

*There is a moment of silence as the two men gaze at the door*

Sam (quietly) Sorry about that, Joe.

Joe No—no. Don't worry yourself, Sam. It's just that—well—I hope you don't think—well—you know—about the meals . . .

Sam Eh? No—no. Of course not.

Joe (after a slight pause) I don't know how you put up with it, Sam. Honest I don't.

Sam (joking) Listen who's talking. Your Renee led you a dog's life when she were alive.

Joe (smiling) Aye—she did that. Still—I've got to be honest about it, Sam. We had a good marriage.

Sam Eh?

Joe Oh, aye. There were nowt wrong with our *marriage*. The trouble started after we'd *left* the church. She had her views on how to run things, and I had mine. So in the end we had to come to a compromise—and we did things her way. Still—it all turned out for the best. Thirty-seven years and never a cross word exchanged.

Sam (sitting on the sofa) Now come off it, Joe. I'm not having that. I've heard her yelling at you for hours on end.

Joe I said exchanged, Sam. Exchanged. She never had her mouth shut long enough for me to interrupt. (He sits beside Sam)

Sam (sighing) Sounds a bit like Alice.

Joe (thoughtfully) You know—I've often wondered what she were think-about—that last morning.

Sam How do you mean?

Joe Well—it were sort of funny, like. There she was, laid out in bed and stiff as a board—with a smile all over her face. First time in years I'd seen her smiling. Only thing I could think of was happen she didn't know she were dead.

Sam Gerrou, you daft beggar.

Joe It were strange at first—after she'd gone. I couldn't get used to the silence—it were sort of unnerving. That's when I started going over to the *Commercial* for a pint or two. It made all the difference. She'd never let me touch the stuff before—but by heck—I've been making up for it ever since.

Sam I wish I could. You know, Joe—there's some nights I think I could go mad for the want of a pint. Used to be a big drinker, I did, in the old days. But—well—I take one look at Alice's face . . . (He shakes his head)

Joe It's too late for that now, Sam. You should have taken a closer look at it before you marched her up the aisle.

Sam (sighing) You'd never believe a lass could change as quick as she did. Sweetness and light one day—and the next . . . (He sighs again)

Joe Tell you what. Hows about you and me slipping off for a quick one after you get back from the cemetery?

Sam Sorry, Joe. I daren't risk it. If Alice ever found out she'd go through the roof. You know how she feels about drinking.

Joe How would she know? She'll be going over Half Acres to their Doris's, won't she? Like she does every Saturday night.

Sam Well—aye—I suppose so.

Joe Suppose so, nothing. She's never missed a Saturday at her sisters since old Dan died—'cepting that time she were having your Terry. Come on, Sam. What's to stop you?

Joe Gittings contd. (and Sam)

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**Sam** (*hesitant*) What about me breath, though? She's bound to smell it on me breath.

**Joe** Has tha never heard of peppermints, Sam? Just suck a couple of them before tha comes home again, and nobody'll be any the wiser.

**Sam** (*almost convinced*) Are you sure?

**Joe** 'Course I'm sure.

**Sam** (*deciding*) Right then. You're on.

**Joe** (*delighted*) That's the ticket. (*He rises*) I'll nip up to Wilkinson's right now and buy a packet.

**Sam** (*rising*) And I'd better get buttering that bread. I'll see you out, Joe.