsberg, Leinz, Klagenfurt. He was in a POW camp in Austria.

CARL

(Incredulous)

My mother was from Wolfsberg in Karnten where the British POW camp was located. I was just a little boy during the war. My brothers were with the army on the French and Russian fronts.

CYRIL

Hmm ... He's Austrian!

TERRI

Look Mr. Orter, he's not going to want to go.

CYRIL

Go?

CARL

This isn't like a hospital. I know he had a bad experience recently.

TERRI

He went down-hill so much last time. I'd hate to see him like that again. He was like a little rabbit that had been let out of a cage. He was terrified. When he came back, he ran out on to the back lawn in his bare feet and literally crawled on the grass like an animal.

CYRIL

(Agitated)

How could you do it to me? How could you do it to me? How could you?

TERRI

(Over Cyril's voice)

He kept screaming at me: "How could you do it to me? You put me there. You put me there". He didn't understand I was in hospital too and ill. He won't understand now either.

CARL

They will look after him. There'll be others he can talk to. He'll be able to play his violin. It's a very good dementia unit

VIGOROUS VIOLIN

CYRIL

I never would have imagined. They're sending me back.

CARL

Does he always play like that?

TERRI

You never know what is going through his mind in that room. He rarely comes out now.

CYRIL

Here we go again. Sunday: 27th. April 1941. They've left us again. No ships.

CYRIL
Monday: 28th. April. Kalamata.
Fighting in town and on the
beach. Who made the joke about
the "cactoblastis"? Sergeant
Major Dolan did. Are you
there?

TERRI
It's all right Cyril. Cyril.

CYRIL
It's not all right. And the
singing stops. Rows of men.
Rows of frightened men.
Waiting men: And only my
fiddle played.

MUTTERING IN GIBBERISH

CARL
(Speaking over
Cyril's voice)
What's he muttering about?

TERRI
He'll be all right. He gets
aggressive at times. Though I
hadn't seen him do that with
his violin.

CARL
Did he say something about
ships? 1941? Kalamata olives
or something?

TERRI
Everyday he goes over and over
his diary. 'Could easily be
something about the war. He
was captured at Kalamata Bay.
On the day before his unit
surrendered to the Germans, he
was playing his fiddle on the
beach to try and lift the
spirits of the men.

CYRIL
"I took my fiddle from its
case, grasped it by the neck
and hit it against a stone
wall! It whined complaining,
but it didn't break. The
second stroke smashed it to
pieces. I broke the bow across
my knee and felt a really

personal hatred at that moment
for all Germans."

CARL

He still remembers 1941!

TERRI

Look, Mr. Orter, here are all
these papers. Can you help me
here.

FX BATTLE

CYRIL

"3.30pm. Kalamata Bay ... We
fixed bayonets for the first
time ... and we broke into the
tune of 'Johnny Is In Town'
substituting the word 'Jerry'
for 'Johnny'. We watched those
seven destroyers enter the bay
in the dusk as we then went to
fight Jerry in darkened
streets and on the wharfs. (He
sniggers) Won them back again
too ... by 10.00pm. It was a
vicious fight. Then southward
we went into the gray dawn
searching for mates lost in
the night's confusion. Furtive
councils were held in gullies
and culverts and sometimes in
sight of German patrols
rounding up the beaten foe and
robbing them of food and
possessions. The ocean lapped
the beach cynically
indifferent to all that had
happened between the
tides and it looked clear and
inviting. Then, April 29th.
Capitulation."

CYRIL

"Surrender. They left us. We
saw the ships ... The
Bonaventure was the last. But
they dissolved into the
darkness ... with good
reason."

CYRIL' NARRATOR
VOICE

So no bitterness eh Cyril?
None. Then four years ...
gone? Ah ... Ah dear. What was
lost on that beach Cyril? What
was lost? And what was gained
for that matter?

SOUND OF BEACH

CYRIL

Win some: Lose some, as the saying goes. Pardon me if I keep forgetting that was a long time ago. The dark areas (pointing to his head and winking) you know! Sometimes, there are moments when an event which took place over fifty years ago can seem more current than anything happening in the past few seconds.

Hmmm ... Kalamata "olives"! Did you hear him say olives? More to the point, did you hear me say "olives"? Ah who cares? The old idiot in his room. Who cares? AHHH DEAR ...

CYRIL

What was lost on that beach? My fiddle. I smashed it. I'd carried it with my pack, my rifle, and my tin hat through North Africa. And in Greece while fighting a rear guard action all the way from Thermopile to Kalamata. And I missed it. I missed it more than freedom. Didn't get another one until a German Commandant, Sergeant Osi, got me one from Leinz in Austria, a year later. So that's what I lost on the beach at Kalamata: My fiddle. Yeah, my fiddle.

CYRIL NARRATOR
VOICE

Was that ALL?

CYRIL

Oh ... And a temporary loss of freedom. At least this time, they say I can still play my violin.

TERRI NARRATOR
VOICE

Terry surprises you Cyril. Your performance has no traction with her. She hears

what others hear. Your "real time voice".

TERRI
Cyril ... Cyril ... Cyril

CYRIL
AH ... aye ... Ah dear ...

TERRI
Would you like a cup of tea,
Cyril?

CYRIL
Aye?

TERRI
A cup of tea. Tea?

CYRIL
Well, that'd be ... and who
might this ... (looking around
for Carl) Well, that's funny
(giggles) ... Ah dear ... Ah
dear ...

TERRI
You'd like a tea and biscuit?

CYRIL
Ah a cuppa! Don't mind of I
do. Don't mind if I do. And
who is this young bloke? Eh!
It's a fine thing. (Shaking
his head) I don't know ...
(Holding back a sob) It's all
... (He is nodding and
studying Carl)

CARL
My mother came from Karnten.
In Austria. Near Wolfsberg!

CYRIL
Oh ... Austria?

CARL
Terri tells me you were a
prisoner of war ...

CYRIL
Beautiful place. You were
there?

CARL
As a little boy ...

CYRIL
Mum! (Shaking his head) No.
No.

CARL
I enjoyed your playing before.
Cyril shrugs his shoulders.

CARL
You play very well.
I've always liked the violin.
It's such a poignant
instrument. Mind you, in the
wrong hands it could drive you
crazy. I admire you for being
able to create such a
beautiful sound from such a
difficult instrument.

TERRI
You going to join us Cyril? Or
would you like your tea in
your room?

CYRIL
(Sniggers) Hmm ... It doesn't
matter.

TERRI
Now Cyril, it does matter.
What would you prefer?

CYRIL
Ah dear ... ah dear ...

TERRI
I think his medication can
make him a bit depressed. He's
not usually like this. Cyril
would be the politest man I've
ever known.

CARL
It's all right. He's probably
exhausted from playing. It
takes a lot out of you.
Doesn't it Cyril? It does.

CYRIL
Ah dear ... ah dear ...
TERRI
You'll have your tea in your
room.

CYRIL
Thanks mum ...

CYRIL'S

NARRATOR VOICE

My old man's voice reverts to the familiar Voice of the commentator. That you, my friends hear now. And I don't mean to be rude, but Terry's right. I do sometimes feel so depressed.

CYRIL'S

NARRATOR VOICE

But why would you feel depressed, Cyril?

CYRIL

Why! Indeed. Terri is so kind to me now. I try to express my gratitude as best I can and not be short with her when things annoy me. She makes my tea exactly as I like it. You know, I spent a short time in the Repat Hospital, and I was lucky to GET tea. Half the time it was coffee. Once I ended up with some of that herbal stuff. God, I don't know how anyone can drink it. But Terri: she makes my tea just right.

TERRI

There you are Cyril. You enjoy that.

CYRIL

Right you are ... Ah dear, ah dear ... Terri leaves his room and joins Carl in the lounge.

TERRI

He likes his tea ... made in just a certain way.

CARL

You can show them. That's what they're paid to do. You'll see.

TERRI

I don't have much time ...

SILENCE.

CYRIL

"What was lost on that beach on April 29th. 1941?", I have to say "nothing" other than my fiddle.

VOICE

Cyril, they see you looking over at them and then as you sip your tea, perhaps they might wonder what is going on in your head. And you turn back to those pictures and your diaries ...

CYRIL

Everyday, I look into these pictures and I go over my words written during those years. Page and point to those smiling men who stand in front of the barracks looking at you with long gone eyes. So young! And there you are Cyril!

VOICE

Look at you. And all these words. And there you are Cyril ...

CYRIL

The old buggers were young buggers once ...

VOICE

Have you found it yet Cyril?

CYRIL

What? What?

SILENCE

CARL

Sorry Mrs. Farmer, I can't complete these now. It's best you read through them all and take your time. And ... ah ... I have to be off.

TERRI

Well, thank you so much Mr. Orter. I'll call you if I have any problems.

CARL

Any time! Thank you and good bye. GOOD BYE CYRIL. Keep playing ...

FX: DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES.

TERRI
You all right Cyril?

CYRIL
All right? All right? Ah dear
ah dear ... Yep... and you?

TERRI
You had enough. You finished
your tea?

CYRIL
Beautiful ... thank you ...

CUPS TAKEN AWAY

CYRIL
How did most men discover,
under duress, the very worst
and the very best in
themselves? Well I'll tell
you. The moments where these
discoveries were made, were
often the most obscene and
brutal. Most would now prefer
to say nothing. Most such
moments are locked deep
inside: confined there to be
later protected by death. So,
when I look at my pictures and
read through the diary, I'm
not reliving or finding a kind
of nostalgia in those war
years. Quite the contrary! I'm
looking for clues as to what
is going to happen next ...

TERRI
Oh Cyril ... couldn't make it?

CYRIL
Ah ... Oh dear ... Oh dear ...

VOICE
You've pissed yourself old man
... Oh, Cyril ...

TERRI
Never mind Cyril. Here. Take
your trousers off. Do you
still need to go to the
toilet?

CYRIL
It's a bit late now. Isn't it!

CYRIL

Never mind ... I um ...
All right? I stand to look out
my window, and it's an issue.
All right? Reverting to
temporarily to Dementia Voice)
Ah dear ... Yep!

VOICE

Terri produces a sponge and a
bucket and proceeds to sponge
his legs. She is surprisingly
efficient and he is very
compliant. The cleaning is
matter-of-fact. She takes
clean dry towels and dries
him. He is helped to put on a
new pair of boxer shorts. Once
dressed in these, Cyril's
attention shifts back through
the window. Suddenly she
staggers as she clasps at her
hip. Cyril doesn't notice.

CYRIL

You know Terri, everyday, I
still look out this window and
I notice the people who pass
by this house.

TERRI

Cyril ...

CYRIL

Mostly you don't see them as
they travel in their cars. But
then, there are others who
walk their dogs ...

TERRI (In

pain) Cyril, can you help me?

CYRIL

or walk to the shops, or who
jog or who ... So when I'm
feeling better, I wait at the
front gate to greet them and
engage them in idle chatter.

TERRI

Cyril, take my hand.

VOICE

Terri tries to straighten her
leg. But she is in extreme
pain.

CYRIL

I must say, this is very rare these days. Remember my dark areas! (Gesturing to his head and sniggering). I mean no one really wants to talk to an idiot simpleton.

VOICE

He straightens up to regain a proud stature. Terri takes long and deliberate breaths.

TERRI

I can't do this ...

CYRIL

But some days, I'm still a bit adventurous.

Where's my trousers?

TERRI

Here.

CYRIL

Thank you Terri. She hands them to me. I am aware of her once again. Then she helps me dress myself in silence. She then picks up the remaining items and carries them out of the room. She dumps the objects next to the piano and sits on the Piano stool. Her head droops.

VOICE

Cyril feels his trousers.

CYRIL

Thank you Terri. (He contemplates) My wife! My wife; a beautiful woman! Woman ... What was her name?

VOICE

Who's name?

CYRIL

You know, there is one particular young woman who comes past each day. She carries a wicker basket or other similar bag. I have often wondered what is in it and where she goes to. There is something about her that is

so familiar. And one of these days, I would like very much to go down to the front gate, and introduce myself. She looks so open and light. And I'm sure she would talk with me and tell me a bit about herself.

CUT SOUND CUE OF OCEAN. SILENCE.

CYRIL

Look, I see her. There she is ... Sure enough, there she is.

VOICE

Who is she?

CYRIL

Who is she?

1930s FX:

YOUNG CYRIL

Fran. Fran.

FRAN

It's about time Cyril. I went to all this trouble and you're late.

YOUNG CYRIL

We're leaving. Our unit is going into camp and we'll be off.

FRAN

No. Oh ...

YOUNG CYRIL

Somehow Fran, all this is meant to be. I don't want to spend my life as a printer's assistant or working as a clerk in a stationers' shop. The war won't last forever and I'll still have my music. And my pen. We'll still be able to adventure through life, the two of us, just as we always said we would.

FRAN

That's if you come back ... and not too changed. I've heard how people can change so much when in ... well ...

those circumstances. And me
...

YOUNG CYRIL
And you? You and Beth: You'll
have to do what the blokes
have always done back here.
Women will be manning the
factories, running the banks
and doing all the men's
things. Won't you Fran?

FRAN
(Slightly hesitant) Of
course. We'll be all right.

YOUNG CYRIL
Some of the lads talk about a
three years war. Others, a six
years war. And one bloke
mentioned the hundred year
war. (He chuckles)

FRAN
Crikey Cyril ... Hold me.

YOUNG CYRIL
Hey ... I'll be back. The war
won't last forever. Nothing
does.

FRAN
Will you still be here for the
Requiem?

YOUNG CYRIL
I don't think so. Someone else
will have to take over first
violin.

VOICE
Old Cyril picks up his violin
and plays a dramatic
introduction almost like a
reveille. A howl emanates from
his throat. Young Cyril jumps
to attention and salutes.

YOUNG CYRIL
Sah!

CYRIL
(Calling out) You! You and ME!
All of us ... We all must fight.
Fight and die! Fight to the
Death! All of us ... The violin

and bow are almost a warrior's
weapon and shield in my hands.

SILENCE

VOICE

Fran, picks up a letter.

FRAN

(Naively)

Libya! You know I'd never
heard of the place. It's in
Africa isn't it? Egypt!
Pyramids and the Sphinx. And
Italians. Cyril's fighting
Italians as well as Germans,
Beth. (Pause) Nice tea
Mrs.Farmer. At least he got to
travel on the Queen Mary. It's
lovely tea Mrs.Farmer.

Fran pulls out another letter and
studies it.

FRAN

A prisoner! Well at least
you're still alive.
Thank God. Your dad assured us
you would be. But when we read
about what happened in Greece
... well ... I wonder about
you? What
you're thinking. What your
feeling. It must be
cold in Austria. Your mother
says she will be
able to send you things
through the Red Cross.
Warm bits of clothing. Small
luxuries: Even
chocolates! Oh Cyril, are you
cold? I hate to
think of you being cold.
Seeing your nervous
shiver even when it's hot
makes me shudder to
think of you in those icy
mountains. 'Makes me
shiver just imagining it. But
I am being silly,
aren't I? I should be cheering
you up instead of
telling you my fears for you.
I should be telling
you all the news and all about
the little things
that are happening: what Mrs.
Turner made for

lunch at choir practice or how
old Peter Chatswood has been
promoted to first
violin in your absence. We're
doing Faure's
Requiem instead of Mozart this
year. Oh and
your dance band isn't the same
without you.
They've really become quite
boring. And Cyril,
we're all working very hard
for the war effort.
And Beth is well. And so are
your mum and dad.
And they've been very nice to
me. I think I've
almost become part of the
furniture at your place.
I pray for you Cyril. May God
bring you back
safely ... and soon. All my
love, Always,
Fran.

VOICE

She places it in an envelope.
Cyril breaks from his salute
and returns to his chair.

CYRIL

"All my love? Always?" Why do
people persist in such
emotional banalities? Eh!

VOICE

Isn't that the way you look at
it now? Eh Cyril? Emotional
banalities!

CYRIL

(Towards Fran)

"I dreamed of home last night.
It was painfully
real. I was telling them about
Greece and Corinth
and were about to have a
wonderful meal of all
the good things I used to have
when I became
aware of lice and a cement
floor and the smell of
unwashed men in a crowded
basement ..."

VOICE

But what's this old man?
Dreaming of dreams now?

CYRIL

Dreams? (Shaking his head) And she's still here. Still here. She still speaks to you. Now that you're alone and old.

VOICE

She has written a different letter.

Faure Reprise

FRAN

I'm sorry for feeling so pensive. You seem to be so bright in spite of your ordeal. But I've been thinking of that time we each lit a candle in Saint Patrick's and placed it on the little altar. We lit them for you and I. I keep thinking somehow that while the candles stay alight, then our love will remain alive, and even the circumstances of this dreadful war and the horrible things around us will just disappear in the darkness surrounding the light. I visit Saint Patricks each day and light two small fires for both of us. But, oh God, I feel so silly. I'm not so naive to think all is jolly with you and you indulge in nostalgic daydreams like I do. For you, the sheer task of keeping alive from day to day must be so hard. But you know what I am like. I am writing my silly thoughts down so that I won't back away from them later when feeling so much more sensible. Oh Cyril, wouldn't other people ridicule us for ever thinking and feeling the way we do. I know you won't laugh at me. But God doesn't seem to have quite the same pride of place he used to enjoy. I wonder if you were able to keep the little missal book I gave you. Though, I know with all you've been through it's probably buried under sand on a Greek beach or

under snow on one of those
lovely Austrian mountains.
Anyhow, I'll write again soon.
We are getting your letters.
We got your last
one about your dream of dinner
at your mum's. Beth is now
working for the Americans,
believe it or not. So keep on
dreaming. I'll try and send
you a happy one. I felt so
sorry
for you when you spoke about
waking up on a
concrete floor ...

VOICE

Fran slowly turns to a
makeshift altar and lights
three candles.

MUSIC

CYRIL

Two letters ...one from Fran
and the other from mum. I
usually opened Mum's first.
But on this day, I opened
Fran's letter first. It was so
delicate: whimsical and soft.
I felt a nobility derived from
our love. It was the same as
that sustaining force that
kept alive the flame of
life even in those most
dreadful days in Corinth, the
forced marches and the journey
to Austria crammed into the
cattle trucks. I didn't find
her words morbid. She need not
have worried in that regard.
Then I opened my mother's
letter. The horror I felt in
her words had no precedent.
Worse than anything suffered
at the hands of the enemy was
the news that my beautiful
Fran had died. She was no
more. And as I read her words,
I knew she no longer breathed
and the marks on the page were
hollow. Fran died from a
complaint which apparently had
been developing over a year.
But she never once mentioned
it or alluded to it in any
way. The war could never be
over for me until I had

touched the earth in which she
lay.

MUSIC CUT: SILENCE

Hi Dad. BEN

Ah Ben! CYRIL

You've got your fiddle out.
Been playing? BEN

Just ... ah ... CYRIL

Mum's been ill. BEN

Eh! Ben? CYRIL

BEN

Dad, you knew Mum was ill. She
has to go into hospital again.

SILENCE.

You've been going through the
photos again ... and some of
your old letters! Who is that? BEN

A beautiful girl. CYRIL

Yes! Who was she? BEN

Ah dear! It's all a mess. And
um ... What's your name young
fella? CYRIL

I'm Ben, Dad. BEN

And where is ... you know! The
other one? CYRIL

BEN

Who?

CYRIL

You know ... ah gee ... I can't ...

BEN

Kris!

CYRIL

Ah dear. Ah dear!

BEN

Kris ... we separated.

Cyril

I am aware of Ben in the room.
I can hear his voice.

BEN

Dad?

CYRIL

(Abruptly) Hmm?

VOICE

Ben picks up some of the
letters.

BEN

What are these?
(He reads.)

BEN

Love, Fran? (Ben grins)
Look Dad, I gotta go. But just
had to drop in and see how you
were. It's OK I'll be back in
a couple of days to help you
pack.

CYRIL

Pack?

BEN

Yes ... Pack. You can't stay
here. Mum has to go into
hospital.

CYRIL

Good bye Ben ...

TERRI IS ON THE PIANO.

BEN

Mum, you've kept it tuned.

TERRI

Did you talk with him?

BEN

A little. I had a look at some
of the letters he has out

there. He seems to be able to read OK still.

TERRI

I think that's right.

BEN

Who was Fran?

TERRI

He always said they weren't all that serious: just friends.

BEN

She was a musician?

TERRI

Yes! All Cyril's women were either musicians or singers.

BEN

All?

TERRI

All two of us ... Fran's main legacy was the Faure SONATA. They played it before he went off to war. For a long time, I refused to play it. Silly jealousy! But we've been happy here these last few years. We played more together in the past five years or so than in the previous forty. I think music played a larger role in his life than any of us. He used to say he did far more for the war with his fiddle than he ever did with a Bren gun.

HE PLAYS "THESE FOOLISH THINGS"

VOICE

Cyril is lost in thought and trying to remember the words of an old song: "These Foolish Things". He is humming it.

CYRIL

De neh neh neh der neh neh neh neh neh neh ...
"These foolish things, remind me of you ..."

The foolish and naive things one says! Fran and I knew that

even our friends would have regarded our habit of praying together and lighting candles in the church as ridiculous. The rosary and the mass were as much a part of our courtship as was the romantic glow of the moon on a summer night over a lovers' balcony. No wonder, her death prompted music and a poem rather than tears. For surely, even in death, her spirit lifted me beyond the filth, the stench and the obscenity and barbarism that was the war ...

(Reading)

Delicate feet upon a feathery ground where saints and angels and spirits found the cloying touch of a breathless sight the shadowless spectre in a waking night.

I saw you as an angel. Our spirits released.

PAUSE.

I never touched her ... you know. Not really touch her. Her skin; her breath; the smell of her perspiring; the sensuous odours of a woman's ... Ha ... What couldn't be put into song or poetry: what couldn't be elevated into some kind of spiritual form was of no value after visiting that beach at Kalamata. I remember some of the other blokes seeing one of her letters. I was so angry. "What are ya?" they sneered. "Did ya get ya bit? A tit? A bit of finger in? eh?" God ... In Gradnitz, why not just find a bloke with a greasy bot and a warm bunk? That point where the impact of bodily function and spirit meet. "Say nice things to me!" he said. And don't we all want nice things said to us. Nice things thought about us. "Say nice things to me!" But in Gradnitz, the size of your prick was more significant than any devotion ... Any

virtue. The size of your
prick and a greasy bot was
sung about, was joked about,
was elevated to the status of
an icon. Who was circumcised?
Who wasn't? Pricks! (He
pauses) So naturally, a bloke
who spent his free time
playing his fiddle and writing
his furtive diary on bits and
pieces of throw away paper
might have seemed a bit of an
oddity. And as for lighting
candles with a young woman in
a church and praying for each
other's soul? Well, it seemed
foolish. For in the camp
wasn't life just a prick? a
chance to get what you can?
(He pauses again) No it
wasn't. But there was one
bloke we called Dive Bomber.
I first saw him in Corinth.
Later he showed up at Leinz.
Dive Bomber always seemed to
find a way of getting drunk. I
could never work out exactly
how. But he'd get drunk and
then shadow the guards or any
officers who smoked in order
to be the beneficiary of their
cigarette butts. The sight of
Dive Bomber darting across the
floor to retrieve the butt of
a German officer's cigarette
on a railway station in Leinz
must surely be one of the most
embarrassing and humiliating
moments in my life. And it fed
the picture being painted by
the Nazis. I'm sure that for
Dive Bomber, all relations
between the sexes were equally
based on "getting ya finger
in" and "getting ya bit". So
... I make no apologies for
reading my missal ... my
prayers; my absurdly
restrained view of life; my
misplaced optimism; my trying
to see worth in things that,
really, were worthless; and
for writing my poems or
playing my music ... or for
lighting candles with a young
woman who's spirit rested over
my shoulders and bid me to

rise with her and to seek the
eternal.

SILENCE

So what clues are there for me
now? What advice? What
prophecy is there for me now?
What in all these pages is
there for an old bloke?

SILENCE

Terri will die. Our children
probably won't light candles
for her. And I'll probably be
too stupid. And all the fuss
the young blokes paid to their
pricks and their lust will
mean nothing more than
nostalgia. Terri and her music
will die and be buried ...
Just like the girl from back
then. Only now, I won't be
able to write a poem, or a
song ... or explain my
feelings or speak of the
eternal. All there IS, is a
hope in an eternal: that it
really DOES exist. And there
is more than a prick and ...

VOICE

LOOK ... The girl appears again
on the street, catching YOUR
attention. This time she is
arm in arm with a young man.
They are laughing and moving
slowly. Cyril, you watch them
as they amble past your window
to the opposite side of the
road. There, they stop and
embrace to kiss.

LIGHTS FADE.

End of Act One

THESE FOOLISH THINGS REPRISE