CONVERSATION PIECE

by

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N.B. It is essential to be listening to the piece of music while reading the script, and I have also included a timecoded script as an appendix, so the reader can match up the lines of dialogue to the particular musical phrases.
INT. LIVING ROOM - SUNDAY MORNING

We open in the living room of Jean and Maurice’s house. They’ve lived here for years, and now the kids have all moved out, they rattle around on their own. It’s medium-sized, in the suburbs. Pretty nice, nothing too grand, but full of the bric-a-brac of lives lived to the full. Most of this bric-a-brac is chipped, used, glued back together - we see a montage of clutter on mantelpieces and shelves. A lifetime of knocks, breaks, kids and accidents.

The early morning sun warms Maurice, late-60s, as he sits down in a flea-bitten armchair that he has refused to trade up for years. Like its inhabitant, it sits uncomfortably in the rest of the house, which wears a well-to-do sheen, even if the things inside it are a little broken. Maurice wears a towelling dressing gown and pyjamas. Yes it’s Sunday, but since they retired, isn’t every day a Sunday anyway?

Maurice pulls a newspaper from one of the many pockets of his dressing gown, unrolls it, and starts to read. From another pocket he pulls a piece of buttered toast, and with a small grunt of agreement, he munches into it.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Through the tiled hallway, we can see through to the kitchen, where Jean, also in her late-60s, is moving around in silhouette, cleaning, organising. She wears her Sunday best - a smart blouse and skirt as she clatters some pots and pans around.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maurice hears the noise from the kitchen, and tutts. He puts down his newspaper and shuffles over to the record player - an old model from the sixties, and carefully pulls out a piece of vinyl from a sleeve - ‘Conversation Piece’ by Rex Stewart. He fumbles with the disc, almost dropping it, but recovers, and places it on the record player. He pulls a record duster from another pocket, gives the vinyl the once round, and hooks the needle down on to it. He sits back down in his armchair and resumes reading his paper.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jean hears the music begin, and stops what she’s doing. She moves quickly towards the living room, but something catches her eye in the hallway - her Wedgewood vase has moved from its usual home - there’s an inch where the vase used to stand, where the sun hasn’t faded the mahogany table - and she’s pretty good at spotting these things. On closer examination, she notices a chip missing from it.
She calls through to the living room from where she stands.

JEAN
Are you in there, Maurice?

Silence.

JEAN
Maurice, are you in there?

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He interrupts reading his newspaper begrudgingly, but still holds it in place.

MAURICE
What are you shouting about, love?

JEAN (O.S.)
It’s broken!

MAURICE
What? What is it now?

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She does not appreciate his tone.

JEAN
My vase! The beautiful one the kids brought back from their honeymoon.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He shrugs to himself, and returns to his paper. Jean storms in, chipped vase in hand. She places it on the coffee table in front of him and points at it accusatorially.

JEAN
This one? Remember?

He gives her a cursory glance.

MAURICE
I’m sure I’ve never touched that vase.

She storms back out. He straightens his paper and doesn’t watch her go.
MAURICE
(to himself)
Your mind is going soft.

INT. HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS
Jean thinks she hears him muttering and stops. She puts down the vase on the table in front of him and takes a deep breath. She decides to change tactics and walks back into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS
Jean leans seductively against the doorframe.

JEAN
Maurice?

He puts down his newspaper, frustrated.

MAURICE
(to himself)
Jesus, what now?

He turns to look at her. She slides her foot up the door frame. Her skirt hitches up her thigh a little.

JEAN
Tell me did you break my vase?

Maurice sighs at her attempts.

MAURICE
I assure you... I didn’t.

She starts walking towards him, provocatively, sexy.

JEAN
Are you sure?

MAURICE
Yes.

His finality takes the sheen off her attempts at seduction. She deflates a little.

JEAN
So I suppose it went and broke itself, then?

MAURICE
I guess it must’ve.
I didn’t break it.
She comes over, stands behind him and places her hands on his shoulders. She looks stoically out into the distance.

JEAN
I forgive you.

Maurice pays her no mind.

MAURICE
Didn’t break it.

She stops massaging him.

JEAN
You can tell me.

MAURICE
Didn’t break it.

He puts down his paper, and turns to face her, pointing out items on the shelf as he speaks.

MAURICE
Just like I didn’t break your casserole dish, that lamp or that bone china plate.

He rather deliberately goes back to his paper – ‘end of story’. She removes her hands, but there’s a tempest brewing inside. Her face turns slightly red, and then.... she blows.

JEAN
OOOH! Say that again? Say that again! What a number!

She storms up and down the living room in front of him. He watches her like a bemused audience member.

JEAN
Unbelievable. Here you sit, in your throne, make me feel like I’m going crazy, when all you want is to... hurt... me...

She starts to tear up a little. She buries her head in her hands and slumps against the door.

Maurice puts his paper down, and shuffles himself to the edge of his armchair.
MAURICE
Darling? Jean. Lemon?
Sweetheart. I’m sorry. I really am. I’m really sorry.
More than I usually am.
Why don’t you come and sit over here and wipe your nose?

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out some tissues. She looks up through teary eyes.

MAURICE
I’ve got a hanky right here.
That’s right.

He pats his knee, and she comes and settles on it. He holds the tissue up to her nose.

She blows.

MAURICE
Let it out.

She blows.

MAURICE
That’s right, sweetheart.

She blows.

MAURICE
Better out than in.

She rests her head on his shoulder. He puts an arm around her.

JEAN
Oh, Maurice.
You old fool.
My husband.
The wiley snake.

She sits up, away from him, still on his knee, but looking directly into his face.

JEAN
You think with your ’Darling?’ ’Sweetheart?’
’Lemon?’ I’m suddenly going to forget the vase? The casserole dish and the lamp?
(MORE)
JEAN (cont’d)

And my beautiful bone china plate... the only memory... I have... of... mother?

Maurice looks her in the eyes and nods his head - ‘well, yes I do’.

JEAN

You must think I’m crazy.

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

JEAN

I know that it’s crazy.

She snuggles her head back down on his shoulder.

JEAN

I still love you and I always will.

She kisses him on the forehead and leaves the room. Maurice watches her go. When he is sure she has left, he reaches into another one of his dressing gown pockets, and pulls out a tube of superglue. From another, the missing chipped bit of the vase.

He glances up to make sure she is still in the kitchen and starts gluing it back together.

EXT. HOUSE - SUNDAY MORNING

We back up and away from them - through the windows we see him in the living room, her in the kitchen. The record player needle crackles around the vinyl.