

HARRIET
SALESMAN
GEORGE

THE FOOTSTEPS OF DOVES

The scene is the basement of a store which sells nothing but beds, mattresses, springs, frames, and all the accouterments of the bedroom. Various beds are displayed. At one side there is the usual double bed: fifty-four inches. At another side, there are two single beds.

The salesman enters with Harriet and George. The salesman is a dried neuter of a man. George and Harriet are an attractive, successful couple in their late forties. She wears a very nice suit, conservative hat and white gloves. He wears a gray flannel suit, button-down blue shirt, and brown felt hat. He has had one and one-third martinis.

SALESMAN. (*As they enter.*) Downstairs here you have your better mattresses and springs. All sizes, shapes and degrees of firmness.

HARRIET. (*Moves past the double bed to the twin sizes.*) We're interested in the twin size. (*George stops at the fifty-four-inch double bed and stands and stares at it.*)

SALESMAN. (*Flat, not too interested.*) Of course, your old classifications have broken down. Your twin used to mean thirty-six by seventy-five. Now you can get them in almost any dimension you want to suit your personal tastes. It's really just a matter of the price you want to pay, the dimensions and degree of firmness, and whether you want foam rubber or inner spring.

HARRIET. (*Looking at the beds.*) I understand foam rubber is hot in summer.

SALESMAN. For some people. . . . But then, some people are naturally warmer, some are colder. (*To George, who has sat on the double bed.*) That's your fifty-four. The twins are over here.

GEORGE. Good old fifty-four.

SALESMAN. A few people still ask for it.

GEORGE. We've slept in one for twenty-five years. (*Salesman is confused. He looks to Harriet, who has ignored George—and will continue to ignore him—elaborately.*)

HARRIET. How long is this one?

SALESMAN. That's our dimple model mattress. . . . Apparently the buttons create dimples. . . . (*George has propped himself against the headboard of the double bed.*)

HARRIET. How long is it?

SALESMAN. That's your thirty-six by seventy-five.

HARRIET. (*Sitting on the bed.*) I like a reasonably firm bed. George . . . Mr. Porter . . . likes a soft bed.

GEORGE. I'm Mr. Porter.

HARRIET. We've slept in a compromise for years, and neither one of us has been happy.

GEORGE. I've been happy.

HARRIET. George, is this long enough for you? (*He is still lying on the fifty-four-inch bed.*) George!

GEORGE. What?

HARRIET. See if this would be long enough for you, please (*George saunters over and flops down, not at all interested. His hat topples off.*) Move up a little bit. (*He squirms up.*) That seems to be long enough. Are you comfortable? (*George shrugs.*) We should have measured the length of the old bed.

SALESMAN. If you've had it twenty-five years, it's probably seventy-five inches. (*As Harriet sits on the bed.*) The only way to tell is to try. . . . (*Harriet is embarrassed.*) You don't have to take your shoes off . . . we have those protectors. . . .

HARRIET. (*Embarrassed, she starts to lie down next to George. She has to squeeze.*) George. (*He moves a little. They both lie rigid, on their backs.*)

GEORGE. Put sides and a lid on it and bury us.

HARRIET. (*Sitting up.*) This is how wide?

SALESMAN. That's your thirty-six. They come thirty-nine to But of course, it's not meant to hold two people . . . except under . . . special circumstances.

GEORGE. (*Gets up.*) That's what I'm interested in. The special circumstances. (*He moves to the fifty-four-inch bed and sits down on it, patting it.*) My mother and father had one bed, one of the . . . their whole married life. They both died in that bed.

HARRIET. (*Still aloof.*) Your mother first, as I remember.

SALESMAN. People were smaller then.

GEORGE. And more loving. Now people are detached. They dance far away from each other. They want to sleep far away from

each other. . . . Sure, if you want to stay apart, a fifty-four-inch is too small. But that's not the idea. The idea is to get all mixed up with each other. You've seen cats sleeping together. (*He proceeds to demonstrate: cuddling his arms around his chest. Harriet ignores him, she goes on reading labels and looking at ticking swatches, etc.*) Or puppies, or bears. One stirs, the other stirs . . . kind of slow and easy accommodation to each other. But they stay in a lump. For reassurance, comfort. All day you bump up against hard facts, hard edges, cold bodies. Good old fifty-four throws you up against something warm and round and soft. . . . (*He looks at Harriet. She looks away. He speaks to the salesman.*) Are you married?

SALESMAN. No.

GEORGE. Let me tell you about twin beds . . . I tell you, the longest distance in the world is the distance between twin beds. I don't care if it's six inches or six feet. It's psychological distance. . . . In an old fifty-four, you may get into bed. You don't know what you feel like. . . . Then you roll up together . . . and you know. . . . In twins, you got to make up your mind all by yourself, and then cross that damned gulf and find out if your twin feels like it. And then if you get there and find out you were wrong about yourself, well, it's a lot of embarrassment retreating. Or if you find out she's not in the mood . . . it's a big rejection. But in good old fifty-four, you don't make a move until you're sure of yourself, and you can pretty well sense if she's in the mood. . . . And if it still doesn't work out, what the hell, you just fall asleep, all wrapped around each other. No damage done.

HARRIET. (*Elaborately ignoring him.*) The price is just for the mattress?

SALESMAN. Yes. In each case the box spring is available for the same price. Seventy-five dollars for the mattress . . . seventy-five for the box spring.

GEORGE. Same price for the double as for the single size. Right?

SALESMAN. Up to the fifty-four inches.

GEORGE. I've never understood that, but I've always thought it was damned nice. Somebody with a heart working there somewhere. . . . (*He shrugs, still not understanding how it happened.*)

SALESMAN. Our prices are competitive. I say that because people often come here and pick our brains and then go buy at discount houses.