

Not a Bad Chap by Frank Hibberd

‘That’s not a bad wine, Brian.’

Jeremy’s comment drew murmurs of agreement from around the dining table. Mrs. Browne had invited two of her son Brian’s work colleagues, together with their partners; in the hope, Brian knew, that he would be moved to enter the marriage market.

‘Was it expensive?’

‘About eight quid, Jeremy.’

‘Not bad. But I know a man who can get me *really* top class wines at bargain prices.’ Jeremy winked at the assembly. ‘Let me know if you’re interested.’

Brian looked impassively at him, resisting the temptation to pour a glass of wine over his sleek, centrally parted hair and elegant powder-blue linen suit. And anyway, he didn’t want to stain the carpet.

‘I’ll keep that in mind,’ he said. ‘Meanwhile, I’ll get another bottle.’

Jeremy followed him out of the room. ‘Just popping out for a tinkle, old man. Nice looking bint, that Maria.’

Brian nodded. ‘Yes. And Sarah’s a very lovely lady. You’re a very lucky man.’

Jeremy laughed. ‘No luck involved, mate. I make up my mind what I want and then make sure I get it. Why don’t you get Maria?’

‘But she’s Pete’s fiancée!’

‘So what? All’s fair in love and war, old man.’

Brian returned to the table.

‘Jeremy seemed a bit sniffy about our wine, Brian.’ Mrs. Browne looked disapprovingly at her son.

‘I don’t think you should let him get away with it.’

Brian glanced apologetically at Sarah.

‘Oh, come on, mother. He’s not the most tactful guy, but he’s a not such a bad chap, really. (On the other hand, he’s a smug self-satisfied bastard.)’

Brian had a habit of mentally adding unspoken comments to a conversation.

‘Yes!’

Brian, taken by surprise, reacted slowly, and was run out by three yards.

‘Bad luck, old man,’ said Jeremy, as Brian walked past on his way to the pavilion., ‘but you do need to be on the alert.’

Brian sat down next to Andy, the team captain.

‘Sorry about that, cap.’

Andy shook his head.

‘Not your fault, Brian. That bastard ran you out. Just when you were getting going - twenty three on the board. Y’know, I think he just wanted to make sure you didn’t get more than him.’

Brian shrugged.

‘Ah, well. Just one of those things. He’s not such a bad chap, really.’

He shook his head ruefully.

(‘But he’s actually an egotistical arsehole.’)

‘Who suggested we should come out for lunch,’ asked Pete. ‘We’ve got to get back to work in an hour.’

‘I confess,’ said Jeremy. ‘I hadn’t realised parking would be so difficult. Ah, there you are. Go in there.’

Brian, driving, shook his head. ‘That’s disabled parking.’

Jeremy shifted impatiently. ‘So what? Nobody ever checks. And anyway, half those disabled types are perfectly capable of walking.’

Brian ignored him and drove on.

‘OK,’ said Jeremy, ‘drop me here and I’ll grab a table.’

‘See you in a couple of hours,’ he said derisively, as he closed the door.

Pete glanced at Brian.

‘He’s a bit of a shit sometimes.’

Brian shrugged.

‘He’s not such a bad chap, really. (But he *is* a self-centred swine.)’

'I'm sorry, Brian. I know you were looking forward to the Paris meeting, but Jeremy was adamant that he should go. But if you really want.....'

'No, that's all right, Martin. I've got one or two things in mind to do.'

Martin frowned.

'I think it's a bit of a dirty trick on his part.'

Brian shrugged.

'He's not such a bad chap, really. (Though it's true that he's an arse-licking skunk.)'

Brian rolled over in the bed.

'He's not such a bad chap really.'

They both laughed.

'You should try being married to him,' said Sarah.