

## GROWING APART EXTRACT # 1

**Context: The year is 1937. In England on leave from his job in India, English civil servant Rupert Chilcott tells his mother Joyce that he has fathered illegitimate twin boys in India, and that their mother died in childbirth. Joyce is shocked, even more so when he says he must go back to India.**

Joyce had taken the news of his affair in India better than expected, but would she feel the same about the babies, Rupert wondered? He was trying to decide whether or not to say more, when Joyce spoke again.

‘What’s done is past. You’re getting married to a lovely girl and you won’t need any more affairs. Your father says that you can stay in England and go back to the London office, so there’s no need for you to do anything else.’

‘That’s what they told me today and it’s what I’ll do.’

‘Good,’ she said, evidently well pleased. ‘It’ll be best. You have Fiona to look after, and you can start a family.’

Rupert could not leave it there. *Now or never*. He took a deep breath. ‘I’ll need to go back to India, to tie things up.’

‘Go back? Whatever for? But if you must, you can do it after the wedding.’

He replied quietly, but firmly. ‘No, Mother, it has to be now, as soon as possible.’ He could not bring himself to look at her and lowered his head. ‘Patsy died in childbirth.’ Then he looked up. ‘She had twin boys.’

It was as if Rupert had slapped her. Instantly, Joyce’s face took on a look of horrified disbelief. ‘*What?*’ She shook her head slowly. ‘I don’t believe you! You – are you saying that you’ve fathered *two children?*’

‘Yes,’ he replied bleakly.

Joyce's shoulders shook as she demanded, 'Whatever possessed you? *For God's sake*, Rupert, have you never heard of contraception? Having a... a fling is one thing, but not taking proper precautions – that's something only a fool would do!'

Head bowed, Rupert could only mumble. 'I'm sorry.'

For a few long moments Joyce said nothing. When she spoke again, she seemed a little calmer. 'Who's the family? Do we know them?'

'No.'

'*No?* Is that all you have to say? What does the father do?'

'He's a night watchman.'

'*A night watchman?* What sort of job is that?' It was a few moments before the implication appeared to dawn on Joyce. Her eyes rounded and she demanded, 'The girl *is* English, isn't she?'

Rupert shook his head slowly, feeling utterly miserable. 'They're Anglo-Indian.' It was out. At least she knew now.

Joyce slumped back heavily in her chair. For once she seemed to be speechless and for his part, Rupert had nothing to say. The heavy silence was finally broken when she asked, quietly but sharply, 'How can you be sure they are yours?'

Momentarily shocked, Rupert reacted angrily. 'She was a virgin. I should know, I was her first. And nobody else was seeing her. They're mine. *My* children, Mother. You wanted a grandchild? Well, now you have two.' Joyce appeared stunned. Her eyes widened as he went on. 'I hope you understand now. I have to go back because I care. It's what I want. You may not like it, but that's how I feel.' Rupert had never spoken to his mother like that before. The realization that it felt right came slowly. And it felt good.

An icy silence hung in the air. The long-case clock in the hall chimed the half hour. Joyce said, 'I suppose we'll have to postpone the wedding. Assuming that Fiona will still

have you.' She shook her head. 'I'm not at all sure she will. Your father's not staying over in Westminster tonight, so he'll be in soon. Heaven only knows what he'll make of all this.'

When John Chilcott came home Rupert was in his room. He stayed there because he felt sure that Joyce would break the news to him. There would be an almighty row, but he knew his father well enough to believe that it would not happen immediately. John was a man who took his time when confronted with a problem. He would probably wait until they were at dinner.

Rupert went down to the dining room just after eight. As usual, the meal had been prepared in advance by their cook Polly, before she departed to her lodgings in the village. When Rupert entered, his parents were already seated at the long oak table. The silence that met his entrance was glacial.

'Evening, Dad,' Rupert said, nervously.

His father looked up but did not reply. Joyce indicated towards the chair that her son normally used. 'It's lamb casserole with potatoes. Sit,' she commanded. Rupert took his place and began to spoon food onto his plate. He was uncomfortable but there was nothing he could say. He would just have to wait.

John finally spoke. 'Hitler's assured France that he has no intention of occupying Morocco. There are some in the House who actually believe that.'

'Dreadful man,' Joyce observed. 'Not to be trusted at all.'

'Meanwhile Goering's vultures are practising aerial bombardment in Spain. On civilians. Winston's furious. He thinks the PM's a spineless nincompoop.' John looked across at his son.

'What do you think, Rupert? Is this really a good time to be going off to India?'

Rupert was caught off guard. They were both looking at him. He had a mouthful of food, so he took his time gaining a few seconds to think. Finally he put his cutlery down. 'Perhaps not. Who knows what's going to happen? But it's what I feel I have to do just now.'

John said, 'I can understand why you want to do something about the babies, but why now? Surely it can wait, for a couple of months at least?'

Joyce cut in. 'Your father's right. We've worked hard making the wedding arrangements; it would be ridiculous to postpone it now. And we'd have to do it all again when you return. That's if Fiona still wants to marry you.' She raised her chin. 'What about the girl's parents? I imagine they'll want a say in what happens. Maybe they've done something already. Have you asked?'

'No, I've not had the chance yet. But there'll be bills; the hospital, doctors and,' he hesitated, 'the funeral. I don't think they have any money.'

John seemed about to speak, but Joyce cut in again. 'We can do something about that, without you having to go there.'

Rupert shook his head. 'It's not just the money, there's more to it than that. As I said before, Mother, they're *my* children, your grandchildren. I have to be certain they'll be looked after. Properly.' To his father he said, 'Don't you agree, Dad?'

John shrugged. 'It's your life. But by the time you get there, they'll have been settled, one way or another.'

'Not if I go by air. I've checked. It takes just over a week.'

Joyce appeared astonished. 'What? Don't be ridiculous!'

Rupert persisted. 'Why not? The service has been running for a few months now.'

'Well...' She appeared to be searching for a reason. 'There's the cost, for a start. Mavis Prothero's been to Athens on it. She said she would have gone to India, but for the price. Do you realize it's more than a hundred pounds, *one way*?'

‘Yes, I know.’ Rupert was determined to show that he meant it. ‘I’ll find the money, somehow. I’m serious about this, Mother. I’ve made up my mind. I shall go as soon as it can be arranged.’

A brief silence ensued while Rupert looked from one to the other. John, who had been watching the verbal sparring between his wife and son, finally spoke, quietly but with authority.

‘We’ll give you the fare. But it’s a loan; you’ll have to pay it back.’

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**An extract from the manuscript of the novel *GROWING APART*, by Chris Calder**

