

EXTRACTS FROM
A FAMILY AFFAIR
A ONE-ACT COMEDY

By Christopher Owen

Winner of the RAFTA One-Act Play Festival 2009

RUNNING TIME 43 MINUTES

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CHARACTERS:

DILYS, in her forties.

MIRIAM, Dilys' sister, in her forties.

BRIAN, Dilys' husband, in his forties.

THE COMEDY IS SET IN DILYS AND BRIAN'S DINING ROOM IN THEIR HOUSE SITUATED IN A SMALL TOWN IN WALES.

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE OVER SUNDAY LUNCH.

Running time: 40 minutes.

Dilys and Miriam are sisters who have always been jealous of each other especially where men are concerned. Brian, Dilys' husband, is caught in the middle. However, it turns out he has a few surprises up his sleeve.

FIRST EXTRACT:

**DILYS AND MIRIAM AND BRIAN ARE SEATED AT THE DINING TABLE
THEY ARE EATING THEIR SUNDAY LUNCH.**

DILYS AND MIRIAM ARE DRINKING WINE WITH THEIR MEAL. BRIAN IS DRINKING BEER.

Dilys: You like the roast beef, Miriam?

Miriam: Very nice, Dilys.

Dilys: Brian?

Brian: What? Yes, very nice.

THEY CONTINUE TO EAT.

Dilys: (TO MIRIAM): More gravy? You don't seem to have got very much.

Miriam: No, no. I'm fine, thank you.

A BRIEF PAUSE WHILE DILYS PICKS UP THE GRAVY BOAT AND HELPS HERSELF TO MORE GRAVY, AFTER WHICH SHE SPEAKS.

Dilys: There's plenty more of everything, roast potatoes, sprouts, carrots, if you want them.

**MIRIAM PICKS UP THE GRAVY BOAT AND HELPS *HERSELF* TO MORE GRAVY.
THIS DOES NOT GO UNOBSERVED BY DILYS.**

A BRIEF PAUSE WHILE THEY CONTINUE TO EAT.

Miriam: It's very nice of you and Brian to have me over.

Dilys: Well, it's the first Sunday of the month, Miriam. Since your Harry died, we've always got together on the first Sunday of the month. We can't have you on your own week after week. That's how I've always looked at it – one's own sister on her own, having Sunday lunch on her own all the time. That's so, isn't it, Brian? With the children grown up and living so far away – John in Dundee, Gwyneth in Canada – it's been nice for Brian and I to have the company. That's how I've looked at it over these last few years.

A PAUSE WHILE THEY CONTINUE TO EAT, WITH BRIAN HELPING HIMSELF TO MORE GRAVY, AND THEN CONTINUING TO EAT.

Dilys: I'm worried about you, Brian.

Brian: (WITH HIS MOUTH FULL): Worried?

Dilys: What's going to happen to you while I'm in London?

Brian: (WITH HIS MOUTH FULL): Don't talk like that, Dilys.

Dilys: I do talk like that.

BRIAN IS POURING HIMSELF MORE BEER.

Dilys: I'm not leaving, not without seeing you're settled. Someone to look after you - eh, Miriam? Look at him. He can't pour a glass of beer without spilling it. Spilling it on the tablecloth. He'll not manage on his own, that's for certain. He pretends he'll manage on his own, but you and I know differently.

Miriam: (LEANING OVER AND MOPING UP THE BEER BRIAN HAS SPILT ON THE TABLECLOTH): He needs someone to keep an eye on him, that's for sure – see he takes proper care of himself.

THEY CONTINUE TO EAT.

Miriam: The Yorkshire pudding's delicious, Dilys. I don't know how you do it. Delicious, isn't it, Brian?

Brian: Lovely.

A PAUSE AS THEY CONTINUE TO EAT.

Dilys: And what about you, Miriam?

MIRIAM LOOKS AT DILYS SUSPICIOUSLY.

Miriam: What about me, Dilys?

Dilys: Every since your Harry died – when was it? – eighteen months is it now?

Miriam: Over two years now, Dilys. Your own sister – you'd think you'd remember how long it is since Harry died.

Dilys: You on your own in that big house. Talking to yourself at night, making conversation with those men on the television.

Miriam: I'll have you know I do no such thing.

Dilys: You told me yourself. Don't you sit there trying to deny it. That man on News At Ten, with the suit, you know him better there in your living room with the lights out than you know your own neighbours.

Miriam: You haven't met my neighbours, Dilys.

Dilys: All on your own as you are – it's not healthy, Miriam.

A PAUSE AS THEY CONTINUE TO EAT.

Dilys: Look at that roast potato, Brian. Look at that roast potato on the tablecloth, won't you?

BRIAN HURRIEDLY PUTS THE POTATO BACK ON HIS PLATE.

Dilys: That's a sign, an indication of things to come, that's what it is. It's a warning.

Brian: I'll manage. You have a nice few days in London. A nice few days shopping. Don't you worry about me.

Dilys: I do worry. I worry about both of you.

Miriam: Don't you worry about me.

A PAUSE AS THEY CONTINUE TO EAT

Dilys: You can't see what's staring you in the face, Miriam, that's the truth of it. You'd not appreciate the significance of Noah's Ark rising up outside your bedroom window, if you saw it. You'd see it, you'd say, oh, look, it's raining.

Miriam: It would be, Dilys. It would be raining. Noah's Ark floating up past my bedroom window, it'd not be far off the mark to say it was doing just that.

Dilys: You'd not see the wider significance. That's what I'm saying. Never could. Even when we were children. Mam used to say our Miriam can't see the wood for the trees.

IN A SHOW OF IRRITATION, MIRIAM ABRUPTLY PICKS UP THE SALT CELLAR, ADDS SALT TO HER FOOD, AND EMPHATICALLY RETURNS THE SALT CELLAR TO THE TABLE. THE ACTION IS IGNORED BY DILYS, BUT NOT BY BRIAN WHO SENSES TROUBLE.

Dilys: (CONTINUING TO EAT): I'm not leaving for London, not until I feel assured you and Brian have agreed to settle down together.

Miriam: Settled down?

Dilys: Wedding bells, Miriam.

Miriam: God, Dilys, what are you talking about?

Dilys: Don't break down, for heaven's sake, Miriam.

Miriam: I'm not breaking down.

Dilys: Don't break down, Miriam, that I couldn't bear. Brian and I are getting divorced.

BRIAN STARES AT DILYS. HE IS BOTH ASTONISHED AND SUSPICIOUS.

Miriam: You're divorcing?

Dilys: (CONTINUING TO EAT): We've gone our separate ways, Miriam. You know that. Brian knows that. Don't you, Brian?

Brian: No.

Dilys: Don't pretend you don't know. It's not been what a marriage ought to be, not for a long time. That potato is back on the tablecloth again.

BRIAN PUTS THE POTATO BACK ON HIS PLATE.

Dilys: While I'm in London I shall be seeing a solicitor. Get things moving.

Miriam: This is news to me, Dilys – you and Brian divorcing.

Brian: You've not said anything to me about this.

Dilys: I've only recently decided. Eat up. It'll get cold.

Brian: Don't you think we should discuss this?

Dilys: No.

Miriam: You're divorcing him?

Dilys: Our marriage is over, Brian, you know that. Don't pretend you don't know. (LOOKING AT MIRIAM AND BRIAN'S PLATES): You're not eating your roasted parsnips. I made them specially. Don't you like them?

Miriam: Yes.

MIRIAM AND BRIAN IMMEDIATELY EAT A PIECE OF PARSNIP.

A PAUSE AS THE THREE OF THEM CONTINUE TO EAT.

Dilys: You and Brian, I want you married. I want you to look after each other.

BRIAN AND MIRIAM GAWP AT HER IN GUILTY DISBELIEF.

Brian: Hang on a mo, Dilys.

Dilys: You and Brian, Miriam, it's what you want after all. Brian knows he'll crack up if he's left on his own. More sprouts? Carrots?

DILYS SPOONS SPROUTS AND OTHER VEGETABLES ONTO THEIR PLATES.

Dilys: Your English Literature class, Miriam – Friday evenings – is it still Dickens you're studying in class, is it? Been studying Dickens, how long is it now? Since Harry died, is it? Well, you can't hurry Dickens. I'll say this for him, he wasn't a man to spare himself when it came to the words. If Dickens could say something in a single sentence, you can be sure he'd manage to say it in three or four paragraphs. Not a mean man when it came to literature. How was the lunch, Miriam? On Friday?

Miriam: Friday?

Dilys: Friday before your English Literature class. You and Brian. Weavers Restaurant off the High Street. Bronwen Leppard saw you going in. Bronwen Leppard comes over to me in Zarathustras – the bookshop – you know, Miriam – the bookshop, Brian – opened last week – High Street – organically written novels – that sort of thing – they give you a rose as you go in, you eat it as you come out. A mouth full of rose petals. Bronwen Leppard manoeuvres her skinny tumble-down frame to me in the teach-yourself-self-assertion section. Old mother gossip herself, she says: 'I saw your Brian and your sister Miriam going into Weavers Restaurant – Friday' she said. They were holding hands,' she said.

Brian: I was just a lunch, Dilys.

Dilys: Funny you didn't tell me you'd been. Don't you think? Bronwen Leppard knows you've been. *She* knows, so does everyone else, that's for sure. The whole town, I'd not be at all surprised.

Miriam: Lunch, Dilys. Lunch. What's so significant about that? So we forgot to tell you. It didn't seem important. How long have we known each other? I mean you and me and Brian?

Dilys: It'd have been nice to know though, wouldn't it? You and Brian having lunch at Weavers Restaurant. Nice to know what you had and that, don't you think? It was nice, was it? What you had? What was it? What did you have?

Miriam: I can't remember what I had, Dilys.

Dilys: Did you have the same? Brian?

Brian: What? No.

Dilys: Well, whatever you had it's no concern of mine – chicken, veal, it's none of my business, I know that – shepherds pie, Dover sole – you had Dover sole, Miriam?

Miriam: Dilys.

Dilys: I can tell. Dover sole. It's written all over your face. Brian, he'd have had the trout. Friday, he's trout. That's my guess. Not that it has anything to do with me.

Miriam: He was beef.

Dilys: Beef? Brian was beef, Friday? Well, I wish you'd have told me. If you'd told me you two were going to have lunch together, just the two of you, Friday, and Brian here was to have beef, I wouldn't have gone out specially and bought this joint, now, would I? I'd have chosen something different. You don't want to have red meat too often, do you? Not twice in one week. Not with Brian's high cholesterol.

Miriam: We just didn't think to tell you, Dilys. Did we, Brian?

Brian: What? No. No. It sort of escaped my memory, you see.

END OF THE FIRST EXTRACT

SECOND EXTRACT – A LITTLE LATER DURING THE LUNCH:

Miriam: Brian would have married me – he would - if you hadn't got yourself pregnant.

Dilys: I did not.

Miriam: You planned it, you did.

Dilys: I did not. I certainly did not.

Miriam: Your John was born seven months after your wedding, don't you deny it.

Dilys: So? It doesn't mean I planned it. You've no proof. Making your unfounded accusations. I'm not discussing it. That's it.

Miriam: Everyone knew you planned it. It's always been the same. She accusing me of trying to take her boyfriends off her. What about Harry? My husband? Christmas, only a year before he died? Christmas Eve, on the landing, and no mistletoe to excuse her antics. Her hands where they shouldn't be. Trying to upset him. She tried to come between me and Harry. Harry going about the house for weeks after like a spaniel, his jaw all loose and hanging. You didn't know that, did you, Brian?

(HITTING THE TABLE): Eh, Brian? (FOOD FLIES ALL OVER THE TABLE). Answer me.

Brian: No.

Miriam: My Harry.

A PAUSE AS BRIAN PICKS UP VEGETABLES AND PIECES OF MEAT OFF THE TABLECLOTH AND RETURNS THEM TO THE PLATES FROM WHENCE THEY CAME.

Dilys: You go off with Miriam. You're welcome to her, Brian. I'm divorcing you, I told you. I'm going to London on the six twenty seven. You take her to Rome. Don't bother to come back.

Brian: I'm not going to Rome.

Dilys: Bangor then. Bangor.

Brian: I'm not going to Bangor.

Miriam: What?

Brian: I'm going to Keswick.

Dilys: Keswick, is it?

Miriam: You haven't said anything about Keswick. You didn't ask *me* if I wanted to go to Keswick?

Brian: We're not going to Keswick.

Dilys: You're not going to Keswick?

Miriam: Why say Keswick then?

Brian: *I'm* going to Keswick.

Dilys: *You're* going to Keswick?

Miriam: You're going to Keswick on your own, are you?

Brian: No. I'm going with Rosemary.

Miriam: Rosemary?

Dilys: Who's Rosemary?

Brian: Someone.

Dilys: Well, of course she's someone, Brian. We didn't expect her to be no one.

Miriam: You're making this up, are you? Is that what you're up to, is it? Playing us along, are you? Rosemary? Who is this woman, for God's sake? - sitting there, poking at your food.

Dilys: Who is she, Brian?

Brian: She works at the bank. A clerk at the bank

Dilys: Clerk at the bank?

Miriam: She works at the bank – your bank? You’re going to Keswick with a woman who works at your bank?

Dilys: Is that what you’re saying, is it?

Brian: Yes.

Miriam: You’re going to Rome with me, and you’re going with the woman in the bank to Keswick?

Dilys: This Rosemary woman?

Brian: I’m not going to Rome. I’m not going with you. Not going anywhere with you, Miriam. I’m going with Rosemary.

Dilys: To Keswick?

Miriam: You deceive your wife and your wife’s sister with that woman? That woman Rosemary is married. You know that, do you, Brian?

Dilys: Married, is she?

Miriam: Married. That Rosemary woman, I’ve heard her talk about her husband. Cashing a cheque at the counter, she telling one of the customers about her husband.

Dilys: What’s she say about him?

Miriam: From what I heard her say he’s a man of regular habits. He has to have his dinner half six on the dot.

Dilys: And she’s going off with you, Brian, to Keswick, is she?

Miriam: You do know what you’re doing, do you, Brian?

Dilys: I very much doubt that her husband is going to get his dinner at half past six on the dot on the day she and Brian go off to Keswick. Who else are you going out with?

Brian: Angharad.

Miriam: Angharad?

Dilys: Angharad Evans?

Brian: No. Angharad Roberts.

Dilys and Miriam: Angharad Roberts?!

Dilys: Angharad Roberts is married to Roberts the butcher – to the man who sold me this joint of beef!

Miriam: Angharad Roberts, for God's sake?

Dilys: What's going to happen if Roberts the butcher finds out, Brian? – finds about you and his wife? Where are we going to get our meat from then, I'd like to know?

END OF SECOND EXTRACT.

THIRD EXTRACT:

Miriam: For God's sake! If you want to know, I am seeing someone.

Dilys: Oh?

Brian: You're seeing someone? Who?

Miriam: What's that you, Brian?

Dilys: Quite right. It has nothing to do with you, Brian.

Miriam: If you want to know –

Dilys: It doesn't matter, Miriam.

Miriam: - If you want to know it's my dentist.

Dilys: Your dentist?

Brian: He's homosexual.

Miriam: He's not.

Dilys: He's homosexual as sure as day is day, Miriam.

Miriam: Only part of him is gay.

Dilys: Which part would that be, Miriam? I'd have thought that would have been a major consideration, knowing you as we do.

Brian: He lives with that instructor at the swimming baths.

Miriam: They've separated.

Brian: They have?

Miriam: He's moved out.

Dilys: Who has?

Miriam: My dentist.

Dilys: Where's he living now?

Miriam: You don't think I'd be stupid enough to tell you, do you?

Dilys: So you're hitching yourself up to a partial homosexual, are you?

Miriam: Believe me, Dilys, he's not homosexual with me, partially or otherwise.

Dilys: I can imagine. Well, thank God for that. Miriam is catered for. She's taken care of.

Miriam: He's a very gentle considerate man.

Dilys: I'm sure he would be.

Miriam: He understands me.

Dilys: It goes without saying.

Brian: What's happened to his partner, the instructor at the swimming pool?

Dilys: Why, Brian? Are you interested in this swimming pool instructor?

Brian: I'm just asking, that's all.

Dilys: You have an interest in homosexuals, have you?

Miriam: He's not a homosexual. Not now.

Dilys: (TO BRIAN): Don't you like the pudding, the gooseberry tart, that your fiddling about with it? (TO MIRIAM): The instructor at the swimming pool, your dentist's ex – is *he* only partially homosexual then?

END OF THE EXTRACTS