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Mixed Doubles

An Entertainment on Marriage

Alan Ayckbourn Alun Owen David Campton Fay Weldon Harold Pinter James Saunders John Bowen Lyndon Brook George Melly

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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Mixed Doubles was originally presented at the Hampstead Theatre Club on February 6 1969, under the title *We Who Are About To . . .*, and was subsequently presented in this final version at the Comedy Theatre, London on April 9 1969. The linking scenes written by George Melly were performed by Victor Maddern. The casts for the plays were as follows:

A MAN'S BEST FRIEND by James Saunders

JACKIE	Andree Melly
PETE	Oscar Quitak

SCORE by Lyndon Brook

HARRY	Nigel Stock
SHEILA	Vivien Merchant

NORMA by Alun Owen

THE WOMAN	Andree Melly
THE MAN	Oscar Quitak

NIGHT by Harold Pinter

THE WOMAN	Vivien Merchant
THE MAN	Nigel Stock

PERMANENCE by Fay Weldon

HELEN	Andree Melly
PETER	Oscar Quitak

COUNTDOWN by Alan Ayckbourn

THE HUSBAND	Nigel Stock
THE WIFE	Vivien Merchant

SILVER WEDDING by John Bowen

AUDREY	Andree Melly
JULIAN	Oscar Quitak

RESTING PLACE by David Campton

THE OLD WOMAN	Vivien Merchant
THE OLD MAN	Nigel Stock

Mixed Doubles was devised by Anton Rodgers and directed by Alexander Dore.
Designed by Tim Goodchild.
Lighting by Joe Davis.

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Resting Place—when this play is performed individually application for royalties should be made to J Garnet Miller Ltd, 311 Worcester Road, Malvern, WR14 1AN

The version of *Silver Wedding* by John Bowen included in *Mixed Doubles* and printed here is approximately half a one-act play, of the same title, in two scenes, with two characters. Applications for performance, and copies, of the full text should be made to Samuel French Ltd.

Part One

THE VICAR

Speaking from the pulpit

. . . It seems but yesterday she was standing in front of this very altar holding the Brownie's banner at a service of dedication; and yet we are gathered here this day to witness her entry into the state of holy matrimony with the man of her choice.

I must confess that I hadn't met her husband-to-be before they came to discuss the arrangements yet, even on so short an acquaintance, I was impressed. A serious young man, practical yes, but very very much in love.

Today is a joyous day, and rightly so, yet I would be at fault if I were not to remind this young couple that the night cometh. Marriage is not all a bed of roses. There is no rose without a thorn. We are raised up through suffering, yet our faith penetrates the darkness like a great lighthouse. It is the upright mast to which we must nail our hopes. It bendeth, yet doth not break, though the faithless cry out or moan as the storm reaches a climax and the timbers creak beneath us.

Marriage is like unto a vineyard. Yea a vineyard where the good husbandman tendeth the vines with gloves on. We hear much of 'modern methods': the chemical sprays of permissiveness, the artificial manure of purely sensual pleasure. But Christ watches over the marriage bed. Not literally of course, but in spirit. This young couple before us are setting out on a pilgrimage and we must pray they don't fall by the wayside too often. Ideal love is pure, totally pure. In sickness and in health you will promise, and that means unselfishness, for the moon waneth and waxeth. Plenty of fresh vegetables and cold baths, not too many blankets is sound advice, as suitable at a wedding as for a confirmation class; and now let us sing hymn three hundred and twenty-seven: 'The Bridegroom cometh 'ere his time . . .'

A MAN'S BEST FRIEND

by James Saunders

Two benches set representing seats in a railway carriage.

BRIDE. We seem to have exhausted the conversation . . .

Pause.

GROOM. What? . . .

BRIDE. Do you want a chocolate?

GROOM. No thank you, darling . . . (*He smiles, wanly.*)

BRIDE. It'll keep your strength up.

His smile goes.

As my Uncle George did nothing but say.

GROOM. Uncle George is a bit of a card.

BRIDE. Isn't he?

Pause. He taps his foot on the floor.

GROOM. One doesn't take him seriously of course.

BRIDE. Don't tap your foot, darling.

GROOM. I'm not tapping my foot.

BRIDE. Darling, you are.

He looks, stops tapping.

GROOM. Does it annoy you?

BRIDE. Of course not . . .

GROOM. This is the sort of thing one should be on the lookout for, you see. I'm glad you mentioned it. You must mention all those little things you find irritating or annoying. Because it's a well-known fact that it's those little things that wear a marriage down – (*He is tapping again.*)

BRIDE. It doesn't annoy me, darling. I'd just rather you didn't do it.

GROOM. Why?

BRIDE. It means you're worried.

GROOM. I tap my foot when I'm worried?

BRIDE. It was one of the first things I noticed about you. The first time . . . You took me to a restaurant you took one look at the wine list and away went your foot.

GROOM. You've never mentioned it before.

BRIDE. It's not important, darling, really. After all, it's part of you.

GROOM. My foot . . .

BRIDE. The way you tap it; it's part of your character. Like the way you walk.

Slight pause.

I mean it's *characteristic.* It makes you *belong* to me, you see? I could tell you in a thousand just by the way you walk.

Slight pause.

GROOM. Don't I walk normally?

BRIDE. It depends what you mean by normally, darling.

GROOM. What do *you* mean by normally?

BRIDE. There's some confetti on your lapel.

GROOM. Where?

BRIDE. It's not going to bite you. (*She flicks it off.*) There, it's off.

GROOM. I thought I'd got rid of all that stuff. Where's it gone?

BRIDE. What?

GROOM. That bit of confetti.

BRIDE. What do you want it for?

GROOM. I don't want it, I want to get rid of it.

BRIDE. But I've *got* rid of it.

GROOM. No you haven't you've flicked it onto the floor somewhere. Or on the seat even. (*He gets up, starts searching.*) If someone comes in the compartment and sees that bit of confetti . . .

BRIDE. They'll know we're just married.

GROOM. Exactly.

BRIDE. So what?

He searches on hands and knees.

I *like* being married, I don't care who knows it.

GROOM. There's no need to shout it from the housetops, that we're just married . . .

BRIDE. Darling, we're talking about a little piece of confetti . . . it's on the seat.

GROOM. Where?

BRIDE. Just there, under your nose. I'll brush it off.

GROOM. No! (*He wets his finger, picks up the piece of confetti cautiously, opens the window and carefully lets it go. He sits down again.*) There.

BRIDE. How long do you mean to keep it a secret?

GROOM. I just don't want to brandish it about, darling, that's all. Surely you can understand that. It'll be bad enough having the whole of the hotel staff knowing we're newlyweds. They have second sight, those people.

BRIDE. We can tell them we're living in sin if you prefer. If it worries you.

GROOM. Worries me? It doesn't worry me. Why should it worry me?

BRIDE. That's what I wondered.

GROOM. It doesn't worry me, darling. I'm not a callow youth after all. Why should a thing like that worry me? It doesn't worry me . . . he ha . . .

BRIDE. You've made your point, darling.

GROOM. All I ask is that they give us service. That's what they're paid for. Let them do their job and let me do . . .

Pause.

BRIDE. Relax, darling. We're not going to the dentist's. Now you're biting your lip. Now you're tapping your foot again . . .

He uncrosses his other leg and puts his foot to the floor with a bang. There is a short moment of suspense. Then he reaches under his seat and brings out his guitar.

Do you want a magazine?

GROOM. No thank you very much. (*He opens the guitar case, rubs at a smudge with his sleeve, then takes out his breast-pocket handkerchief to polish it.*)

There is a shower of confetti.

Pause.

Very well. Let everybody know we're just married! (*He polishes his guitar; pauses.*) Does it annoy you that I bite my lip?

BRIDE. Darling, why should it annoy me? I simply don't like you *worrying* —

GROOM. I'm not worrying; I've nothing to worry *about.*

BRIDE. I know, I just thought you had.

Slight pause.

GROOM. What?

BRIDE. I don't know, darling. Do you?

He brushes confetti off his jacket and fiddles with the guitar.

BRIDE. Are you going to practise that thing now?

GROOM. I thought I'd just tune it up.

BRIDE. But you tuned it up half an hour ago.

GROOM. They get out of tune. (*He plucks a string.*)

BRIDE. Does it matter?

GROOM. Of course it matters.

BRIDE. You can't play it.

GROOM. I can't *learn* to play it if it's not tuned, can I? (*He plucks a string.*) The strings slacken. It happens on all guitars. You have to keep them tuned up. Every stringed instrument's the same. The strings slacken. I can't learn to play on slack strings. (*He plucks a string.*)

BRIDE. You're just tuning it up then putting it away?

He plucks a string.

So in half an hour'a time you'll take it out and tune it again?

Pause

Are you going to tune that guitar at half-hourly intervals throughout our honeymoon?

GROOM. If tuning this guitar *irritates* you . . .

BRIDE. I only want to know where I stand. If there's to be a third party . . . It also occurred to me that if someone looks in this compartment and sees you covered with confetti, tuning a guitar, it might look a little odd.

GROOM. What's odd about it? (*He plucks a string.*)

BRIDE. It's still flat. Now it's sharp . . . In fact the very idea of taking a guitar on a honeymoon seems a wee bit grotesque . . . when you can't play it. (*She giggles.*)

GROOM. I don't see anything grotesque about it. It seems perfectly natural to me.

BRIDE. Of course, a harp would be funnier still. I mean, serenading your lady outside her window would be very romantic, if you could play it, but tuning it up isn't quite the same . . .

GROOM. I happen to be very fond of my guitar.

BRIDE. Oh, darling . . .

GROOM. I mean I've got used to having it around. But if you object to it . . .

She giggles.

BRIDE. Darling . . . You don't take it to bed with you?

He gives a final twist to the screw.

The string's snapped.

GROOM. I realize that. (*He puts the guitar away, deliberately.*)

BRIDE. You haven't finished tuning it.

GROOM. It doesn't matter.

BRIDE. Actually I'm crazy about guitar music. When it's well-played . . .

GROOM. I know. That's why I bought it in the first place.

Pause.

BRIDE. Darling . . .

GROOM. But it doesn't matter. We all get delusions about ourselves. I pictured myself learning to play it really well, so I could . . . play it. It's a great asset, to be able to play an instrument. But since it obviously irritates you, I know better than to keep on with it. It's little irritations like that that wear a marriage down, and marriage comes first. I'll not let my guitar come between us. I'll not look at it again, I'll sell it.

BRIDE. Dar-ling . . .

GROOM. In any case, I'd never be any good at it. I mean not first rate. I'd never be better than second rate and I don't want to be

second rate. I'm second rate at too many things already to be second rate at that as well. There's no point in going out of one's way to pile up things one's second rate at.

BRIDE. Darling, have I hurt . . . ?

GROOM. Hurt my feelings, what a crazy idea. D'you think I'm a child? I'm just facing facts, that's all. Facts are not always easy to face, not when you've set your heart on something, but it's best to face them in time. Before it's too late. (*He looks at his watch.*)

BRIDE. Another twenty-five minutes.

GROOM. What?

BRIDE. We'll be at the hotel in an hour.

GROOM. Then there's this business of morning tea. Why can't they leave the morning tea outside the door? I object to having strange women marching into my room first thing in the morning.

BRIDE. We don't *have* to have morning tea, darling.

GROOM. Ha ha, and have them wondering why we're *not* having morning tea.

BRIDE. Do you want a chocolate?

GROOM. As for that Uncle George of yours, he's on the way to becoming a dirty old man, that's my opinion.

BRIDE. He's travelled a lot in his time.

GROOM. That's no excuse. Apart from exaggerating . . .

BRIDE. What about?

GROOM. What about? He only talked about one thing. I've never heard anything like it.

BRIDE. I know he's a bit coarse, darling . . .

GROOM. Coarseness is one thing, I don't object to that; I've as many coarse relations as the next man; but making up wildly improbable stories about his . . . prowess, at his niece's wedding, that's something else.

BRIDE. Hmm.

Pause.

GROOM. You mean you *believed* all those stories?

BRIDE. He's been married three times, darling.

GROOM. What's that got to do with it! Of course he was exaggerating . . . (*His foot taps. He recrosses his legs. The other foot taps.*)

BRIDE. You know best . . .

GROOM. What do you mean by that?

BRIDE. I don't mean anything, darling . . . Are you sure you don't want a chocolate?

GROOM. Why do you keep offering me chocolates? What are you insinuating?

BRIDE. Darling, I don't know what you mean. I didn't want to pig the whole box, that's all. You know what I'm like with chocolates . . . (*Pause. She leans back, closes her eyes.*) Did you know, darling . . . that when the cocoa-bean first found its way to this country . . . it was considered an aphrodisiac . . . ?

There is an awkward pause.

I don't know why that came into my mind . . .

Slight pause. He looks at his watch.

GROOM. Twenty three minutes . . .

BRIDE (*eyes closed*). What's it going to be like tomorrow, I wonder . . . (*Pause.*) Will it be like today, do you think? Or will it rain?

GROOM. How do I know, darling?

BRIDE (*eyes closed*). It's a funny time, isn't it, this journey-time . . . between the wedding reception and the . . . honeymoon hotel. Between one life and another. A bit sort of disjointed. Like a sort of limbo . . . I didn't expect it to be like this . . . ?

GROOM. I'll tell you the reason I'll never be a first class guitarist. It's because of my hands. There's nothing wrong with them as *hands* . . . They're just not the *sort* of hands that make anything but a second rate player. It's not my fault of course. I just have to realise my limitations . . . And not give any . . . false impressions . . . in advance . . .

Pause. They both jolt suddenly.

She opens her eyes.

Points.

BRIDE. Points?

GROOM. Points. We're on the outskirts . . .

BRIDE. I dropped off.

GROOM. Oh . . .

Slight pause. She puts out her hand.
He stretches out his; she takes it.
She examines the palm of his hands closely.

BRIDE. You've got . . . nice hands . . .

GROOM. Darling . . .

BRIDE. Hm . . . ?

GROOM. What did you mean about the way I walk . . . ?

They freeze in profile as the sound of the train comes up.
The lights fade to blackout.

THE BANK MANAGER

The BANK MANAGER *is sitting behind his desk leafing through a statement. He looks up at an imaginary man seated in front of him.*
If it was up to me of course I wouldn't worry, but as you know our Lords and Masters aren't very keen on overdrafts at the moment and if all my customers have what they asked for they'd be down at me from head office like a ton of the proverbial bricks ha ha. Besides we do like to come to an arrangement and I don't believe we ever have. Just crept up on us hasn't it?
A pause.
Yes, I agree we took on the bridge loan but then, when you put your old house on the market you led us to believe that it'd cover the cost of the new one . . .
A pause.
Of course it wasn't your fault they decided to build an overpass right in front of your old house but then it wasn't ours was it?
Offers cigarette.
Cigarette? No? You'll stick to cigars.
Puts away case.
Yes I realise you had to move into a more select area now you've gone up in the world. I appreciate that, but two thousand on that bridge-loan-cum-overdraft in the last nine months . . .
A pause.
Oh no, there's no mistake. It's all down here in black and white . . . well red and white actually . . .
He glances down.
A new car I see; that's put the monthly payments up.
Short pause.
Yes, I do see that in your position you can't make do with an old car, but it's not only the car . . . There's a new standing order

at twenty pounds a week in favour of 'Fine Furs'. Eighteen months to go . . .

A short pause. He raises a placatory hand.

Hold on. I never suggested that your good lady should 'make do with a nylon fun fur' as you put it, but in your present financial position . . .

He glances down again.

. . . and thirty guineas per annum for the Greenways Golf Club. It's a very nice club they tell me, a very select club, but it does happen to be the most expensive club this side of Guildford.

A pause.

It may very well be necessary to join the right clubs. I can understand that. Yes . . .

Another glance.

Is the Pandora Club, Dean Street . . . Oh! Incidentally while we're on the subject are you intending to change your signature? Several of the cheques you've made out from there show considerable variation.

A pause.

Of course you're entitled to your relaxation. You've a great deal more responsibility and very clearly you would have an excellent future ahead of you, but the thing is old man . . . we just can't afford it.

SCORE

by Lyndon Brook

A tennis net is stretched across stage over the floats. HARRY *and* SHEILA, *in white, hold rackets, but mime the use of tennis balls.*

HARRY (*not pleased*). That's another game to you two . . . (*Lifts his head at some remark from our side of the net.*) Now Jim! Don't you start feeling sorry for us – this is all part of our tactics, we're lulling you into a false sense of superiority!

SHEILA (*collecting balls upstage*). False?

HARRY (*to query from* 'JANE'). Score? Ah yes – (*Clicking his fingers at* SHEILA.) Sheila, what's the score?

SHEILA. Don't you click your fingers at me! We're losing, I can tell that much.

HARRY. Very helpful.

SHEILA. Well, for heaven's sake, you're supposed to be keeping it!

HARRY. Let's see . . . it's your serve —

SHEILA. I know we've won two games —

HARRY. And I started serving this set —

SHEILA. I *think* it's two – five (*She indicates her side and opponents' side of net.*)

HARRY. Hell, really? (*Turns front.*) Know the score, Jim? . . . Two – *four*! . . . No, no. (*Pleased.*) If you say so – we've – er – we've lost count! (*Traps ball from* JIM.) Thanks! (*Traps ball from* JANE *right.*) Grazie (*pronounced Grahtsy-eh*) Jane! Sheila's serve! (*Throws ball back in general direction of* SHEILA.) Put it on his backhand. (*Settles and smiles at* JANE.)

Slight pause. SHEILA *is getting her hair in place, then collects two balls and comes to base line to serve.*

(*To* JANE.) Sorry, was I staring? . . . Oh! Your hair! I thought you said my –. . . I think it looks wonderful . . . I wish you'd tell

Sheila where you go: she has such a terrible time keeping it even presentable! . . . Oh yes, the hair's all right – it's what she does with it, poor darling.

SHEILA *serves.* HARRY *misses* JIM'S *return.*

HARRY. Damn! Good shot, Jim! (*To* JANE.) Better keep my eye on the *ball*! (*To* SHEILA.) I said his *back*hand!

SHEILA (*calm*). It was the wind.

HARRY. Oh. (*Then, realising.*) There's not a *breath* of wind!

He has crossed down right. SHEILA *collects balls on way up* left.

SHEILA. Love-fifteen.

SHEILA *serves. Into the net.* HARRY *picks it up quickly. On* SHEILA'S *second serve* HARRY *misses* JANE'S *sideline return.*

(*Sweetly.*) Wouldn't you be more use back here, darling?

HARRY. Server's partner always stands at the net.

SHEILA. Only when he can make contact with the occasional ball, surely.

SHEILA *goes right to pick up ball.* HARRY *crosses down left and talks across right to* JANE.

HARRY. Afraid we're not giving you much of a match, Jane . . . Oh, well, if you play every week! . . . No, Sheila always seems to have so much to do – in the house . . . Oh yes, au pairs – they never stay, though.

SHEILA. Love – Thirty.

HARRY. We've a Belgian girl at the moment . . .

SHEILA. You'll get hurt, Harry, if you stand so far over as that!

HARRY (*moving left but continuing talking to* JANE). But I caught *her* looking up the cross-Channel ferries yesterday.

SHEILA *serves. Into the net.* HARRY *picks up the ball.*

Sheila just can't get on with them.

SHEILA *serves again. Into net.* HARRY *picks it up.*

Double.

SHEILA (*cutting but smiling*). Yes, I saw.

HARRY (*to* JANE). *I* find them – stimulating. They keep you young!

SHEILA. Balls; please. (*She is up left.*)

HARRY *bounces the two balls he has in his hand back to her.*

Love – forty.

SHEILA *serves.* HARRY *takes vicious swipe at the return and wins the point.*

HARRY. Grazie, Jim, it wasn't too bad, was it!

SHEILA. Fifteen – forty.

HARRY *hasn't moved.*

(*Repeats.*) Fifteen – forty. (*Pause.*) Other side, Harry.

HARRY. Oh. (*Moves left speaks right to* JANE.) That's my best shot – I've been trying to get it back all day!

SHEILA *serves. It hits* HARRY *on the neck.*

Ow!

SHEILA. I warned you – you were practically on the centre line!

HARRY (*to* JANE). I suppose that's what they call a lethal serve.

HARRY *moves further left.* SHEILA *serves. The return goes to her and she drives to* JANE. HARRY *repeats his swipe and wins the point.*

HARRY. That's better! (*Crossing right.*) *Thirty* – forty! Now, we need a couple more like that —

SHEILA. *I* need something to serve with.

HARRY. Eh? Oh – (*Starts looking for balls.*)

SHEILA (*trapping one and then another from* JIM). Thank you, Jim – (*Low.*) Glad someone has some manners.

HARRY. Oh, stop nagging.

SHEILA. Thirty – forty, then.

She serves from up left. HARRY *takes third swipe, grins delightedly at the result and starts to turn upstage.*

HARRY. Deuce! (*Stops centre and turns to* JIM.) *Out*?! (*Looks at* SHEILA.) Out?! (*Then back at* JIM.) Are you sure, Jim? . . . No, no, I just thought – . . . Oh, thanks, Jane, no, there's no need to play it again – if *you* say . . . (*Slight pause.*) I must admit I thought . . .

SHEILA. Don't argue, Harry.

HARRY *moves back towards* SHEILA.

Your game, then – (*She hits ball across to* JANE. *Turns to* HARRY.) Five – two.

HARRY. Did it look out to you?

SHEILA. Couldn't possibly tell from back here. I take Jim's word.

HARRY. You would. (*Throws a couple of balls over net from baseline.*) Your serve, Jane.

SHEILA. Don't know what's worrying you. Thought you wanted them to win.

HARRY. What on earth are you talking about?

SHEILA. You said it might make things easier at the office —

HARRY. If we didn't beat them by too wide a margin, you idiot! I never said —

SHEILA. Well, that's not very likely, is it, the way you're playing!

HARRY. And you're Virginia Wade, I suppose! If you're so —

SHEILA. What were you nattering to Jane about?

HARRY. Oh, this and that . . . What Jim? Oh yes, we're ready.

SHEILA. You'd do better to concentrate on the game. Tennis.

HARRY (*to* JIM). Just a little conference on tactics. (*Moves to net left.*) Yes, Jane: – five – two . . . Cinque – due – (*Cheenkweh-Dooeh.*)

SHEILA (*mutters*). Eight days in San Remo . . .

SHEILA *receives serve. Her return is smashed by* JIM.

HARRY. Shot, Jim! (*To* SHEILA.) You gave it to him on a plate!

SHEILA. Couldn't help it – my racket slipped.

HARRY. That's just your trouble – you don't use the right grip. Your racket can't slip if you hold it properly: like this. (*He demonstrates.*) Look – *you* hold it like *this*!

SHEILA. Who's nagging now? . . . Here you are, Jane! (*Throws ball across and moves down right to net position and talks across to* JIM *left.*) What, Jim? . . . Oh, do you think so? (*Looks down at, smoothes her dress.*) How nice of you to say – . . . Heavens no, I made it myself, from a pattern . . . I'm lucky to be able to buy darning wool on the dress allowance Harry gives me . . . I'm always green with envy at Jane's clothes.

HARRY *receives* JANE'S *serve. His return is smashed by* JIM.

What was that about handing it on a plate?

HARRY. It was Jane's serve. It was a brute! . . . Lovely serve, Janey!

SHEILA. Janey? Since when Janey?

HARRY. Everyone calls her that.

SHEILA. I don't.

HARRY. Come on – it's thirty – love.

SHEILA, *up right, returns* JANE'S *serve.*

Well done.

HARRY, *at net left, returns next shot,* SHEILA *the next, but when ball comes back fourth time* HARRY *makes attempt to stretch across right.*

HARRY. All right, mine! (*Misses it.*) No – yours!

But SHEILA *has changed courts by now and can't retrieve* HARRY'S *miss.*

SHEILA. Oh charming! I could have got it perfectly well if you –

HARRY (*becoming more and more tense*). Then why didn't you!

He picks up two balls at baseline and smashes them across net. SHEILA *walks to position at net right.*

SHEILA. Calm down, darling, it's only a game. (*To* JIM.) Honestly, I don't know what's the matter with Harry today – he's right off . . . Yes, he should, you're right . . . It's all I can do to get him out to post a letter sometimes . . . He comes back from the office and just slumps in a chair watching television . . . (*Laughs.*) Oh yes, he always watches Wimbledon . . . you'd never have guessed it, would you!

HARRY. Sheila! It's forty – love! Match point!

SHEILA. Well, try not to send this one straight to Jimmy – (*Smiles at* JIM.) He's got a terrific smash.

HARRY. Got a terrific what?

SHEILA (*dry and clipped*). Smash.

HARRY *returns* JANE'S *serve to* JANE. *Ball comes back to* SHEILA *who plays it to* JIM. JIM *smashes to* HARRY *who,*