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SF PERUSALS

LIFE AND BETH

A Play

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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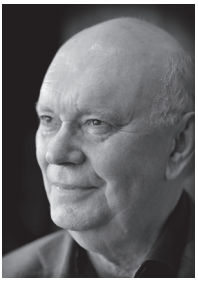
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Ayckbourn has worked in theatre as a playwright and director for over fifty years, rarely if ever tempted by television or film, which perhaps explains why he continues to be so prolific. To date he has written more than seventy-nine plays, many one-act plays and a large amount of work for the younger audience. His work has been translated into over thirty-five languages, is performed on stage and television throughout the world and has won countless awards.

Major successes include: *Relatively Speaking*, *How the Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *Bedroom Farce*, *A Chorus of Disapproval* and *The Norman Conquests*. In recent years, there have been revivals of *Season's Greetings* and *A Small Family Business* at the National Theatre, in the West End *Absent Friends, A Chorus of Disapproval, Relatively Speaking* and *How the Other Half Loves*. In 2015, Chichester mounted a very successful revival of *Way Upstream*.

Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre from 1972 to 2009, where almost all his plays have been first staged, he continues to direct his latest new work there. In recent years, he has been inducted into American Theatre's Hall of Fame, received the 2010 Critics' Circle Award for Services to the Arts and became the first British playwright to receive both Olivier and Tony Special Lifetime Achievement Awards. He was knighted in 1997 for services to the theatre.

Image credit: Andrew Higgins..

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LIFE AND BETH

First presented at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, on 22nd July 2008, with the following cast:

BETH TIMMS	Liza Goddard
GORDON TIMMS	Adrian McLoughlin
MARTIN TIMMS	Richard Stacey
ELLA PACKER	Ruth Gibson
CONNIE BUNTING	Susie Blake
DAVID GRINSEED	Ian Hogg

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Pip Leckenby
Lighting by Kath Geraghty
Music by John Pattison

CHARACTERS

BETH TIMMS – recently widowed, 50s
GORDON TIMMS – Beth's late husband, formerly a maintenance engineer, 60s
MARTIN TIMMS – their son, a car salesman, 30s
ELLA PACKER – Martin's girlfriend, late 20s
CONNIE BUNTING – Gordon's sister, also a widow, 50s
DAVID GRINSEED – a clergyman and a widower, 50s
MAN – police officer, voice only
WOMAN – police officer, voice only

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in the living room of **BETH** and **GORDON TIMMS'** suburban, semi-detached house

ACT I
Christmas Eve. Evening

ACT II
Scene One An hour or so later
Scene Two Christmas Day. Around midday

Time — the present

ACT I

A modest sitting/dining room in a fairly modern, semi-detached suburban house. Christmas Eve, evening.

There is a dining table, easy chairs, a coffee table, a TV, etc. In one corner there is an empty cat basket. A single door leads to the hall and the rest of the house. In one wall there is a service hatch with twin doors connecting to the kitchen. There is also a fireplace with a coal-effect electric fire, next to which there is a set of superfluous fire tongs.

BETH, *a pleasant woman in her fifties, is sitting on the sofa. Across from her in the armchair sits* **CONNIE**, *about the same age, fidgeting awkwardly.*

On the coffee table between them are the remains of tea things for two, biscuits, etc. The TV, on low, is playing a carol service from somewhere or other. There is little evidence that it is Christmas time. One or two cards dotted about, nothing more.

The **WOMEN** *appear to have run out of conversation. Whilst* **BETH** *is quite happy with this, it's evidently not a situation that suits* **CONNIE**.

CONNIE *(after a long pause)* Well...

BETH *(vaguely, agreeing with her)* Mmmmm.

CONNIE As I say...

A pause.

He was remarkable, wasn't he...?

BETH *(vaguely)* Oh, yes...

CONNIE Treasure. Absolute treasure. They broke the mould... when they...didn't they? Everyone adored him, didn't they? I mean you, you simply worshipped him, didn't you? The ground he stood on?

BETH Yes, I was very fond of him.

CONNIE Oh, come on, you adored him. We could all see that. No, I mean, face it, Beth, you couldn't have done better, could you? Better than Gordon? As husbands go, I mean... as husbands go...

BETH Yes. Well, he's gone now, hasn't he?

CONNIE God rest his soul.

BETH Yes.

CONNIE *(after a pause)* He was a wonderful brother to me, too. My big brother, I called him. I mean, I know I was a little bit older than him but only by a year or so. But I always thought of him as my big brother. I couldn't have asked for better. Always looked out for me, always took care of me. I only had to lift the phone...

BETH ...yes.

CONNIE ...he was always at the other end, Gordon. Sorting me out.

BETH Yes, you were often on the phone to him...

CONNIE Well, he was my brother. I was his sister. All on my own, wasn't I?

BETH I know.

CONNIE ...all on my little own... No. Gordon was always the special one. I know my parents felt he was. I mean, from the minute he was born, almost. I don't think it was just because he was the boy. It would have been the same even if he'd been a... He was always remarkable...reading early... writing...multiplying in his head, you know... Me? I couldn't

keep up with him. Didn't even try. You know, when I was about eight or nine, it must have been, Dad took me to one side and he said, "Don't get me wrong, Connie. Me and your mum, we still love you, we both still think the world of you but even though you're the eldest, we're going to need you to step aside, love, make room for young Gordon. You're going to have to let him past. Like in a race. He's lapping you, you see, Connie. He's been round three times to your one and he's still passing you..."

BETH He shouldn't have said that to you.

CONNIE No, it was true, Dad was being honest, he was only being honest with me...all the time I was growing up. I could always feel Gordon, breathing down my neck. No, he was like that, my dad. He always came straight to the point, I admire that in a man...

BETH Still, it was only his opinion, wasn't it? You never know, you might have come on later—

CONNIE Later?

BETH You might have been a late developer, if they'd given you a year or two.

CONNIE I never developed at all, did I?

BETH Not surprised, after that.

CONNIE Well, we'll never know now, will we? Nearly forty years ago. I could have been a scientist, couldn't I? Or a surgeon?

BETH *(slightly dubious)* Possibly.

CONNIE Now look at me. Stocktaking at Porters.

BETH You've done well.

CONNIE But I could have done better. I know I could. If I hadn't stepped aside for Gordon. He had the best of everything. He had the biggest bedroom. Best education. We all made sacrifices for Gordon.

BETH Well, maybe you shouldn't have done, Connie.

CONNIE Well, I had no say in it, did I?

BETH I mean, Gordon never became a scientist or a surgeon either, did he?

CONNIE No. But we all thought he might have been...

BETH Health and safety officer at Twistleton's. That's a far cry from brain surgeon...

CONNIE They spent every penny they had on him. I never got my doll's house. Dad couldn't afford it. Nor a pony. I always wanted a pony. All I got was his hand-me-down tricycle. The day he got his new fairy cycle.

A pause. **CONNIE** *reflects back gloomily on her life.*

BETH *(trying to lighten the mood)* Oh well, under the bridge now, isn't it?

CONNIE That's where I feel my life's gone, Beth. Under the bridge and into the drain...

BETH *(reflecting; smiling)* Fairy cycle! Think I had a fairy cycle...

CONNIE ...into the sewer...

BETH *(indicating the TV)* Oh, this is a lovely carol, isn't it? It's one of my favourites... Do you mind if I turn it up a bit?

BETH *operates the remote. The volume on the TV increases.* **BETH** *hums along with the carol.* **CONNIE** *starts to cry.* **BETH** *is aware of this and attempts initially to ignore it.* **CONNIE** *gets louder, eventually competing with the TV.* **BETH** *turns off the TV.*

(slightly irritably) Connie, do try and cheer up, love. Come on now, it's Christmas.

CONNIE *(tearfully)* It's all right for you, Beth.

BETH What do you mean, it's all right for me? I've just lost my husband, for heaven's sake...

CONNIE Yes, and I've just lost a brother...

BETH You weren't even that fond of him, were you?

CONNIE I was, I adored him.

BETH You just said he ruined your life...

CONNIE What a terrible thing to say. That's a terrible thing to say, Beth, about my brother. About your late husband...

BETH *makes to respond, then checks herself and takes a deep breath.*

BETH Maybe you'd like to unpack your things? I've put you up in the spare room. I hope that's all right?

CONNIE Oh, that'll do me. I won't sleep much anyway.

BETH ...I gave it a good airing...

CONNIE ...never sleep these days...

BETH ...I put Martin and his friend Ella in our room...in my room...

CONNIE Your room? Where are you sleeping, then?

BETH I'll have the couch here...

CONNIE The couch?

BETH This sofa bed, it pulls out...

CONNIE That's not very fair on you, is it...?

BETH It makes quite a nice little bed, this sofa. We used it a lot in the old days. Whenever we had a full house...

CONNIE ...turning you out of your bed.

BETH ...it's no problem. I'll be up first, it's not a problem...

CONNIE ...this is meant to be a break for you...

BETH ...I'm not sleeping that much lately, either...

CONNIE ...we agreed, Martin and I, you're not to lift a finger. It's a Christmas for you to put your feet up. What sort of rest would it be, if you're going to be down here sleeping rough?

BETH It's really rather comfy. Gordon even used to…at the end, you know, when he couldn't…cope with the stairs…before he was… *(She tails away)*

CONNIE *(sympathetically)* Yes…

A silence.

Still, it could get a bit chilly down here in the night, couldn't it? Once the heating goes off.

BETH I can always put the fire on.

CONNIE Be careful you don't gas yourself with the fumes. I was reading, you know, about this entire family—

BETH It's electric.

CONNIE Oh. *(She pauses)* Still got his basket, I see.

BETH What?

CONNIE *(indicating the cat basket)* Wagstaff's basket. Still got it, have you?

BETH Yes.

CONNIE Just in case he…?

BETH Comes back.

CONNIE No sign of him?

BETH No. Day of the funeral he just went out through the cat flap in the kitchen there, never came back. Never came back for his tea.

CONNIE Oh, well. They say they can sense it, can't they? Animals? They say they hate change almost as much as we do. He probably missed Gordon. He sensed Gordon had gone forever and it upset him so much he ran off…

BETH He didn't even like Gordon.

CONNIE Beg your pardon?

BETH Wagstaff couldn't stand him.

CONNIE Oh, he must have liked Gordon, surely?

BETH He used to hiss at him whenever he came near.

CONNIE Everybody adored Gordon.

BETH Wagstaff didn't.

Silence.

You going to church later on? For the midnight service tonight?

CONNIE Yes... I'll go along...support David, you know...

BETH Support who?

CONNIE David Grinseed. The Reverend Grinseed.

BETH Oh, yes...

CONNIE I always call him David. He prefers it if his close friends call him David. I know him as David, anyway.

BETH Yes, of course, he did the funeral, didn't he? I'd forgotten his name was David.

CONNIE Well, its not everyone he – you have to get to know him for a little while first.

BETH He was very pleasant.

CONNIE Oh, yes.

BETH It was a nice funeral.

CONNIE Oh, he always does a good funeral, David. Quiet manner. Sympathetic.

BETH Yes. Have you been to many of them, then?

CONNIE Beg your pardon?

BETH Funerals? You sound as if you've been to several.

CONNIE Well...as I say, I try to support him, you know.

BETH I see.

CONNIE It's not only funerals. I mean, I go to his weddings as well.

BETH Christenings?

CONNIE One or two. If I'm not working. I don't join in, you know. I'm just there for support. David's not married. He lost his wife a few years ago. *(mouthing)* Cancer.

BETH Oh, sad.

CONNIE So he's just a bit lonely. Currently. Yes, David's a lovely man once you get to know him.

A pause. **CONNIE** *is a little flustered.* **BETH** *stares at her.* **CONNIE** *turns her attention to the tea things.*

I'd better clear all this, hadn't I?

BETH No, no, Connie, I can easily...

CONNIE Beth, I've told you, you're doing nothing. You're not lifting a finger 'til New Year's Eve...

BETH I can easily rinse them through—

CONNIE *(fiercely)* Sit down! You're to sit down, now!

BETH *(feebly)* You don't even know where anything goes—

CONNIE Then you can show me...

BETH What's the point of that? It's just as easy for—

CONNIE Sit!

BETH *(sitting; muttering)* It's my house...

CONNIE Not for the next few days, it's not. You're to treat this place just like a luxury hotel, do you hear?

CONNIE *starts for the door with the tray.*

BETH Probably should have done that, really...

CONNIE Done what?

BETH ...if we'd thought of it. Gone to a hotel.

CONNIE *(dubiously)* Oh, I don't think so. I wouldn't fancy that. Not at Christmastime. Not in a strange hotel.

BETH Might have been rather nice. A bit of an adventure, really…

CONNIE We don't want adventures at our time of life, do we? Certainly not at Christmas.

The doorbell rings.

BETH *(rising)* Oh, that'll be them!

CONNIE *(putting down the tray)* Don't worry, I'll let them in.

BETH They're early. Traffic must have been good.

CONNIE Wait there, wait there. Luxury hotel, remember?

BETH *(unconvinced)* Yes…

CONNIE *(as she goes)* Here goes the chambermaid…

CONNIE *exits.*

BETH *sits for a moment, then rises and stares round the room. Her gaze finally alights on the empty cat bed.*

BETH Where have you got to then, you little bugger? *(She sighs)* Oh, well.

She turns towards the tea tray where **CONNIE** *left it.* **BETH** *seems intent on taking it out to the kitchen but before she can move to it, the tray jumps slightly, as if shaken, causing the crockery to rattle.*

(startled) Oh! *(Staring at the tray, puzzled)*

That's odd.

She makes to examine the tea tray but before she can. **CONNIE** *enters, flushed with excitement. She leads in* **DAVID**, *a clergyman in his late fifties, at present in official mode, i.e. visiting a recently bereaved parishioner whom he doesn't know terribly well.*

CONNIE *(in a hushed tone)* Beth. It's David. Come to see you.

BETH Oh.

DAVID Hallo, Mrs Timms. I'm sorry to burst in on you on Christmas Eve. I just wanted to see how you're doing. I hope this isn't entirely the wrong moment...

BETH *(a bit flustered)* No. Do come in. We were just...having tea. Would you care for some?

DAVID No, no, thank you.

CONNIE You sure, David? It's no trouble...

DAVID No, please, I know traditionally vicars are always up for free teas...but not just at present, thank you. If truth be told, the day I've just been having, I could probably do with something stronger...

BETH Well, there's some beer, I think. I got in some beer for my son.

CONNIE *(with her)* There's some beer, David...

DAVID No, that's awfully kind but no thank you. I'm here for a briefest second. I just wanted a quick word with Mrs Timms. I promised her I'd look in weeks ago...make sure she was coping OK.

BETH Do sit down, won't you?

DAVID Thank you.

DAVID *continues to stand. There is a slight pause.* **DAVID** *looks at* **BETH**, *smiling.* **BETH** *smiles at* **DAVID**, *rather shyly.* **BETH** *looks at* **CONNIE.** **DAVID** *looks at* **CONNIE.**

CONNIE *(a little put out)* Well, I'll... I'd better wash these up, then. *(picking up the tray)* You just shout if you need anything, David.

DAVID Thank you, Connie.

CONNIE That's me. Connie cook and chief bottle-washer...

DAVID *laughs politely.*

I'll just be in the kitchen.

CONNIE *goes out with the tea tray.*

BETH Please, do sit down Mr – er – Reverend—

DAVID *(doing so)* David, please. David.

BETH David.

DAVID Everyone calls me David. It's Beth, isn't it? You don't mind if I call you Beth?

BETH Everyone else does...

DAVID Listen, Beth – I know we met, of course, at the service—

BETH Oh, yes. Briefly.

DAVID Funerals are always such awkward, emotional occasions. Sometimes I find it's better to leave things a week or two. Just to let the – *(Gesturing vaguely)* the – things to settle a bit.

BETH Yes.

DAVID But I enjoyed our talk together afterwards.

BETH *(frowning)* Did you?

DAVID You don't remember?

BETH I remember a few words, I— *(She shakes her head)*

DAVID Well, it was more than a few words, we did have quite a chat. You obviously don't remember?

BETH I'm sorry. It was – one of those days, you know. Sorry.

DAVID No, no, why should you? So, Beth. Tell me, how's it been without – er – without – Graham?

BETH Gordon.

DAVID Gordon, I'm sorry. How's life without Gordon? Bit tough still, is it? I imagine it must still be tough. People I spoke to said you were both very close.

BETH Well, it's strange, really. I mean, I miss him, of course. I couldn't not miss him. Gordon. He was always there, you see. 'Til he went.

DAVID Yes, yes. It was a very special marriage, I imagine. And he went quite suddenly, your sister tells me.

BETH Sister-in-law...

DAVID Sorry.

BETH Connie's Gordon's sister. She's not my sister...

DAVID Sorry. Bit guilty of not quite doing my homework, I'm afraid. So it all happened suddenly? That must have been the most terrible shock.

BETH Yes, it was quite sudden, really. He had the fall at work, of course...

DAVID Oh, dear. Now remind me, where did he work?

BETH Twistleton's Engineering. He fell off a ladder. He should never have been up there in the first place, especially not with him being in charge of health and safety, but he insisted... Never listened to anyone.

DAVID What was he doing up this ladder?

BETH Trying to rescue this lad. Who should never have been up there either. Not with the lad having vertigo. Gordon clearly told him to come down the ladder at once as he was contravening mandatory health and safety procedures. Only he panicked.

DAVID Gordon panicked?

BETH No, the lad panicked. Gordon didn't panic, Gordon never panicked. He climbed up the ladder to rescue the lad. Only this lad was so terrified, his hands were gripped tight to the ladder. And when Gordon tried to lever them open, he fell off.

DAVID The lad fell off?

BETH No, Gordon fell off trying to lever the lad off the ladder. The lad's fingers stayed gripped tight.

DAVID Heavens!

BETH They had to cut the whole ladder down with the lad still clinging to it. Took him and the ladder off to A & E. Eventually they had to operate.

DAVID On the ladder?

BETH No, on the lad. The ladder was cast iron. They had to put the lad under and ease open his fingers from the ladder. He'd gone into spasm, you see.

DAVID Poor lad, poor lad.

BETH Yes, he recovered quickly enough, though.

DAVID Oh, good.

BETH More than Gordon did. He broke his back.

DAVID Oh, that's terrible. How terrible!

BETH That was the start of it. When they finally let him home, practically the first thing he did was to fall off a chair.

DAVID Oh, heavens! Just quietly sitting, was he?

BETH No, he was standing on it. In the kitchen, out there. Trying to fix something, as usual.

DAVID Not the sort of thing he should have been doing with a recently broken back, surely?

BETH He was always fixing things, Gordon. Very keen on DIY.

DAVID Well, you know what they say. Ninety per cent of accidents occur in the home, don't they?

BETH Something like that. Most of them were Gordon's.

DAVID *(looking to change the subject)* Well, anyway...

BETH Have-a-go hero, that's what they called him in the paper.

DAVID Yes, yes...

BETH That's not what I called him. Bloody stupid idiot, I called him. *(After a slight pause)* Sorry.

DAVID Well, you know, Beth, most of us do tend to feel angry occasionally with those we love most, don't we? Sometimes it's almost irrational. Possibly because we care so much about them that we grow angry if they injure themselves, we tend to feel their hurt almost as if it were our own. When they finally leave us alone in the world...particularly a relationship as close as yours...it's practically a sense of betrayal, isn't it? I know, in my own case, my late wife... she... *(He hesitates)* I mean it was months, years before I finally...but I prayed for guidance...and eventually, Beth, the realization came to me, I saw that, no, this isn't the way I should be remembering her, not with anger or with bitterness, not with resentment...that wasn't the way. I must let all that go, mustn't I? Rather I should remember her with love. And, finally, after all those endless months of anguish, I found peace and contentment. It's not a matter of forgetting, Beth. Heaven forbid that we should ever forget. It's rather a case of *how* we remember, do you see?

BETH Yes.

DAVID I sense, Beth, that you loved your husband, you loved Gordon more than you loved your own life.

BETH Yes, well, I...

DAVID And that love was a beautiful and special thing, Beth. The love between a husband and wife can be the most precious there is. Our Lord intended it that way and – aside from our love for Him, of course – the love that exists between a husband and wife is the strongest. But when the day finally comes to say *au revoir* – well, it's rather like that lad with the ladder, isn't it? We need to learn to let go. Release the fingers, relinquish that grip, you see?

BETH Right...right.

DAVID Because rage, anger, disappointment, frustrated unrequited love, sense of betrayal, they're all negatives, aren't they? There's an old song, you know. I don't expect you know it, Beth, probably before your time. I can't remember who wrote the words – possibly Johnny Mercer? Sammy Kahn? It goes something like this: "You've got to ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive…eliminate the negative…cling right on to the affirmative…and don't mess with Mr In-Between." You see?

BETH No, I can't say I know that one.

DAVID *is standing quite close to* **BETH** *now, their eyes on each other. Silence. A scratching sound can be heard from the kitchen hatch. They become aware of this.* **DAVID** *looks puzzled.*

(frowning) Excuse me, please.

BETH *moves swiftly to the hatch and pulls it open to reveal a startled* **CONNIE***, clutching a milk jug.*

CONNIE *(startled)* Oh, sorry!

BETH Sorry, Connie, did you want something?

CONNIE No, I was just…wondering…wondering where this…

BETH *(brusquely)* In the cupboard over the sink.

BETH *closes the hatch abruptly and moves back to* **DAVID.**

I beg your pardon, David, you were saying?

DAVID *(vaguely; a little bemused)* Was I? Yes, I…

BETH Don't mess with Mr…

DAVID In-Between. Yes.

BETH Yes.

DAVID I hope that's been of help, Beth.

BETH Yes, it's been most helpful, thank you.

DAVID Life is for living. I really believe that.

BETH Oh, yes. I mean that's the reason we're all here, isn't it?

DAVID You're still young – for a woman. You're attractive.

BETH Thank you.

DAVID Life is ahead of you. Seize it with both hands. Make new friends, explore new places. Turn a new page, Gerald is a past chapter—

BETH Gordon.

DAVID Go on! Push the boat out! Take that dog of yours for a long walk, why don't you?

BETH Dog?

DAVID He's out of his basket, anyway. He's eager to find a way forward. Come on, I bet he hasn't had a walk for days, has he? He's probably even now scratching at the back door, dying for a walk.

BETH He's a cat.

DAVID Well, then...do whatever you do with cats. Pick it up and cuddle it. Get used to sharing your love again, Beth...

BETH Wagstaff's gone.

DAVID Who?

BETH The cat. He walked out, he just wandered off.

DAVID Oh, dear. How long's it been gone?

BETH About six weeks ago. He left the day of the funeral.

DAVID Ah, well. They say animals often sense things, don't they? They have an instinctive sense of when things aren't all they should be.

BETH I wish he'd told me...

DAVID Ah. Would that they could speak sometimes.

BETH ...I'd probably have left with him.

DAVID Yes?

BETH But then... I couldn't do that, could I? Not the day of the funeral...

DAVID No, we're not like cats, are we?

BETH I can now, though, can't I?

DAVID How do you mean?

BETH Walk away. My life's my own again, isn't it? Free as a bird.

DAVID That's the spirit. *(Smiling at* **BETH***)* Good on yer, Beth.

BETH *(smiling at* **DAVID***)* Thank you.

They stand for a moment, looking at each other.

DAVID *(awkwardly; shyly)* Beth, would you...would you mind if I if– I—

BETH Would I mind what, David?

DAVID Would you think it – terribly...if I—?

BETH If you what?

DAVID If I said a prayer for you? Would you mind?

BETH Oh. No, not at all. Why not? I have a Buddhist friend who's chanting for me somewhere. The more the merrier.

DAVID Thank you. These days, some people, they rather object – in principle, you know. Best to check first. *(He clasps his hands and closes his eyes)*

BETH What, now? You're going to say it *now*?

DAVID Yes.

BETH With me here?

DAVID Do you mind?

BETH Might make me feel a bit weird, you know. Hearing myself discussed.

DAVID I promise I'll only say – of course, if you'd rather I—

BETH No, you carry on, David. Don't mind me.

DAVID *prepares to resume his prayer.* **BETH** *waits, rather self-consciously. The front doorbell rings.*

Oh, that's probably them. My son, Martin, and his friend. Would you excuse me a moment...

BETH *goes to the door.*

DAVID Of course.

BETH, *on her way out, nearly collides with* **CONNIE.**

BETH Oh, beg your pardon, Connie.

CONNIE *(as she goes)* I'll go, Beth. I'll let them in, don't worry.

CONNIE *exits.*

BETH Sorry to interrupt you, David. Do carry on.

DAVID Well...maybe this is...not the time. I'll save it 'til I get to church.

BETH Perhaps that'd be best. Probably be stronger from there. *(She smiles)*

DAVID *(smiling)* Possibly.

Voices are heard from the hall. A moment passes.

CONNIE *comes back in.*

CONNIE *(as she enters)* They're here...they've arrived...

MARTIN, *in his thirties, enters. Although he is rarely less than ebullient, he is especially so at present, in anticipation of this occasional, somewhat exceptional, meeting with his mother. Unsure of how he'll find* **BETH***'s state, he has characteristically opted for seasonal bluster.*

MARTIN Knock-knock! We're here! At last! Hallo, Mum! *(He embraces* **BETH***)*

BETH *(reciprocating)* Martin!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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