

SUNDAY AFTERNOON TEA

By CHRISTOPHER OWEN

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CHARACTERS:

Dilys, in her late forties.

Miriam, Dilys' sister, in her late forties.

Brian, Dilys' ex-husband, in his late forties.

**THE COMEDY IS SET IN DILYS' DINING ROOM IN HER
HOUSE SITUATED IN SMALL TOWN IN WALES.**

**THE ACTION TAKES PLACE WHILE THEY ARE HAVING
SUNDAY AFTERNOON TEA AND CAKE.**

Playing time: 10 minutes.

DILYS: (POURING): Tea. Cake, Brian, Miriam. It's nice having a cup of tea, Sunday.

MIRIAM: Thank you.

BRIAN: Very nice.

DILYS: Bronwen Leppard - she comes over to me from the Mental Health Section in Zarathustra's bookshop - she tells me Brian has been diagnosed with the prostate, Brian. He never tells me - his ex-wife. He hasn't told his wife's sister, hasn't told you, Miriam. He's been put on hormone tablets. These hormone tablets, Bronwen Leppard says, they kick the testosterone into touch, she says.

MIRIAM: Kick it into touch, is it?

DILYS: That's the end of his sex life, isn't it, Brian?

MIRIAM: You mean he can't have sex anymore? Well, I'm very sorry to hear that, Brian.

BRIAN: I'm alright, thank you.

MIRIAM: Dear God.

DILYS: And what about you, Miriam?

MIRIAM: What about me, Dilys?

DILYS: (OFFERING CAKE): You go off to Rome with that nice homosexual dentist of yours, you come back looking triumphant, and all of a sudden the man goes back to his swimming pool instructor.

MIRIAM: Don't you worry about me.

BRIAN: Nice cake, Dilys.

DILYS: Thank you, Brian. That dentist of yours, I can't think what he can get from that swimming instructor that he can't get from you, Miriam. What do you think, Brian?

BRIAN: You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

DILYS: That's it. Brian has spoken. You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

MIRIAM: He's only in his forties, for God's sake.

DILYS: Forties is old for a homosexual, Miriam. Bronwen Leppard's been reading up about it.

MIRIAM: For God's sake.

DILYS: Bronwen's very well read in these matters, encyclopaedic, she is. You come back from those few days with your dentist, those few days in Rome. You were victorious. The colour bright in your cheeks, a spring in your step. Your teeth newly cleaned. Your fillings renewed. You were walking on air, Miriam. Never seen you happier, never seen you more triumphant. Not since you were seventeen, you came home and proudly informed me that Peter Jenkins, he had a nine inch appendix scar. In seventh heaven, that's the phrase Bronwen chose to describe you when you were going out with the dentist. And now look at you, for goodness sake – all of a sudden the air out of you like a popped balloon – and you here, you fiddling about with my Victoria Sponge as if it isn't to your

liking. I don't know what we're going to do with the both of you. You, Miriam, on your own again –

MIRIAM: I'm alright.

DILYS: Brian having to face up to a life of impotence. And what can one say about that poor Mr Roberts the butcher's wife Angharad Roberts – Angharad Roberts left high and dry – her sexual antics, her monkey tricks with my ex-husband here suddenly and inexplicably curtailed, her expectations of him in ruins – gasping in her ignorance of what has befallen Brian here, he not having had the courage or decency to own up, to tell it how it is. There's Brian all over Angharad Roberts, breathing fire he is, hot as mustard for her – and after fifteen years marriage to that butcher of hers, that Mr Roberts, him all twenty two stone and as sexually arousing as five tons of pig's trotters, Brian coming onto her like the dragon's breath, bringing the blood back into her cheeks, the bounce back into her step – well, you remember, Miriam – the way she walked, the swinging of her hips – you remarked on it. I remember. We were in the High Street that Saturday afternoon, she was coming out of the butchers carrying old Mrs Evans' weekly meat order to her car, you said, 'look, Dilys,' you said – I remember – 'Angharad's bottom,' you said, and don't

you deny it, ‘Angharad’s bottom swinging from side to side all over the pavement’, you said. ‘Look at her, won’t you,’ she said, Brian. ‘If that isn’t love, I don’t know what is,’ you said, Miriam. And of course we knew, didn’t we – we knew who it was who caused this transformation to Angharad, didn’t we? It was Brian, it was. It was her bottom in the High Street proclaimed it. And of course the butcher, her husband Mr Roberts, he’d not noticed a thing. Mr Roberts, he’s taken up with the meat trade, isn’t he? Angharad Roberts is in seventh heaven - and then Lothario here, he goes and gets himself put on hormonals and poor Angharad is wondering what the hell she’s done to cause this hitherto passionate man to become such a cold fish. Blames herself she does. And he doesn’t have the decency, the courage, the face to tell her. She’s on anti-depressants. Did you know that? Because of your prostate. Your prostate has a lot to answer for, Brian.

BRIAN: (LOUDLY PROTESTING): Shut up! Do you hear me?!

DILYS: I’m only telling it as how it is –

BRIAN: Be quiet! You’re only talking the way you’re talking because of that Alan Phillips, he having given you your marching orders.

DILYS: My what?!

BRIAN: You know what I'm saying, Dilys.

MIRIAM: What're you saying? Marching orders?

DILYS: Don't take any notice of him.

BRIAN: That man Alan Phillips, he's broken it off with you, that's what Alan Phillips has done. So don't you try to deny it - you going on about Angharad and me and Miriam.

MIRIAM: Alan Phillips left you all of a sudden, has he?

DILYS: Brian doesn't know a thing about it. You don't know a thing.

BRIAN: I do know it, I do know it. Bronwen Leppard, she knows it.

MIRIAM: Bronwen knows it, the whole town must know it.

DILYS: You don't want to listen to what Bronwen tells you, Brian. That woman, she'll say anything so as to gain attention to herself.

MIRIAM: You listen to her, I'd like to remind you, Dilys.

BRIAN: She told me. Alan Phillips had had it up to here on account of your shopping, eh? That's it, isn't it? You and him in London, in Oxford Street, that's what he told Bronwen Leppard. Morning, noon and night – shopping - non-stop.

DILYS: No, I didn't. I didn't shop – no more than one might expect – visiting London once in a while – that's what it's for, for God's sake! You'd not go to London if it weren't for the shopping, would you?! It wasn't only shopping we did.

BRIAN: Alan Phillips, that's how it seemed to him.

DILYS: You'd deny a woman a little shopping, would you? Is that it?

MIRIAM: What that poor long-suffering man has had to put up with, Dilys.

DILYS: He's not the only one who's been long suffering, I'll have you know. Let me make that quite clear. You know what that man, what he dragged me to see? Intellectual, you're right there, Miriam.

MIRIAM: I never said he was intellectual.

DILYS: Your intellectual Alan Phillips you're so proud of, we have a few precious days together in London, he drags me along to a play by a man called Stringberg – you know a man called Stringberg, Miriam? – you at your English Literature classes Friday evenings? – Somebody Stringberg. This dreadful man in it haranguing women. Well, I put up with that, didn't I? I didn't complain about that. If he'd had left it at that, well, I've always been one for fitting in, making other people happy, but then next evening he takes me to a filthy room above a pub, in Fulham he said it was. I was obliged to sit through what seemed hours and hours of listening to a man talking into a tape machine– a man called Krapp – which just about summed it up, Brian, Miriam! – the bloody man moaning and whingeing on and on. And, that over, I say to him, to Alan - not to the man Krapp – to Alan – I say to him let's go and have a drink in a nice bar in the West End, shall we? - but no, no, there's another play or whatever one might call it – not just the Krapp man but another one - a

woman buried up to her neck in sand, for God's sake, Miriam, Brian!

You go all the way to London for a few days with a man you thought had some feeling for you and to do a little shopping and you end up listening to a woman talking a lot of incomprehensible garbage sitting there just a few feet away from you and her up to her neck in sand! He made me go to that dreadful bloody gallery place on the Embankment – the modern place.

MIRIAM: The Tate, is it? Would that be the Tate, Dilys?

DILYS: You think I'm unreasonable, inconsiderate?

MIRIAM: I told you he's not suited to you, Dilys.

DILYS: You think I lack stamina? You stand on your feet hour after hour staring at blank canvases, and piles of rubble, litter everywhere – I bent to pick it up, the litter, bits of paper, bits of stick and cardboard, I think it was, on the floor, a man comes up, asks us to leave for interfering with the Turner Prize. It was a nightmare.

A PAUSE

DILYS: More tea? Cake?

BRIAN: I think I'll have a scotch.

MIRIAM: I'll have a gin and tonic.

DILYS: We always have tea and cake at this hour, Sunday afternoons,
Miriam, Brian. Always.

PAUSE.

DILYS: Oh God. Make that two gin and tonics, will you, Brian.

**NO ONE MOVES. THEY STARE AT THE WRECKAGE OF
THEIR SUNDAY AFTERNOON TEA.**

THE END