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Key For Two

A Comedy

John Chapman
and
Dave Freeman

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



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ISBN 978 0 573 0573 11258 4

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KEY FOR TWO

First presented at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, by Duncan C. Weldon with Paul Gregg and Lionel Becker for Triumph Apollo Productions and Pieter Toerien on 8th September 1982, with the following cast of characters:

Gordon	Patrick Cargill
Harriet	Moira Lister
Alec	Glyn Houston
Anne	Barbara Murray
Richard	David Stoll
Magda	Sonia Graham
Mildred	Eileen Anson

Directed by Dennis Ramsden

Designed by John Page

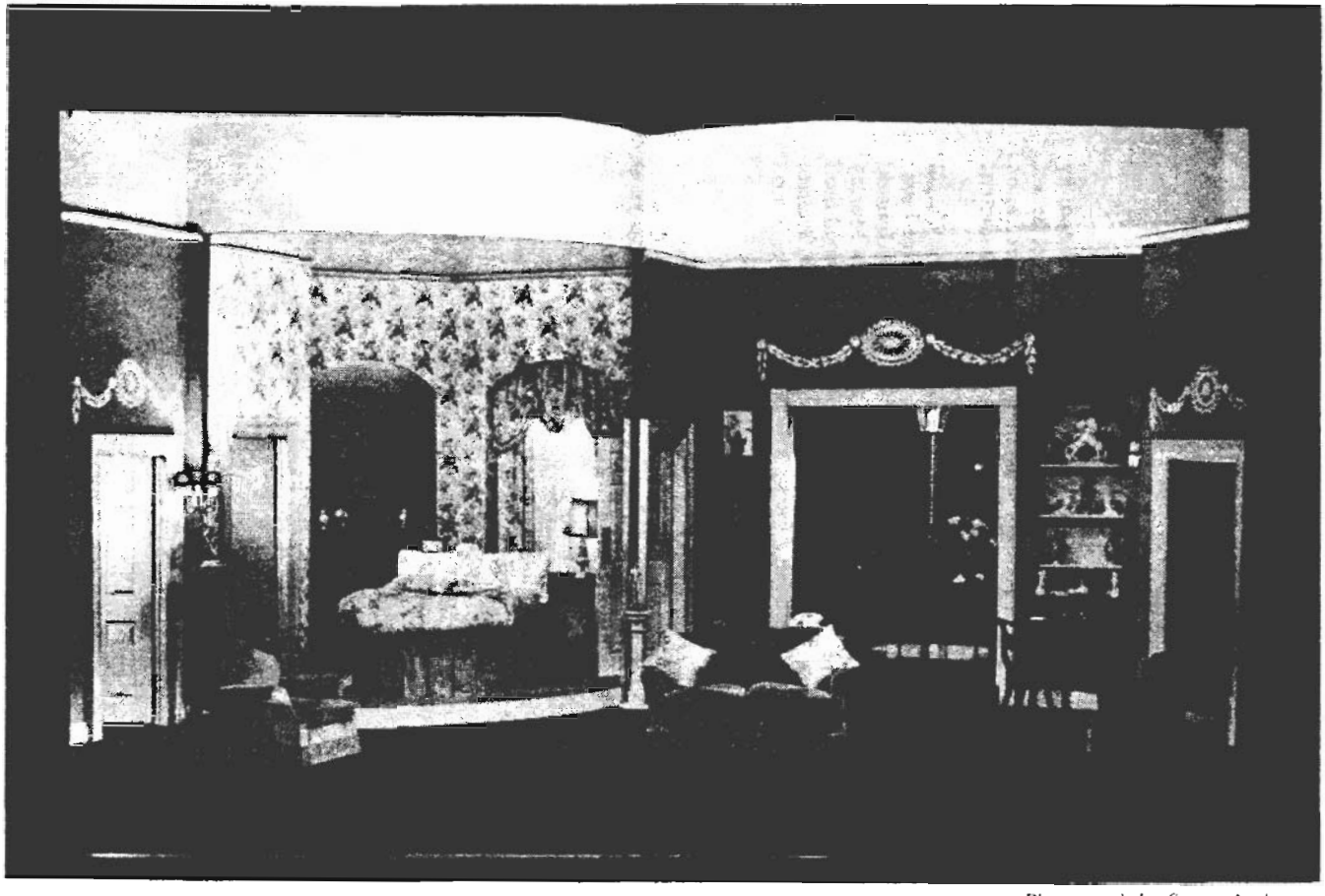
The action of the play takes place in the sitting-room and bedroom of Harriet's Regency flat in Brighton

ACT I

SCENE 1 Monday morning
SCENE 2 Some time later
SCENE 3 Wednesday afternoon

ACT II Later that night

Time—the present



Photograph by Stuart Anderson

ACT I

SCENE 1

The sitting-room and bedroom of Harriet's elegant Regency flat in Brighton. Monday morning

Most of the stage is occupied by the sitting-room. About a third is given over to a small bedroom UR, *with a double bed, a small gilt wicker chair, a chest of drawers and a bedside table. The bedroom section is on a raised dais. In the back wall upstage of the bed there is a window and* L, *set at right angles to the back wall, there is a door which leads from the sitting-room into the bedroom. Another door* UR *leads into the bathroom. The wall around the bedroom is imagined and the rest of the stage below the bedroom is part of the sitting-room.* DR *there is a door into the dining-room and there is also a door* DL *going to the kitchen.* UCL *there is an archway leading to the hall which has a front door* R *and a spare bedroom to* L. *The furnishings in the sitting-room are elegant and in the style of the house. There are two chairs, a small sofa, a writing-desk and chair, and a sofa table which has a shelf underneath for drinks*

When the CURTAIN *rises, Gordon is putting on his tie in the bedroom. Gordon is in his forties, handsome, athletic and runs a successful advertising agency. He is dressed in trousers and shirt and his jacket is over the wicker chair*

Harriet enters from the kitchen carrying a breakfast tray and goes into the bedroom. She is a very glamorous woman of about forty and will probably continue looking forty for years to come. She is intensely feminine and fun. She wears a gorgeous housecoat over her nightie

Harriet Oh, you're up, I thought we'd have breakfast in bed.
Gordon Oh, sorry.

Gordon has coffee and toast as he finishes dressing. Harriet looks out of the window and then sits on the bed with the tray

Harriet That garden fence is nearly down. Look at it.
Gordon Haven't time at the moment. Can't you get someone in to mend it?
Harriet It's not that, darling, it's the cost of everything. Everyone wants the earth. The Gas Board have sent us a bill for twenty-seven pounds for mending the water heater and the man was only here three minutes.
Gordon Well, query it. You can query it you know.
Harriet I wanted to tie them up today.
Gordon Tie who up?
Harriet The roses, they're sprawling all over the place.
Gordon Well tie them up, then.
Harriet I can't with the fence half down.

Gordon This coffee tastes off.
Harriet No, the coffee's all right, it's the milk that's off.
Gordon Yes, you're right.
Harriet It's that fridge, it's not working properly.
Gordon Nothing in this place is working properly. The water heater, the fence, the fridge. It's all crumbling about our ears.
Harriet I know, darling, I do the best I can.
Gordon Harriet, I can't let you have any more money. I just don't have it.
Harriet I didn't ask for any, darling. I mean, I'm not the one who's complaining, I'm drinking *my* coffee. (*She sips her coffee and grimaces*)
Gordon I shouldn't bother.
Harriet I'm trying to save money.
Gordon Harriet, I give you a hell of a whack every month to keep this place going, but business is awful at the moment. God knows what we're going to learn today at the board meeting.
Harriet Oh you'll be splendid, darling. You'll bring them all round to your way of thinking.
Gordon That won't be difficult . . . we all think the same way . . . how to avoid going bankrupt.
Harriet Oh, it can't be as bad as that.
Gordon It's a world wide recession, Harriet, and our advertising agency hasn't a single safe account left.

Gordon strides out of the bedroom into the sitting-room and goes to the desk. Harriet picks up the tray and follows him. He opens his briefcase and starts going through some papers. Harriet goes towards the kitchen with the tray

We're facing complete financial disaster.
Harriet It's not an awfully good moment, but you haven't given me the housekeeping yet.

Harriet exits to the kitchen

Gordon Yes, all right. (*He sits as he takes out his cheque book and pen*)
Harriet (*off*) A couple of extra bills came yesterday, darling, they're on the desk.

Gordon picks up the bills and looks at the first one. He groans

Gordon Oh, it's awful. (*He looks at the second bill and groans again*) Oh, my God!
Harriet (*off*) I didn't show them to you last night . . . I didn't want to ruin your evening.
Gordon Well it hasn't helped the morning much. (*He starts to write the cheque and stops*) I don't even give my wife this much.

Harriet enters with a vase of flowers which she puts on the sofa table

Harriet What, darling?
Gordon Oh, nothing.
Harriet I thought you said something about your wife.
Gordon Yes, I've had to cut down on her housekeeping.
Harriet Oh, Gordon, poor woman. How on earth can she manage?

Gordon She seems to cope. Mind you the meals are getting a bit ropey. Thank God I'm not often at home.

Harriet If you didn't waste money on women, you'd have more to spend on your wife.

Gordon That I find rather odd, coming from you.

Harriet Don't evade the issue. You've no sense of responsibility.

Gordon Don't nag me, Harriet. I get quite enough of that at home.

Harriet Sorry, I didn't mean to hen-peck.

Gordon Oh hens, that reminds me. I'll bring you some more eggs.

Harriet Darling, I could feed Africa on the eggs you bring. Couldn't you manage the odd chicken once in a while?

Gordon (*shocked*) Good God, no. That would be like breaking into capital.

Harriet How many do you have?

Gordon Well let me see . . . there's Emily, Marigold, Fiona, Penelope . . . and of course, Fred.

Harriet Well you wouldn't miss Fred, would you?

Gordon No, but they would. Anyway you said you liked eggs.

Harriet Oh, I do . . . in moderation.

Gordon (*getting up*) Well, I prefer them to all that fish you keep serving up. (*He shuts his briefcase and puts it by the hall table*)

Harriet I thought you liked fish.

Gordon Well yes, once in a while, but not the vast quantities we seem to consume. It must cost a fortune.

Harriet I don't pay for it. Mummy brings it.

Gordon Well let her eat it. I'd like a change sometimes.

Harriet All right, what would you like for dinner on Wednesday?

Gordon You mean Friday. Wednesday's Magda's birthday, I can't miss that.

Harriet No, of course not. I'm sorry I meant Friday. What can I tickle your fancy with?

Gordon Ah, well could we have those lamb chops done in cider?

Harriet Yes, all right.

Gordon And could you copy out that recipe for Magda . . . ?

Harriet What, *now*?

Gordon It's pretty urgent. The meal she served up on Monday was appalling. God knows what she'd done to it. Go on, jot it down.

Harriet I thought you were pushed for time . . .

Gordon No . . .

Harriet sits at the desk and starts to jot down the recipe

(*Looking at the clock*) Wait a minute, is that clock right?

Harriet Yes, to the second.

Gordon (*looking at his watch*) Well I'm fast . . . (*He presses the button of the watch*) Oh hell, I was on Johannesburg time. It keeps slipping from one time to another. I have to look at Johannesburg and subtract two hours. It won't stop on Greenwich . . . Oh that's that last damned straw . . . That's the end. (*He takes off his watch*)

Harriet (*scribbling*) Don't make such a fuss, it's not a catastrophe.

Gordon It's our account. We have to sell the damn things and all I can get is Johannesburg . . . Haven't you seen our slogan, "The Watch of the Future

as worn by Astronauts"? (*He holds his watch by the strap and bangs it on his wrist*) Bloody thing!

Harriet I'm sure they'll be all right as long as they all splash down in Johannesburg.

Gordon She's doing Hungarian Goulash tonight. That could mean anything.

Harriet Oh, nonsense.

Gordon Have you thought any more about it?

Harriet What?

Gordon My leaving her and coming in with you.

Harriet No, thank you.

Gordon But, Harriet.

Harriet I've had one husband and that's quite enough.

Gordon Yes, but he was a rotten double-dealing swine with a bit on the side.

Harriet Yes . . . ?

Gordon Yes, well . . . I mean . . . I know . . . but we're different, I love you.

Harriet And I love you, too, so let's not spoil it by getting married. Now, here's your recipe.

Harriet stands up and hands Gordon the recipe and he tucks it into his breast pocket, then he grabs her

Gordon If you won't marry me, why can't I move in with you?

Harriet I'm afraid Mummy wouldn't take too kindly to our little set up.

Gordon Perhaps if I could meet her . . .

Harriet No, Gordon. She's rather old fashioned, even prudish.

Gordon She doesn't seem too prudish when it comes to the question of drink. By the look of those bills she's marinated in vodka.

Harriet She enjoys a little drink sometimes.

Gordon Yes, but it's my little drink, isn't it?

Harriet Sometimes she brings a friend or two.

Gordon Pretty thirsty ones. I mean I don't mind buying it for us, but I can't afford to supply the neighbourhood.

Harriet I'll have a word with her.

Gordon What happens if she asks to come on one of my days?

Harriet I simply tell her I'm working.

Gordon As what?

Harriet A private secretary to a very demanding gentleman who requires a twenty-four hour a day service when called for.

He draws her to him

Gordon Oh that perfume . . . what is it?

Harriet It's a quarter-past eight.

Gordon Masses of time. Let's go back to bed.

Harriet And what about this board meeting . . . ?

Gordon I'll ring them later and tell them I've been held up.

Harriet How much later?

They go to the bedroom

Gordon That depends on you.

Harriet I know you, you'll go off to sleep again.
Gordon I'll set the alarm. (*He fiddles with his watch*)
Harriet But that watch is wrong. (*She takes her housecoat off and hangs it on the hook on the bedroom door*)
Gordon I'll set the alarm clock, that goes off like a fire gong.

Harriet slips under the bed covers and he starts to undress speedily as—

the CURTAIN *falls*

Immediately a loud alarm clock rings

SCENE 2

The same. Sometime later

The alarm clock is still ringing as the CURTAIN *rises after a few seconds*

Harriet sits up, stretches out an arm and turns off alarm clock. Then she shakes the sleeping figure next to her, hidden under the bedclothes

Harriet Darling . . . Darling . . . Wake up . . . You'll be late. I told you you'd go off to sleep again.

A figure sits up. It is Alec. He is a North-country man, in his fifties, big, bluff and owns a fleet of trawlers

Alec Oh, hell. What time is it?
Harriet Well look. It's nearly ten.
Alec Oh, that's not too bad.
Harriet What do you want for breakfast?
Alec No breakfast. I'm on a diet, remember?
Harriet Yes, of course, darling. I've got a memory like a sieve.
Alec I've noticed that. Still, the rest of you's all right. Give us a kiss.
Harriet Yes, all right, but I want some breakfast even if you don't.
Alec Come on.
Harriet Oh, why do you all get so amorous in the mornings?
Alec What do you mean . . . you all?
Harriet Oh, it's a thing I picked up off Mummy. She lived for years in Alabama . . . you know . . . (*with an accent*) yo all.
Alec I'd like to meet this mother of yours one day. She's travelled a lot, hasn't she? (*He gets out of bed*)
Harriet Yes. Oh, darling, before I forget, that garden fence is nearly down. Shall I get someone in to do it?
Alec (*glancing through the window*) No, they charge the earth. That'll cost you about a hundred and fifty quid. I'll have a go at it next time I come down.
Harriet That's what you all say . . . (*Hastily*) You always say.
Alec I'll do it. It won't take me long. Didn't I buy the nails for it?
Harriet No.
Alec No, you're right . . . those were for mending the trellis at home.
Harriet They must have been.

Alec I'll bring some of them down. They're a hell of a price now, nails. I'll have to finish that trellis first though. Mildred's nagging the life out of me. All her roses are dangling over the path.

Harriet So are mine. I thought you had a gardener?

Alec We did have. He's packed the job in. Gone in for demolition. He should do very well. He's had enough practice on our place.

Alec exits to the bathroom

The phone rings. Harriet picks it up

Harriet Hello? Five-five-o-two-one. . . . Gordon! (*She looks towards the bathroom. Speaking in a low voice*) Can you ring back later? Mummy's here.

Alec (*off*) Who is it?

Harriet It's Gor——Mummy.

Alec Who?

Harriet (*cupping the phone*) Poor Mummy. (*Into the phone*) Just hold on. (*She puts the phone under the pillow and goes to the bathroom door*) I'll just close the door, darling, in case she can hear the shower. (*She closes the bathroom door and returns to the phone*) It's all right, Gordon, Mummy wondered who it was. I've told her you're the builder . . . the one who is coming to do the fence, yes. He's given me a quotation of a hundred and fifty pounds . . . yes, well, it's the nails . . . they're a hell of a price, nails. . . . No, they are not gold-plated ones. . . . What? . . . No, darling, it's Tuesday. You know you never come on a Tuesday evening. It's when Mummy and I go Old Time Dancing. . . . Well, it's her only pleasure these days. I can't possibly put it off. Now be a good boy and wait your turn. I mean when I'm not too busy with Mummy. . . . Tomorrow afternoon? . . . Well, I'd better see what her plans are, hold on. (*She covers the phone. Calling*) Darling?

Alec opens the bathroom door

Alec Yes?

Harriet What time are you coming tomorrow?

Alec Why?

Harriet Mummy wants me to go shopping in the afternoon.

Alec That's all right. As long as you're back by six.

Alec closes the bathroom door

Harriet (*returning to the phone*) Yes, darling, that's fine, as long as you're away by five-thirty . . . Bye. (*She replaces the receiver. She takes her diary and pen from the bedhead and jots it down*) "Eggs away five-thirty. Fish arrives at six." (*She closes the book and replaces it on the bedhead*)

Alec enters from the bathroom in shirt and trousers, carrying his jacket

Alec I've just weighed myself. I've put on four pounds.

Harriet Well it's not what you eat here, darling.

Alec Oh, no, it's not here, it's at home. Mildred's the best cook south of the Humber . . . her treacle parkin's out of this world. If I didn't come down here a couple of nights a week, I'd be out like a balloon.

Harriet (*getting out of bed and putting her housecoat on*) That reminds me, darling . . . The housekeeping. (*She turns the duvet back*)

She goes into the sitting-room followed by Alec

Alec What again?
Harriet It's a fortnight since you gave me the last lot.
Alec Oh, it can't be. I thought it was last week.
Harriet No, darling, that must have been Mildred's.
Alec I suppose it must have. We'll have to have a chat about this, Harriet. I mean there's hardly any difference between your housekeeping and Mildred's and she feeds three growing lads.
Harriet Well I do have Mummy.
Alec Well she must have an appetite like a bloody horse.
Harriet It's not like you, Alec . . . to be rude about my mother.
Alec I know, but she does go it a bit. I mean, she smokes like a chimney and gets through four bottles of vodka a week. Times are bad, Harriet. I've got six trawlers laid up at Grimsby, and that lot I've got in the Channel are doing me no good.

Harriet picks up the bills from the desk. He finishes dressing

Harriet There you are . . . I keep everything.
Alec Harriet, I trust you.
Harriet No, just look at the bills. I want you to look.
Alec All right then. (*He takes the bills to the desk, sits and examines them closely*)
Harriet Of course, we could put Mummy in a home if that's what you'd prefer.
Alec I don't hold anything against the woman. It's just that she's an extra mouth to feed . . . and times are bad. Look at this . . . not only vodka, Champagne.
Harriet It was Mummy's birthday. We had a few friends in.
Alec You must have had half of Brighton in. *Six bottles?*
Harriet We've two bottles left. Look I can't stand this bickering. I'll pay for it.
Alec No, it's not that, Harriet, but hasn't your mother any means of support apart from me?
Harriet Daddy left her penniless. It's all right though, I didn't want you to pay for it. I'll sell some jewellery my grandmother left me.
Alec Oh, don't start that. I'll pay the damn thing. It's just that for a woman with no money, she flings it about a bit. (*He gets his cheque book out*)
Harriet I'll speak to her.
Alec Just tell her times are hard. We've all got to tighten our belts. Nowadays, there are more fishermen than fish. It's like I've told Mildred, we've got to economize. I've got her mother to keep as well you know, apart from her three brothers and their families.
Harriet (*handing him a pen*) You mustn't let people take advantage of you.
Alec (*writing a cheque*) When I think of the number of people I'm supporting . . . if anything happened to me, the whole social security system would collapse under the strain. (*He gives her a cheque*)

Harriet Thank you, darling, you're gorgeous.

She puts her arm around his neck and kisses him

Alec Don't start getting me going again. (*He gets up*)
Harriet All right we'll wait till this evening.
Alec Bye . . . d'you really think there's any chance of us putting your mother into a home?
Harriet Well we could try, but it would be frightfully expensive. Shall I make some enquiries?
Alec (*going towards the front door*) Might not be a bad idea. But make damned sure it's a temperance one.

Alec exits

Black-out

Scene 3

The same. Wednesday. Late afternoon

The Lights come up and Gordon is discovered doing up his tie in the bedroom. He walks into sitting-room, putting on his jacket

Gordon (*calling*) I'm just going to phone Magda.
Harriet (*off, in the kitchen*) Well hurry, it's after five-thirty.
Gordon (*starting to dial*) Do you want a drink, darling?
Harriet (*off*) No, Gordon, I'm making some tea.
Gordon Do you mind if I have one? (*Still holding the receiver he gets a glass, then a carafe of water, then a bottle of vodka from the shelf under the sofa table*)
Harriet (*off*) You've been drinking rather a lot lately.
Gordon (*holding up a nearly empty bottle*) It's your mother you ought to worry about, not me. She's had most of this. (*He pours the vodka into his glass, then pours a little water into the empty vodka bottle, swills it round and then empties the bottle into his glass . . . shaking it to get the last drop. He then lifts the glass to his lips but puts it down on the table to speak into the phone*) Hello, Magda, it's me. The phone's been ringing for ages, where have you been? . . . The hen house? . . . Well, why isn't Freda laying? . . . Oh all right, I'll have a word with her when I get back. . . . Now don't start, Magda, I've had a very exhausting afternoon . . . well you know what our clients are like. Nothing you can do pleases them . . . a hell of an afternoon. . . . No, Magda, I'm not trying to dodge your birthday party. I'll be there. I shall be leaving the office in a few minutes. I've just got a couple of letters to dictate and then I'm off. . . . Yes, you go back to the hen house . . . put a couple of golf balls under Freda. It might jog her memory. (*He replaces the receiver*)

Harriet, in a smart outfit, enters from the kitchen

Harriet Darling, I think the electric kettle's on the blink.

Gordon I don't want to know, I've just had Nagda magging me.
Harriet What?
Gordon Magda nagging me. I'll have to go.
Harriet I'm not asking you to look at it, I just wondered if we could afford an electrician.
Gordon Nobody can afford an electrician . . . see if your mother can fix it?
Harriet Mummy?
Gordon Well, you told me she mended the vacuum cleaner.
Harriet (*realizing*) Oh, yes, so she did. I'd forgotten.
Gordon (*giving her a kiss*) See you again on Friday.
Harriet Darling, I can hardly wait. I'll be counting the minutes.
Gordon Me too.

Harriet looks at her wristwatch and Gordon goes to the hall and picks up his briefcase. The doorbell rings. Harriet looks surprised

Harriet Hell . . .

Gordon, clutching his briefcase, comes rushing back to the sitting-room

Gordon Who can that be?
Harriet Must be Mummy. Go out of the back way through the kitchen.
Gordon Hang on, wouldn't this be a good time for me to meet her?
Harriet Certainly not. (*Pushing him towards the kitchen door*) Now off you go.

The doorbell rings again

Gordon exits through the kitchen door and slams it as he goes

(*She empties the ashtray, pours Gordon's vodka back into the bottle and then puts the glass, water carafe and bottle back on the table shelf. She composes herself, and then goes and opens the front door*) Anne!
Anne (*off*) Darling!
Harriet I don't believe it. Come in.

Anne enters. She is a smartly-dressed woman of about thirty with a bright personality. She is carrying a small suitcase

They come into the sitting-room

Anne I hope I haven't come at an awkward time.
Harriet (*taking the suitcase and putting it under the desk*) Course not. I just can't believe it's you. You look marvellous.
Anne *You* do, I feel a total wreck. I can't tell you how thrilled I am to see you.
Harriet I kept sending you Christmas cards but they came back address unknown. I'd given you up for dead.
Anne We moved to New Zealand.
Harriet Oh, well, I wasn't far wrong.
Anne I gave up writing to you when you and Bob went to South America.
Harriet I didn't stay there long. We split up.
Anne Oh, darling, I am sorry.
Harriet You needn't be, he turned out to be a crook.
Anne No. In what way?

Harriet In every way, fraud, embezzlement, robbery with violence, attempted murder.
Anne Not you I hope.
Harriet No, a very dear friend of ours. Awfully nice man, frightfully wealthy, and a judo expert. One day he was fooling around and put me in this rather complicated hold. Bob walked in, misunderstood, and threw him out the window.
Anne Was he hurt?
Harriet Deeply. Now tell me about Richard, is he still a vet?
Anne Yes. He administers to half the sheep on South Island.
Harriet Sounds very lucrative.
Anne It should be.
Harriet How on earth did you find me?
Anne Sheer chance. Someone gave me your mother's address in Sydney. So I rang her up and she told me where you were.
Harriet How long are you over for?
Anne I'm not sure.
Harriet Is Richard with you?
Anne No, he's not. We came over together, but we had another blinding row yesterday and I told him to clear off back home.
Harriet You mean without you?
Anne He couldn't care less. Nowadays he lives in an alcoholic haze. He tries to give it up occasionally, but he only needs one and bingo, he's flat on his back again.
Harriet So it's over?
Anne Finally and irrevocably.
Harriet Oh dear, where are you staying?
Anne I'll find a hotel.
Harriet Don't give it another thought, you're staying with me and the first thing you're going to have is a stiff drink . . . I've got a drop of brandy somewhere. (*She gets a bottle and glass from the shelf of the sofa table*)
Anne This is a lovely flat, how long have you been here?
Harriet (*giving Anne the brandy*) About three years.
Anne Thanks.
Harriet Just after I met Alec.
Anne Oh, you've remarried?
Harriet Not exactly.
Anne Ah . . .
Harriet He's a—a friend.
Anne Well that's the sort of friend to have, dear.
Harriet And then if you're here at the weekend, you'll meet another friend.
Anne Oh, lovely, who?
Harriet Gordon.
Anne And doesn't Alec mind?
Harriet He doesn't know.
Anne You mean they've never met?
Harriet And please God they never will.
Anne (*after a pause*) Do you . . . er . . . with Gordon?

Harriet Yes.
Anne And do you . . . er . . . with Alec?
Harriet Yes I "err" with both of them. But not at the same time.
Anne Darling, how exciting. A husband in Peru and two boyfriends, which one pays the rent?
Harriet They both do. It's the only way I can keep this place up.
Anne You must be rolling in it.
Harriet No, dear, they've both got wives to support. It doesn't leave much over for little luxuries like me.
Anne Don't you get a feeling of guilt when you think of their wives?
Harriet No, darling, I'm not trying to break up their marriages. I wouldn't dream of it.
Anne But they're both sleeping with you.
Harriet Well, yes, but just because a man hops in a taxi once in a while, doesn't mean he's got to get rid of his car. Anyway, I've already had a husband and I don't want any more thank you.
Anne How do you keep them apart?
Harriet I found it a bit tricky at first until I thought of Mummy. She's very pure and strait-laced.
Anne *Your mother?*
Harriet Not the mother you know. This is a mythical mother who'd die of shock if ever she knew I was a kept woman.
Anne And it works?
Harriet It has so far, thank heavens. My whole livelihood depends on it. If I lose one of them I'm out on my ear.
Anne Well I've lost mine.
Harriet Never mind.
Anne I wonder what went wrong with my Richard?
Harriet Darling, what goes wrong with any of them?
Anne I suppose it could have been me.
Harriet Absolute rubbish. I married a real charmer and look how he turned out. I certainly didn't make him turn to crime and women any more than you caused Richard to become an alcoholic. The tendencies were already built in. They're like electric toasters, once they go wrong you might as well chuck 'em out and get a new one.
Anne I suppose you're quite an authority on men by now.
Harriet There's nothing to be an authority about. They're incredibly basic, they have none of our finesse, and subtlety.
Anne Don't you ever get bored?
Harriet I haven't time, darling, I'm far too busy. I'm running a minor industry.
Anne And quite a successful one.
Harriet Yes, I'm working double shifts. (*She looks at her watch*) And the evening one starts any minute now.
Anne Are they both generous?
Harriet As generous as they can afford to be.
Anne Having two customers helps.
Harriet Anne, dear, don't be crude.

Anne You admit to having two.
Harriet The number is immaterial, it's the word customer I take exception to. I'm a mistress.
Anne Yes, but to two men.
Harriet Not as far as they are concerned. And if there wasn't an economic crisis right now I could manage very happily with one. I dare say if you're a vet with a practice of half a million sheep you're not short of a bob or two, but over here everyone is having to make sacrifices, and it's been a very bad year for kept women. Tea and cakes?
Anne Just some tea would be lovely.
Harriet I'll have to boil the water in a saucepan.
Anne Why?
Harriet The kettle's broken and I've still got some washing-up to do.

Harriet exits to the kitchen

Anne Don't your lovers ever help you?
Harriet (*off*) No. That'll be the day.

Alec enters from the front door with a plastic carrier bag

They've both been spoilt by indulgent wives.
Alec Who has?
Anne I beg your pardon?
Alec Who's been spoilt?

Harriet hurries back in

Harriet Hello, darling. (*She kisses him*) We've just been talking about husbands. Hers and mine. This is my friend Alec. Alec, this is Anne.
Alec How d'you do, Anne.
Anne How do you do.
Harriet I'm just making some tea, will you have a cup?
Alec All right. And then I've got to nip along to Newhaven.
Harriet What now?
Alec I'll only be an hour or so, one of the trawlers has run aground.
Harriet Is everybody all right?
Alec Oh, yes, they can all walk off. They've had enough practice. Oh—(*he hands her the plastic bag*)—I thought I'd drop this off. It's our supper.
Harriet (*brightly*) Oh, cod?
Alec It's best halibut.
Harriet That's a change.
Alec It'll make a change from all those bloody omelettes.
Harriet The eggs are a present from Mummy, she likes them.
Alec Likes them? I reckon she lays them.
Harriet You two make some small talk while I'm in the kitchen and do keep off controversial subjects.
Alec Such as what?
Harriet Morals, matrimony . . . and Mummy.

Harriet exits to the kitchen

Anne and Alec eye each other

Alec Just popped in have you?
Anne Yes.
Alec Live locally?
Anne New Zealand.
Alec Oh, New Zealand, eh? I was there when I was in the Navy.
Anne Really.
Alec I spent a few weeks in Windy Wellington with a bent shaft.
Anne Sounds painful.
Alec (*laughing*) Very. How long are you over for?
Anne Well, it's sort of indefinite.
Alec Where are you staying?
Anne Harriet very kindly said I could stay with her.
Alec Any friend of Harriet's is a friend of mine. You're very welcome.
Anne Thank you.
Alec Harriet's told you about us, I suppose.
Anne Yes, she has.
Alec She's a grand girl. Have you known her long?
Anne Yes, ever since we were kids, I always looked upon her as a sister.
Alec Oh. Then no doubt you know her mother.
Anne Yes, I do.
Alec Sanctimonious old trout. Got religion, you know.
Anne Oh really?
Alec She's probably a very nice woman underneath, but despite all that psalm singing and good works she can't half knock it back. (*He mimes drinking*) Did you know Harriet's husband?
Anne Only slightly.
Alec Mad Bob they call him. He's in and out the nick in Peru.
Anne So I've heard.
Alec But I gather Harriet's mother's still very loyal to his memory, thinks the sun shines out of his trousers. And what about your husband? What does he do?
Anne He's a vet.
Alec That's a worthy vocation. A man of loving kindness, eh?
Anne Yes, to animals but not to me. I think I'd be all right if I had four legs.
Alec He ought to team up with Harriet's mother, she's got hollow ones.

Harriet enters with a tray of tea

Harriet Despite what you may think I've never known her the worse for drink.
Alec No, it probably improves her.
Harriet (*pouring the tea*) Here we are, and go easy on the sugar, dear.
Alec Stop nagging, Harriet. It's my only weakness, apart from you that is. (*He blows her a kiss and helps himself to sugar*)
Harriet I keep telling him all that sugar can't be good for him.

Alec jerks his cup and spills some tea on his trousers

Alec Oh hell. (*He puts the cup down and feels for a hanky*) I haven't got a hanky.
Harriet Your clean ones are back from the laundry.

Alec Can you get me one?
Harriet You've got the key.
Alec Oh, yes. (*To Anne*) We have to keep my things locked away in case her mother sees them. I'm not supposed to be here.

Alec goes into the bedroom and shuts the door. He unlocks the top drawer and takes out a pocket hanky and relocks the drawer. Then he dabs at his clothes. During this Harriet and Anne continue speaking

Anne He's sweet, isn't he?
Harriet Yes. (*She looks at the tray*) Oh, sorry, I forgot the cake. Would you like some?
Anne Yes, please, I'm famished.
Harriet When did you last eat?
Anne I had a slice of toast at breakfast.
Harriet Oh, you silly thing, you should have said something. Come into the kitchen and I'll run you up a batch of omelettes.
Anne Oh, thanks.

Harriet and Anne exit into the kitchen. Gordon enters from the front door and looks around

Gordon Harriet?

Harriet appears at the kitchen doorway and is transfixed

Harriet Gordon.
Gordon Sorry, darling. Magda's birthday. I left her present in my drawer. (*He goes to the bedroom door*)

Alec exits to the bathroom

Harriet daren't shout out as Gordon walks into the bedroom. She stands at the kitchen door, closes her eyes and awaits the inevitable. Gordon goes to his drawer, unlocks it, rummages around, takes out a small jewel box and closes the drawer. He then opens the box to admire the ring, but it falls out and rolls under the bed

(*Muttering*) Oh, hell. (*He bends down beside the bed and starts groping for it, almost ending up under the bed*)

Alec comes out of the bathroom, zipping up his flies, and walks straight out of the bedroom into the sitting-room without seeing Gordon. He walks over to his tea and drinks it

Alec Lovely. (*He walks over and gives Harriet a kiss*) See you . . . I won't be long.

Alec exits through the front door

Harriet, still frozen with fright, tiptoes into the bedroom

Harriet Gordon.
Gordon (*getting up from beside the bed*) Found it, damned thing rolled right under.
Harriet You, er . . . you didn't notice anything?

Gordon Bit of fluff, that's all.
Harriet (*relieved*) Ah, well, the hoover's not working again.
Gordon You're a pair, you and Magda. You've only got to look at a household appliance and it stops. (*He crosses out of the bedroom into the sitting-room*)
Harriet (*following*) Look, darling, I do wish you wouldn't come without phoning first. Mummy could have been here.
Gordon You told me yesterday she wasn't coming till this evening.
Harriet Oh, did I?
Gordon Yes.
Harriet Ah, well that's true, she isn't.
Gordon Then what are you making a fuss about?

Anne enters and stops on seeing Gordon

Harriet Oh, this is my friend, Anne, from New Zealand.
Gordon How do you do.
Anne Hello.
Harriet Anne, this is Gordon.
Anne (*reacting nervously and shooting furtive glances around the room, looking for Alec*) Oh, how do you do, Gordon. We've just made some tea. Would you like some?
Gordon No thanks, I haven't time.
Harriet Oh, please, just for a few minutes.
Gordon No, I'm organizing Magda's party. We've got half of Reigate coming.
Harriet Just stop and say hello to Anne.
Anne I've heard so much about you.
Gordon (*warily*) Have you?
Harriet It's all right, darling, she knows about us.
Gordon In that case I'll have a quick beer.
Harriet You know where it is.
Gordon Yes, in the fridge. (*To Anne*) Nice to meet you.

Gordon exits into the kitchen

Anne You certainly know how to pick 'em dear. I've been wasting my time in New Zealand.

There is a loud crash and shout from the kitchen

Harriet God, what have you done?

Gordon crawls in

Gordon I've broken my leg.
Harriet How?
Gordon I slipped on a bloody fish!
Harriet Oh, my God.
Gordon Help me into bed.
Harriet There isn't time.
Gordon Isn't time for what?
Harriet Before you go home.

Anne You've got to leave at any moment.
Gordon I can't. I'm in agony. Help me on to the bed and get a doctor.

They help him through to the bedroom

Harriet But Magda's birthday party.
Gordon It's agony.
Anne No, you may enjoy it.
Gordon I mean my leg. Now steady, let me down gently.

They jerk him up on to the bed

Harriet You can't stay.
Gordon Just ring for the doctor.
Harriet No, they never come out for little things.
Gordon Little things? It's broken
Harriet Have a look at it Anne.
Anne (*removing his sock and shoe*) I think I ought to take his trousers off.
Harriet I think not, it's only his ankle that needs looking at.
Anne (*feeling his ankle and calf*) Lie back.
Gordon Ooo . . . ah . . . careful!
Anne Be quiet.
Gordon Are you sure she knows what she's doing?
Harriet Course she does. Her husband's a vet!
Anne I'll just make absolutely sure it's not broken. (*She pushes the ball of the foot back*)
Gordon *Ow!*
Anne Now what?
Gordon You've made it worse.
Anne Nonsense
Gordon You have.
Harriet She's done this to sheep all over New Zealand.
Gordon Then she ought to be investigated by the RSPCA.
Anne It's only a sprain.
Gordon Fat lot you know.
Anne Have you got a bandage?
Harriet In the bathroom cabinet.

Anne exits to the bathroom

You ought to be in hospital.
Gordon I don't want to go to hospital. I hate hospitals.
Harriet Then go home.
Gordon That's even worse. Magda can't bear anyone to be ill, it upsets her, especially on her birthday.
Harriet You can't possibly stay here.
Gordon Why not?
Harriet Because Mummy's coming round.
Gordon Let her. You can tell her I'm the paper hanger and fell off a ladder.
Harriet Don't be stupid.
Gordon I've been avoiding your mother for two years. I don't mind it when I'm in good health, but when I'm injured and suffering the most

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