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SF PERUSALS

Two of a Kind

A Comedy

Hugh Janes

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-01944-9

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TWO OF A KIND

First presented by Bill Kenwright in association with the ThorndikeTheatre, Leatherhead and the Theatre Royal, Windsor, on 25th July 1995 at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, with the following cast:

"Wally" Wallis	Eric Sykes
George Fairbrother	Michael Denison
May	Dulcie Gray
Matron	Carmen Silvera

Directed by Ian Kellgren
Designed by Geoffrey Scott
Lighting designed by Matt Drury
Associate Producer Rod Coton

An earlier version of the play titled **THE DIVIDER** was presented by the Casson Company at the Casson Room, Thorndike Theatre on 16th May 1985 with the following cast:

George	Alan White
Matron	Muriel Barker
May	Freda Jackson
Wally	Peter Baylis

Directed by Alan Rothwell
Designed by Stuart Stanley

CHARACTERS

"Wally" Wallis
Major George Fairbrother
Matron
May

The action of the play takes place in the lobby, the Matron's office, and a shared room in the Grove Lodge Retirement Home. Scenes in the Chapel of Rest and Garden are set in the lobby area

Time — the present. Spring

ACT I — Saturday and Sunday

ACT II — Monday and Tuesday

This play is dedicated to
Bill and Rod,
without whom ...

ACT I

Grove Lodge Retirement Home. Saturday

The home has been converted from a large old house with some original features still intact. To one side is a plain room slightly too small for two residents: this is Wally's room. It has easy chairs, set as if used by friends, divan beds, bedside cabinets and lamps, a double wardrobe (with a plate on top of it), chest of drawers, waste-basket and wash-basin. A curtained window overlooks the garden. A shelf beside Wally's bed has on it three worn paperbacks, Jane's Fighting Ships, *a large seashell and an old photo of friends on a ship. Under Wally's bed is an old trunk and a kitbag. The shelf by the other bed has on it a garish beer mug and a soccer scarf. A ship's bell is mounted beside the shelf*

A half-door leads from the bedroom into a lobby with a hall table, fire hydrant and noticeboard. Two corridors lead off the lobby: one past the door to Matron's office, the other to an unseen dining area. There is also a fire exit door. A large, smart suitcase stands on the lobby floor

US *of the lobby is Matron's fresh, smart office with a palm, filing cabinet and desk with chairs either side. The window has attractive curtains. An old attaché case stands on top of the filing cabinet. Matron's office may be raised and linked with stairs up from the lobby to the corridor*

When the CURTAIN *rises, the Lights are on in all the areas. Matron, middle-aged and crisply attired, stands in the bedroom, holding a clipboard and examining the room*

In the office, George, a man hidebound by order and convention, is waiting. He has with him a hat and furled umbrella

Matron removes the scarf and mug from the shelf and walks to her office. She hangs the scarf over the old attaché case and puts the mug beside it. She picks up a clean towel

Matron If you follow me, Colonel Fairbrother, I'll show you to your room.
George Thank you, Matron. Actually it's Major.
Matron (*checking her clipboard*) Major. Oh. This way.

George picks up his hat and umbrella and follows. In the corridor he picks up his large, smart suitcase. Matron stops in the lobby and indicates an unseen room out front

Matron Now, what do you think of this?
George Oh, most attractive.
Matron This is the standard we set in all our rooms.
George I shall be more than happy in here.
Matron You're not in here; this is Mrs Gleason's. I wanted you to see what yours will look like when it's been modernized. (*They move on*) The room you're in now compensates with a very pleasant view of the garden.

They enter the room; George is disappointed

There. Home sweet home. This room has the morning sun. Mr Wallis, who sleeps there, has been here four years now. An outgoing person, friendly — with most people, so you should get on like houses on fire.
George I was expecting a single.
Matron And you would be in one now if Mr Gomez hadn't brought your ceiling down with his bath water. Our builder estimates only six to eight weeks.

George drops his case with a thud

If Mr Potterton hadn't passed on this morning you wouldn't even have this. We try not to be oppressive here at Grove Lodge: "care is the watchword". No reflection on yourself but some people of advancing years sit alone and get morbid.
George We can get as morbid as we like in groups, can we?
Matron I like to have everyone mixing. A cocktail party, minus cocktails.
George I see.
Matron We run many activities; bingo, beetle drives and the vicar leads an excellent game of "Oh Hell". The church is a great provider but then we do encourage religion.
George I've rather lapsed I'm afraid. Surfeit of church parades. (*He puts his case, hat and umbrella on his bed and removes his overcoat*)
Matron We'll soon unlapse you. There are two television rooms and a "quiet" lounge at the end, where knitting needles are forbidden. An excellent place to write one's memoirs.
George Do many people write their memoirs?
Matron Oh I've a cupboard stuffed with Chapter Ones.
George I'm on chapter four of a detective novel.
Matron Fiction. We're not used to such ambition.

George "The Case for Justin Lockett". He's a sort of modern day Raffles. Lockett, you see, the key is in his name.

Matron Good; activity will stop you from nodding off during the day. I allow a nap after lunch, if you can't stop yourself. Any more only spoils your sleep. Food, alcohol and smoking in the room are absolutely taboo. Tipsy old people falling down starting fires make a lot of extra work. We haven't time to waste extinguishing scorched pensioners.

George No.

Matron You are allowed out — whenever you have my permission. You will make your own bed and keep the room generally tidy. Sheets and towels are changed every Monday unless they become particularly soiled. Should you become incontinent don't keep it a secret between yourself and the mattress, we are organized in that department.

George I assure you, Matron ...

Matron Everyone does, Major. Everyone does. All seems a bit of a rush I expect? How long have you been on our waiting list?

George Over six months. Since I first saw your advertisement.

Matron So few places arise. We take pride in prolonging life. (*She glances at George's bed*) As a rule.

George Everything sounded right for me here. The right setting. The right type of people.

Matron Oh yes. I can see you're going to fit in. That's what counts.

A pager on her belt bleeps

Oh, my pager. Minor crisis. Do excuse me.

She exits

George sits dejectedly on the corner of his bed and surveys the room

George Oh damn! (*He rises and hangs his coat in the wardrobe, puts his hat on top and hangs the umbrella on the side nearest his bed*)

May enters. She is a well-dressed, determined woman who walks aided by a stick. She passes Matron's office and starts singing "Isn't It a Lovely Day to Be Caught in the Rain"

As May sings, George opens his case and stands listening to the song. Then he places two family photographs, a framed display of medals and a few detective novels on his shelf and hangs a blazer and trousers in the wardrobe

May clicks her tongue three times and wiggles her hips. She checks no-one is about and opens the fire exit door

May (*calling off*) Wally?

Matron crosses the lobby with a vase of flowers

May hides

Matron enters the room

Matron I thought under the circumstances the room could do with brightening up.
George What lovely flowers. Are they from the garden?
Matron No. The crematorium.
George Oh.
Matron Some kind of exchange I suppose. We're like a florists here in winter. Unpacking? That's it, set out your stall. No point shilly-shallying around. Life's abysmally short as it is. A soldier and a literary man; I'll introduce you to our expert on crossword puzzles — and our war widows.
George One or two introductions would be more than sufficient. I'm not particularly gregarious.
Matron We'll sort you out, don't worry. (*She goes out of the room*)
George (*following*) Oh Matron? I wonder, could you ... the ... wash room.
Matron Jolly good. No messing about. Come along.
May (*returning to the fire exit and calling out of the door*) Wally.
Matron May? Whatever are you doing?
May (*surprised*) Nothing, Matron.
Matron You look as if you're loitering.
May I have never loitered in my life.
Matron You'll do your arthritis no favours hanging around draughty doors. (*She shuts the fire door*)
May Don't shut the door. (*Fabricating*) I was just catching my breath. (*She breathes heavily*)
Matron That's why we're here. To help with these little problems. (*She takes May's arm*)
May There is no problem and I don't want to go anywhere.
Matron Come along now, May.
May (*not moving; to George*) Are you him?
George Him?
May Is he? Is he him?
Matron Now, May ...
May I do not like being manhandled; especially by a woman.
Matron Now come along.
May Will you let go? I must be here. It's important.
Matron Be quiet, there's a good girl. You wouldn't want me to call Nurse Wiggins.

May Oh gawd!

She exits immediately

Matron Just along there, Major. Door with the "little man".
George Thank you. (*He pauses, puzzled by May*)
Matron You'll be all right will you? Don't need any help?
George Oh no. (*He heads for the exit*)

Matron exits

There is banging on the fire door

George stops and looks

Wally (*off*) May! Open the blooming door. What's the matter, you silly old coot.

George listens at the door

George Hallo?
Wally May, stop messing about and open this door.

George tentatively opens the door

Wally bustles in. He is a dishevelled seadog in old nautical clothes. One of life's contenders

Where's that silly fool May? Matron could have caught me. Ay ay, new face straight off the ferry. When were you admitted?
George Today.
Wally We need some young blood about the place. House is full of pensioners.
George (*surveying Wally*) Do you live here?
Wally Yes I do.
George (*shutting the door*) I beg your pardon but you can't be too careful these days. I didn't want to admit anyone.
Wally They admitted you. I suppose you're private.
George I'm paying, yes.
Wally You look private. I'm Council. One of the last. Doesn't half stick in Matron's craw.
George There appears to be something oozing under your arm.
Wally (*removing a steak, wrapped in paper, from under his arm*) Ssh! Don't breath a word.

George I wasn't going to.
Wally Contraband, that's what this is. Smuggled. Only they have Customs and Excise men in here dressed up as nurses.
George Do they?
Wally (*unwrapping the steak*) 'Ere, look at that. Isn't that a nice bit of steak? Aberdeen Angus. Well, late Aberdeen Angus. Proper steak that is, not the mad cow they have in here.
George I'm a vegetarian myself.
Wally Last vegetarian we had suffocated on an omelette. (*He taps his gullet*) A pimento blocked his sarcophagus. I tell you, it's lame dogs and Englishmen in here.
George Sounds like I'm in for a stimulating decline.
Wally Potts is the life and soul of this place. Bloke I bunk with. Even Matron likes Potts and she's not a woman to give her affections lightly. I take it you've met Mrs Winstanley (*née* Hitler) SRN?
George She was extremely kind.
Wally Kind? She'd throw a drowning man both ends of the rope.
George I'll try not to slip in the bath then. (*He gives a little laugh*)
Wally It's no laughing matter. Matron is the senior citizens' Captain Bligh. Duck when you hear her keys rattling.
George She doesn't lock you in, does she?
Wally No, she throws them at you. (*He slaps the back of his head*) One volley and Good-night Vienna!
George I take it you don't like authority.
Wally I'm used to it but the day I stop challenging it is the day I pop off. I'm only here because the Old Sailors' Retirement Home was full of retired old sailors.
George Will you excuse me. I have to find the little man.
Wally Know him well.
George And don't worry about your steak, I'm very good at secrets. (*He heads off*)
Wally Keeping them — or telling them?
George The former. I signed the Official Secrets Act you know.

He exits quickly

Wally Don't hurry, old son. You've just joined the queue for the hereafter — and there's not much of a rush to get to the front.

May enters

May Pssst!
Wally I expect you are.
May You got in then.

Wally No, I'm still outside. That's the last time I ask you to do me a favour.
May Wally, I have something important to tell you.
Wally Some weak-bladdered toffee-nose let me in. So I expect all our undercover operations are blown.
May Please listen. It's serious.
Wally (*whistling*) Pipe up, Potts. Shipwrecked sailor coming aboard.
May Don't go in there.

Wally enters the room

Oh, please yourself.

May walks away

Wally looks about the room and returns to the lobby, confused

Wally I'm in the right place. Cell block 17. 'Ere, May, have you seen Potts? There's a suitcase out. Do you think he's going on his holidays?
May How the hell should I know. I'm not Thomas Cook.

May exits

Wally (*entering the room*) More like Captain Cook. Silly old sea buzzard. Where's his things? He's only got enough to fill a paper bag.

Wally discards the steak on to his bed and looks in George's case. It has layers of laundered, good quality shirts, ties, etc. Wally burrows into them, strewing clothes everywhere

George enters

George What in God's name do you think you are doing?
Wally Unravelling a mystery old son. Went out this morning and left my old mucker in his hammock with a touch of bronchials. Come back and the Marie Celeste is deserted. I wondered if these were his things?
George Those are my things. That is my case.
Wally What's it doing here?
George This is my room. I'm unpacking.

George tidies his clothes; Wally puts them back in the case. George takes them out; Wally puts them back

Wally No don't — don't unpack, old son. You're in the wrong room. You are the victim of a bureaucratic balls-up.

George Matron herself put me in here.
Wally Poor woman's going doo-lally. All this mixing with old folk. Me and Potts been in here four years. She can't go chopping and changing just like that now, can she?
George Are you ... Mr Wallis?
Wally No mister in my name, I'm just Wally.
George It might be advisable if you went to see Matron.
Wally What is this? What's going on?
George I would prefer not to say.
Wally There's a plate on top of the wardrobe. Fix my steak to it. And no nibbling while I'm out.

Wally plonks the steak in George's hand and leaves, heading for the door to Matron's office. George puts the steak on the plate

The Lights fade in the room

During the following, George removes his suit jacket and hangs it over the back of an easy chair. He then moves the chair beside his bed, in front of the wardrobe

Matron enters and meets Wally outside her office

Matron, what's happened to ——
Matron Ah there you are, Mr Wallis. I've been looking for you. (*She opens her office door*)

They enter the office

You've been out again without permission.
Wally I've been round the world twenty times, I think I can manage half a day at the shops.
Matron Suppose something happens to you?
Wally Something usually does. (*He shuts the door*)
Matron (*sitting at her desk*) Missing meals ruins the continuity of our diet.
Wally I don't like this Saturday cook.
Matron Mr Pyranjanis was trained at the Savoy.
Wally What as? Hall porter?
Matron Please sit down, Mr Wallis.
Wally I like standing. Takes the weight off my bum.
Matron It is extremely difficult for me to tell you this. Sadly, Mr Potterton passed on this morning.
Wally Potts? Passed on? Don't be daft, woman. Potts wouldn't pass on without telling me where he was going. He'd tell me wouldn't he?

Matron It was very sudden.
Wally Sudden. There was nothing wrong with him. He was in good health. Touch of the bronchials, that's all. Bit of a chill on the chest. Look, I bought him some vapour rub. (*He takes a pot of Vick from his pocket and puts it on his desk*)
Matron Something like this leaves everyone unprepared.
Wally Tell me you've just moved him to another room — temporary like.
Matron I wish it was that simple.

Slowly the news of the death sinks in to Wally

Wally (*picking up the Vick*) He won't be needing this, then.
Matron I'm afraid not.

Wally removes his woolly hat and sits

It was a heart attack. The chest complaint may have been an early symptom. I went in to see him shortly after you'd gone out. It had already happened. The ambulance arrived within minutes but it was no use. Took us all completely by surprise.
Wally Where is he, Matron?
Matron I'm not sure exactly.
Wally That's typical of Potts to go missing at a time like this.
Matron I mean — by now he may be with the undertaker.
Wally Discussing terms?
Matron His relatives made some mention of him being bur ——
Wally Relatives? If you mean Nora the niece, I'm amazed she remembered who you were talking about.
Matron Families have different ways of staying close. Blood is thicker than water.
Wally Gin is thicker than her blood. (*He sees Potts' things*) Are these his things, Matron?
Matron Yes.
Wally That's his mug. (*He picks it up*) He won this at Blackpool fun fair. Took some girl there on a day trip and tried to win her a teddy bear on the rifle range. All he got was this. He was a rotten shot. God knows why they took him in the Royal Artillery. He never drank out of anything else. Used to carry it from pub to pub. I'd like to keep this.
Matron I don't know if that's possible. All possessions must go to the next of kin.
Wally I am his next of kin. Siamese twins weren't as close.
Matron The regulations are very strict about this sort of thing.
Wally You know my opinion of regulations.

Matron Fortunately your opinions don't change our rules. Even you must see this has to be enforced or it might lead to all sorts of misappropriation.
Wally I think this is appropriate. Misappropriation! That's pinching. Are you accusing me of pinching?
Matron I'm merely saying ——
Wally Potts and I have known each other nearly fifty years. We've been in here four years. Shared the same room, the same food, at the same table. I'd have done anything for Potts, as he would for me. So don't you accuse me of thieving this ... ugly thing. It's a remembrance. He'd have given it, given the chance. This is for four years.
Matron I know how you must be feeling.
Wally Good. Then you'll know why I'm hanging on to it.
Matron I'll see what I can do.
Wally I'm obliged. If the relative is that desperate for it I suggest an optician. (*He leaves and shuts the door*)

The Lights come up in the room

Matron leaves her office

(*Entering the room*) Oh Christ! I'd forgotten about you. (*He returns to the lobby*)

During the following, George finishes unpacking

Matron meets Wally in the lobby

Matron Mr Wallis?
Wally Matron, what's that bloke doing in my room?
Matron You will be sharing with him, for the time being.
Wally My friend isn't even cold yet.
Matron I'm very sorry, Mr Wallis. It was all rather quick.
Wally Quick! Who is he? Roger Bannister?
Matron The circumstances were rather exceptional.
Wally Don't I even get one night alone for my thoughts?
Matron I'm afraid that decision was taken by the owners. I did what I could.
Wally I'm sure you bent over backwards on my behalf.
Matron Consider where you are, Mr Wallis. This is a home for senior citizens, we do anticipate death.
Wally And trample over its consequences.
Matron Some things are unavoidable. At least you have a secure home here. There are others less fortunate.

Matron exits

Wally (*calling after her*) Potts is one of them. (*He returns to the room*)

George slides his case under his bed. Wally goes to the wardrobe but the chair is in his way

Did you put this chair here?
George Yes.
Wally Would you mind putting it back?
George I prefer it there.
Wally It's in my way.
George I don't see why you should need to be there. This is my side of the room.
Wally I wasn't aware it had sides. (*Pause*) I can't get to my place.

George can't bear fuss and moves the chair. Wally puts the umbrella on George's bed then runs his hand down the front of the wardrobe to the "right spot" — and bangs! A small panel flips open on the side. It hides a cubby hole with a bottle of whisky. He pours into the mug, replaces the whisky and shuts the panel. George replaces his umbrella. Wally throws his reefer jacket in the chair with George's jacket and sits. George reacts. Wally rises; George grabs his jacket and places it on his bed. He folds Wally's coat and places it on Wally's bed while Wally pulls the old trunk from under his bed, finds a packet of cigarettes in it and lights up. George sits. Wally sits in the chair facing and smokes, puffing rather than inhaling. George wafts the air

Seen someone you know?
George It's just the smoke.
Wally If all you can do is wave your hand about, get out in the garden and wave at the birds.
George I'm sorry.
Wally You're sorry. I'm sorry. I haven't smoked since I quit the sea. I came ashore and said, "That's it. New life; new habits". So don't stand there saying you're sorry when you should be someone else.
George Excuse me. I expect you would prefer to be alone.

George exits with his jacket

Wally (*sobbing*) Pottsy, what have you done? Where have you gone? You're part of me. How can you have gone when I'm still here? I won't have any more of this; you wouldn't want me to. (*He throws the cigarette in the basin and runs the tap*) I'm not giving up our medicine chest, mind. (*He raises the mug*) Good hiding-place of yours. Captain Bligh never suspected. Here's to you, Potts — and our good times. (*He drinks and sits*) But where

are they now? I'll wake up soon. That's what'll happen. Wake up and find you're back. (*He cuddles the glass, sobbing gently*)

The Lights fade. Music. During the Black-out, Wally falls asleep in a chair

The Lights come up. It is two hours later

The music fades. An electronic tea bell sounds

May enters the lobby from the dining area carrying a piece of cake on a plate held at an acute angle; the cake falls off

George enters from the other corridor

May Oh firefly!
George Oh please, allow me. (*He puts the cake on the plate*) Would you like a fresh piece?
May A bit of dirt won't hurt. (*She blows the dust off*)
George Are they serving tea?
May (*heading for the bedroom*) If you've got the stamina to wait. Oh, and bring Wally a cup will you?
George Yes ... yes.

George exits

May enters the room and sings "Da-Da" to "The Hornpipe"

Wally (*waking with a start*) Potts?
May No. It's only me — "from over the sea, said Barnacle Bill the sailor." I brought you some cake.
Wally No tea?
May You're lucky to get cake.
Wally Madeira.
May Don't mention it. (*She sits*) You slept for hours. But you could do with some beauty sleep.
Wally Thank you, Fairy Godmother.
May You all right?
Wally I'll manage.
May Course you will but are you all right?
Wally I will be if you don't keep pestering me.
May Thank you, May, for bringing me this cake. Thank you, May, for showing some concern.
Wally Yes yes, slapped wrists, Granny. I'm all right. (*Pause*) I miss him, May.

May Course you do. Why don't you find out where they've laid him and tell him so. His spirit will be waiting to put you at your ease. (*She rises*)
Wally Don't go. Sit down; let's have a noggin.
May I can't. My daughter's coming.
Wally How is she?
May Makes me wish I'd never met her father.
Wally Maybe it was her upbringing.
May Well she didn't get it from me. Last week she took me to all the wrong places. All my shops had gone.
Wally They were there when I went out.
May The chemist was full of pictures of naked girls.
Wally For months now that chemist has been a porn shop.
May Then why did she take me there? What have I got to pawn at my age?
Wally I dread to think. (*He bites the cake — and wonders*) Did you put anything on this?
May (*a little guiltily*) Cinnamon. (*She leaves the room*)

Wally moves to sit on George's bed; he continues eating the cake

George enters the lobby with two cups of tea

May and George meet

What kept you? He needs that. Poor devil looks half dead himself.
George They ran out and had to make a refill.
May I've told them to buy a bigger pot. That thing wouldn't hold a dormouse. Mean old toadies.

May exits

George enters the room. Wally is sitting on George's bed eating the cake

George You were sound asleep when the bell went for tea.
Wally I wouldn't have heard Big Ben

George offers Wally a cup of tea

Very civil. (*He takes the cup and drinks*) Urgh! Did you put any sugar in this?
George One spoonful.
Wally Three spoonfuls. I like three spoonfuls.
George Surely you can't taste the tea.
Wally I hate tea. I like sweetness. (*He puts the cup down and eats*)
George That lady ...?
Wally May.

George May ... didn't look very safe with the cake but I see it arrived.
Wally She moves like a centipede with athlete's foot but she's got it up here (*he indicates his head*) — and a heart of gold.
George The food looks rather good here.
Wally Depends what you're used to.
George Not much lately. My mother was an excellent cook. Everything always meticulously served.
Wally We used to eat my mum's custard with a knife and fork. Still, doesn't matter what it looks like as long as it tastes good.
George On the contrary. Half the pleasure of food lives in the appearance.
Wally Where does tripe and onions fit in your scale of things? Looks as if it's still alive, and smells like an astronaut's jockstrap just after lift-off, but I could eat it four times a day. I love it.
George I prefer brightly-coloured food. Spring carrots, tropical fruit. The occasional rainbow trout.
Wally You'll love it here then. The food here resembles Blackpool illuminations only without the taste. Plenty of gravy, that's what I like. We had gravy on everything in the Merchant Navy. Even the bosun in heavy seas. (*He drops his cake*) Aw look at that! (*He picks it up*) Can't eat it now it's been on the floor. (*He drops the cake in the basket by the basin, leaving the plate and lots of crumbs on George's bed*)
George Excuse me asking, but was there any particular reason why you were eating your cake on my bed?
Wally Yes; I don't want a mess on my bed.

George brushes his bed

Matron enters her office and writes unobtrusively

Wally sluices his face noisily and hangs the towel on the tap. He puts Potts' mug on his shelf. Unhappy with this, he takes a picture from the wall and hangs the mug on the hook

There, Potts' pot, your new home.
George I'd like to say, Mr Wallis, how sorry I am about your friend. It must have been a great shock to you.
Wally If it's all the same I'd like to keep off the subject, especially with you. It's nothing personal but I can't help resenting you being here.
George I understand.
Wally Finished your tea?
George Oh, yes.
Wally Give us your cup.
George I'll take them back. I don't mind.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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Samuel French London



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SF **PERUSALS**