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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

BIRTHDAYS PAST, BIRTHDAYS PRESENT

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

ISBN 978-0-573-13256-8

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BIRTHDAYS PAST, BIRTHDAYS PRESENT was first produced by the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough (Round auditorium) on 10th September 2019. The performacne was directed by Alan Ayckbourn, Set Designer Kevin Jenkins, Sound Associate Paul Stear, Lighting by Jason Taylor. The cast was as follows:

MICKY ..... Russell Dixon
MEG ..... Jemma Churchill
ADRIAN ..... Jamie Baughan
GRACE/FAITH/CHARITY/HOPE ..... Naomi Petersen

CHARACTERS

MICKY – the father
MEG – the mother
ADRIAN – the son

GRACE – Adrian's current girlfriend*
FAITH – Adrian's wife*
CHARITY – a call girl*
HOPE – his sister's friend*

*played by the same actor

SETTING

The time frame of the scenes are meant to show us something about the attitudes and prejudices that often existed during those years.

Scene One:	Micky and Meg's living room, round about now.
Scene Two:	A private room at The Swan Hotel, fifteen years ago.
Scene Three:	Adrian's flat, twenty-five years ago.
Scene Four:	Adrian's room in his parents' house, thirty-eight years ago.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Birthdays Past, Birthdays Present was written and presented to mark the year of Alan Ayckbourn's own 80th birthday.

Welcome to Ecraf.

Early on, very early on, in my writing career, someone asked me what I was planning to write next.

Being very early on, I was foolish enough to tell them.

Now any experienced writer will warn you that telling anyone what you are planning to write next is a sure way to scupper the project. In this creative business, a germinating seed of an idea prematurely exposed to the cold light of logicality is inevitably doomed to shrivel and die of shock.

So, back in those days, I foolishly told them I was planning to write a farce backwards (working title Ecraf), which would start with four trouser-less clergymen trapped in a cupboard, and then work steadily backwards in time finally to reveal what on earth had caused things to lead to that.

Naturally, the idea never saw the light of day. Now here we are fifty years and eighty plays later and all is forgiven and forgotten.

It is no longer called Ecraf and there's no sign of a clergyman, not even a fully clothed one.

But it does go backwards and there's certainly a cupboard - though you'll have to wait for that.

Starting at the end, hopefully, will prompt you to wonder what on earth caused things to lead to this.

If all goes according to plan, you'll then be intrigued enough to stay with the story through till the very beginning.

Alan Ayckbourn

ACT I

Scene One

*(***MICKY***'s eightieth. The front room of* **MICKY** *and* **MEG***'s semi-detached house. Dotted around are several birthday cards. On a side table in one corner, there are various birthday gifts, all still gift wrapped.* **MEG***, seventy-five, is busying around preparing the main table for tea. During the next, she struggles to open up the table and extend the gate leg section.* **MICKY** *watches her from his chair.)*

MICKY. Who's coming, then? Who is it we're expecting?

MEG. *(As she fiddles with the table.)* Adrian. And his new girlfriend. He's bringing her as well.

MICKY. Another one, then? *(Watching her.)* Manage that, can you?

MEG. I can manage. I always find it so fiddly. Fiddly thing!

MICKY. Aye, it's always been fiddly. It were fiddly thirty years ago, when we first bought it.

MEG. *(Straightening up.)* There. That'll have to do. It should hold. Providing no one stands on it. Sorry, you'll have to do without your birthday cabaret, this year.

MICKY. That's a shame. Not going to do your fan dance for me, then?

MEG. Chance'd be a fine thing. I'd never get up there, would I? Even if I did, I'd never get down again. Right. I'll fetch things. They'll be here soon. *(As she goes.)* Grace. This one's called Grace, remember?

MICKY. Grace. *(Calling.)* Got to the G's already, has he? He gets through them, doesn't he? Collects women like I collected cigarette cards. Hope this one works out better than the last few.

*(***MEG** *returns with a tablecloth which she proceeds to spread over the table.)*

MEG. *(Returning.)* Well, he's still searching, isn't he? Ever since Faith left he's been looking for someone to take her place. It's not easy, not when you're his age. Fingers crossed this Grace will be the right one for him. She sounded nice on the phone. Gentle and soft-spoken, you know.

MICKY. Tenth time lucky, eh?

MEG. I hope we haven't seen the last of Faith, though. I know they're divorced but I hope we can keep in touch. I really grew fond of her, you know. Over the years.

MICKY. I found her a right misery.

*(***MEG** *goes off again.)*

MEG. Yes, I know you did. Made no secret of it either, did you? *(As she goes.)* She had good reason to be miserable, poor lass. What with all her problems. Her health problems. And then, of course, she had her mental problems as well, on top of all that…

MICKY. *(Calling.)* She was, she was bloody mental full stop, if you ask me. Adrian was a saint putting up with it as long as he did –

*(***MEG** *returns with two plates of clingfilm covered sandwiches.)*

MEG. *(As she enters.)* Well, that's his nature, isn't it?

MICKY. I wouldn't have put up with it –

MEG. I know you wouldn't –

MICKY. I'd have been off like a shot –

MEG. I know you would. You don't have to tell me. In the old days, if I caught so much as a cold, you'd start packing your suitcase. Good job it's not me who's disabled, isn't it? You'd be long gone. I'd be trapped here all on my own, wouldn't I?

MICKY. *(Gloomily.)* It's me that's trapped, isn't it? I'm the one who's trapped.

*(***MEG** *goes off again.)*

MEG. *(As she goes.)* Rubbish. You're not trapped. You've got me here. You're perfectly free to move around if you want.

MICKY. *(Calling.)* Move around? Have you seen the state of my legs lately, have you?

MEG. I see them every single morning, don't I, when I put your stockings on. I'm sick of the sight of your legs.

MICKY. *(Sulkily.)* You don't have to do it.

*(***MEG** *returns this time with a plate of small cakes and some fancy biscuits.)*

MEG. *(As she enters.)* Yes, I do have to do it. Else you'd be even more trapped. Doctor said those legs would swell up like balloons without your stockings. No, I miss Faith, sometimes, popping in to have a little moan. I hope we see her kids again, too. Little Colin and Christine. I grew quite fond of them, as well. Mind you, I say little Colin, he'll be nearly twenty now, won't he?

MICKY. Adrian adored them, didn't he? Devoted. Even if they weren't his.

MEG. It was mutual. Such a shame. Still, she's only staying at her mother's – *(As she goes.)* You never know, we may not have seen the last of her.

*(***MEG** *goes off again.)*

MICKY. *(Muttering.)* I hope to God we have.

MEG. *(Offstage.)* No, I have to say, this new one sounds quite promising.

MICKY. *(Calling.)* Where'd he meet her, then?

MEG. *(Offstage.)* At a church coffee morning, apparently.

MICKY. *(Calling.)* Church coffee morning? What's Adrian doing at a church coffee morning?

MEG. *(Offstage.)* No, he's gone a little bit religious lately. Joined the local church, he told me.

MICKY. What? In Nottingham?

MEG. *(Returning.)* I don't know if he's gone religious or just got a bit lonely. Wanted to meet new people, you know. Women.

*(***MEG** *has brought in a tray with four cups together with the mats for the tea pot, etc.)*

MICKY. What kind of woman's he going to meet at a church coffee morning?

MEG. Well, hopefully, a nice, pleasant, well-spoken one, like this Grace.

MICKY. So long as she's cheerful. Most of those churchgoers, in my experience, they turn out right miserable buggers.

MICKY. *(Dubiously.)* Well. It's worth a try. He's had a go almost everywhere else, hasn't he? Pubs, social clubs, internet dating. Everywhere. Last resort really, isn't it, the church?

*(***MEG** *goes off again.)*

MEG. *(As she goes.)* It was good of the neighbours to come round this morning, wasn't it? The neighbours?

MICKY. *(Without enthusiasm, calling.)* Very nice of them.

MEG. *(Offstage.)* Neighbourly. All stood out on the front lawn there, singing happy birthday through the window. It was lovely.

MICKY. *(To himself.)* Bloody racket.

MEG. *(Offstage.)* And then leaving you all those presents, which you don't deserve.

MICKY. *(Glaring at the side table, muttering.)* Which I never even asked for.

*(***MEG** *returns with an empty cake stand. She finally places this on the table and, during the next, arranges things in their final positions.)*

MEG. *(As she enters.)* It was good of them. 'specially since you never speak to most of them half the time. Always left to me, isn't it? You never even thanked them properly, did you? Not so much as a smile.

MICKY. I'm not smiling at that lot. Can't stand half of them, anyway.

MEG. Well, you can say that now. We'd be glad of them in an emergency, wouldn't we? Our neighbours? Say we fell down and couldn't get up again…

MICKY. What, both of us?

MEG. …supposing I slipped on that bathroom floor, say, like nearly happened the other day, on the wet? Supposing I slipped over, and you fell on top of me? So neither of us could get up again? What would happen then?

MICKY. We'd be buggered, wouldn't we?

MEG. We'd be glad of them then. We'd be grateful for neighbours then, wouldn't we*? (Surveying the table.)*

I won't bring the cake in, not just yet. We'll wait till they're here.

MICKY. Oh, we've got cake, have we?

MEG. 'course we've got cake. It wouldn't be a birthday without cake, would it? I made one specially.

MICKY. What sort of cake?

MEG. Wait and see. Surprise.

MICKY. Not full of nuts and fruit, is it? You know I can't eat nuts and fruit, they get stuck under my plate.

MEG. It's a perfectly plain lemon sponge with a soft butter icing. I remembered, don't worry. I don't want you taking your teeth out in the middle of tea again, not in front of Grace.

MICKY. Where's Sonia, then? Is Sonia coming?

MEG. No, I told you this morning, they're still in Spain. She's working. So's Peter. They're both working. They can't get away, till the weekend, I told you that.

MICKY. They're always working, her and Peter. Both of them at it, non-stop.

MEG. Thank your lucky stars we've got a successful daughter and son-in-law, to take care of us in emergencies. At least we've got one successful child. Count your blessings. We'd be in real trouble if we had to rely on just Adrian, wouldn't we?

MICKY. Oh, don't start getting at him, again…

MEG. Well, stuck in that dead-end job at Dunstan's. How long's he been there, now? Thirty years, isn't it? Over thirty years, must be.

MICKY. He's doing well. Head of his department now, isn't he?

MEG. Assistant head. He's only the assistant.

MICKY. Well, he's got another ten years yet. If he sticks at it, he could well be head, by the time he retires.

MEG. He used to have so many plans, didn't he? When he was young? Such big ambitions. What was it he wanted to be at one time? An astrophysicist, didn't he? Now what is he? A bookkeeper at Dunstan's Department store.

MICKY. *(Gloomily.)* Ah, well, he had to come down to earth eventually, didn't he? We all start out with ambitions. I did. Never thought I'd end up as a coach driver. Not my original dream, was that, ferrying busloads of drunks to and fro across the country.

MEG. *(Rather sadly.)* I always wanted to be a dance teacher, at one time. Have my own dancing school. Always my dream, that. And then I ended up sitting behind a till at Sainsbury's, didn't I?

MICKY. You were better off sitting behind a till, believe me. Far better off.

MEG. Think so?

MICKY. Else you wouldn't have met me, would you? You'd never have caught me going into a bloody dancing school, I can tell you.

MEG. No, that'd be the day. Anyway, they'll be here at the weekend, Sonia, Peter and the kids. Then we're all out to dinner on Saturday, aren't we? Don't worry, they're paying. I booked us in at The Plough. They're good with kiddies. Remember you enjoyed The Plough last time, didn't you?

MICKY. That the one with the steak and kidney?

MEG. That's the one. And then you had the crumble. Remember you 'specially liked their crumble? You had seconds, didn't you? And most of mine too, on top of that.

MICKY. *(Savouring.)* Oh, aye, the crumble!

MEG. You were up and down all night after, weren't you?

MICKY. Good apple crumble, that. Steak and kidney pie and apple crumble. That's me sorted, then.

MEG. Remind me to stock up on the Rennies.

(Another pause.)

MICKY. You think we ought to warn her, then?

MEG. What?

MICKY. This new woman of Adrian's? You think we should warn her?

MEG. Grace? Warn her of what?

MICKY. About Adrian? About his predilections? You know. These personality shifts of his?

MEG. *(Firmly.)* I don't think we need say anything about that.

MICKY. We don't want it happening again, do we?

MEG. Not a single word. Listen, it's just a theory. It's just a crackpot theory of yours –

MICKY. More than a theory –

MEG. – we don't know it for certain –

MICKY. – it's a fact. And with her being a churchgoer, religious and so on, she might be, you know, more vulnerable. Sensitive –

MEG. – we don't need to say anything –

MICKY. – it's the problem with his personality, isn't it? That's what broke up his other relationships, wasn't it –?

MEG. – we don't know that –

MICKY. – it's what broke up his marriage. Faith said, in so many words. The reason it all broke down. On account of his – insatiable demands, you know –

MEG. – we don't know that for certain. That's just your interpretation –

MICKY. – we owe it to – this – Grace, don't we? Wouldn't be fair on her, would it? We need to get in early this time. Nip it in the bud. Fair to her, fair to both of them. Else the lad's never going to form a proper relationship with a woman, ever again, is he? That's my opinion.

MEG. Yes, it is, it's just your opinion. That's all it is. Personally, I don't think we should say anything to her. It's not our place to interfere.

MICKY. We're his parents, we owe it to him.

MEG. *(Resolutely.)* Well, I'm not saying a word. This time I'm not saying a single word. I'm sorry, Micky, but I think all this interfering in the lad's life, it's doing more harm than good, it really is.

MICKY. He's ill. He's imbalanced. Partly mental, partly hormones. He's got unbalanced hormones. They're out of kilter.

MEG. What are you on about now? Hormones? I think you're beginning to lose it, love, I really do. You're going bonkers on your birthday.

MICKY. No, listen. Superman. You remember Superman?

MEG. Oh, for God's sake don't start on again about Superman –

MICKY. No, listen, listen to me –

MEG. – every time we get on this subject, you bring up bloody Superman. I don't know what he's got to do with Adrian's sexual problems – I think you're going off your head, Micky. It's your age, love, it's got to you –

MICKY. – nothing wrong with my head –

MEG. Listen, if you honestly believe we've got Superman as a son…take a look at him. Just take a look at Adrian, the next time you see him. He's a lovely gentle lad and I won't have a word said against him, but really! I can't imagine anybody less like bloody Superman than Adrian Copthorpe! Now shut up or I'll have you put away.

(A slight pause.)

MICKY. *(Muttering.)* The lass needs warning, that's all I'm saying, she needs warning.

MEG. That's enough! Or I promise. They'll be round here with a van!

(Another pause.)

MICKY. Should be here by now, shouldn't they?

MEG. There might be traffic. If they're coming from Nottingham. It's never good between here and Nottingham, not on a Friday. 'Specially if Adrian's driving. It'll take even longer with him at the wheel. In the old days, whenever he took me to the shops, he'd drive so slowly. I'd say, Adrian, for God's sake get a move on, love, they'll all be closed. He'd stop for everything. He only had to see a crossing sign and he'd slam his brakes on, even when there was no one there…

MICKY. He's a responsible, conscientious driver. I taught him well.

MEG. …one time, he even pulled up for a pile of leaves. I said, Adrian, they're just leaves, love, off the trees. It's perfectly safe to run them over.

MICKY. …there should be more drivers like him on our roads, if you ask me.

MEG. Now you're alright sitting there, are you? You need anything bringing, before they come?

MICKY. Just my tea.

MEG. You'll get it in a minute. Soon as they arrive. You're still dry, are you? You're not damp?

MICKY. No, I'm dry enough.

MEG. Only I don't want you sitting there feeling uncomfortable. Not on your birthday.

MICKY. No, I'm alright just now. Comfortable enough.

(Another pause.)

MEG. I've sorted out a parking disc. Put one on the hall table for them.

MICKY. They'll need one, if they're here more than five minutes. You know what those buggers are like…

MEG. Uncle Hal's Jaguar. He hadn't been parked two minutes, had he? And they swooped just like that. Threatened to tow him away, didn't they?

MICKY. Mind you, out of date licence, no tax disc and three bald tyres, what did he expect? But then that's Hal for you, isn't it?

MEG. Oh, yes, that's Hal for you.

MICKY. Bloody black sheep, wasn't he, your brother?

MEG. Well, he's passed on now. To a better place.

MICKY. He'll be lucky to get there. Not with three bald tyres and no tax disc.

(The doorbell rings.)

MEG. Oh, they're here!

(She hurries to the front window to check.)

Yes, it's them. Now, remember, behave yourself!

MICKY. How do you mean?

MEG. None of that Superman nonsense, you hear?

*(***MEG** *hurries out to the front door.)*

MICKY. *(Muttering to himself again.)* Something needs to be said. She needs warning, the lass needs warning.

*(***MEG** *is heard greeting their guests in the hall. In a moment,* **ADRIAN** *and* **GRACE** *are ushered in by* **MEG.** **ADRIAN** *is very much as described. A mild, undistinguished man in his mid-fifties.* **GRACE**, *ten years his junior, is similarly well-disposed with a sunny, unassuming manner, currently a little shy.* **ADRIAN** *immediately bounds forward to greet his father. He is carrying a gift-wrapped book.)*

ADRIAN. *(Affectionately.)* Hello, Dad. Happy birthday, mate.

MICKY. *(Brightly.)* Adrian, son! How's it all going?

ADRIAN. *(Handing him the book.)* Here. Happy birthday.

MICKY. Oh. You shouldn't have bothered, lad.

MEG. *(Stepping forward.)* Here, I'll take it. I'll put it over here with his other presents, he can open it later.

ADRIAN. It's a Pictorial History of The Omnibus.

MICKY. Oh, aye.

MEG. Oh, doesn't that sound lovely. Very interesting.

ADRIAN. I had to send away for it especially. There's some fascinating old pictures. I think you'll appreciate it, Dad.

MICKY. I'm sure.

ADRIAN. You're looking good. Looking good, Dad. How are you feeling in yourself?

MICKY. Oh, pretty fair. Considering.

ADRIAN. He's looking great, isn't he, Mum? Don't you think he's looking good?

MEG. He's doing alright. Not bad for eighty.

(A slight pause.)

Come on, then, Adrian. Aren't you going to introduce Grace to your Dad? Where's your manners?

ADRIAN. Oh, yes, sure. Sorry. Grace, this is my Dad.

GRACE. *(Shyly.)* How do you do, Mr Copthorpe?

MICKY. Micky, love, call me Micky. Now I'm eighty you can call me Micky.

GRACE. Congratulations. Happy birthday

MEG. And I'm Meg, love. Do call me Meg, please.

GRACE. Meg. Oh, isn't this a lovely cosy room! It's so lovely and cosy, isn't it?

MEG. Well, thank you. I don't know about cosy, I think poky is how we usually describe it, isn't it, Micky?

GRACE. No, really, it's just so warm and welcoming. I love the colours.

ADRIAN. *(At the side table.)* Hey, look at all these presents! These all for you, are they, Dad?

MICKY. Hands off! Hands off, you bugger!

ADRIAN. Who's being spoilt on his birthday, then?

MEG. Now, Grace, do sit down, make yourself comfortable, love. I was just about to put the kettle on, make us all a nice cup of tea.

GRACE. Oh, wonderful.

MEG. I bet you're dying for a cup of tea, aren't you? After your journey?

GRACE. Lovely.

MEG. How was your journey? You've made good time, haven't you?

ADRIAN. Oh, it was good, wasn't it? Pretty clear. Less on the road than usual.

MICKY. No piles of leaves, then?

ADRIAN. Sorry?

MEG. *(Gently admonishing.)* Micky! Behave!

ADRIAN. Piles of leaves?

MEG. I'll just heat the kettle up.

GRACE. Can I help at all?

MEG. No, it's all ready to bring in. I've just got to warm the kettle.

GRACE. *(Following her to the door.)* Do let me help, please. I'd love to see the kitchen.

MEG. *(As they leave.)* Well, I'm afraid it's a bit of a mess at present…

GRACE. *(Going with her.)* Oh, that's alright, don't worry. You should see my kitchen…

*(***MEG** *and* **GRACE** *leave the room.)*

ADRIAN. *(At the main table.)* Hey! Look at all this. One of mum's teas. Eat till you drop, eh? Where's the cake then? We're getting a cake, surely?

MICKY. It's out there. Saving itself for the grand finale.

ADRIAN. Has it got eighty candles?

MICKY. I hope not. There'll be more bloody candles than cake.

ADRIAN. *(With a glance towards the kitchen.)* Well, leave them both to it, eh? Get to know each other. What do you think of her then, Dad? Grace? From what you've seen? Gorgeous, isn't she?

MICKY. *(Guardedly.)* She seems – very pleasant. Course, I've only just…

ADRIAN. Oh, wait till you get to know her, Dad. She's special. Grace's really special. I think she's the one this time, Dad, I really do. I think I've found her at last. The one I want to share the rest of my life with. She's just – perfect. Kind and gentle. Understanding. She's a really – good person – you know. In the real sense.

MICKY. Yes, I heard she was a – she's a Christian, isn't she?

ADRIAN. Yes. She's a Christian. But in the proper sense, you know. Not one of those do-gooder, holier than thou sort of Christians. A proper Christian with love in her heart. Not just for me. For everyone around her. Whenever she walks in, she just lights the place up. Like a three-thousand-watt bulb. Dad, you've no idea, I'm such a happy man. I'm seventeen years old again, walking on air.

MICKY. Well, I'm happy for you, son, I really am. You deserve a bit of happiness. You've been through a bit. I'm pleased for you.

ADRIAN. *(Grasping his hand.)* Thank you, Dad. Thank you. That means a lot. Bless you.

MICKY. But, being absolutely straight for a minute, son. And if I sound – if I sound a bit less than – over the moon for you – it's just we've been down this path once or twice before, haven't we? I mean, only in recent months, haven't we? I mean, truthfully, this isn't the first one you've said that about, is it?

ADRIAN. No, this is different. This time it's definitely different. I'm positive. It's the real thing, this time.

MICKY. I mean, I don't want to put a damper on your happiness, but – Adrian, if you'll take a bit of advice from your dad...

ADRIAN. Of course, of course...

MICKY. I mean, I may not be what you'd call the wisest of people, you know –

ADRIAN. Oh, yes you are, Dad. To me anyway, you are –

MICKY. – but I have lived to be eighty and so I may have picked up a thing or two, over the years, with regards to women.

ADRIAN. I'm sure you have, Dad.

MICKY. Rule one with women. Don't try and rush them, son. In my experience, women mostly prefer to set the pace – you don't mind me saying this to you, do you –?

ADRIAN. *(Considering this, gravely.)* No, well, they're wise words, Dad. Words of wisdom. You know me, I never tend to rush things. Kid gloves, me.

MICKY. Treat her like your best bone china. Don't be like your mother's brother.

ADRIAN. You mean Uncle Hal?

MICKY. Don't get like him. He's wrecked havoc in his wake, that man. Left a trail of broken hearts behind him. Don't get like him, lad.

ADRIAN. Yes, Mum's sixtieth birthday, at the Swan? Remember when he –?

MICKY. Don't mention that. Not in front of your mother, son!

ADRIAN. Yes, I remember when Mum went and – *(He breaks off.)*

*(***MEG** *and* **GRACE** *return with the tea things.)*

MEG. Sorry. We got nattering. Yatter, yatter, yatter...

MICKY. Oh, yes? Why are we not surprised?

MEG. We've been discussing wallpaper, of all things. I don't know how we got on to wallpaper, do you, Grace?

GRACE. We started on lino. Old-fashioned lino. How we wished they'd bring it back, instead of all these fancy tiles that always need specialist people to lay them. Whereas, a good old-fashioned roll of lino, you can lay it yourself, can't you?

MEG. They must still make lino, mustn't they?

GRACE. You just never see it though, do you?

MICKY. I wouldn't know.

MEG. Anyway, enough of that. Tea, everybody? Everyone wants tea, I take it?

ADRIAN. Please.

GRACE. Lovely.

MEG. Micky?

MICKY. What?

MEG. You want a cup of tea, love, don't you?

MICKY. Ta.

MEG. So, what have you two been talking about in here?

ADRIAN. We were just remembering your sixtieth birthday at the Swan.

MEG. Oh, don't bring that up again, please.

GRACE. Why's that?

MEG. Never a year goes by without him bringing that up. I thought we'd forgotten all about that.

GRACE. Whatever happened?

ADRIAN. Well, Mum –

MEG. Don't you dare! Not one word, my boy! Unless you want this tea poured over your head. I'll tell you some time when we're on our own, Grace. Once we know you a little better. Would you mind passing those. Thank you.

*(***GRACE** *passes cups to both the men.)*

MICKY. Ta.

ADRIAN. Thank you.

*(***MEG** *pours* **GRACE** *a cup.)*

GRACE. *(Taking her cup.)* Thank you.

MEG. You don't take sugar, do you, Grace?

GRACE. No, thank you.

ADRIAN. *(Smiling at her.)* Sweet enough already, aren't you?

*(***GRACE** *smiles back at him.)*

*(***MEG** *sits at the table and pours herself a cup as well.)*

(Meanwhile **ADRIAN** *has sat on the sofa.)*

*(***GRACE***, taking her own cup, crosses companionably to sit next to him.)*

*(***GRACE** *smiles at* **ADRIAN***. He smiles back at her.)*

MEG. Well, isn't this nice? Micky's birthday tea. We should give him a toast, really. Only I don't think it's the done thing to toast someone with tea, is it? *(Raising her cup.)* A toast anyway. To Micky. And many more to come, love.

GRACE. *(Raising her cup.)* Micky!

ADRIAN. *(Raising his cup.)* To Dad!

(They all drink.)

MEG. *(With a yelp of alarm.)* Oh, my God! I completely forgot. You haven't done your parking disc, Adrian.

ADRIAN. *(Springing up.)* Oh, no. Forgot that. Must do that.

MICKY. No, don't forget your disc. You know what they're like round here.

ADRIAN. I'll do it straightaway. Won't be a tick.

MEG. Are you parked far away?

ADRIAN. *(As he goes.)* Just round the corner in Park Street. Won't be long!

*(***ADRIAN** *hurries out.)*

MEG. *(Calling after him.)* It's just on the hall table there.

ADRIAN. *(Offstage.)* Got it!

MICKY. *(To* **GRACE.***)* They're 'specially fierce round here. Adrian's uncle Hal, my wife's brother, he had a serious altercation with his Jaguar.

GRACE. Oh, yes?

MEG. *(Calling.)* Adrian, leave it on the latch, love.

ADRIAN. *(Offstage.)* Right!

MICKY. *(Significantly.)* Three bald tyres and no tax disc…

GRACE. *(Laughing.)* Oh, really? That's incredible.

*(***MEG** *removes the cling film from the plate of sandwiches.)*

(In a moment, the front door closes.)

MEG. Well, we won't wait for Adrian. Something to eat, everyone?

*(***GRACE** *rises and takes the side plates from the table.)*

GRACE. I'll pass these round, shall I?

MEG. Oh, thank you, love, if you wouldn't mind. Terrible asking guests to do it, but…

GRACE. Quite alright, happy to help.

(She distributes the plates, leaving one by **MICKY** *and two others by the sofa for her and* **ADRIAN**.*)*

(Indicating the plates of sandwiches.) Would you like me to do these as well?

MEG. Thank you, love. *(Indicating.)* Those are the paste. And those there are cucumber. *(Confidentially.)* Only don't give Micky any cucumber. They interfere with him.

*(***GRACE** *now offers* **MICKY** *the paste sandwiches. He takes two.)*

(She takes two sandwiches for herself and two for **ADRIAN**.*)*

(She returns both plates to the main table for **MEG** *to help herself.)*

(During this, the conversation continues.)

So how did you and Adrian meet, Grace?

GRACE. *(As she busies herself.)* We met at a coffee morning. A St Catherine's Church coffee morning. One of those Saturday morning do's. You know. Rather sad actually. All the people in the parish with nowhere else to go on Saturday morning. A bit of a lonely-hearts club, really. And Adrian and I found we both had a lot in common, being both of us on our own. With his wife having – only recently left him, you know.

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