

A LATE COFFEE

by

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CHARACTERS

Claudia Hopkinson

Russell Hopkinson

Bill Norris

Gail Norris

Two sets of married couples meet for a nightcap / coffee after a night out. Their relationships are a little fraught and 'A Late Coffee' follows the actions of that night and an afternoon a fortnight later.

The characters are all about the same age - with enough miles on the clock to reflect on 15 years of marriage and

time to have become successful in their careers. They could be from mid thirties towards fiftyish.

What is important is that the audience should detect a certain 'chemistry' between the couples - and I don't mean the married ones!

Russell and **Claudia** are married. **Russell** manages a local firm. **Claudia** is a chemist and runs the firm's health & safety committee. **Russell** can be a little self-satisfied. He's comfortable financially. **Claudia** is more dynamic.

Bill and **Gail** are married. **Bill** is the trade union official at Russell's firm. **Gail** is a teacher at a local secondary school. **Bill** appears tipsy at the start of the play, following the evening out. He makes corny old jokes. **Gail** is more prim, eager to please, a little more conformist.

The play takes place in the living room / kitchen of Russell and Claudia Hopkinson

Scene 1 A Saturday night in October

Scene 2 A Saturday afternoon 2 weeks later

Drinks cabinet UC; arm chairs CR and CL; two-seater sofa CS; small coffee table DS of it; chair by UR exit. Doors UR and UL . There is a need to show a kitchen area stage left - possibly a split stage, or kitchen 'island'.

Claudia leads Bill in from UR to CR chair

Claudia Sit yourself there, Bill, and I'll get the coffee going. (*exits briefly UL*)

Gail and Russell enter UR stay by UR chair

Gail It's very kind of you to ask us back, Russell, thanks.

Russell Don't mention it. My pleasure.

Gail Well, I'm glad you did, we've had a superb meal and I even got Bill to get up for a dance..

Claudia is now in the kitchen

Russell Claudia kept asking when I was going to organize a get together. Tonight just seemed a perfect opportunity.

Gail Well, it was. You know, I usually dread these firm's annual dos but I've enjoyed this one.

Russell Good, Claudia has wanted you to spend more time with us
and you looked like you were having fun.

Gail I was. I can't believe how late it is either, well past my bed
time! (*to Bill in CR chair*) Bill, sit up straight, dear, anyone
would think you'd had too much to drink.

Bill 'ave not, 'm OK.

Claudia (*coming from door UL*) Gail, what can I get you to drink?
Filter? Espresso? Instant?

Gail Any coffee, I don't mind, thanks. No milk, no sugar though.
Russell, could I have some water too?

Russell Of course.

Gail Claudia, what are you having?

Claudia I think I'll have a small coffee and a large brandy. No
driving for me, just a gentle climb up the stairs.

Bill I'll have brandy too, ta.

Russell I'll fix those

Gail (*sits at R of sofa*) Bill, you sure, I don't want you to be ill.

Bill Sick you mean!

Gail Bill, ssh, you're embarrassing.

Bill Hey, what's that noise? Is it a paper bag? No, it's Russell!!
You get it, rustle!

Gail Bill! You promised!

Bill (*stands behind G at sofa*) Hey what's the weather going to
be like? You should know, Claudia, should n't yer. Hey,
'cloudier', you get it?

Claudia Bill, come with me and help me make the coffees. (*beckons him to UL*)

Bill OK, Claudia, I'll spoon the cups into the coffee. Don't worry, Gail, I've done this before, loads a times, loads. (*goes to UL doorway*)

Bill and Claudia exit UL

Russell (*goes to her on CS sofa*) When are you going to tell him?
(*hands on her shoulders*)

Gail You've seen him, how can I have a sensible conversation with him?

Russell We need to let him know. It's important he understands.

Gail He'll understand alright - he'll want to kill either you or me.

Russell He drinks so much, he'll not know what's real or what's not.

Gail He'll know what's real OK, and he gets so jealous we'd better watch out.

Russell Who'll tell him, you or me?

Gail I'll do it, fifteen years of marriage deserves a proper chat.

At stage left

Bill How long will it take to make this coffee?

Claudia It's a filter coffee, about 4 minutes.

Bill Do you think Russell suspects?

Claudia Don't be silly, he thinks you're just a drunk.

Bill Gail gets very protective you know.

Claudia That's because you do such a good act. Give me a kiss and go back in.

They embrace tenderly and Bill leaves her

Russell & Gail 'separate' on Bill's entrance.

Bill *(from doorway UL)* Hey, what d'yer call a woman who doesn't know owt about butter? Give up? Marge! I've got loads like that. *(from back of sofa)* And the one who was dead religious? Abby!

Gail *(at CR)* Bill, come and look at this painting, I think you'll like it.

Bill joins her CR. Picture is on CR wall

Gail *(hissing)* Why are you doing this? Russell and Claudia could be really good friends, why are you messing it up?

Bill Oh, 'Russell' is it? Not Mr Hopkinson, not Bill's boss?

Gail Don't be daft, he's really pleasant and he says you're good at what you do.

Bill True, I am, and if he knew a single thing about running the damn factory he'd understand just how good.

Gail Don't start again, the redundancies weren't your fault. - you did your best.

Bill Gail, I don't lecture you about teaching, don't lecture me about the Union.

Russell *(from UC)* What do you think Bill? You sounded quite animated. *Brings Bill's brandy*

Bill Oh yes, Russell I'm very animated - must be being so close to management

Gail Bill!

Bill (*Accepts drink from Russell DR*) Ta. How much did this set you back?

Russell Well the chap's a young painter and we like to support new talent when we see it. I think we only paid about four hundred for that.

Bill Four hundred! It's just a few blobs of colour - you can't see what it's meant to be even.

Bill has drunk the brandy and holds out his glass

Russell It's not 'meant to be' anything, it just gives suggestions of form and changes of light. (*Sees Bill's empty glass*) Let me sort those drinks out (*moves back UC*)

Gail Bill's not really so ignorant, he's quite artistic actually.

During next lines Russell puts own brandy on CR coffee table, back to drinks trolley UC. Then to Gail CR with water

Bill Thank you, dear, praise indeed. Well, one day perhaps I'll be able to keep you in the manner that Russell keeps the lovely Claudia.

Claudia (*coming from kitchen, moving to small coffee table CS*)
Here we are, sorry to be so long. Did you just say 'lovely' about me, Bill? You'll make a girl blush.

Bill (*moving to coffee table CS*) Well, look at you, lovely house, lovely setting, lovely clothes - just lovely.

Claudia (*next to Bill*) You are such a sweetheart. (*kisses him on the cheek*) There, was that 'lovely' too?

Bill Hey you'll make me blush now! (*sits R of sofa*)

Gail *(takes coffee moves to chair CR)* Thanks Claudia

Russell *(brings brandies for Bill & Claudia)* Here you are, dear

Claudia *(has sat L of sofa next to Bill)* Thanks, Russ, lovely.

Russell Bill. *(hands over brandy)*

Bill Ta, Boss. Only joking! Thanks Russell, sorry about the
paper bag gag, couldn't resist.

Russell It's OK, no harm done. *(raises own glass move CL)* Cheers
everyone, here's to our continued friendships.

Claudia 'Friendships'? Russ, don't you mean friendship?