



A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

By Vivien Jones

A SMITH SCRIPT

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Characters :

Christine : born 1953 (53) mother, wears ethnic clothes

Maisie : born 1987 (19) daughter, wears unisex sports clothes

Douglas : born 1920 (86) grand-dad, wears conventional clothes.

Christine (53) is a Canadian national who has lived in Scotland since the 1960s when she was an activist in the peace movement, particularly in the anti-Vietnam protests. She has long been separated from her husband. She and her daughter, Maisie (19) have lived with Christine's father, Doug. It is the morning of Maisie's 18th birthday.

Scene : Living room/kitchen of the house. On the table is a small pile of wrapped presents. Doorbell/letter-box sounds. ENTER Christine with a handful of cards which she sorts through - one catches her close attention but she shrugs and arranges them around the presents. ENTER Doug.

DOUG Look at that – lovely! Is she up yet?

CHRIS No, but I hear her stirring.

DOUG Anything from himself?

CHRIS One from Canada but it's something official. No. You'd have thought...

DOUG On her 18th.

CHRIS Just like the other 16 he's missed. Don't know that I expected anything different.

DOUG But he's her father.

CHRIS He fathered her. 19 years ago. Nothing else.

DOUG He was around that first year. And it was you that threw him out. No matter. We'll just have to make it special for her, won't we.

I hope you're right about that dress. It's a bit....

CHRIS It's only a dress, Dad. And she's a lovely young woman. It's done now so no point discussing it. Have you got her a card with that voucher?

DOUG I'll just nip upstairs and put it in an envelope.

MAISIE ENTERS

CHRIS Happy birthday, darling!

MAISIE Thanks, Mum. Wow – look at these! I'll read these over breakfast when Grandad's here.

CHRIS There's one more, of course, as promised. Here.

MAISIE Business Class! Mum – they must have cost a fortune!

CHRIS It's a long way to Canada. And you'll probably only go the once.

MAISIE It's so exciting, Mum. And it'll be great to meet Lucy properly. How old was I when she was here? Two, three?

CHRIS Two. My little sister. She's promised to look after 'my little girl' for me. Some little girl. Wait 'til she sees you. Quick, before your grandad comes. Open this one.

CHRIS hands MAISIE a parcel. It contains a showy night-out red dress.

CHRIS I didn't think you'd mind. Just this once.

MAISIE It's lovely, of course, but...

CHRIS Indulge your mother.

MAISIE When do you think I'm going to wear it?

CHRIS Well, tonight for one.

MAISIE Tonight?

CHRIS Your Grandad's gift. He's booked us into Raymondo's

MAISIE Raymondo's! How many weeks' pension is that going to cost?

CHRIS He loves you, Maisie. We both do. Indulge us.

MAISIE Bit of a dirty trick, Mum. And rather against your principles.

CHRIS Not at all. Just because I'm a feminist doesn't mean I don't like pretty clothes. Come on, we're not going to argue on your birthday, are we?

MAISIE That's a dirty trick too.

CHRIS The colour's just perfect. Aren't you going to try it on?

MAISIE After breakfast.

CHRIS OK, please yourself. Will that be before or after you open that other letter?

MAISIE Other letter?

CHRIS The one in your pocket. The one with the Canadian postmark.

MAISIE I haven't read it myself yet.

CHRIS Obviously. It's not from Lucy.

MAISIE No.

CHRIS You don't know anyone else in Canada. Oh for heaven's sake, Maisie. Why so secretive?

MAISIE If you must know it's from the Canadian Light Infantry.

CHRIS And?

MAISIE Do you mind if I read it first?

CHRIS You must know what it's about.

MAISIE Of course I do.

CHRIS Well then!

DOUG (*enter*) Happy Birthday, Maisie. 18 today! My favourite grand child

MAISIE I'm your only grandchild.

DOUG There is that. Still, Happy Birthday anyway. Now then, breakfast ready, Chris?

CHRIS Won't be long.

DOUG (*holding up dress*) My, who's going to the ball tonight?

MAISIE Mum told me about *Raymondos*. Thanks, Grandad.

DOUG Nothing's too good for you. Anyway, you'll be away for six months soon. You might not come back if we don't spoil you a bit. Lovely dress.

MAISIE Not really my style.

DOUG It should be. All your other clothes are brown or grey or black.

MAISIE I hardly ever wear dresses.

DOUG All the more reason to wear one tonight. They won't let you in if you're wearing trackies and trainers. I've had my suit dry- cleaned.

MAISIE OK. I give in. I'll wear the dress. Tonight.

DOUG You never know, you might catch a young man's eye.

CHRIS She certainly doesn't need to be thinking about catching men's eyes.

MAISIE What's the dress in aid of then?

CHRIS For you. For you to feel good. Nothing to do with men.

MAISIE I feel good in the clothes I have.

DOUG Come on you two. Time we ate. Breakfast.

(After breakfast Doug makes an excuse to leave)

CHRIS Are you going to open it then?

MAISIE Of course I am.

CHRIS I mean now.

MAISIE Are you going to blow your top?

CHRIS You obviously think I am.

MAISIE I might leave it until tomorrow. Enjoy today.

CHRIS Maisie, this is silly. We're grown ups. Just tell me.

MAISIE Sit down then. Do you remember me talking about Nichola Goddard?

CHRIS Female combat soldier. Canadian.

MAISIE Killed in action in Afghanistan last year.

CHRIS I didn't know that. Oh, is she the one on your pin-board?