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SF PERUSALS

Alternative Accommodation

a play

Pam Valentine

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CHARACTERS

Anna, recently widowed; 70s
Peter, Anna's son, high-powered financial consultant, full of self-importance and highly unaware; late 40s
Joy, Anna's daughter, runs her own PR company, dashes through life to show how super-efficient she is; 40s
Gemma, Anna's daughter, vicar's wife, lives in the country and has never quite left the sixth form; late 30s to early 40s

The action takes place in Anna's house

Time — the present

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The play can be set very simply against a black backdrop or curtains.

Place names that appear in this text, for example Watford and Waterloo, can be changed to suit the location of production.

Anna's, Peter's, and Joy's mobile phones must have differing ring tones.

Pam Valentine

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(See also page ii)

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ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

The living-room of Anna's house

UC *is a table or cabinet with a tray holding a bottle of whisky and tumblers. On either side of the table/cabinet there are two dining-room chairs facing* DS. *There is an armchair* DL *and another* DR. *Both armchairs are of simple construction and are not necessarily matching*

A doorbell rings long and loud

Anna (*off, calling*) I'm coming! (*Slight pause to allow her to open a door*) Hallo, dear. Come on in.

Anna and Joy enter R. *Anna is wearing a dressing-gown and slippers. Joy is wearing a very smart trouser suit and a white shirt. She carries a shoulder bag and a document case*

(*As she enters*) Have you been ringing for long?

Joy Ages. I was getting really worried. Are you all right, Mum?

Anna I'm fine, dear. I was asleep.

Joy Asleep? You never sleep in the daytime.

Anna I know, but I had a late night, woke very early, made a cup of tea, took it back to bed and ... (*She looks at her watch*) Oh my goodness — is that the time? I'll pop up and get dressed. Let the others in for me when they get here.

Anna crosses L, *as Joy looks at the armchairs*

Joy Mum — where's the three-piece suite?

Anna (*hardly pausing*) What?
Joy The three-piece ——
Anna (*glancing back*) Oh, I got rid of it.
Joy Got rid of it? Why did you …?

Anna exits L

Joy is obviously puzzled. She puts her bag and document case by the dining-room chair R. *A mobile phone rings. She takes a phone from her bag*

(*Into the phone; briskly*) Joy Webster. … Mr Godwin, hallo. … Yes, I'll be with you by two. … Yes, with a strategic over-view and a draft communication plan of the whole concept. … Well, if you don't — but I'm sure you will — it's back to the drawing-board. But I think you are going to be very excited when you see the layout. … Sorry? ... Ah, if anyone from the media does ring pass them straight over to me. …

The doorbell rings

Yes, absolutely. See you later, bye. (*She switches off the phone and returns it to her bag*)

She exits R

(*Off*) Oh! Both of you together, come on in.

Joy enters followed by Gemma and Peter. Gemma is flustered and breathless. She is wearing a raincoat and sensible shoes. She carries an umbrella, a small holdall and a handbag. Peter has an officious manner. He wears a business-suit and has a mobile in an outside pocket

Gemma I'd just got off the bus and I saw Peter's car at the traffic lights. So I ran and knocked on the window.

Peter Knocked! (*To Joy*) She nearly smashed it in with her umbrella.

Joy (*to Gemma*) You're not staying, are you?

Gemma Staying? No, course not. (*She puts her holdall, bag and umbrella on the floor by the armchair* R)

Joy (*indicating the holdall*) What's in there?

Peter Where's the three-piece suite?

Gemma (*looking in the holdall*) My knitting, my flask ——

Joy She's got rid of it.

Peter Why?

Gemma My book … (*She takes the book out*)

Joy She didn't say.

Peter That's a bit worrying, isn't it?

Gemma What is?

Peter Mother's got rid of the three-piece suite.

Gemma (*looking round*) Oh yes…

Peter Anything else gone?

Joy I've no idea! Would you like me to go round and take an inventory?

Peter Where is she?

Joy Upstairs, getting dressed.

Peter Getting dressed?

Joy She was asleep when I arrived.

Peter Asleep? She never sleeps in the daytime.

Gemma Is she ill? I could stay if she's ill. I always carry a toothbrush and spare knicks.

Joy Too much information, Gemma. (*To Peter*) She looked OK to me. She said she had a late night.

Peter Doing what?

Joy I don't know! Stop interrogating me.

Gemma (*offering Joy the book*) This is really good. Do you want to borrow it?

Joy I don't have time to read books. (*Glancing at it*) Especially books with a nurse on the cover. (*To Peter*) Listen, before she comes down, how do you think we should go about this? Chit chat chit chat or jump straight in or what?

Peter I've no time for chit chat, Joy, no time at all. Which is why I've made a note of … (*He reaches into an inside pocket*)

Peter's mobile phone rings

(*He sighs impatiently*) Here we go … (*He takes out his mobile phone; into the phone*) Webster. … In that case make my three o'clock my four o'clock and switch my five o'clock to ten o'clock tomorrow. … Got that? ... Right. (*He puts the phone back into his pocket and reaches again into an inside pocket. He takes out a folded piece of paper*) Bullet points.

Gemma What points?

Joy Bullet points.

Gemma looks blank

The main things we want to say.

Gemma (*making a mental note*) Oh. I see. Bullet points.

Peter (*unfolding the paper*) This couldn't be happening at a worse time — end of the fiscal year, corporate clients going crazy … (*He looks at the paper*) My secretary's on maternity leave.

Joy (*sarcastically*) Is that a bullet point?

Peter No. But very irritating.

Gemma Is it her first?

Peter First what?

Gemma Baby!

Peter I don't know. (*He looks at the paper*) Right. One — it's three months since dad died. Two — to keep a house this size on is financial madness. Three — we should organize the sale of this place and find suitable alternative accommodation. Four — investing the equity to give her an income.

Joy You're not going to come out with it all just like that, are you? Bam bam bam.

Peter No, of course not.

Joy Good.

Peter But neither am I going to waste time going all round the houses. We've made the plan and now we execute it.

Gemma Andrew said she might not want to move.

Peter If Andrew was a financial consultant and not a vicar he'd realize she's going to have to move. Apart from anything else what's going to happen when something goes wrong? Which it will in a house this age and size. I can't come racing over here every time a washer needs changing. And I don't want her to prey to every cowboy workman who knocks on the door.

Gemma (*hesitantly*) I've been thinking ——

Joy Always dangerous.

Gemma I know we didn't discuss it but … (*She hesitates*)

Peter (*warily*) What have you been thinking, Gemma?

Gemma Well — suppose she lived with us.

Joy Which one of us had you in mind?

Gemma Not one of us all the time. We could split her up. Three months with each.

Joy That's nine months, Gemma, three threes are nine.

Gemma Oh. Four months then.

Peter Four months? I couldn't ask Jen to take that on board! I mean she's fine about the odd weekend and a week or two in the summer but with all her committee work … She's just taken the chair of the Pewter Mark Society.

Gemma looks at Joy

Joy Don't look at me. I run my own company twenty-four-seven. I don't have time for cosy chats and making milky drinks.

Peter Let's agree right now that living with any one of us is not an option. I mean think about it ——

Joy I don't have to think about it. No.

Gemma Andrew said we'll have a job persuading her to move. I mean how long has she lived here? Forty years? (*To Joy*) You're forty-five ——

Joy Forty-four, actually.

Peter (*getting tetchy*) How long she's lived here is completely irrelevant. The important factor is she can't go on living here. Dad's pension is now halved, I've done a breakdown of the running costs and ——

Gemma I think we should give her the chance.
Joy Chance of what?
Gemma Living with us. It would make her feel wanted.
Peter What's the point of making her feel wanted when she's not wanted! Well ... Of course she's wanted but ... haven't you listened to a word we've just said?
Gemma Yes, but we could tell her we'd thought about it then — sort of explain why she can't.
Peter Suggest something that isn't possible to make her see that it isn't possible? Brilliant.
Gemma There's no need to be sarky!
Joy Oh, for God's sake, Gemma. Last week, — and with great difficulty — I cleared a morning so we could all meet and decide what was the best course of action. Why didn't you say anything about her living with us then?
Gemma It was the Mothering Sunday service, Andrew gave all the little ones a daffodil to give to their mummies and — I know I'm a soppy old thing — I got a bit weepy and I thought, well, I thought perhaps we could share her.
Joy If you want to clear your conscience and have her to live with you then fine. But count me out.
Gemma Oh, not permanently, Joy. Just the three — four months. It would have to be in the summer because Andrew said ——
Peter And what happens in the other eight months?
Gemma Well, if she can't come to either of you ——
Joy And she can't.
Gemma Perhaps she could — go on one of those old people's holidays.
Joy For eight months? She'd need a bloody big suitcase.
Peter Gemma, living with us is out of the frame and please — please, Gemma, don't mention it.

Gemma looks huffy

She has two options — a retirement home ——
Joy I did say last week I'm not sure about that. I can't see Mum sitting in a high-backed chair with a pink bow in her hair.

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