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SF PERUSALS

Things We Do for Love

A play

Alan Ayckbourn

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE

First presented at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, on 29th April 1997 with the following cast of characters:

Barbara	Joanna van Gyseghem
Nikki	Sally Giles
Hamish	Cameron Stewart
Gilbert	Barry McCarthy

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop
Lighting by Mick Hughes
Music by John Pattison

A new production was first performed at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, by arrangement with Michael Codron and Lee Dean, on 10th February 1998 and subsequently presented by Michael Codron and Lee Dean at the Gielgud Theatre, London, on 3rd March 1998 with the following cast of characters:

Barbara	Jane Asher
Nikki	Serena Evans
Hamish	Steven Pacey
Gilbert	Barry McCarthy

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop
Lighting by Mick Hughes
Music by John Pattison

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Barbara Trapes, 40s
Nikki Wickstead, her friend, late 30s
Hamish Alexander, Nikki's fiancé, 40s
Gilbert Fleet, 40s

The action takes place in sections of three flats at 56 Bloom Street, London SW, over twelve days in October

ACT I
SCENE 1 Monday 10th October. 6 p.m.
SCENE 2 Tuesday 11th October. 5 p.m.
SCENE 3 Friday 14th October. 8.30 p.m.
SCENE 4 Saturday 15th October. 9.30 p.m.

ACT II
SCENE 1 Monday 17th October. 6 p.m.
SCENE 2 Thursday 20th October. 7 p.m.
SCENE 3 Friday 21st October. 7 a.m.
SCENE 4 Friday 21st October. 6.30 p.m.

Time—the present

SCHOOL SONG

The school song "Girls of St Gertrude's" (lyrics by Alan Ayckbourn, music by John Pattison) is on pages 86 and 87. Please note that there is a separate fee for the use of this music (see page ii).

Plays by Alan Ayckbourn published by Samuel French Ltd

Absent Friends
Absurd Person Singular
Bedroom Farce
Callisto 5
A Chorus of Disapproval
Communicating Doors
Confusions
A Cut in the Rates
Dreams from a Summer House (with John Pattison)
Ernie's Incredible Illucinations
Family Circles
Henceforward ...
How the Other Half Loves
Intimate Exchanges (Volume 1 and Volume 2)
It Could Be Any One of Us
Joking Apart
Just Between Ourselves
Living Together
Man of the Moment
Mixed Doubles (*with other authors*)
Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays
Mr Whatnot
My Very Own Story
The Norman Conquests
Relatively Speaking
The Revengers' Comedies
Round and Round the Garden
Season's Greetings
Sisterly Feelings
A Small Family Business
Suburban Strains
Table Manners
Taking Steps
Ten Times Table
This Is Where We Came In
Time and Time Again
Time of My Life
Tons of Money (*revisor*)
Way Upstream
Wildest Dreams
Wolf at the Door (*adapter*)
Woman in Mind
A Word from Our Sponsor (with John Pattison)

ACT I

Scene 1

56 Bloom Street, London SW. Monday 10th October. 6 p.m.

A side-on view of this early Victorian terrace house. The building is now divided into flats. To one side, the front door from the street leading to a small hallway with stairs up to the first floor flat and another flight down to the basement flat. There is a front door leading off this hallway to Barbara's ground-floor apartment. In view in her flat is the main sitting-room. This serves as her living and dining area. The room is adorned with numerous knick-knacks, many of them arranged on a home-made shelf unit attached to one wall. The overall impression is of order and cleanliness. A tasteful feminine, male-free, child-free zone; a room with small-scale, fastidiously selected furnishings chosen to suit its fastidious single owner. Leading from the living-room are three further doors: one to the bedroom, one to the bathroom and one to a small, galley-style kitchen. Upstairs, we can see part of the corresponding flat above Barbara's. However, our view of this is cut off at about knee level. This is therefore the view we are afforded of any occupant. As far as we can see, this flat is more basically furnished: a utility carpet, the legs of an old-fashioned bedstead, a Victorian nursing chair and a chest of drawers. Downstairs in the basement, below Barbara, we can see even less of Gilbert's flat. A foot or so of the ceiling of his bedsitting-room is all that is visible, together with the top of a step-ladder supporting a trestle. Gilbert appears to be decorating his ceiling

At the start, Gilbert is not in his own flat but upstairs in the top one. We can see him now and then, his box of tools on the floor near by, lying on the floor wrestling with an old-fashioned radiator valve. Gilbert is probably in his mid-forties, but he is one of those people whose age is hard to guess. As he works, Barbara's feet (for that is all we can see of her) are clopping backwards and forwards across the upstairs room as she tidies, cleans and lays things out. Gilbert chats away happily as he works. Barbara barely seems to be listening to him but this doesn't seem to bother Gilbert at all. It is quite usual

Gilbert (*working*) ... no, you see, what you've got here, Barbara, is a basic, good old-fashioned gravity system which is effectively responsible for pumping hot water to all parts of the building: this flat, your flat downstairs, my flat in the basement there ... but it's not very efficient ...

Barbara (*absorbed in her own tasks*) No, it certainly isn't …

Gilbert … not if it's installed wrongly, like this one was. It never could have been, you see. Because what you're asking the water to do is, you see, Barbara, is to lift itself by its own heat. You get me?

Barbara Goodness …

Gilbert You see, hot water, Barbara, hot water is actually lighter than cold water. Did you know that?

Barbara (*not particularly interested*) No, I didn't. How fascinating.

Gilbert It has a lower specific gravity, hot water. You get me?

Barbara Easier to carry, then?

Gilbert No, no, no. I don't think that, no, but …

Barbara I must bring some tea towels up before I forget …

Gilbert … what's intended in a system like this, you see …

Barbara I'm just getting some tea towels, Gilbert. They won't have tea towels.

Gilbert … is that as the water, Barbara, is heated, it rises up the pipe from your downstairs boiler …

Barbara Won't be a second, this is fascinating, Gilbert, carry on … (*She leaves the flat and goes downstairs and into her own, the door of which is open*)

During the next, she goes into her kitchen and returns with a handful of neatly folded tea towels which she will bring upstairs again. We see now that she is a small, neat woman of about forty; precise, organized, contentedly living alone in an ordered, if slightly antiseptic, domain of her own creation

Gilbert (*continuing as if she were still in the room*) … and as this water rises … (*to a recalcitrant radiator part*) … come on, get off, get off, you bastard … (*resuming*) … as your water rises up your flow pipe it circulates through your rads and then, in turn, the cooler water from the rads — once it's cooled — with its higher specific gravity, you get me? — will drop down and back into your tank and that's your circulation. That's how you get your circulation, Barbara. (*Raising his voice as he realizes she has gone*) You get me?

Barbara (*yelling from the flat below*) Keep talking, I can hear you, Gilbert.

Gilbert Because this is interesting, Barbara, what you've got in this instance — is that someone in their wisdom, or rather lack of wisdom in our case — has installed a single-pipe system. Now for various reasons too complicated to go into, a single-pipe system is never going to be as efficient as your two-pipe system. You get me? Because with your single pipe your water is being circulated through one rad out of that into another rad — you get me? — so the net result is that the water at the end of your loop is going

to be cooler than at the beginning, so what you end up with is UDH. Unevenly distributed heat …

Barbara (*returning to the upstairs flat with her towels*) I know. Don't tell me.

Gilbert You get me? I mean, it should never have been put in like this. You get me?

Barbara Don't blame me. Blame my father … He put it in …

She moves into the upstairs bathroom though we can see nothing of it

Gilbert Well, they saw him coming, your father. That's all I can say. I mean, a single-pipe system …

Barbara (*off*) He was probably broke. He usually was. He probably couldn't afford more than one pipe. I hope this towel rail's still working. My God, they left this place in a tip. How can people live in such a tip? She said she'd cleaned it. She hasn't touched it. Look at the state of this shower. Just look at this shower tray! I mean, how can people walk away from a shower tray and leave it like this? It's unbelievable. It's black … What have they been doing in here? Storing coal?

Gilbert They'd need to up here to keep warm. If you want my tip, you'd be better off taking all this lot out and starting again …

Barbara (*off*) I mean, they both worked for solicitors, for heaven's sake …

Gilbert Well …

Barbara (*off*) I despair of people sometimes, Gilbert. I despair.

Gilbert (*sympathetically*) Ah …

Barbara (*off*) I can't bear to look under the bed.

Gilbert Looks all right from here …

Barbara (*off*) I'll have to clean the whole place myself. I don't know when I'm meant to do that. They're moving in tomorrow. What's the time? They'll be here in a minute. They'll probably take one look and bolt.

Gilbert It's a very nice flat, Barbara.

Barbara (*off*) It was. Once. This used to be my bedroom when I was little, you know. (*A fresh horror*) Oh, God, I can't bear it! I cannot bear it! Will you look at the state of this lavatory-bowl …

Gilbert Not everyone's got your high standards, Barbara. Alas.

Barbara (*off*) Well, they could at least aim straight …

Gilbert … would that they had.

Barbara (*off*) I don't know why men have to spray up the wall like cats …

Gilbert Once I get this heating working it'll make all the difference.

Barbara (*off*) I'll have to spend all night doing it, I suppose. I've no time tomorrow. I have to be at work at the crack of dawn.

Gilbert They push you too hard, that firm.

Barbara emerges from the bathroom

Barbara (*with a last look at the room*) Uggghh! It's disgusting. This door-handle's sticky, as well. Just turn the light out and shut the door when you've finished, will you, Gilbert?
Gilbert Right, I'll do that, Barbara.

Barbara starts downstairs again. During the following she goes back into her own flat

You see, if you replaced this whole system, what you'd actually be doing in the long run is saving money. On your running costs. Do you get me? I mean, you've got water rising from the tank at what, ninety degrees centigrade in order to come down through the top rads at about seventy degrees …

The front doorbell rings just after Barbara enters her own flat

Barbara (*over Gilbert*) Oh, they would be early. That's typical. When you'd prefer people late they come early. When you want them on time they're invariably late …

Gilbert (*ploughing on, oblivious*) … so by the time the water reaches the lower rads, yours and mine, Barbara, it's going to be significantly that much cooler. You get me?

Barbara Just a moment, Gilbert, there's someone at the door …
Gilbert Right. I'll leave you in peace, Barbara.

Barbara goes to the front door and opens it

Nikki is on the doorstep. She is a pretty, rather superficial woman, a few years younger than Barbara. As soon as she sees Barbara, she bursts into song

Nikki (*singing*) Girls of St Gertrude's
Where e'er you be,
Strong in your virtue,
Come join with me!

Barbara joins in with her

Nikki
Barbara } You in the classroom,
You on the field.
We shall not weaken
Nor shall we yield!

They fall into each other's arms with cries of affection

Nikki (*as they embrace*) It's so good! It's just so, so wonderful to see you again, Barbs.
Barbara You've not changed at all!
Nikki Oh, I have. I have. Look at me! I'm fat! Fat!
Barbara Nikki, you're not!
Nikki I am. Look at me. I'm terribly, terribly fat. I'm gross.
Barbara Nonsense.
Nikki *You're* not! You're — I don't know how you do it. You never change. You still look seventeen.
Barbara (*mirthlessly*) Ha! Ha! Come in, it's freezing, come in. Oh, where's ——?
Nikki Hamish is coming. He went via the house. He had to have a word with the architect.

They enter the flat

Barbara (*as they do so*) Let me take your coat. How's it coming along? The house? I want to hear everything.
Nikki (*removing her coat*) Oh, well. The house. Forever. Hamish says we'd have been better off starting from scratch and building a new house. Every time they strip the plaster off, there's another tale of disaster. The whole place is held together with willpower ...
Barbara (*examining her coat*) This is nice. Where did you get it? In Norway?
Nikki No, Harvey Nichols.
Barbara Oh, it's lovely.
Nikki Hamish gave it to me. An unbirthday present.
Barbara Yes, I want to hear all about him, too.
Gilbert (*calling down*) You'll never believe what they've done here, Barbara ...
Barbara Yes, Gilbert. I'm just shutting the door, I've got someone here now.
Gilbert Right-o. You would not credit it ...

Barbara closes her flat door

(*To himself, examining the shoddy workmanship*) Dear, oh, dear.
Nikki (*sotto voce*) Who's that?
Barbara Oh, that's Gilbert. He lives downstairs. He's — having a look at the heating for me.
Nikki Oh, really? He's not ...?
Barbara Not what?
Nikki I mean, you're not a unit or anything, are you?
Barbara Certainly not. Good lord!
Nikki Sorry, I just wondered if you'd been keeping him a secret ...

Barbara No. Certainly not. Heaven forbid! No, he just rents the basement flat from me. He's been here for ages. I must have mentioned him, surely? He does odd things for me. He's very helpful but — no, nothing like that. (*She wrinkles her nose in mild distaste at the very thought*)

Nikki What is he? A plumber?

Barbara No. He's a postman, actually.

Nikki Golly.

Barbara So he's up at dawn. And then spends the rest of his time doing odd jobs. He's very useful. His wife died very young. He moved in below. I mean, it's good to have a man around occasionally, isn't it? But certainly nothing like that.

Nikki So you're still — fancy free?

Barbara Happily. Are we waiting for Hamish? Would you like a cup of tea or something?

Nikki I'd kill for a cup of tea.

Barbara goes to the kitchen

This is lovely. You've made this place beautiful.

Barbara (*off*) Thank you. I'm very happy here now. I love it.

Nikki I can't even remember what it used to look like. You've turned it all into flats, obviously …

Barbara (*off*) Well, after Mummy died …

Nikki (*snooping around*) So what have you got now, you've got … ?

Barbara (*off*) Well, there's not much more to it. Have a look, you're welcome. I think the place is probably a tip but ——

Nikki A tip? You should see our place! (*Sticking her head through the kitchen door*) Oh, this is lovely. Barbs! What do you mean, a tip? It's gleaming. Like a ship. There's not a saucepan in sight.

Barbara (*off*) No, well, it's tiny. I have to keep it straight. Otherwise it's a nightmare. I'd never find anything.

Nikki Look at all those knives standing to attention. Like they're on parade. Oh, it's all beautiful, Barbs.

Barbara (*off*) Thank you. You see those shelves out there? I put them up myself. I'm very proud of them.

Nikki (*looking*) What these? Brilliant.

Barbara (*off*) Gilbert says they're going to fall down any day but I put that down to pure male jealousy.

Nikki I didn't know you were practical as well. I mean, at school you were always the brains, but I didn't realize you were practical …

Barbara (*off*) You live on your own you just get on with it, don't you? Can't call someone in every time you need to change a lightbulb.

Nikki (*wandering away towards the bedroom*) I have to.

Barbara (*off*) No, you don't.
Nikki I can't do anything. I just lie on the floor and scream.
Barbara (*off*) Then you're just playing helpless little woman, Nix. Shame on you. I can't be doing with that. Lapsang Souchong or Earl Grey?
Nikki Not fussy.
Barbara (*off*) Come on, quickly. Which? Which? Which?
Nikki (*pulling a face*) Earl Grey, please, senior prefect. (*Inspecting the bedroom from the doorway*) Oh, this is sweet. What a pretty little bedroom! I love it, everything here's so diddy.

Barbara emerges from the kitchen

Barbara Diddy?
Nikki You know. Like a doll's house. Diddy.
Barbara Why shouldn't it be? I'm quite diddy.
Nikki I suppose when you're used to living with men, you get used to everything on a massive scale. *Huge* chairs and *vast* beds. Great big cupboards filled with *enormous* trousers.

Barbara returns to the kitchen

Barbara (*off*) Well, I couldn't have a man here. There's no room.
Nikki There certainly isn't. It makes me feel even more vast. (*Inspecting the other door*) And this is the bathroom. Look at this dinky winky little bathroom. And look at that little bath. Can you actually bath in that?
Barbara (*off*) Yes. I can bath in that. Every morning. Very comfortably. I wish you'd stop trying to make out I'm some sort of mini-freak.
Nikki I'm not! I love it. I'm terribly jealous, Barbs. Mind you, I could never keep the place as tidy as this. I never could. It would be total chaos in ten minutes. I think you're terribly lucky.

Barbara comes out of the kitchen with a tray of tea things

Barbara (*putting the tray down*) It's not luck. It's simple choice. I chose. I chose to live alone. I can choose how I live. Better let this brew for a second. No, we all have a choice. Live alone or compromise. Take your pick. You want to compromise, that's your choice. (*She sits*)
Nikki I don't necessarily want to compromise. It's just that I can't live on my own.
Barbara Of course you can.
Nikki I can't. I've tried it. I — wilt.
Barbara (*irritably*) Nonsense. That's just pathetic.
Nikki (*meekly*) We aren't all as strong as you, Barbs. (*Looking at her affectionately*) You're just the same, aren't you?

Barbara How do you mean?
Nikki You know. Spiky.
Barbara Spiky?
Nikki You were like that at school, too.
Barbara At St Gert's? No, I wasn't.
Nikki You were even known as Spike. That was your nickname. Spike.
Barbara Spike? What are you talking about? Nobody ever called me Spike.
Nikki Not to your face they didn't. You were a prefect. We were just fourth-formers.
Barbara And you called me Spike?
Nikki Yes. It was meant affectionately.
Barbara Doesn't sound it.
Nikki Well, it was. We were all madly in love with you.
Barbara Who were?
Nikki The fourth form.
Barbara In love with me?
Nikki You know. Only crushes. We thought you were wonderful. We all had wild dreams of being carried off by Spike.
Barbara I'm glad I never knew.
Nikki God, we'd never have told you. We were all far too terrified.
Barbara Of me?
Nikki You were so fierce. And clever. And strong. And honest. We adored you. We'd have died at your feet. The whole of St Gert's, practically.
Barbara (*dubious*) They really were terribly unhealthy, those single-sex schools, weren't they? Thank God they're dying out. Lemon?
Nikki Please. (*Sadly*) Yes, poor old St Gertrude's. All closed up now.
Barbara Yes.
Nikki Once Miss Tong died …
Barbara (*recalling*) Miss Tong. Yes …

Gilbert starts downstairs, carrying his toolbox

Nikki Remember Miss Tong? (*Chanting*) Good-morning, Miss Tong …
Barbara What have they done with the building, do you know? Pulled it down?
Nikki No. It's a Centre for Business Studies or something now, I think. Something like that.
Barbara Good job, too. Good riddance.
Nikki Oh, come on, Barbs. It was great fun.
Barbara I didn't realize I was an object of fourth-form lust, I must say.
Nikki Oh, really! It was a phase. If it hadn't been you it would have been somebody else.

Gilbert knocks on the door

Barbara (*calling*) Hallo?

Gilbert (*calling through the door*) It's all working now, Barbara. It should be all right now.

Barbara (*rising and opening her door*) Oh, thank you, Gilbert. You're brilliant.

Gilbert holds up a tiny piece of plumbing

Gilbert There he is, you see. The guilty man. That's the guilty party. This little fellow. Return valve. You get me? Jammed solid.

Barbara Oh, yes, horrid.

Gilbert I've by-passed it temporarily, Barbara. I'll pop in the shop on the way back from work, get you a new one tomorrow.

Barbara I don't know what I'd do without you, Gilbert.

Gilbert Oh, you're not that hopeless, Barbara. Don't give me that. (*To Nikki through the doorway*) She's not that hopeless, look at her shelves there, eh?

Nikki Hallo.

Gilbert How do you do. Gilbert Fleet.

Barbara Oh, Gilbert, this is Nikki. Nikki — what do you call yourself these days?

Nikki I'm back to my own name. For the time being. Nikki Wickstead. Hallo.

Gilbert Hallo. You're taking the flat upstairs, so I understand?

Nikki Yes. With my — fiancé. Just until our house is ready.

Gilbert Right. Right. That's nice. See a bit of you then, I expect.

Nikki I hope so.

Gilbert Nice and warm up there now, anyway. Will be in half an hour. Moving in tomorrow, are you?

Nikki Yes. Sometime in the afternoon. We have to check out of our hotel at noon. Pick up the rest of our stuff from the store …

Gilbert Good bit of luggage, then?

Nikki Quite a bit.

Gilbert Bang on my door. I'll give you a hand with your luggage. I'm home by one.

Nikki Well, there's no need for ——

Gilbert My pleasure. We are on this earth but once …

Barbara That's very kind, Gilbert, thank you.

Gilbert It's a lonely old world if we can't help each other along the way.

Nikki Yes …

Barbara Well. (*Attempting to close the door, gently*) Till tomorrow then.

Gilbert Oh, Barbara, I'll be going past the charity shop Friday. If you've got any stuff for them, I can drop it off for you.

Barbara Yes, I have as matter of fact. I've just been chucking out some of my summer clothes. I'll leave them out for you.

Gilbert Just sling them in a bag as usual.
Barbara I will.
Gilbert Just bung them in a bag, Barbara.
Barbara Yes. 'Night 'night, Gilbert. See you later.

Gilbert goes off downstairs

Barbara closes the door. The women look at each other and laugh

Nikki (*giggling*) Yes. I can see he might not be quite your type.

They laugh some more

I'm so pleased to see you, Barbs. I've really missed you, you know.
Barbara Yes, I've — I've missed you, too. Letters aren't the same, are they?
Nikki No. So you're entirely a hermit, then.
Barbara No, I'm not a hermit, not at all. Don't keep on about it. I just don't want some heavy relationship. I've been very lucky. I've never felt the need.
Nikki Don't you get lonely sometimes?
Barbara I have my work. I have Marcus to look after.
Nikki Oh, yes. The famous Marcus. Still the same boss then?
Barbara I suppose you could call him that. Technically. We're more of a team, really. The fact is, Marcus can't move without me. He says these days I actually get his thoughts just before he does. It's extraordinary.
Nikki How old is he?
Barbara (*airily*) Heavens, I don't know. Forty-five — fifty. I don't know. (*Slight pause*) I think he's forty-eight. Next April. The sixteenth. He's an Aries. Why?
Nikki Nothing.
Barbara Oh, don't be so corny, Nikki. For goodness' sake. He's got this beautiful young wife. He has Miriam. He has three children. He's got everything in the world he could possibly want ——
Nikki And he has you looking after him at work. Lucky old him.
Barbara That's my job. Anyway. Enough of me. What about you? Are you over it all now? It sounded a nightmare.
Nikki Oh, God. Don't. I've been through hell, Barbara. It was absolute unmitigated hell. I don't want to talk about it. I wrote you everything, anyway. In boring, boring detail.
Barbara I did warn you.
Nikki Everybody did, Barbs. My mother warned me. All my friends warned me. But, you know what it is when you're in love like that — No, you probably don't, do you? You've been lucky. Well, it blinds you. Like they

always say it does. No, it really does, Barbs. Stop looking like that. It does. I knew Micky was violent. That he had this terrible temper — he was in a fight the very first time I first met him.

Barbara Micky was?

Nikki He was always — getting into quarrels. He'd drink and then he'd lash out. But never — never with me.

Barbara I thought that was the point. He did.

Nikki Well, only later. Yes, eventually he did. He broke my jaw and put me in hospital for three weeks but — that was only towards the end.

Barbara I hope so.

Nikki He was only mentally cruel to start with. He'd lock me in cupboards and things. You know, Barbs, I still ask myself: Was it partly me? Did I provoke him somehow? Was some of it my own fault?

Barbara (*angrily*) Oh, for God's sake, Nix …

Nikki No, no. Listen. I'm serious. Am I a born victim, Barbs? That's what I ask myself sometimes. Do I bring out the worst in people? I mean, it happened before Micky with other men, in minor ways. Not as violent as him. But they used to throw things at me. I'm wondering if it's me.

Barbara God, this makes me mad. I'm sorry this sort of talk just makes me absolutely hopping mad, I'm sorry. No, you are not a born victim, Nix. You do not deserve to be struck by any human being, male or female. Or indeed have things thrown at you or be shut in cupboards. There is no excuse for anyone ever to strike another person, and certainly not in a relationship which is supposedly based on trust and respect and love. There, end of lecture.

Nikki But it all happens *because* of love, Barbs. Don't you see?

Barbara (*impatiently*) Where's this man of yours? Is he coming or isn't he?

Nikki I'm sorry. Have I made you cross?

Barbara No, no, not at all. I just don't want to talk about it.

Nikki I have. I've made you angry, I'm sorry. Please don't be cross with me.

Barbara I'm not cross.

Nikki I always hated it when you got like this. Come on, we haven't seen each other for eleven years, you know. Please, Barbs.

Barbara Is it really eleven years?

Nikki You came and saw us off at the airport.

Barbara Yes. You and that ——

Nikki Micky. Yes. (*A little tearfully*) We were so happy then … I did try, Barbs. Really I did. I put up with it for six years, you know.

Barbara Well, you're all right now, aren't you? You've got — thingumabob, haven't you? Hamish. So come on. Brighten up.

Nikki Oh, I'm so pathetic sometimes, aren't I? No wonder people punch me. Never mind, Barbs, it's all going to change, I promise. You're right. I've got dear, sweet Hamish now. I have to keep pinching myself to remind me

I've got Hamish. I've been rewarded, Barbs. I wake up in the night and there he is. On the pillow beside me. God, he smells so beautiful. I look at it this way, Barbs. I've been through the valley of pain and unhappiness. I've lived in the shadow of loneliness for so long. Now at last the sun has started to shine for me again.

Barbara I think you've been living in Norway far too long if you ask me. Is Hamish Norwegian, by the way? I never asked.

Nikki Oh, no.

Barbara He sounds more Scottish.

Nikki He is sort of Scottish, yes. Both his parents were Scottish.

Barbara I think that makes him Scottish then, doesn't it?

Nikki Well, he doesn't sound Scottish. Not terribly Scottish, anyway. But he's so gorgeous, Barbara. He is, he's really, really dishy. He's kind and he's gentle and he's patient with me. He's got this wonderful tender humour. And he's everything that Micky wasn't.

Barbara He hasn't shut you in the wardrobe yet. Let's put it that way.

Nikki Of course he hasn't. Don't even say that. He treats me like — royalty. He says I'm his porcelain princess.

Barbara Oh, yes?

Nikki Don't tell him I told you.

Barbara I wouldn't dream of it. If a man called me that, I'd knock his teeth out.

Nikki Oh, Barbs!

Barbara Porcelain princess. You're both batty. How old is he?

Nikki About — about your age.

Barbara And he's never been married before?

Nikki (*guardedly*) Yes. But they're separated.

Barbara And why did they separate? Do you know?

Nikki Well, yes. Me. He left Sonja for me.

Barbara I see.

Nikki She was Norwegian. It was a dead marriage. I didn't break it up or anything. It was totally dead. She was horrible to him. You've no idea.

Barbara Just so long as you're sure. Don't go through all that again, Nix. Be very certain this time, won't you?

Nikki I am, Barbs. This time I really, really am. Wait till you see him. You'll understand. I really do love him.

Barbara Enough to marry him?

Nikki Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. Have you never been in love, Barbs? Ever?

Barbara I don't think so. If I have been, I haven't noticed.

Nikki Oh, you'd notice. I promise. You'd notice.

Barbara Too late now.

Nikki What?

Barbara Past all that, thank you very much. Give me a nice book, a hot water bottle, a bit of good music, that's all I want.

Nikki What do you — I have to ask you — have you never had — never ...?
Barbara If you're asking if I've ever had sexual intercourse, Nix, the answer is yes. And it really wasn't worth the time or effort.
Nikki How often?
Barbara Enough. Enough to know. Once or twice.
Nikki No, I mean was it ongoing or just the odd one-night stand?
Barbara I can't remember, Nix. Why are you asking all this?
Nikki I just think you probably haven't given it a proper try, that's all.
Barbara Well, once was at St Gertrude's with the caretaker's son. That was the first time.
Nikki What, with the Coote? With Barry Coote?
Barbara I think that was his name.
Nikki He said he had. He told us he had. We wouldn't believe him.
Barbara He told you?
Nikki "I've had 'er. I've had 'er," he said. "I had your Spike." And we said, "Bollocks, Barry. Go and screw yourself."
Barbara I can't believe he told you.
Nikki That's amazing. Was he any good?
Barbara He had a nose bleed in the middle, I think. It was all very messy. I've wiped it from my memory completely.
Nikki And the other time?
Barbara Other time?
Nikki You said once or twice. What was the twice?
Barbara (*after a moment*) That was it.
Nikki Just Barry Coote?
Barbara Yes.
Nikki Oh, Barbs, that's so sad. The sum of your whole love life is Barry Coote. That's so, so *sad.*
Barbara What's sad about it? Don't you start pitying me, Nix. It's you who ought to be pitied. Wasting your life ducking plates and being beaten up. I'm fine. Don't worry about me.
Nikki There are other times. Good times ...
Barbara I'll do without them. I've got this far. The only reason would have been to have had children and I can't stand them so that's fine. My role in life is to stay single and take care of romantic little fools like you.
Nikki (*smiling happily*) We used to talk like this in the old days, didn't we? Before I went away. You used to tell me off then. You used to get so cross with me. Nothing's changed, has it? (*Taking Barbara's hands*) Nothing's changed between us. Isn't that wonderful?

The doorbell rings

Oh. That'll be Hamish. Shall I let him in? (*Excitedly*) Wait till you see him.

Nikki goes out of the flat and opens the outer front door. Barbara moves to her mirror and, despite her apparent indifference to all this, checks her appearance

Hamish is on the doorstep. If he can't quite live up to Nikki's build-up (who could?) he is both charming and good-looking

Hamish Hi! Sorry, darling. Traffic. I couldn't get a cab.

Nikki nuzzles up to him at once. They kiss

Nikki Missed you, big bear.
Hamish Missed you, princess.

They both go through their little semi-secret loving mantra

Nikki Love you, love you, love you!
Hamish Want you, want you, want you!
Nikki Need you, need you, need you!

They kiss again. Barbara is now in her doorway looking on rather disapprovingly. Hamish finally sees her over Nikki's shoulder

Hamish Oh, I'm sorry.
Barbara Hallo.
Nikki Barbs, this is Hamish.
Barbara Hallo.
Nikki Hamish, this is Barbara, my very, very, very best friend.
Hamish (*charmingly, taking Barbara's hand*) Hallo, I've heard a lot about you.
Barbara (*smiling*) Jolly good. Do come in.
Hamish Thank you.

They all go into Barbara's flat

(*As they do so*) What a lovely area round here. I don't really know this part of London. It's really very peaceful.
Barbara Not too bad. It can get rowdy. On Saturdays, mainly. If there's football. We're not far from the ground. Then we get all those drunks.
Hamish Oh, this is beautiful. What a lovely room.
Barbara Thank you.
Nikki (*proudly*) It's all Barbara. All of it's Barbs.
Barbara With a little help from Peter Jones.

Nikki Is he your architect?
Barbara No, he's a shop.
Hamish Peter Jones, darling, you know.
Nikki Oh, yes, I know. Sorry. That Peter Jones.
Hamish I must congratulate you.
Nikki She's brilliant. She put those shelves up herself as well, darling.
Hamish Amazing. That's impressive. More than I could do. You'll have to forgive me, Barbara, I'm particularly interested at the moment in looking at other people's ideas. Everywhere I go I find I'm checking their wallpaper. (*He laughs*) As Nikki probably told you, we're right in the middle of decorating our own house.
Barbara Yes, she's told me all about it.
Hamish Yes, I feel this place is your centre. You must feel very centred here. (*He goes to sit on the upright chair*)
Barbara (*sharply*) No, not there if you don't mind.

Hamish jumps up

I'm afraid that won't take any sort of weight. Sorry.
Hamish Right. Understood.
Nikki (*puzzled*) What's it there for, then?
Barbara Well, not for sitting on.
Nikki But it's a chair.
Barbara Yes, it's a chair for — putting things on.
Nikki That's silly.
Hamish No, no. I can see that, darling. It's more an ornament than a chair. It's a — it's a chornament. (*He smiles*)
Nikki (*laughing*) *A* chornament.
Barbara (*unamused*) You want to look at the upstairs flat?
Hamish Oh, yes, thank you. It's so kind of you to — I hope Nikki explained. As soon as the builders are out we'll be moving into our place, but there are the usual delays. In the meantime, thank you. Really.
Barbara You are paying, of course. For the flat.
Hamish Oh, yes. All the same ...
Barbara I mean, it's not free ...
Hamish No, of course not. That's understood ...
Barbara I mean, I didn't want a misunderstanding ...
Nikki No. We're paying, Barbs, we're paying. It's all right.
Barbara You're not paying very much but ... Mind you, once you've seen it, you might decide you don't want it at all.
Nikki No, we'll love it, I'm sure. If it's anything like this ...
Barbara It isn't. I have to warn you it's disgusting. It's absolutely filthy. But I will give it a thorough clean tonight, I promise.

Hamish Oh, there's no need.
Barbara There's every need. Wait till you see it.
Hamish Barbara, may I just say this? This is a beautiful house. We're both very grateful to you for sharing it with us, and of course we want to pay our share. You've also been a great friend and support to Nikki at a very difficult time in her life. I don't want to break a confidence, but I can tell you she did read me parts of your letters to her. They were really a tremendous help. I love her very dearly and I want to thank you for that on behalf of us both.

Nikki takes Hamish's hand

Barbara (*unimpressed, smiling*) Yes. Well, this time I'm here to keep an eye on her personally, aren't I? Shall we go up? (*Waving Hamish ahead*) Please. Lead on. It's the door at the top of the stairs.
Nikki After you, darling.

Hamish starts up the stairs, leading the way. Nikki follows him

(*Turning back to Barbara, in an excited whisper*) Isn't he gorgeous?

As they continue up the stairs, the Lights fade

Scene 2

The same. Tuesday 11th October. 5 p.m.

Gilbert and Hamish are struggling up the stairs with a trunk

Nikki's feet are seen upstairs as she busily unpacks things. She is wearing her jeans. The most noticeable change is that the upstairs bed now sports a new, brightly coloured bedspread

The men pause for breath on the stairs, putting down the trunk

Hamish (*breathless*) Just a minute. Out of condition. I'll have to start playing squash again.
Gilbert Did you play squash in Norway, Hamish?
Hamish Not a lot, Gilbert, no. Right. Here we go again. Ready?
Gilbert Right.
Hamish One, two ... hup...

They lift the trunk again

Gilbert (*as they struggle*) What is it you do then, Hamish? What line are you in?
Hamish Well, I'm technically an oceanographer ...
Gilbert Oh, right ...
Hamish I was over there attached to the university ... but I've got side-tracked into other things of late.
Gilbert Deep-sea diving. Submarines. That sort of thing?
Hamish No, more sitting behind a desk really. I'm about to work for the government ...
Gilbert Oh, dear. (*He laughs*)

Nikki appears at the top of the stairs

Nikki Do you need a hand?
Hamish No, no. We're all right, darling. If you don't mind my asking, though, what the hell have you got in here?
Nikki Everything I own in the world.
Hamish (*as they struggle up*) I thought you said you didn't own anything.
Nikki That trunk and a few cardboard boxes ...
Hamish I ask you, what a dowry, eh? All right — to me ...

They squeeze through the door of the upstairs flat

Gilbert To you ...
Hamish Up a bit ... mind the door ...
Nikki (*ineffectually instructing them*) Through you go. That's it! ... keep straight on ... that's it ... that's it ... straight on, keep straight.... that's it ...
Hamish (*only mildly irritated by this*) Yes, all right, darling. We've got it. It's OK.
Nikki That's it, that's it! Down here.

They set the trunk down

Hamish Whooorr!
Nikki Well done. You all right, darling?
Hamish Yes, I'm fine, darling.
Nikki Only I don't want you to do your back again ...
Hamish No, I'm fine. Really.
Nikki He's got a bad back.
Hamish No, I haven't got a bad back, darling. Not any more.
Gilbert You shouldn't be lifting that. Not with a bad back. You should have said. I'd have done it on my own. I'll change that plug for you next, Nikki.
Hamish No, I can do that, Gilbert, really ...

Gilbert (*leaving*) Just get my tools.
Nikki (*after him*) I've put it on the side here. I bought the plug. Though I wasn't sure about the fuse. It's a hair-drier.
Gilbert (*going downstairs*) Don't you worry, Nikki. I've got fuses.

Gilbert goes down to his flat and disappears for a time

Nikki kneels and starts to try and unlock her trunk

Nikki (*as she does so*) He's so kind, isn't he?
Hamish Oh, yes.
Nikki You forget how kind people can be sometimes. Look, darling.
Hamish What's that, darling?
Nikki The bedspread we bought. Look. Doesn't it look good?
Hamish Oh, yes. Makes a great difference. Lightens the place up a bit.
Nikki It is a bit pokey here, isn't it? After Oslo. But I think we'll cope.
Hamish It's only for a day or two.

He sees she is in difficulty with the trunk keys and kneels beside her

Here. Let me do that. (*He takes over the job of unlocking the trunk*)
Nikki (*kissing him*) Thank you, darling. Barbs should be home in a minute.
Hamish Mmm. Mmm.
Nikki I'll ask her about that electric meter.
Hamish I think you need a new lock on this, darling.
Nikki You didn't really take to her, did you? Barbs?
Hamish She's all right.
Nikki No, you disliked her, big bear. I could tell.
Hamish I didn't. I just … didn't instantly warm to her. She's quite hostile, isn't she?
Nikki She can be, I suppose. No, not really.
Hamish Maybe it's just men. She certainly didn't warm to me. As soon as we met she seemed to want to put me down.
Nikki No …
Hamish That's the impression I got.
Nikki She liked you.
Hamish (*unconvinced*) Really?
Nikki Yes. She said she thought you were gorgeous.
Hamish (*disbelievingly*) Oh, yes. (*He opens the trunk*) There you are.
Nikki Well done.
Hamish I wouldn't try locking it again.
Nikki No, I won't. I'd love you and Barbara to get on. She's been such a good friend. My only real friend now. I've lost touch with the rest.

Hamish I appreciate you're both very close. I wouldn't want to damage the friendship. I just can't see what you can like in the woman.
Nikki It's just her manner, darling. She doesn't mean it. And she's let us have this flat, hasn't she?
Hamish For a price.
Nikki Quite a small price.
Hamish It's quite a small flat.
Nikki Not for London, it isn't. Pity about having no bath, though.
Hamish Well, we'll shower. We can shower, can't we?
Nikki I love being in the bath together.
Hamish We can shower together instead. Let's be adventurous. Let's get vertical for a bit. (*He kisses her*)
Nikki Oh, you big gruffly bear … You're all prickly …

Hamish growls and gently lays her on her back

What are you doing?
Hamish (*growling*) Big bear's here to eat the princess … (*He growls again*)
Nikki No. No, big bear, not now. Not now. Don't eat the pwincess now. No, no, no, no …

Hamish growls again and stifles her protests with a kiss

(*Making muffled sounds*) … we mustn't. (*Ineffectually*) No … no …

Hamish starts the awkward task of removing her jeans whilst unfastening his own

As this is happening, Barbara lets herself in through the front door. She is dressed for work. Simultaneously Gilbert comes out of his flat with his tool box

Gilbert 'Evening, Barbara.
Barbara Oh, hallo, Gilbert. Are they … ?
Gilbert Yes, they're moved in. Upstairs unpacking. I'm just going to do their plug. (*He starts up the stairs*)
Barbara (*letting herself into her flat, calling after him*) Super. Tell them there's a cup of tea down here if they'd like one.

Nikki and Hamish stop and listen, frozen

Gilbert (*calling down*) I'll tell them, Barbara …
Hamish Shit!

The two scramble hastily to their feet, adjusting their dress

Barbara meanwhile goes into her bedroom removing her coat

Gilbert knocks politely on the upstairs flat door and enters

Gilbert Only me. Back again.
Hamish Come in, come in.
Nikki Hallo.
Gilbert Do your plug, then you're all set, aren't you, Nikki?
Nikki Thank you. It's just my hair-drier.

During the next, Barbara comes out of the bedroom and goes into her kitchen

Gilbert Can't do without your hair-drier, Nikki, can we? Barbara says there's a cup of tea downstairs if you'd like one.
Nikki Oh, really? How kind. Did you hear that, Hamish?
Hamish Mmm?
Nikki Barbs is making us a cup of tea.
Hamish Oh, great.
Nikki Want to go down? Leave Gilbert in peace?
Gilbert Don't mind me, Nikki.
Nikki Coming then, darling?
Hamish Yes, all right, darling.
Nikki We'll see you in a minute, Gilbert.
Gilbert All right, Nikki. You carry on.

Hamish and Nikki start down the stairs

Nikki (*softly, as they go*) Do you think he saw us?

Hamish shrugs

We'll have to thank him somehow, you know.
Hamish How do you mean?
Nikki You know. Thank him.
Hamish We do. We do nothing else but thank him. We've been saying thank you to him all afternoon.
Nikki You know what I mean, darling.
Hamish You mean money?
Nikki No, I don't think so. He'd probably be very hurt.
Hamish Why should he be hurt?

Nikki Well. He's a postman. (*Knocking on Barbara's door, coo-ing*) Hallo!
Barbara (*off, from the kitchen*) Come in. Kettle's just boiling.
Nikki (*softly again to Hamish*) No, I didn't mean money. I meant possibly offer him a meal or something.
Hamish A meal. My God! Couldn't we make it a snack? Listen, we're not going to make a habit of coming down here, are we?

Barbara comes out of the kitchen

Barbara Hallo. Welcome. Come in. (*Embracing Nikki*) Hallo, Nix darling.
Nikki Hi, Barbs darling. Mmm, you smell good.

Hamish watches this, expressionless

Barbara The usual old pong. (*Rather more formally*) Hallo, Hamish. How are you?
Hamish (*likewise*) Very well, thank you, Barbara.
Barbara Do sit down, both of you.
Hamish Thank you. (*Indicating the sofa*) Safe to sit here, is it?
Barbara Sorry?
Nikki Sit down, darling.

Hamish and Nikki sit together on the sofa

Barbara I can see I won't hear the end of that. Tea won't be a second. It's just boiling. Moved in all right, have you?
Nikki Yes. Wonderful.
Hamish We were just wondering about the electric meter, Barbara. It seems to be set a little high.
Barbara Really?
Hamish It appears to be charging about two pounds a minute. And that's just with a sixty-watt bulb burning. We're a little nervous about opening the fridge in case the light goes on.
Barbara Well, I'll have a look. Nobody else has complained. I think you're beginning to talk a little like a true Scotsman, Hamish.
Hamish No, I think I'm just talking a little like a man on a finite income, Barbara.

They laugh

Barbara I'll have a look.
Nikki Thank you so much. We were just saying how ——
Barbara (*indicating Nikki's jeans*) Darling, your zip's undone.
Nikki (*flustered*) Oh, yes. Sorry. (*She does up her zip*) It's always doing that.

Hamish (*winking at Barbara*) I prefer it that way. Ease of access.

Nikki gives a shocked giggle. Barbara is not amused

Nikki You had a good day, Barbs? Good day at work?
Barbara No, I didn't as a matter of fact. Kind of you to ask, but if you must know it was an appalling day. I have a new assistant who frankly should be taken out and shot.
Hamish Poor chap.
Barbara She's a woman, actually. Well, a girl. Her name's Devonia Hargreaves. Says it all really, doesn't it?
Nikki You can't help your name, can you? Look at me. Nikki Wickstead. Nix Wicks. (*She laughs*)
Hamish Is that what you were called at school? (*He laughs*) Nix Wicks?
Barbara I think it was No Nix Wicks at one stage, wasn't it?
Hamish Still is.
Nikki (*giggling, loving to be teased*) Oh, stop it. Stop it, both of you.
Hamish Yes, I'm only kidding, darling.
Nikki I wear knickers.
Barbara Just as well you do. Oh, there's the kettle. Excuse me.

Barbara goes out to the kitchen

Hamish (*under his breath*) Jesus Christ!
Nikki What, darling?
Hamish Nothing, darling.
Nikki Anyway. It'll soon be Nix Alexander, won't it?
Barbara (*off, from the kitchen*) Earl Grey all right for everyone?
Hamish You don't have ordinary by any chance?
Barbara (*off*) What do you mean by ordinary? I've got Lapsang Souchong.
Hamish Er — no, thanks. (*Sotto voce*) An ordinary bloody Tesco tea bag, what does she think I mean?
Barbara (*off*) Herbal? Peppermint? Raspberry?
Hamish (*loudly*) No. Earl Grey's fine, Barbara.
Barbara (*off*) Right. Won't be a second.
Nikki (*sotto voce*) Darling, don't be naughty now. (*Loudly*) Hamish likes plain ordinary tea, Barbs. You know, good old Assam. Hot and strong.
Barbara (*off*) Oh, workman's tea, you mean? Well, jolly good, why not?

Hamish stares at the ceiling

Barbara enters with the tea tray

Here we are. Those are cinnamon biscuits. They're quite nice. Home made.

Nikki Did you make them yourself, Barbs?
Barbara No, of course I didn't, I bought them. I've no time to make biscuits. Lemon?
Hamish Milk, please.
Barbara Milk. Right. I'll get some.
Nikki No, I'll get it, Barbs.
Hamish No, please. Lemon's fine.
Barbara You sure? It's no trouble. (*As she pours*) Now, I was going to say to you, you must come and have dinner one evening. Perhaps towards the end of the week. Yes?
Hamish Er ...
Nikki Oh, that would be lovely.
Barbara Super.
Nikki We really ought to be taking you out though, Barbs.
Barbara No, no, no. I'd love to cook you dinner. I insist.
Nikki Well. Thank you. We'll just have to be careful as far as Hamish is concerned.
Barbara Why's that?
Nikki He's vegetarian.
Barbara Oh my God, he's not? You're joking. Really? You can't be?
Hamish Why not?
Nikki What's wrong?
Barbara Well ...
Nikki What?
Barbara Oh, I don't know. It just sort of generally irritates me, that's all. I mean, I'm sure you have very good reasons, Hamish, but I don't believe half the people you read about these days are vegetarians at all. It's a trend. They just love being trendy, don't they? I think most of it's affectation.
Hamish Affectation? What do you mean? What's affected about choosing not to eat animals.
Barbara Well, for heaven's sake, if we weren't meant to eat animals, then there wouldn't be any animals, would there?
Hamish There wouldn't be any animals specially bred for food, no.
Barbara No, I mean nature wouldn't have made any animals in the first place, would she?
Hamish I'm not following this at all ...
Nikki Now, now, now ...
Barbara Well, what else are animals there for? If not to eat? Tell me that?
Hamish I don't believe I'm having this conversation ...
Nikki Barbs ...
Barbara I mean, what earthly use is a cow except to eat? I mean, they just stand there, don't they? Devouring grass. What else are they there for?
Hamish Look, I don't want to get into this.

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