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SF PERUSALS

NO SEX, PLEASE– WE'RE BRITISH

A Comedy

by Anthony Marriott and Alistair Foot

SAMUEL FRENCH

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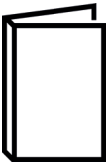
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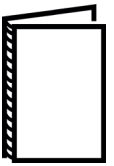
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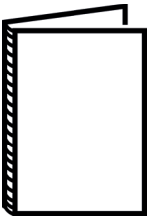
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NO SEX, PLEASE–WE'RE BRITISH

First presented by John Gale for Volcano Productions Ltd, on June 3rd, 1971 at the Strand Theatre, London, with the following cast of characters:

PETER HUNTER	Anthony Valentine
FRANCES HUNTER	Linda Thorson
ELEANOR HUNTER	Evelyn Laye
BRIAN RUNNICLES	Michael Crawford
LESLIE BROMHEAD	Richard Caldicot
SUPERINTENDENT PAUL	Gordon Whiting
MR NEEDHAM	Dennis Ramsden
SUSAN	Janet Mahoney
BARBARA	Vikki Richards
DELIVERY MAN	David Shaw

The play directed by Allan Davis
Setting by Hutchinson Scott

The action passes in a flat over a sub-branch of the National United Bank in a respectable town in the Thames Valley

ACT I
Scene One A Monday in June, 9 a.m.
Scene Two Early evening, two days later

ACT II Later the same night

Time – the present

ACT I

Scene One

The curtain rises on an empty set. It is the main living area of a medium-sized flat over a sub-branch of the National United Bank on the outskirts of a respectable town in the Thames Valley. The flat has been nicely modernized and converted from the Georgian original and the overall effect is of warmth and comfort but not opulence. The furniture is all new—mostly modern and in good taste. Down left a door opens off stage into the second bedroom. Up left centre a door gives access to the main bedroom. Next to it—and set back facing the audience—is the front door leading to a passage and then (ostensibly) stairs down to the ground floor. Adjoining the front door is a flight of stairs leading to a small landing and a return. Next to the stairs are the double swing doors to the kitchen. Facing the audience is a dining counter between the main living area and the kitchen. The opening is at present almost completely obscured by an attractive wooden hatch. In front of the kitchen counter there is a fold down table and two chairs. Next to the kitchen hatchway is a door opening into the bathroom and lavatory. The only other remaining door is half-way down right which leads into the study.

The rest of the furniture and fittings include a small desk and chair adjoining, a studio couch with a long stool in front of it; a rocking chair, a trolley set with drinks with a portable television on the lower shelf, and a long occasional table behind the settee. When the hatch is up we can see the interior of a luxury kitchen with two sinks,

fitted cupboards, electric cooker and so on. On one side of the main door there is a wall speaker connected to the bank below. When it is used, the voices on the other end can be heard quite clearly. On the other side of the main door there is a telephone which connects to the speaker downstairs outside the side door of the bank. Voices will also be heard clearly on this. The telephone is used for identification and there is a downstairs door release switch by the side of it. There is no fireplace in the room. Artificial light is mainly provided, when required, by wall lights and table lamps.

There is a moment's silence and then we hear voices from behind the hatch.

PETER *(offstage)* ...Frances, more coffee darling?

FRANCES *(offstage)* I'll do it, Peter. You eat your cornflakes.

PETER *(offstage)* Thanks.

FRANCES *(offstage)* It's all right. Sit still. I can reach over.

PETER *(offstage)* Sure you can manage, dar...? *(He stops in mid-word. There is a silence)*

FRANCES *(offstage)* Wait a moment—your tiepin—it's caught on me.

As **FRANCES** *attempts to free* **PETER***'s tiepin from her dressing-gown, the counter hatch suddenly shoots up.* **PETER** *is a bright and energetic young executive who is clearly going a long way with the National United Bank. He has a good sense of humour and is normally sensible and stable although these qualities are shortly to be tested to the limit. He is fully dressed in a nicely cut business suit with white shirt and silk tie.*

FRANCES *is attractive, vivacious and uninhibited. She is resourceful, amusing and very much a girl of today. They are a normal, happy, newly married couple—and enjoying it. They do not have an obsession with sex—for*

its own sake—but they have a warm and healthy relationship and this cannot help but colour the breakfast-time conversation which is otherwise very matter of fact. It is not so much what is said and done but the way it is said and done. **FRANCES**, *who wears only an attractive dressing-gown, and* **PETER** *are both sun-tanned.* **FRANCES** *is distracted for a moment by the hatch.*

What is the matter with that thing? It seems to be taking on a life of its own.

PETER Must be something to do with the counterweights. I'll try and fix it tonight. *(He goes to pour himself another mug of coffee)*

FRANCES Don't move, darling. There's a thread caught on your tiepin. *(She moves in very close to him and frees the clip)*

PETER My God, look at the time. *(He comes out of the kitchen carrying his mug of coffee)* Now have I got my keys with me? Yes. Frances, where did I put my briefcase?

FRANCES Where you left it on Friday night.

PETER Where I left it on... Oh, yes. *(He picks up the briefcase and checks the contents)*

FRANCES *meanwhile comes out of the kitchen with the tiepin.*

FRANCES I can't think why you bother to bring it upstairs at all. I mean you never get round to opening it until Monday morning, do you?

PETER I don't suppose I do—and I can't think why.

The hatch starts to creep down.

(indicating the hatch) Darling.

FRANCES *(pushing the hatch up)* You will see to this thing tonight, won't you, darling?

PETER *(gulping his coffee)* Yes, yes I will.

FRANCES Oh, and the waste disposal needs greasing and that speaker thing— *(Indicates the door intercom)* —needs fixing, I think it's got a loose connection.

PETER Now I know why I never get round to opening my briefcase.

FRANCES So do I... *(Looking at the tiepin)* This tiepin's got an inscription on it. *(Reading) Ex nihilo* what?

PETER *"Ex nihilo, nihilfit."* It's the bank motto: From nothing, nothing comes.

FRANCES It sounds like a permanent credit squeeze. *(As she puts the tiepin on)* Why's Mr Bromhead got a gold tiepin when yours is only silver?

PETER Because he's a district branch manager and I'm only a sub-branch manager, that's why.

FRANCES Well, I think it's ridiculous—having this sort of class distinction in a bank. You haven't had your toast, Peter.

PETER I haven't got time.

FRANCES Yes, you have. I'll get it for you. *(She turns and goes back into the kitchen)*

PETER You haven't forgotten my mother's coming to lunch, have you, darling?

FRANCES No, darling.

PETER Good. Now you know she won't expect anything special—as long as it's all vegetarian. By the way, I don't think it's at all likely—but it is just possible she may want to stay the night.

FRANCES *bangs a cup and saucer on the sink.*

(hesitantly) Are you all right, darling? Did you hear what I said?

FRANCES *(appearing in the kitchen doorway with a plate of toast)* Yes, I heard what you said. You said your mother is staying the night.

PETER No, no, I didn't, darling. What I said was she…she…she might—just might—want to stay the night. I mean I don't think it's in the least likely but it is just possible. She may be too tired to go back to Chelsea.

FRANCES *(firmly and knowingly)* You mean Fulham and you mean she's staying the night.

PETER Well, even if she is, we'll still be on our own. She'll be quite happy upstairs, she told me so.

She just sits and looks at him. He flounders on.

I mean she won't want anything special… I mean she can have the Teasmaid just for one night, can't she?

She still sits and looks at him.

I mean it's not as if she's any trouble and we never use the electric blanket or the radio at night, anyway, and—and—and where are you going, darling?

FRANCES *(turning to the kitchen)* I'm going to get the Kenwood mixer, darling. She might like that as well.

PETER *(injured)* Now there's no need to be like that about it…

FRANCES *(turning back to him)* But we've only been back ten days!

The hatch on the counter shoots down suddenly unaided.

Oh, damn the hatch! You really must fix the wretched thing!

PETER I will, Frances, I definitely will. I'll do it tonight.

FRANCES Then just see that you do.

The bank buzzer sounds loudly.

PETER Hello?

BRIAN 'Morning, Peter. Don't want to intrude on the happy couple...

PETER That's all right, Brian. I was just coming down.

BRIAN *(offstage)* You do know your first appointment's at o-nine-thirty?

PETER I know—Superintendent Paul—about the police sports and social club. Thanks, Brian.

BRIAN *(offstage)* Not at all, not at all. That's what I am here for. Thank you. Good morning.

There is a click and **PETER** *hangs up.*

FRANCES Does that nosey-parker have to be so formal and pedantic every morning.

PETER You know Brian—does everything by the book. If Head Office told him to lose his virginity, he'd do it in triplicate.

FRANCES Actually, I think he's been a bit upset since you were promoted.

PETER Nonsense. He offered to be my best man, didn't he?

FRANCES Offered? Insisted! His toast to the bridesmaids had everything in it but a change in the bank rate.

PETER It wasn't that bad. I've heard worse. I can't remember exactly when but I must have heard worse. Look, I've got to get down to the bank, darling. *(He kisses her)* I'll see you at lunchtime. *(He kisses her again)*

FRANCES Aren't you going to kiss me good-bye?

PETER Yes, of course.

They go into a longer kiss.

(breaking away) Please, darling! I must get downstairs.

As **PETER** *goes to the front door and opens it,* **FRANCES** *goes towards the bathroom and then turns casually.*

FRANCES Give me a buzz if there's any post for me downstairs from London.

PETER *(turning back again)* London? Frances, you haven't started writing off for jobs, have you? Now you promised you wouldn't.

FRANCES *(wide-eyed)* No, no, I haven't been writing off for jobs, darling. I haven't, really I haven't—there was just this advertisement, you see.

PETER What advertisement?

FRANCES In the local paper. Business Opportunities. It was going to be a surprise. And it's only fifty pounds.

PETER Fifty pounds? That's not a surprise. After the cost of this furniture, it's a traumatic shock—Frances, you're not overdrawn, are you?

FRANCES Of course not, darling. I've only sent half of it. The other half's on approval.

PETER Approval? Approval of what?

FRANCES Of the stock, of course. They give you your own area. If I get it, I'll be the only one around here.

PETER Don't tell me. I can see it all now. There's your friendly bank manager in the cupboard and his wife on the doorstep as the Avon lady!

FRANCES No, no, darling. It's the Scandinavian Import Company. Glassware, I think—cutlery, that sort of thing.

PETER Whaat?

FRANCES Anyway, it's very high class. You don't call on people. You have a display and sell it from your own home.

PETER But you can't—you can't run a china shop over a bank! It's their flat. Why do you think Head Office sent poor old Carter from Ealing to Cleethorpes—almost overnight?

FRANCES Did he have an orgy in the strongroom?

PETER No. They found out about his wife's Tupperware parties. What in God's name made you think of such a thing?

FRANCES *shakes her head, goes to the studio couch and sits down on it.*

FRANCES I wanted to help us, that's all—to get a house of our own with a garden.

PETER But we've only been married three and a half weeks! We're very lucky to get a nice flat like this from the start.

FRANCES I know—but it's not ours. Who wants to live on top of their work with buzzers buzzing all the time?

PETER Oh, darling, you do exaggerate...

The bank buzzer buzzes three times, **FRANCES** *reacts.* **PETER** *jumps to the bank intercom and answers it.*

Yes?

BRIAN *(offstage)* Sorry to intrude again but Superintendent Paul's arrived early. He's due in court at o-ten-hundred.

PETER Right, right. I'm just coming down. *(He hangs up and hurries over to* **FRANCES***)* Don't worry, darling. We'll get the house and garden without your Scandinavian glass. *(He pulls her up and kisses her)* It was very thoughtful of you, anyway. Forget all about it. I'll see you at lunch. *(He kisses her)* 'Bye.

PETER *exits to the hall.*

FRANCES 'Bye, darling.

FRANCES *goes into the bathroom. Through the open door we hear her running a bath.* **FRANCES** *comes out of the bathroom. A buzzer sounds by the front door.* **FRANCES** *hurries and picks up the bank phone.*

Hello? Hello?

FRANCES *realizes it is on the front door not the bank telephone. She hangs the phone up and answers the intercom.*

Hello? Who is it?

ELEANOR *(offstage)* It's me, Frances.

FRANCES Who?

ELEANOR Me, of course, darling, Eleanor.

FRANCES *(astounded)* Eleanor! What? *(Hastily)* I mean what a nice surprise.

ELEANOR *(offstage)* Don't bother to come down, darling. Just release the door.

FRANCES Oh—oh, yes, of course.

FRANCES *switches off the intercom and presses a button by the side of it. She then goes running into the bathroom to switch off the bath. As she goes, she mutters to herself.*

How dare she! How dare she! Half past nine in the morning!

She is now in the bathroom. The water goes off. She reappears and runs across into the main bedroom.

(as she goes) It's a bit bloody much… I've no chance at all now.

FRANCES *is now in the main bedroom. There is a knock at the front door.* **FRANCES** *comes rushing out of the main bedroom, still dressed only in the dressing-gown.*

I'll tell her—I'll definitely tell her. *(She opens the door all smiles)* Hello, Eleanor. How lovely to see you so early.

ELEANOR HUNTER *enters. She is an extremely elegant, sophisticated woman in her fifties—one who has been well preserved by the West End beauty salons for years. Everything about her is in immaculate taste and expensive. When she is about she likes to do most of the talking—not because she is gushing or feather-brained*

but simply because she is a very bad listener. To her snobbery is quite natural. She is carrying a small overnight valise and a bouquet of flowers.

ELEANOR Hello, darling. *(She kisses* **FRANCES** *on the cheek)* My dear, you look radiant. How nice of you both to invite me so soon.

FRANCES Not at all.

ELEANOR I thought I might be in the way until Peter said you were insisting. It really is sweet of you.

FRANCES Not at all.

ELEANOR Of course I wouldn't have been quite so early but for my driver. My dear, thirty minutes from Chelsea! I'm sure the man thought he was Graham Hill—but he was nowhere near as good-looking unfortunately. *(Holding out the bouquet)* I've bought you a few flowers.

FRANCES How very kind. They're lovely.

ELEANOR *(suddenly noticing* **FRANCES***' strange dress)* My dear, I haven't interrupted you in the middle of anything, have I?

FRANCES No, no—I was thinking of having a bath, that's all.

ELEANOR I always have mine first thing in the morning.

FRANCES So do I usually—I'd better put these in water.

FRANCES *goes into the kitchen carrying the flowers.*

ELEANOR *(looking around her)* So this is the flat I've heard so much about? My dear, it's charming.

FRANCES *pushes up the kitchen hatch and puts the flowers in a vase, adding water from the sink.*

Absolutely charming. Hooray for Habitat and Heals! And it's so much easier to run than a house and garden and everything. And I'm sure there's masses of room for the time being.

FRANCES Yes, it's very nice while there are just two of us.

ELEANOR No hurry there, is there, darling? You did promise you wouldn't make me a grandmother until I look at least forty-six. *(Indicating the stairs)* Do those lead to my room?

FRANCES What?

ELEANOR My lovely bedroom Peter was telling me about.

FRANCES Oh, yes, that's right.

ELEANOR Is my bathroom upstairs as well?

FRANCES No— *(Indicating) —the* bathroom's there.

ELEANOR Oh—well never mind. Don't bother about me, darling. I'll just fetch the rest of my things.

ELEANOR *exits to the hall.*

FRANCES *(to herself)* The rest?

ELEANOR *reappears carrying two more smart suitcases—one of which is truly enormous.*

Good God—I mean good gracious. Can I give you a hand?

ELEANOR *(going upstairs)* No, thank you, darling. I'll just unpack these for now.

FRANCES Unpack? Oh... *(Light-heartedly)* Well, I must say you seem to have enough there for a fortnight.

ELEANOR *(pausing half-way up the stairs with the two smaller cases in either hand)* My dear, I couldn't possibly impose on you for as long as that. Besides my Health Farm have definitely promised me a room by the end of next week.

ELEANOR *sweeps off upstairs.*

FRANCES *stands there aghast. She just cannot believe what she has heard. Then it dawns; she has heard it. She rushes to the bank phone, and buzzes furiously.*

FRANCES Hello, hello.

BRIAN *(offstage)* Good morning, Frances. How are you this morning?

FRANCES I want to speak to Peter.

BRIAN *(offstage)* But he's got Superintendent Paul with him at the moment.

FRANCES I don't care if he's got Pope Paul with him. I want to speak to him now.

PETER *(offstage)* What's the matter, Frances?

FRANCES *(tight-lipped)* Eleanor has arrived with her luggage.

PETER *(offstage)* Oh, yes.

FRANCES I'm surprised she didn't use Pickfords. I think you ought to come up right away.

PETER *(offstage; almost whispering)* But, darling I can't—I've got somebody with me.

FRANCES *(irate)* Yes, and I've got somebody with me—your mother!

ELEANOR *appears on the stairs.*

ELEANOR I just love my room. I'm attached to it already. Peter was so right—it's just the place to spend Christmas.

FRANCES *(staggered)* Christmas?!

ELEANOR And it must be heavenly here in the autumn when the leaves are falling.

FRANCES Yes, I suppose it is. We must take some colour photographs and send them to you.

ELEANOR *(indicating the large suitcase)* I do wish we could get this upstairs. I feel such a mess after the journey.

FRANCES Don't worry. Peter's on his way up now.

ELEANOR He's become so much more considerate since he met you. Thank heaven you two got together before he actually married that dreadful merchant banker's daughter.

FRANCES *(coldly)* Do you mean the one who became a nun?

ELEANOR I shouldn't think so, my dear. She hardly qualified for that one way or the other. But I'm stopping you dressing, aren't I? *(She starts upstairs again)* There's plenty of time to gossip while I'm helping you cook Peter's lunch.

ELEANOR *smiles sweetly and exits.* **FRANCES** *is possessed. She storms off to the main bedroom. The front door opens and* **PETER** *comes in. He is carrying a sheaf of papers and cheques.*

PETER *(with his head in the door)* Frances, darling? Brian. Come in, come in.

PETER *comes in and goes to the main bedroom door. He is followed by* **BRIAN RUNNICLES** *who enters carrying a largish flat cardboard box under his arm.* **BRIAN** *is about thirty-five, very precise, physically fit and completely devoid of any sense of humour. He does not smoke, he does not drink and girls find him extremely boring company. His life outside the bank is devoted to innumerable honorary activities from Round Table to the local youth club with football refereeing thrown in on Saturdays and Sundays. He is the sort of referee who interprets the laws to the letter and never plays the advantage rule.*

(calling out) You'll never guess, darling. Brian has brought up his wedding present.

FRANCES *enters.*

FRANCES You bloody coward! *(She sweeps past* **PETER** *ignoring him completely—still dressed in the dressing-gown)* Hello, Brian. You will excuse my casual outfit, won't you? Only somehow it's not been my morning.

BRIAN Oh, dear. I'm sorry to hear that, Frances. I certainly hope I'm going to put that to rights.

BRIAN *gives a humourless little laugh.* **FRANCES** *laughs back artificially.*

As you know, I was hoping to present you both with a rather unusual table lamp—one incorporating a musical bon-bon box, actually. I thought it was rather clever. When you lifted the lid, it played a selection from *The Chocolate Soldier.*

FRANCES How very appropriate.

BRIAN Anyway, when I went back they'd sold it. Still, be that as it may, I thought you might appreciate a little *objet d'art* instead of a little *objet choclat. (He laughs at his own excruciating joke)*

FRANCES *laughs back and turns to* **PETER** *again.*

I do hope you like it. Art is such a personal thing, isn't it?

BRIAN *draws a medium-sized framed reproduction, from the box. It is from an oil still life of a basket of assorted vegetables, a bottle of wine and a large cheese on a check table-cloth.* **FRANCES** *looks at it in disbelief.*

FRANCES Oh... Oh, vegetables. Isn't it nice, Peter? We must hang it in your mother's room while she's with us.

PETER Yes, darling. Er—er—what's it called, Brian?

BRIAN *Légumes Variés de Provence* from an original by Victor Lemauve. It's non-reflecting glass as well. They do a very nice job at Boots.

FRANCES Er, what's that at the bottom, marrow?

BRIAN No, cucumbers actually. The French have very big cucumbers—particularly in Provence. Didn't you notice when you were on your honeymoon?

PETER I can't say we did, no.

BRIAN Oh, yes, they are at least fifty per cent bigger than ours, they force them under glass, you know. Anyway, I'm glad you like it...

PETER *(to* **FRANCES***)* Oh, we do, we do, don't we, darling? ... Well, we'd better get back to the bank, Brian. *(Showing her his fistful of papers)* Just look at this lot. I'm up to my eyes down there.

Before **FRANCES** *can reply,* **ELEANOR** *comes hurrying down the stairs.*

ELEANOR Hello, Peter, my darling.

PETER Hello, Eleanor.

ELEANOR How well you look. *(She kisses him on the cheek)* You must be so happy—both of you—as I told Frances before she got dressed—before she was going to get dressed.

PETER Just thought we'd pop up for a minute. You remember Brian Runnicies, don't you?

ELEANOR *(shaking hands)* How do you do? How are you? Weren't you at the wedding?

BRIAN Yes, I was the best man. I made the speech to the bridesmaids if you remember.

ELEANOR *(with edge)* I do indeed. *(Noticing the painting)* Surely that's *Légumes Variés de Provence,* isn't it?

BRIAN *(eagerly)* That's right—from the original by Victor Lemauve.

ELEANOR I know. They shot him in nineteen-forty-four—for collaborating.

BRIAN *(crushed)* Oh, really?

FRANCES Peter, darling, perhaps you'd like to take this up to your mother's room with the rest of her luggage.

PETER Yes, of course, darling. *(He puts down the papers and cheques and goes to pick up the suitcase. He has difficulty in doing so)*

ELEANOR *meanwhile starts up the stairs.*

ELEANOR *(as she goes)* Good-bye, Mr er—er

BRIAN Runniclcs.

ELEANOR —yes. Lovely to have met you again. Tell me, Peter, does that Mr Bromhead often come to this branch?

PETER *(staggering up the stairs)* Of course. He's my senior manager.

ELEANOR *(pausing on the stairs)* I shall look forward to seeing him again. Perhaps I might ask him to dinner...?

PETER *and* **ELEANOR** *disappear.*

FRANCES *is beside herself again. She just cannot suppress it altogether.*

FRANCES Now we're inviting people to dinner! *(With heavy sarcasm)* Perhaps we should give her a cocktail party while we're about it!

BRIAN *(taking it at face value)* I'm sure she'd like that, Frances. She doesn't seem a bit shy does she?

The front door buzzer sounds.

FRANCES *(tight-lipped)* Oh, good heavens, it's the front door again. Answer it for me. *(She goes towards the main bedroom)* I must get dressed.

FRANCES *goes into the main bedroom.*

BRIAN *answers the front door intercom.*

BRIAN Good morning. Can I help you?

MAN'S VOICE *(offstage)* Postman here, madam. Registered parcel for Mr Hunter.

BRIAN Oh. *(Calling to the bedroom)* Frances—it's the postman. A parcel for Peter. Registered. Shall I fetch it for you?

FRANCES *(offstage)* Would you? Thanks.

BRIAN Not at all. *(To the speaker)* Don't go away, postman. I'm coming right down.

BRIAN *opens the front door and hurries out eagerly. At the same time,* **PETER** *comes hurrying down the stairs calling back off.*

PETER That's all right, Eleanor. I'll ask Mr Bromhead if he's free for dinner tomorrow.

FRANCES *(offstage)* Whaaat!

PETER Now, Frances.

PETER *exits to the main bedroom.*

FRANCES *(offstage)* If your mother thinks that I am throwing cocktail parties for Mr Bromhead and all her silly friends she's absolutely crazy.

PETER *(offstage)* Don't you worry about Bromhead, darling. I can get us out of that all right.

PETER *enters carrying an electric blanket and transistor in one hand and a Teasmaid in the other.* **FRANCES** *comes to the doorway, still in her dressing-gown.*

FRANCES I'm sure we're not allowed to run a restaurant over a bank, either.

FRANCES *slams the bedroom door again.* **PETER** *is becoming very worried. He hurries upstairs.*

PETER (as *he goes)* It's all right, Eleanor, I'll move the wardrobe.

The front door opens and **BRIAN** *comes in carrying a large brown parcel. He is clearly curious about its contents.*

BRIAN *(calling)* I've got it, Frances. It's quite big. I say, I had to laugh—somebody thinks you're a man. *(He laughs)*

FRANCES *(offstage)* What did you say, Brian?

BRIAN This parcel. It's incorrectly addressed to Mr Frances Hunter. Somebody thinks you're a man, you see. *(He laughs again and turns the parcel over, looking for some clue)*

FRANCES *(offstage)* Sometimes I wish I was.

BRIAN I must say it's jolly well tied up. All the knots are sealed with wax. *(Putting the parcel down)* I'll leave it here. If you'll excuse me, I'd better get back to the bank.

FRANCES *(at the door)* Thanks, Brian. God knows where our scissors are. And we haven't got a sharp knife in the place.

BRIAN *(eagerly)* I've got my old Scout knife with me. Would you like me to do it for you?

FRANCES *(going offstage)* Would you? Thanks.

FRANCES *disappears again.*

BRIAN Not at all, not at all—it's a very professional job. *(He cuts the string on the parcel and removes it)*

FRANCES *(offstage)* Does it say who it's from?

BRIAN No, no, I haven't looked—I mean, well, yes, there is a label on it. Let me see—er—the Scandinavian Import Company.

FRANCES *(offstage) What?* Oh, no!

FRANCES *comes running out of the bedroom pulling her shortie dressing-gown on, as she is still only wearing bra and pants.*

It's all right, Brian—I'll take it. It's only some wineglasses—I sent for—for the flat—a little surprise for Peter...

She goes to take the box from him and between them they fumble and drop it. The box falls to the floor. To their surprise there is no crash and, instead, a pile of plain envelopes litter the carpet.

BRIAN I'm most terribly sorry. How clumsy of me. Allow me.

FRANCES That's all right—I'll do it. It was my fault.

They both get down on their hands and knees and start picking up the envelopes.

BRIAN Funny sort of glasses, Frances. They feel more like packets of postcards.

FRANCES *(gathering envelopes)* They must have got the orders mixed, the idiots. And they're all sealed down.

BRIAN No, no, this one isn't... *(He starts to withdraw a selection of postcard-sized photographs)* Oh, my God! It's a dirty photo!

FRANCES What are you talking about? Let me see.

BRIAN No, no, I couldn't. You can't possibly look at this—*(Looking at a second card)* —or this. *(Looking at a third card)* And as for this—I'd rather not look myself. *(He surreptitiously slips it into an inside pocket)*

FRANCES *(tearing a packet open)* Don't be ridiculous, Brian. They can't be that bad. *(She looks)* Good lord, they are, too! *(She cannot suppress a laugh)*

BRIAN It's nothing to laugh at, Frances. I'm extremely embarrassed. Peter will be furious if he finds out.

At this moment, **PETER** *appears coming down the stairs.* **BRIAN** *and* **FRANCES** *are positioned so that he cannot see them and vice versa. The words he overhears stop him in his tracks. As* **BRIAN** *blethers on,* **PETER** *becomes more and more incredulous.*

FRANCES Oh, Brian.

BRIAN It wasn't me—I didn't want to look. You came rushing out, grabbed hold of it and dropped them on the carpet.

FRANCES You admitted you were clumsy.

BRIAN The next thing I knew I was down on the floor looking at a naked girl in a very odd position. Do them up again before Peter comes down.

PETER *(erupting)* Do them up? Do what up?

PETER *notices her partial undress for the first time. So does* **BRIAN**.

BRIAN Oh, good gracious.

PETER Frances!

BRIAN Frances, look at you... No, no, I'm not looking.

BRIAN *averts his gaze as* **FRANCES** *wraps the dressing-gown round her.*

PETER Are you interfering with my wife, you randy little chief cashier?

BRIAN Certainly not. I'm not. She made me cut her string and hold her little surprise.

PETER *Whaat?!*

BRIAN *(choking)* I tried to keep it from her. I told her it was pornographic.

PETER Pornographic?

FRANCES Peter, stop it! Stop it at once. It's not his fault at all—it's all mine.

PETER *turns incredulously.*

PETER What the devil are you talking about?

FRANCES *(picking up the box)* This parcel—from that import company. They haven't sent glasses at all—it's full of dirty pictures. Look!

She thrusts a sheaf of loose postcards at him. **PETER** *boggles.*

PETER Good god almighty! How can they possibly send stuff like this through the post? There's three of them here on a trampoline! It's unbelievable!

ELEANOR *comes down the stairs, looking fresh and crisp.*

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