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Intimate Exchanges

Volume II

Alan Ayckbourn

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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FOUNDED 1830

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

These plays were written originally for a cast of two. They could of course be performed by a larger cast but the end result would, in my view, be infinitely less satisfying. Similarly with choice of alternatives; it's possible to do just one version but far less theatrically exciting. If, for some unavoidable reason, a decision is taken to mount only one alternative, or one alternative with a larger cast, or even several alternative versions with a larger cast, I would be grateful if the audience could be informed of my original preferences. This would serve (a) to explain why the plays are so idiosyncratically constructed and (b) to let people know what they've missed.

A.A.

INTIMATE EXCHANGES

First produced at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 3rd June 1982

with the following Cast

Celia	}	Lavinia Bertram
Rowena		
Sylvie		
Josephine, Celia's mother		
Irene Pridworthy		
Miles, Rowena's husband	}	Robin Herford
Toby, Celia's husband		
Lionel		
Joe, Lionel's father		
Reg Schooner		

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn

Designed by Edward Lipscomb

Subsequently produced at the Greenwich Theatre on 11th June 1984 and the Ambassador's Theatre on 13th August 1984, with the same cast, director and designer

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Volume I of *Intimate Exchanges*, containing the four plays on the left-hand side of the plan, is available from Samuel French Ltd.

- Scene 1 Toby and Celia's garden
Five years ago in June
- Scene 2 The same. Five days later
- Scene 3 Any one of several places
Five weeks later
- Scene 4 A churchyard. This year

INTIMATE EXCHANGES is a related series of plays totalling eight scripts

This is the Fifth

A CRICKET MATCH

CHARACTERS

APPEARING IN THIS SERIES OF SCENES

Celia

Miles

Sylvie

Josephine

Toby

Rowena

Lionel

Reg Schooner

HOW IT BEGAN

Toby and Celia's garden. Since this set will cover all possible seven scenes during the first half of the play, it will vary only in that occasionally we may wish to feature one area more prominently than another. In total, though, it is a well-kept garden which has been left, over the past few years, to go very much to seed. A garden which gives children great opportunities for play and most adults huge feelings of guilt that it isn't tidier. There is a small paved area at one side, the patio, bounded by a low wall which presumably leads directly off the lounge of the house. There is a garden table on this but no chairs. The table, it would appear; has been left out all winter. On it is an empty coffee cup, a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. A lumpy lawn, some of it may even have been flower beds at one time, leads to a garden shed at the bottom of the garden. Beyond that and unseen is a fence. And beyond that again playing fields. From this direction, throughout this scene, occasional shouts of children are heard

All the garden belongs of course to the house, although this is in fact a bungalow. Or sometimes, as it is more grandly known, the Headmaster's Cottage. It is modern, built by Toby's predecessor within the grounds of Bilbury Lodge, Preparatory School for Boys and Girls. It is a mild, sunny June day—in fact, Monday June 14th. The summer term is underway

In a moment, Celia, a rather worried-looking woman in her mid-thirties, comes out of the house. She has on her working-clothes with a scarf tied round her head. She is evidently involved in some heavy domestic cleaning work

Celia (*calling back into the house*) They must be in the shed. I'll have a look.
... Listen, Sylvie, you carry on up in the loft. I'll join you, all right? (*She listens, then calls*) Sylvie ...

There is no reply

Celia shrugs, then, stands for a moment on the patio to catch her breath. She's obviously been overdoing it more than she realizes. She squints into the sun and breathes the fresh air for a moment. She then looks at herself and cursorily brushes some of the dust off her clothes. She mops her brow with her forearm. Glad of the rest, she now goes to move off towards the shed. Her eyes light on the cigarette packet on the table. She hesitates, stopping in her tracks. She deliberates. Should she or shouldn't she weaken to temptation?

In fact, at this point, we reach the first of our alternatives. Throughout the play, the action will sub-divide as the characters are faced with alternative choices of action. Initially, the choices are smaller. Should she break her rule and have a cigarette before 6 p.m.?

A VISIT FROM A FRIEND

In this instance, Celia resists the temptation and virtuously goes off down the garden and into the shed. Although the inside of this is not much visible during this particular scene, we hear her from the inside and gather it is fairly cluttered with junk

Celia *(in the shed)* Oh, God. *(She clumps about looking for something)*

Sound of the front doorbell. Celia, not hearing it, carries on sorting

(In the shed) I mean, honestly. . . . How is anyone expected to . . . *(she grunts as she heaves something heavy down)* . . . find anything in this . . . ugh. *(She clumps and grunts some more)*

Sound of the front doorbell

The noises in the shed stop

Celia sticks her head out of the shed door and listens, uncertain if she heard anything or not. Hearing nothing more, she goes back into the shed. A moment later, she emerges with a step ladder. Closing the shed door, she lugs the ladder back towards the house. Again, she passes the cigarettes on the patio. Again she pauses, tempted. She stands, deliberating

Miles enters. He is a lean, rather sad man about the same age as Celia

Miles Celia.

Celia Oh, hallo, Miles.

Miles How are things?

Celia Super. Was that you?

Miles I'm sorry.

Celia Was that you ringing?

Miles No.

Celia The doorbell.

Miles No.

Celia Just now.

Miles No.

Celia I thought I heard somebody.

Miles I don't think it was me. No, it couldn't have been. Hang on, it could have very possibly been Hepplewick.

Celia Hepplewick.

Miles You know, Lionel Hepplewick. I thought I saw him stomping away a minute ago.

Celia Oh. Really. Wonder what he wanted.

Miles You're looking busy.

Celia Yes. I'm taking down the sitting-room curtains.

Miles Ah. Yes.

Celia Sylvie and I are just having a clear out.

Miles Spring cleaning.

Celia In June, yes. Better late than never.

Miles Er—Celia. Have you a minute to spare?

Celia Not really, no.

Miles (*stymied*) Oh. All right, then.

Pause

Celia If you don't mind, Miles, we're frightfully busy.

Miles Yes.

Celia I mean, I'm absolutely . . . we're absolutely . . . well, we're completely. . . (*Irritably*) You can see we are, surely?

Miles Oh, yes, yes, yes. No, no, no. Doesn't matter. No, no.

A silence. Miles continues to stand there

Celia It's obviously important.

Miles Yes, well . . .

Celia Oh, Lord. OK. (*She stands, still holding the steps*)

Miles Do you want to put those down?

Celia (*ignoring this suggestion*) It's not something you could possibly talk to Toby about, is it?

Miles Not really, no.

Celia Oh.

Miles It's really about Toby, you see.

Celia Oh, why talk to me, Miles? Why me?

Miles You're his wife, Celia, for one thing.

Celia Yes, I know but . . . there's nothing I can say. What Toby does is his own concern. Talk to him.

Miles It's more than just Toby. It's the school as well, Celia, I'm talking about the school.

Celia Then talk to the Headmaster. I'm only his wife. I don't have any influence. I'm just an honorary non-voting, non-participating . . . thing in the background. There's no point in talking to me, Miles. Honestly there isn't.

Miles That isn't true, Celia, you know it. (*After a pause*) You're certainly not a thing. (*After a pause*) Look. Look, I'm taking the gloves off now, Celia, and I'm going to put all the cards on the table and I'm going to be absolutely frank. Now, I'm wearing my Chairman of the Board of Governors hat at the moment, all right?

Celia Hat, no gloves.

Miles Sorry?

Celia Look, I've left Sylvie in the loft.

Miles You're the absolute hub of this place, you know that, Celia. The rack and pinion of this establishment. The whole institution would cave in without you.

Celia Rubbish.

Miles Everyone comes to you with their troubles. . . .

Celia Well, they do that, yes. Because I'm stupid enough to listen.

Miles The staff come to you. The kids come to you. The parents.

Celia The parents certainly do.

Miles Well, then. You're marvellous. Not a non-participating thing at all.

Very much the reverse. If Toby only had one quarter of that.

Celia I'm sorry. I'm not prepared to start talking about Toby.

Miles Yes, that shows great loyalty. Great loyalty.

Celia Nothing to do with loyalty. I'm just sick to death talking about him.

Let's talk about me.

Miles Just one micro-second, I promise you.

Celia (*reluctantly*) Well, wait there a minute. I'll have to go and sort Sylvie out first. She's straddled up there in the rafters.

Miles Do you want me to . . . ?

Celia No, for heaven's sake don't come in here, it's frightful. I'll be back.

(*Then, as an afterthought*) Oh, could you fish a couple of chairs out of the shed?

Miles Yup.

Celia goes into the house with the stepladder

(*After she's gone, rather lamely*) Don't be too long, will you? I've got a meeting in a few . . . oh. (*His voice tails away and he mutters to himself*) Got to talk to the Board.

Miles wanders towards the shed, still muttering to himself. At first, these mutterings seem fairly incomprehensible but then it transpires he's running over his speech

Meeuurrr . . . meeuurrr . . . nah- nah-nah-nah . . . meeuurrr . . . nah, ladies and gentlemen of the Board . . . here is a . . . meeuurrr who over the meeuurrr has been nah-meeuurrr and meeuurrr. Hair-hore . . . therefore . . . (*He opens the door of the shed and pauses*) . . . therefore, before we rush into this . . . no, before we leap into this . . . before we jump to—jump to hasty judgements—conclusions. Rush into any hasty conclusions, let us be quite certain, let's be perfectly certain . . . (*He finds two fold-up chairs just inside the shed and pulls them out*) no, let us be sure that we're not attempting to lay the blame for something at the door of a man . . . at the feet of a man . . . on the head of a man . . . heap the blame on a man's feet . . . no, on his head. Can't heap blame on his feet . . . on a man who is himself limbless . . . no, blameless . . . oh, hell. (*He stands in the doorway of the shed, having reached an impasse with his speech*)

Celia comes out of the house

Celia I've put the kettle on. Like a cup of something, would you?

Miles Oh, thanks. I think I've just got time. Here. (*He proffers the chairs*)

Celia Oh, well.

They assemble the chairs and sit

I'll say this for Sylvie, she's not very bright but once you've told her what

to do and pointed her in the right direction, she's off like a dose of salts.

Miles That's the Bell girl, is it?

Celia Yes, the older one. Mrs Bell's eldest. She comes round twice a week. The best I've ever had. She won't last. She'll get married or something.

Miles Really? Who's she marrying?

Celia Oh, not yet. Not yet. She's a baby. I think Hepplewick's lurking somewhere.

Miles Lionel Hepplewick? Good heavens. Wouldn't want to marry him.

Celia So she tells me. She's playing it very cool, though, sensible girl.

Miles Well, look, anyway, I've got this meeting in a minute or two, Celia, so let me just . . .

Celia Don't let me forget the kettle.

Miles No, right. You see, the point is that things . . .

Celia I think I ought to say something, Miles, before you go any further. I really think I ought.

Miles Oh, are you sure you need to?

Celia You must have been aware that recently, Toby and I, we've—well, we've been barely rubbing along, to be quite honest. We've both been getting on each other's nerves most frightfully. Now, I realize he's having a very rough time at work. . . .

Miles He's having one hell of a time.

Celia Yes, I know. I can see what it's doing to him. I mean, most nights he's drinking himself senseless.

Miles Is he, is he?

Celia And most days. God, you must have noticed. Everyone's noticed.

Miles Well, now and then. I mean, I don't think I can say honestly and truly that I've ever seen Toby drunk on the job, not on the job. Off the job, yes. Yes, I'll concede that. Quite often. Off the job. But then what a chap does in his own time . . .

Celia Is my concern.

Miles Oh, yes. Put that way. . . . He gets very drunk, does he?

Celia Unbearably.

Toby Oh, dear. Poor old you. I didn't know. Of course, Rowena and I haven't seen much of you both lately. She's been so . . . with other things. We must sometime. Get together. One evening. Now it's summer and all that.

Celia The point is, I don't know how much longer we're going to be able to stay together. Toby and me.

Miles Oh, I see. (*After a pause*) I see.

Celia So.

Miles Yes.

Celia You're not surprised?

Miles No. Well, yes. I don't know. I don't think it's a very good idea, is it, Celia?

Celia It may not be to you. I don't think I can take much more of it, I really can't. He's violent. He's unpleasant. He's rude. He's unpredictable. And he never considers me for a minute. I don't think I can take much more of it. (*She seems very near tears*)

Miles (*embarrassed*) Oh, dear.

Celia I really don't.

Miles Yes, well, that's not really something I can. . . . You see, bluntly, Celia, Toby's no longer doing a very good job as Headmaster.

Celia I'm not surprised. He can hardly see where he's going most of the time.

Miles laughs rather feebly

No, honestly, Miles. He sets off some mornings for assembly, across that field there. I watch him from the bedroom window. He wanders round and round in circles looking for the gate.

Miles He may be thinking. He may be thinking, you know. People do walk in circles, Celia, when they're thinking.

Celia He gave up thinking a long time ago.

Miles Anyway, it's undoubtedly true that standards are slipping. Good staff are leaving and parents are now starting to complain.

Celia Don't tell me. Who do you think they complain to?

Miles Now the Governors themselves are involved. And my attention as Chairman has been drawn. Which puts me in a very nasty position as you can imagine. I'm going to see if I can hold them off. Colonel Malton is definitely out for blood, I can sense it. So is Irene Pridworthy who never liked Toby from the off, let's face it.

Celia Oh, well.

Miles As Chairman I am supposed to be impartial but of course everyone knows I'm not. Toby and I are—God, I put him up for the job, didn't I? Anyway, what I'm saying is I'll do what I can.

Celia I'm sure he'll appreciate it.

Miles The point is, do you think there's any guarantee, Celia, that he's going to try and pull his socks up in the future?

Celia Absolutely none, I should imagine.

Miles So I can't even tell them that? That he's making an effort.

Celia It would be very unwise of you.

Miles So what do I tell the Board?

Celia Don't ask me. Tell them they've employed a drunk. That's what he is.

Miles I'd hate to see you both go down the drain, Celia, I really would.

Celia Well. (*She reflects*) Oh, God, the kettle. Just a sec.

Celia nips back into the house

Miles Oh, dear. (*He gets up and paces about*) I don't know what I'm going to tell them. I can hardly say he's a drunk. Meeuurrr-nah . . . meeuurr . . . meeuurr . . . or let us contemplate, or even consider, yes, let us consider, rather, the record of this remarkable teacher. Five years, six years, five years ago, this school of only—of less than two hundred pupils, many of them girls at that, managed to produce a cricket team second to none. And I quote, although I'm sure Colonel Malton has these figures engraved in his hat. In his heart: played twelve, won nine, drawn three, lost none. I repeat, lost none. Or let us turn to squash. Out of nine matches . . . (*he breaks off as something in the field catches his attention. He*

calls) Oh, good afternoon, Lionel. How are you . . .? Good. How's your father . . .? What? No, I said how's Mr Hepplewick . . .? Oh, good. Splendid. (*He watches Hepplewick depart*) He's a very odd cove, he is. Why are those kids playing soccer, it's the cricket season . . . Or squash. An unbeaten record, members of the Board. Let us not forget this when we . . .

Sylvie enters. She is a fresh faced, rather lumpen, awkward girl of around twenty. She is carrying a load of cardboard boxes, obviously part of the clearing out routine

Oh, hallo, Sylvie.

Sylvie (*shyly*) Afternoon, Mr Coombes.

Miles I was just—er—

Sylvie patters past him and round the back of the shed

Miles watches her

Sound of dustbin lids clattering

Sylvie (*off*) You go away. Go on. You just get away.

Sylvie appears in view. She is talking to someone in the field

Go on. Off you go. No, you buzz off. Go on. (*After a pause she turns satisfied, sees Miles and smiles shyly*) Some of 'em won't give up, will they?

Sylvie goes back into the house

Miles seems a little perplexed by this exchange

Miles (*resuming*) All this excellence surely points to a thriving headmaster.

Ship. Headmastership. And surely, as we all know, and you'll be the first to know this, Colonel Malton, leadership only comes from the top.

Celia (*off*) Do you take sugar, Miles?

Miles Sorry?

Celia (*off*) No, put them with the others, Sylvie. Be sensible now. (*To Miles*) I said, do you like sugar?

Miles No, thank you, no. (*Continuing*) I'm going to be perfectly honest and say to you, yes, Mrs Pridworthy I do have an interested vested here, vested interest here. If you can call friendship an interest. Toby Teasdale is a friend. Celia Teasdale is a friend. Toby and I were at school together. A school, Reverend Fognorth, not unlike the one we're sat in today. As I look out of these windows . . . I better make sure I'm sitting the right way. Otherwise it'll have to be as I look out of this door. Not quite so good. At these grounds—at this hallway—steeped in tradition, I may be excused a small lump in my throat. For surely . . .

Celia appears with two mugs

Celia Here you are.

Miles Oh, thank you very much.

They sit with their coffee

Toby's going to fall apart, you know, if you leave him.

Celia I was under the impression he already had, actually.

Miles Well. If it is all over bar the shouting, I'll say this. He never deserved you.

Celia (*quite touched*) Oh, Miles.

Miles No, he didn't. Toby always takes everything just as it comes. Never a "thank you". Never a "good heavens, aren't I lucky"?

Celia True.

Miles I bet he's never said thank you to you, has he? Not in, what is it, ten years?

Celia (*thinking*) No. I can't remember him saying thank you. No. Still, you don't expect that, do you? People don't much. Husbands and wives. Go around saying thank you very much all the time, do they?

Miles I would have done. I'd have said thank you to you. Every day.

Celia Oh, that's lovely. Do you say that to Rowena a lot?

Miles I certainly don't. I've nothing to thank her for. Nothing at all. Quite the reverse. The way she behaves. I'm still waiting for a thank you from her.

Celia Oh. (*She doesn't want to get involved in this conversation*) I think Toby said "Well done" once or twice early on. Which was quite encouraging while it lasted. But then that sort of died out.

Miles Well done? What, do you mean in bed?

Celia Good Lord, no. He never said that in bed. Well done. Terribly offputting. No, I meant if I'd made a good pie or something. Got something cheap.

Miles (*mystified*) Cheap.

Celia When we were hard-up. Toothpaste or loo rolls or something. "Well done", he'd say.

Miles Not very romantic.

Celia Not romantic, no. I'm not saying that. I said it was quite encouraging. I can do without romance but I do need encouragement. Anyway.

Miles Perhaps I should have said that to Rowena more often. Well done.

Celia No, I don't think so. Not to Rowena. She's a different sort. She's not the well done sort. She's not a well done sort of person.

Miles winces

Oh, I'm sorry, Miles.

Miles That's all right.

Celia No, I didn't mean to say that.

Miles Just a rather unfortunate phrase, that's all.

Celia Yes, I'm dreadfully sorry. Really.

Miles So you're actually thinking of splitting up?

Celia Yes.

Miles What about the kids? Lucy and James? What's going to happen to them?

Celia They'll come with me, presumably. Wherever I end up.

Miles You'll take them away from the school? From here?

Celia I'll have to. It's a shame but—anyway, they're not that happy here, anyway.

Miles What nonsense.

Celia They're not.

Miles I've never seen two more happy children.

Celia Look, do you mind, they're my children. Don't start trying to tell me about my own kids.

Miles It's rubbish.

Celia I know when my children are happy and when they're not, thank you very much. I'll probably move back to London.

Miles Where to?

Celia Somewhere. I don't know.

Miles Seems a bit vague.

Celia Not at all. Maybe to my mother. Just temporarily.

Miles No, I don't believe this is going to happen. You won't split up. Anyway, people who are splitting up don't rush around spring cleaning, do they?

Celia They do if they want to sell the house. (*She rises*)

Miles And what about Toby?

Celia To hell with Toby.

Miles What am I going to tell the Board? That his wife's leaving him as well? I tell them that, that's virtually certain curtains on his career. You realize that, don't you?

Celia I don't care.

Miles Well, I'm telling you, it will be. There was just a chance, just a slim wafer of a chance—whisker of a chance, that if I played all the right cards, I could have given the Board pause for thought.

Celia Well, that's terribly noble of you, Miles, but to be quite honest, I think you're flogging a dead horse. Toby ought to go anyway. He's a liability, he really is.

Miles What are you saying?

Celia I'm saying that I don't consider he's a fit person to be Headmaster of a school any more. And if I wasn't leaving, I'd take the kids away anyway.

Miles What a terrible thing to say.

Celia Miles, it's true.

Miles You can't say that. Not about Toby, not about your own husband.

Celia Miles, he's an incoherent, ill-tempered, irrational, unpredictable slob. You know it and I know it. (*After a pause, she speaks more quietly*) And the kids are beginning to see it too, which is more to the point. I want to get them out before they get hurt. I don't care about me. . . . Now, I must get on. I'm sorry, Miles. I can see you're very shocked by what you consider my disloyalty to Toby but I've lived with the man now for twelve years and I can tell you the last four or five have been no joke, Miles, they really haven't.

Miles (*unhappily*) You can't expect it to be all fun all the time, Celia, you really can't.

Celia It has to be better than this. I deserve a little bit of fun. Sometimes. Surely. Before it's too late.

Miles He needs help badly, you know, Celia. You can't walk out on a man who's flat on his back.

Celia You're his friend, Miles, you pick him up. You're so fond of him apparently.

Miles So were you once.

Celia (*angrily*) Oh, go away, Miles. Just go right away. Go on, clear off.

Celia stamps into the house

Miles Look, Celia . . . oh. (*He stands still in frustration*)

Celia (*off, angrily*) Look, don't put that on there, Sylvie. Use a tiny bit of nous, girl. That is clean washing, Sylvie, isn't it?

Sylvie (*off*) Yes, Mrs Teasdale.

Celia You know the word clean, do you?

Sylvie Yes, Mrs Teasdale.

Celia You can be so stupid, stupid, stupid, Sylvie. Now look at them. Look at this.

Sylvie (*off*) Yes, Mrs Teasdale.

Miles moves away from all this, unhappily. He pauses in the middle of the garden, reaches in his pocket and takes out his diary. He consults it

Celia (*off*) Thank you so much. That's better. Now, will you put that out the back in the dustbins, not on the washing. That will be much more helpful. Off you go.

Sylvie comes out of the house. She is carrying an armload of old paint tins, very dusty and congealed

Sylvie (*speaking, as she comes*) Yes, Mrs Teasdale. (*She sees Miles, smiles and jerks her head to indicate Celia*) Done it again, haven't I?

Sylvie goes off to the dustbins

Miles moves towards the house

Miles (*calling tentatively*) Celia, Celia, could I. . . (*He listens*) Celia?

Silence

Sound of a crash of tins from the dustbin area

Oh, hell.

Sylvie returns from the dustbins.

Sylvie I think she went up to the loft. She's in one of her moods.

Miles Ah.

Sylvie moves towards the house

Sylvie?

Sylvie Yes, Mr Coombes.

Miles Would you—could you tell Mrs Teasdale that—er—

Sylvie Go in, if you like, she's only just in the loft.

Miles No, it's all right. Could you tell her—er—

EITHER he says:

Miles Tell her I don't believe her and to prove it this Friday—have you got that—this Friday. . . .

Sylvie This Friday.

Miles No, it can't be Friday, that's the County Game—this Saturday, are you getting this. . . .

Sylvie You don't believe her and this Saturday—she's only just up the ladder . . .

Miles No, this Saturday we are all four of us having dinner together.

Sylvie Having dinner together.

Miles Like old times.

Sylvie Like old times.

Miles Right.

Sylvie Right.

Miles You tell her that.

Sylvie I will, Mr Coombes, I will. (*She begins to move inside*)

Miles This Saturday.

Sylvie Saturday, yes.

Sylvie goes inside

Miles (*pleased*) So there. (*He slams shut his diary and starts off down the garden*) Meeuurrr—nah . . . we've always, I think . . . I know, recognized Toby Teasdale as a man of strong quirks . . . quirky strength . . . strong quirkiness . . . in fact, it is his very quirkiness which first attached him to us . . . attracted him to us . . . us to him . . . oh, hell.

He disappears from view behind the shed and can be heard muttering into the distance as the Lights fade to a Black-out

To: DINNER ON THE PATIO (page 17)**OR he says:**

Miles (*slamming his diary shut irritably*) You tell her I'm—I'm extremely disappointed in her.

Sylvie You're disappointed in her, right. (*She turns to go into the house*)

Miles No, hang on, I haven't finished. Also tell her—

Sylvie She's only just up the ladder in the loft. . . .

Miles No, no. Also tell her that I intend to stand by—she knows who—and to blazes with her. You tell her that.

Sylvie She knows who, to blazes with her. Yes, Mr Coombes.

Sylvie goes into the house

Miles (*pleased*) So there. (*He stuffs his diary back in his pocket and starts off down the garden*) Meeuurrr—nah . . . we've always, I think . . . I know,

recognized Toby Teasdale as a man of strong quirks . . . quirky strength . . . strong quirkiness . . . in fact, it is his very quirkiness which first attached him to us . . . attracted him to us . . . us to him . . . oh, hell.

He disappears from view behind the shed and can be heard into the distance as the Lights fade to a Black-out

To: CONFESSIONS IN A GARDEN SHED (page 115)

DINNER ON THE PATIO

The same, with perhaps a little more of the patio area now in view. It is Saturday evening, June 19th, just before eight o'clock. It is a pleasant, mellow evening

The patio table now has four dining-room chairs round it and is laid for four people for a small informal dinner party. In the centre of the table is a candle in a glass bowl

There is the sound of shouts from children on the playing field

In a moment, Miles comes out from the house, a glass of sherry in his hand

Miles Oh, we're out here, are we?

Celia (*off*) Yes, I hope it will be all right.

Miles Lovely. Super. (*He consults the sky*) Yes, we should be OK anyway.

Celia enters carrying a glass of sherry, wine bottle and corkscrew

Celia Yes. When it rained this afternoon I thought, well, that's that.

Miles Only a shower though, wasn't it?

Celia Yes. (*She hands him the bottle*) There you are. Open, please.

Miles OK.

Celia I always finish up with the cork inside the bottle for some reason. (*She hands him the corkscrew*)

Miles Ah well, there's a trick to it, you see. You have to pull and not push.

Celia Oh, is that what it is?

Miles Easy mistake to make. (*He starts to open the bottle*)

Celia stands puzzled for a moment, then laughs at the joke rather belatedly

Celia Oh, I see. Yes. I've got one open already. Toby opened it. But I think we'll need more than the one, won't we?

Miles Yes, I think we might, yes.

Celia With him here.

Miles With the four of us, anyway.

Celia Thank you for bringing that.

Miles Least we could do.

Celia I don't think it'll rain again, will it?

Miles Not a chance.

Celia It'll be just my luck. You know, we've lived here six years and when we moved in, we said, "Oh, how lovely. A patio." And, you know, we've never had a single meal out here. Not even tea. It's either snowing or the kids have got colds. Just a second, I'm going to check.

Celia exits

Miles I know what you mean. We've got a breakfast room in our place, you know. I've certainly never had breakfast in it in my life. Well, I couldn't. It's full of cardboard boxes. All Rowena's Oxfam stuff. She'll be here in a sec. She obviously got held up at this meeting. She told me to come on alone if she wasn't back and to send her apologies. Hope we haven't upset your timing. (*He sniffs the now opened bottle*) I think this is OK. I hope so.

Celia returns

I'm saying I hope we haven't spoiled the meal. With Rowena being late.
Celia Oh, no. I never bother with things that spoil. Not in this household. Everything I cook is either cooked to death or not at all. Raw or stewed, take your pick.

Miles Ah. (*He smiles a little apprehensively*)

Celia None of them bother with mealtimes, they're all as bad as each other.

Pause

Actually, to be perfectly honest, I don't quite know where Toby is at the moment. He went to get some cigarettes half an hour ago, in case we felt like one. Though I really shouldn't smoke.

Miles Where on earth did he go to get them?

Celia Only down the road to the pub.

Miles Ah.

Pause

Celia Cheers.

Miles Good health.

They drink

Celia Look, I'm afraid I was rather rude to you the other day, wasn't I?

Miles Were you? Oh, you mean with. . . . Well. Understood.

Celia We'd had a rather rough patch, Toby and me.

Miles Yes, well. . . . Never mind. You've made up now, I take it?

Celia No.

Miles Oh. I rather gathered . . .

Celia Not at all.

Miles You're still going ahead with—with——

Celia We're separating, yes. We're waiting till the school holidays.

Miles Oh, I see. I rather hoped you might both have . . .

Celia No. Still, what I wanted to say to you was, thank you for whatever you did that obviously saved Toby his job.

Miles Oh, well.

Celia Whatever you said to the Board seems to have done the trick.

Miles I think they all went a bit glazed really. I don't think Colonel Malton was very impressed, but I banged the table a couple of times and used words like "integrity" and "passionately" and so on. (*After a slight pause*) It's not too good to hear he's in the pub, though, is it?

Celia He only went for some cigarettes.

Miles Yes, I know but half an hour for a packet of fags. . . . He's obviously driving a pretty hard bargain.

Celia How's Rowena?

Miles Oh, she's terribly well.

Celia Good.

Miles Well, you'll see for yourself.

Celia Yes.

Miles Looking forward to seeing you.

Celia Is she?

Miles Oh yes. You bet. Rather. No, she's blooming. Absolutely blooming.

(After a slight pause) I think I may have been pretty rude the other day, too, you know.

Celia No, you weren't.

Miles I think I may have been.

Celia No.

Miles Well, if I was——

Celia You weren't.

Pause

Miles So where will you be going? Still London, is it?

Celia Probably.

Miles Not much of a place to live, is it?

Celia I'll need a job. There's nothing round here.

Miles What did you used to do before you were married? Organize things, didn't you?

Celia Conferences. We organized conferences.

Miles Packing them off to Eastbourne, eh?

Celia That sort of thing. More sherry?

Miles Oh, well. What the hell.

Celia goes in, taking their glasses with her

Well, there's always plenty of those, you know. Conferences. We've got a whole department now, our firm, which deals exclusively in micro-circuitry, micro-electronic stuff. Only eighty-five per cent of what they produce is totally invisible to the human eye. You can't see it at all. So there we are. We've got a whole load of chaps on absolutely fantastic salaries producing something we can only take their word for. I mean, if they stopped producing them we'd be none the wiser. We'd carry on posting off empty boxes to Kuwait. Anyway, these chaps are always going to conferences. They spend their lives meeting over large free Scotches paid for by us and talking about literally nothing at all. Literally.

Celia returns with refilled glasses

Celia Well, it's the thing of the future, isn't it?

Miles Well, yes. Mind you, it's really rather left to those sort of chaps whether we've got a future at all. Still, it's very profitable. A step up from lawnmowers. Do you know, we started out making lawnmowers? Before my time. But that's how we started out fifty years ago. Thereabouts. Then we went to tractors. Then these things. I prefer the tractors. You can count them. Check if they're in the boxes.

Celia mm's and ah's throughout this without apparently hearing a word

You know, I owe you a further apology.

Celia You're not going to spend the whole evening apologizing are you?

Miles I hope not. But, you see, when I said let's have dinner, I really meant, come round to our place for dinner.

Celia Oh, did you? You didn't say that.

Miles Well, that's what I meant originally. Only I didn't push it. It seemed Rowena wasn't geared for cooking. Not this week. She's got something on the kitchen table she can't move.

Celia What?

Miles Mud, I think.

Celia Mud?

Miles Well, probably clay. She's doing a project with the kids. Only now we have to wait for it to dry. So in the meantime food is a bit scarce.

Celia How awful.

Miles Well.

From the direction of the field, a hand bell rings

Celia (*glancing at her watch*) Eight o'clock bedtime.

Miles Yes. Your two in bed?

Celia I don't think they're asleep. They read till they're cross-eyed. They're being very grown-up about all this, they really are.

Miles They know?

Celia Oh, yes. I had to tell them. Lucy's nearly nine.

Miles They're very hard-boiled, aren't they, kids? I remember when I broke my foot. My three just stood round laughing.

Celia I think they'll just be so relieved to live somewhere where it's a little quieter. They're very quiet children, both of them.

Miles Wish to God mine were.

Celia You never know they're there. And I mean Toby and I have had some of the most appalling. . . . (*She shudders*) Really appalling.

Miles Dear.

Celia You don't have rows, you and Rowena?

Miles Not a lot. She's not there much. Except when she's making mud pies.

Celia She always seems very jolly. I'll say that about her. She's a very jolly woman. And you're—er—well, you're fairly easy going, aren't you?

Miles Sometimes. I don't think I'd remember Rowena for her jolliness.

Celia What then?

Miles I don't know. She's just bloody infuriating most of the time. No, that's unfair. I'm quite fond of her really. But she does drive me up the wall.

Celia (*after a pause*) I'm going to give them another three minutes and then I think we'll start without them, don't you?

Miles Suits me.

Celia I mean, it's ridiculous. The whole idea was to eat out here. In another half hour, it's going to be too cold.

Miles I could help shift this inside.

Celia No, that's not the point. I want to eat out here.

Miles Yes, of course.

Celia More sherry?

Miles Oh, no, no. My limit.

Celia Then let's have some of this. (*She picks up the wine bottle*) We'll try ours, it's slightly suspect.

Miles Right. (*He holds out his hand*) May I?

Celia Yes, do, thank you.

Celia hands Miles the bottle. He pours two glasses of wine

(*Watching him as he pours*) I take it, you don't see a lot of Rowena?

Miles Well, a bit. I am married to her.

Celia That doesn't necessarily follow. Does it? I know couples who don't meet for weeks.

Miles Well, we see something of each other. Not an awful lot. I suppose I see slightly less of her than I see of the au pair and slightly more of her than I see of the cleaning woman. But that's only average. Occasionally Rowena leaves notes for the cleaning woman forbidding her to clean anything so then the poor old soul comes and talks to me. And that bumps the average up.

Celia What I'm saying is, you don't keep very close track of her, do you?

Miles No. Why? Why do you ask?

Celia Nothing. I was just curious.

Miles I usually have a vague idea where she is. In case of emergencies.

Celia Where is she tonight, then?

Miles No idea. This meeting thing, wherever it is. Somewhere. I don't know. I don't quite see your point.

Celia I was just curious.

Miles (*tetchily*) I mean, I don't have her rigged up with a homing device or something.

Celia (*softly*) Maybe you should.

Miles What?

Celia I said, maybe you should, Miles.

Miles (*tasting the wine*) This isn't bad, is it, where did you get it?

Celia Oh, you know. That place.

Miles What, you mean—?

Celia Yes. That place.

Miles Oh, there. Not bad, not bad. (*Suddenly*) Look, I might as well tell you because you've obviously guessed anyway. She's not coming. Rowena's not coming tonight, I'm sorry.

Celia Not—?

Miles No.

Celia Oh, for God's sake.

Miles Sorry.

Celia Why didn't you say so before?

Miles Because I—I couldn't think of an excuse why she wasn't coming. That's really why. You know, headache, flu, fallen out of the kitchen window. They all sound so phoney, don't they?

Celia But I mean why isn't she coming? I mean, the real reason.

Miles The real reason she isn't coming is—because she doesn't want to come. That's the real reason. But you can't just say that to your hostess, can you? Sorry, my wife doesn't want to come. It's so bloody rude.

Celia Oh.

Miles There you are, I've said it now.

Celia I still don't see why she doesn't want to come.

Miles She just doesn't. She didn't offer an excuse. She just said about ten minutes before we were coming, I'm not going. That's all she said. I'm not going. I can't face them tonight.

Celia Us.

Miles Yes.

Celia Meaning me and Toby.

Miles Yes.

Celia I see. Well, bugger her.

Miles Right you are.

Celia So it's just you, is it?

Miles I'm afraid so. Sorry, I would've said something earlier only I was frightened you'd just decide to cancel the whole meal. When you heard it was just me. I was rather looking forward to it.

Celia I didn't know she disliked me quite so much.

Miles Oh, she doesn't.

Celia I mean, I realized she wasn't that fond of me. She found me bossy and over-organized and over-bearing, I'm sure.

Miles (*rather too emphatically*) No, no, no, no.

Celia I suppose if I were to be honest, I do find her one of the most transparent and stupid women I've ever met but we've always sort of got along. Reasonably well. I sorted out all those bloody refugee clothes for her. I never got a word of thanks. Or a card. Or anything.

Miles (*mumbling*) Well, I'm sure she. . . I'm sure . . .

Celia I think that's what it is about her. She's rather graceless, isn't she? Or maybe it's thoughtless. Maybe that's it, she just doesn't think. Doesn't use her tiny brain, does she? Still, why bother? She'll survive on her charm. Men falling over themselves. Good luck to her. Cheers.

Miles It was really my fault, Celia. For not thinking up a decent excuse.

Celia Don't start apologizing again, Miles. For God's sake.

Miles Sorry.

Celia Because you're married to a very boorish woman isn't necessarily your fault. In retrospect, it was possibly a very stupid choice but then people who live in glass houses. . . Who am I?

Miles (*unhappily*) Stupid of me really. I didn't realize you would be quite so upset.

Celia You deserve someone better than Rowena, Miles, you really do. You're too nice a man for what she's doing to you.

Silence

I'm sorry.

Miles (*gently carving at the table with a knife*) Yes, well . . .

Celia Well, shall I get us some food? Before you start eating the table.

Miles I'm sorry, I didn't realize I was . . .

Celia It doesn't look as if we're going to get Toby either. So——(*she makes to go*)

Miles I think if it is hometruths time and it seems to be, you're worth a damn sight more than Toby.

Celia Food?

Miles Did you hear what I said?

Celia (*briskly*) Yes, I did. Thank you, Miles. I'm asking you if you'd like to eat.

Miles Yes, I damn well do.

Celia All right, wait there.

Miles (*indicating the table*) I'll clear us a bit more room, shall I?

Celia No, leave it. It'll serve to remind us of our absentee loved ones. Pour me some more of that, will you?

Miles OK. Right you are.

Celia exits

Miles pours the wine and sets both glasses on the table. He seems quite cheerful all of a sudden. He lights the candle

Celia returns with four glass dishes on a tray

Celia Here we are. Try this.

Miles Aha, marvellous.

Celia Oh, you lit the candle. Good for you. I hope you enjoy this meal because there are seconds and thirds of everything. You sit here. And I'll sit next to you there. We'll put Rowena over there. In the draught. And dear old Toby here.

Miles laughs a little nervously

I will confess to you I had a couple of sherries before you came.

Miles Lord.

Celia I couldn't face Rowena without them. So be warned. Right, eat up.

They eat

Miles (*approvingly*) Mmm . . . mmm . . . mmm . . . mmm . . . mmmm.

Celia All right.

Miles Mmm.

Celia Do you like it?

Miles Very much. What is it?

Celia Grapefruit and prawns.

Miles Ah-ha.

Celia (*as they eat*) Bit of onion . . .

Miles (*chewing*) Mm-mm . . .

Celia Parsley . . . lemon juice . . . white wine . . .

Miles Um . . .

Celia (*with her mouth full*) Oooool-oll.

Miles Sorry?

Celia (*swallowing*) Sorry. Olive oil.

Miles Olive oil, yes.

Celia Mayonnaise.

Miles Mm.

Celia Tabasco.

Miles Ah.

Celia Olives.

Miles Oh.

Celia And lettuce.

Miles Golly.

Celia (*as an afterthought*) Oh, and paprika.

Miles Well, it's excellent. Excellent.

Celia Is Rowena a good cook? I seem to remember she's not bad.

Miles Oh, yes. When she puts her mind to it.

Celia Must be small portions, then. (*She laughs*)

Miles (*frowning*) Sorry?

Pause

Celia Jolly good wine, isn't it?

Miles Yes, it is. Excellent. (*He notices her glass is empty*) Oh, sorry.

Celia I married the most awful bastard, you know. Really. What a bastard.

Miles Oh, no. He's OK. Toby.

Celia He's not OK.

Miles No, he's OK, Celia.

Celia (*furiously*) Don't tell me he's OK. There's nothing OK about him. He's a bastard.

Miles Well. He certainly isn't worthy of you.

Celia He certainly isn't. (*After a pause*) We're sitting here looking absolute fools, aren't we? While they're out doing whatever they're both doing, we're sitting here like two nanas.

Miles I don't know.

Celia While they're out gallivanting.

Miles I'm perfectly happy here. With you. Not at all nana-like. Very pleasant.

Celia Thank you.

Miles (*finishing his first course*) That was wonderful. Absolutely wonderful.

Celia More?

Miles Er—no, thank you.

Celia I'll get the rest in a minute. It can carry on stewing a bit longer. Good health.

Miles And to you.

Celia And to hell with those two.

Miles (*cheerfully*) Rather.

Celia Do you know, Miles, I think there's something rather special about you.

Miles Thank you. And you.

Celia Thank you.

Miles Look, I have to own up.

Celia What?

Hungry for More?

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