

Excerpt from

## Vita & Violet

A full-length play

By

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## Cast of Characters

<u>Vita Sackville-West</u>	A writer, 28.
<u>Violet Keppel Trefusis</u>	Vita's companion, 26.
<u>Harold Nicolson</u>	Vita's husband, 34. A diplomat.
<u>Denys Trefusis</u>	Violet's husband, 30. A soldier.
<u>Solange</u>	A maid, about 20.

## Scene

Violet's suite at the Hotel du Rhin, Amiens, France.

## Time

Friday, February 13, 1920. The following day. It is fifteen months after the armistice.

## Notes to Actors

The Nicolson and Trefusises all use British dialect. Solange is performed with a French accent.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: The visible part of VIOLET'S suite-- a bedroom and adjacent sitting area-- comprises the entire set. A dressing room and bath adjoin the bedroom and lie offstage. A door connects the sitting area with the outside hall, apparent when the door opens. The spacious, elegant bedroom looks as if colored by Bakst. A double bed with pillows, dresser with mirror, upholstered chairs and a table with telephone furnish the room. An upstage window with sconces on either side looks out over Amiens. A cyclorama shows the outlines of the partially ruined town.

AT RISE: LIGHTS: Day. SOUND: 'Aquarium' from Saint-Saens' Carnival of the Animals, faintly heard. Someone knocks at the door. Pause. Another knock. Pause. The door opens. VIOLET enters, in her usual state of agitation. SHE wears a hat and a day dress, which rather daringly exposes her legs. VIOLET is a paradox, a trickster, a spinning top. Girlish and lovely, SHE exudes a remoteness and vulnerability which has undone many a suitor. Underneath, SHE'S high-strung and impulsive, a slave of intensity. SHE looks around, puzzled.

VIOLET

Jeffrey? Jeffrey are you in?  
(disappointed)

Oh, Jeffrey.

(SHE explores the room, pausing to gaze out the window. A noise from the dressing room interrupts her reverie. SOUND: music fades.)

Jeffrey, is that you?

(SHE approaches the dressing room, playful. Another noise within.)

Jeffrey, I can hear you in there. It's me. Why don't you come out?

(SHE opens the dressing room door, intending to enter.  
Darling, I know you're in there. Why are you being so silly.

VIOLET(cont'd)

I--

(SHE sees someone inside, not  
Jeffrey.) )

Oh, my--  
recognizing)  
You!

(SHE backs away, confused.)

What are you doing here? How did you know we--  
(Pause. SHE realizes.)

You followed us from Tangiers, didn't you?  
(terror)

Oh, my God. Jeffrey! Where is he? What have you done with  
him? You haven't hurt him? Tell me you haven't hurt him!

(VITA (pronounced VEE-ta)  
enters from the dressing room,  
a striking figure, seemingly  
materialized from some  
distant, romantic past:  
mannish, self-possessed,  
altogether magnetic. Her  
intensity complements  
VIOLET'S; though where VIOLET  
is coy, VITA is direct. A  
whiff of submissiveness from  
VIOLET will ignite VITA--an  
alchemy irresistible to both.  
VITA is taller, VIOLET  
prettier; VITA'S clothes,  
though expensive, are not  
smart. Her outfit seems  
carelessly thrown together,  
it's effect half-dowdy, half-  
Bohemian. At the moment, SHE  
appears ominous as "Julian."  
SHE advances on VIOLET as  
VIOLET backs away.)

VITA

Shut up!

VIOLET

Julian!

VITA

Shut up, whore!

VIOLET

Oh, God.

VITA

Did you think it would be so easy? Just run off?

VIOLET

How did you find--

VITA

The whole thing planned to make me jealous--

VIOLET

Mother! Mother told you, didn't she? Didn't--

VITA

Disgusting whore. The whole world knows--

VIOLET

Julian, please! He's been kind to me. You can't possibly understand--

VITA

(implacable)

I understand what you said to me. The most solemn oath--

VIOLET

Julian, I did love you. Perhaps too much. But I've seen now there are other feelings more important than--

VITA

Enough! I'm sick of your lying. Get over there!

VIOLET

Where?

VITA

On the bed.

VIOLET

Why? What do you want? What are you--

VITA

I'm taking what's mine.

VIOLET

Julian, no! Don't make me, please!

(VITA seizes VIOLET'S arm and forces HER down on the bed. VIOLET resists.) )

Julian, you're hurting me! No! Not this way--

(VITA kisses VIOLET suddenly and violently on the mouth. VIOLET continues resisting at first, then surrenders. THEY kiss passionately, VIOLET making sounds of pleasure. VITA lets go.)

Mmmm. No.

VIOLET(cont'd)  
(VIOLET pulls VITA back to the  
embrace. THEY kiss until  
VIOLET breaks off.)

VIOLET  
(pleased, herself now)  
Mmmm. That was good. That was wonderful. Oh, you're a beast.  
You're magnificent--

VITA  
(herself now)  
It's still not right. Something's off. It's too...

VIOLET  
Melodramatic?

VITA  
Oh, God. I have the subtlety of a tree trunk.

VIOLET  
(eager)  
Vita, shall we have another go at the bed part?

VITA  
No. Let me think. Maybe not the bed. Maybe the closet.

VIOLET  
Maybe they should talk Romany.

VITA  
Violet, they don't have to do everything we do.

VIOLET  
(conspiratorial)  
e chapiscar obnoton, Vita.

VITA  
e yabu romandimae, Violet. Later.

VIOLET  
You could kiss me again, anyway.

VITA  
I can't kiss you and think about writing a novel.

VIOLET  
Don't you like kissing me? You liked kissing me last night  
when I was Lushka.

VITA  
That's different. We have that worked out.

VIOLET  
I want to be Lushka now. I want you as Mitya.

VITA

Mmmm.

VIOLET

Mitya? Lushka wants you. She needs your strength. I do.

VITA

(relenting)

Lushka.

VIOLET

Mitya, come to me.

(VITA approaches VIOLET and  
pecks HER tenderly.)

VITA

Lushka.

VIOLET

Mitya! My mitya.

VITA

All right. Are you happy now?

VIOLET

Happy is not the word. There's another word for this.

VITA

Blithe? Joyful? Jocund?

VIOLET

More.

VITA

Jolly? Gay? Ebullient?

VIOLET

Ebullient. Yes, I'm ebullient.

VITA

Ecstatic? Enchanted--

VIOLET

Yes, this is all I want--perfect paradise. No husbands, no  
mothers. Just you and me and...what we make up...

VITA

God, you're beautiful. Every writer should have a muse like  
you.

VIOLET

I like being a muse better than cherries. And you are sublime. Hyppolyta, Byron, Joan of Arc.

VITA

Stop.

VIOLET

You are. You don't see it.

VITA

What I see is a page full of crossouts. But you know I actually think it's coming now, Violet. I can feel it. The clouds gathering into shapes.

VIOLET

Did you pick out a cafe for tonight?

VITA

I found one yesterday.

VIOLET

Did you ever think when we play acted as little girls that you'd one day write down what we said in novels?

VITA

I suppose. I was so epistolary, always scribbling.

VIOLET

And did you think they'd come to pass? That we'd--

VITA

Live them out? Violet. I never could have imagined what we've lived out.

VIOLET

I could have. I always told you we'd end up together. You didn't believe me.

VITA

I still don't believe it.

VIOLET

It's better than Ivanhoe, isn't it? It's better than The Count of Monte Cristo. And it's only beginning. Think of Sicily. The soirees we'll have in our living room.

VITA

I thought we were going to Sicily to be alone.

VIOLET

Don't be a stuffed shirt. We'll have plenty of time alone...What do you suppose our mothers would say now?

VITA

If they were here? Spare us, please.

(pause)

Well...your mother must have tea first.

VIOLET

Oh, of course!

VITA

Then she'd walk about the parlor.

(VITA transforms HERSELF into  
VIOLET'S mother. SHE inspects  
the room, speaks in a formal,  
imperious tone.)

It is drab, Violet, drab. How very Bohemian of you.

VIOLET

Yes, mother.

VITA

And you are so careless. Running off in that storm. Catching your death. You gave us all a fright. You might have died of pneumonia.

VIOLET

It was a cold, mother. I caught a cold crossing from Dover.

VITA

And your...

VIOLET

Friend?

VITA

Yes. That Sackville girl.

VIOLET

Isn't she grand?

VITA

Violet, she is common. Spanish blood. I hear her mother's a gypsy or something.

(THEY shriek at this.)

VIOLET

Yes, mother. It's so romantic!

VITA

Is that what you want, Violet? To be a gypsy? To gad about with poets and artists? It will not do.

VIOLET

It does me very well.

VITA

What about your marriage vows? You have broken Denys' heart, Violet.

VIOLET

He had no business following us here!

VITA

He offered his life to England in the war and this is how England repays him?

VIOLET

I'm not England, mother. Anyway, I think you paid him rather well to marry me.

VITA

Really, what will your father say? What would your Uncle Bertie have said?

VIOLET

My Uncle Bertie!

VITA

I'm glad he's not alive to see it.

VIOLET

My Uncle Bertie wasn't my uncle, mother!

(THEY shriek at this; the game dissolves in laughter.)

VITA

(herself again)

This is too good!

VIOLET

All right. My turn.

(VIOLET transforms HERSELF into VITA'S mother. She paces and speaks rapidly in a nervous voice with a foreign inflection.)

Vita. I cannot take any more of this. I simply can't.

VITA

More of what, mama?

VIOLET

Running about with your friend Violet. I don't understand it. I simply don't.

VITA

What's to understand, mama? She's spring rain on my cheeks, honeycomb in my breath, a great wing lifting me to the constellations--

VIOLET

This is nonsense.

VITA

I'm enamored, mama. She's my inamorata.

VIOLET

What is this love between two women? I have read Mr. Kraft Ebbing. I have read Mr....

VITA

Freud?

VIOLET

Mr. Freud. I never heard such drivel. I would expect it of her, Vita. She was raised at Portman Square. A house of scandal. But not you. You come from good stock. You're a Sackville!

(SHE pretends to weep.)

You were born at Knole!

VITA

Leaves turn, bonnie mama. Seasons change.

VIOLET

Knole lives in you, Vita. It never changes. Oh, the shame! I can't take it. My head is pounding, Vita. It's pounding with shame.

VITA

Have some valerian, mama.

VIOLET

And your husband. Dear Hadji.

VITA

(herself)

Call him Harold, Violet.

VIOLET

Dear Harold. You must think of him, Vita.

VITA

What of him, mama?

VIOLET

You must not blame him for his little foibles, Vita, his diversions with the ginger boys at the embassy--

VITA  
(not playing)  
Violet, don't bring up--

(The subject is painful for  
VITA. VIOLET, perhaps looking  
away, does not notice at first  
and continues the game.)

VIOLET  
And your children. I love watching over them. But they're  
always asking when mommy--

VITA  
Violet, please!

VIOLET  
(herself again, realizing)  
Vita! I'm sorry.

VITA  
It's all right.

VIOLET  
I'm so stupid. I didn't mean--

VITA  
It's nothing. I'm fine.  
(SHE's not fine.)  
Let's talk about something else.