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SF PERUSALS

A Touch of Spring

A Comedy

Samuel Taylor

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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CHARACTERS

Presented by John Gale and Allan Davis, in association with John and Alison Boddington, at the Comedy Theatre, London, on May 13th, 1975, with the following cast of characters:

Diana Claiborne	Jill Melford
Alexander Ben Claiborne	Peter Donat
Alison Ames	Hayley Mills
Baldassare Pantaleone	Leigh Lawson
John Wesley	Julian Fellowes
Vittorio Spina	Anthony Morton
Waiter	Ernst Ulman
Assistant Hotel Manager	Bruce Montague
Porter	Lawrence Sewell

The play directed by ALLAN DAVIS
Setting by Carmen Dillon

The action takes place in an apartment in an old hotel, Rome

ACT I A day in May
ACT II A few days later

Time—the present

ACT I

SCENE 1

An apartment in an old hotel in Rome. A day in May.

The hotel is old, majestic and luxurious, the room is large and light and charming. The walls are of painted panels framed by carved wooden mouldings, painted and gilded, and are their own decoration; there are no pictures or paintings in the room. The ceiling is painted and decorated in the same manner, and has suspended from it a chandelier of Venetian glass. The room has echoes of the eighteenth century: it combines Italian and French rococo and German baroque at their lightest and most graceful. It reminds one vaguely of the Nymphenburg Palace, and the Nymphenburg Blue is here, along with ivory and gold. The colours are gentle and warm

Upstage, in the corners, are two charming cupids in niches, and cupids are very much a part of the painted decoration. The main entrance to the room is up C, *double doors raised above the room, opening on to a landing. From the landing, stairs come down to the room from both sides, and framed between these two brief staircases is a marble fountain, another charming cupid. The entrance to the bedroom is down* L. *High on a wall near it is a small radio speaker; the control knobs are immediately below it. The* R *wall is taken up by tall glass doors that open on to a planted terrace. Beyond, is Rome. Downstage of the doors is a table on which is the telephone, and an accompanying large upholstered stool. The furniture is a bit shabby, but nice in a warmly romantic way. There is a drinks table or trolley up* L, *on which are a bottle of Italian aperitif, a bottle of Jack Daniels bourbon, a bottle of San Pellegrino water, an empty ice bucket, and glasses*

As hotel rooms go, this one is a great success. It is light and spacious, it is gay, it has a glow

When the CURTAIN *rises the sun is pouring in through the open terrace doors. All the bells of Rome are pealing. The radio is playing: we hear an Italian tenor singing "Arrivederci, Roma". The bedroom door opens and Diana Claiborne enters, obviously irritated. Diana is a strikingly handsome American in her early thirties. She is the paradigm of the rich young American married woman: intelligent, witty, aware, sharp, knowledgeable, and hard. She is dressed for travelling, and as she enters she gets rid of her handbag and an over-the-shoulder bag, and crosses angrily towards the terrace. She is followed by her husband, Alexander Ben Claiborne, called Sandy. He is in his thirties, good-looking in a rough sort of way, and he is the quintessence of the successful young American business man: quietly self-assured, with the authority and self-confident good humour that comes with success and position. Sandy is essentially a kind and courteous man, but he has been trained to*

toughness in the wars of the business world. He is intelligent, he can be witty, and he can also be fiercely impatient. He wears trousers of a lounge suit, and a white shirt open at the neck. He has a narrow bandage wrapped round his left hand. He carries his wife's suitcases, and sets them down in the middle of the room. He looks across at his wife wryly. She stands rigidly angry, staring out at Rome. Then she begins to rap out commands over her shoulder

Diana Turn off that damned radio.
Sandy (*with resigned good humour*) Yep. (*He turns off the radio, and shuts the bedroom door*)
Diana And ring for a porter.
Sandy Yep. (*He moves to the desk to push the buzzer*)
Diana What did you do with my passport?
Sandy Put it in your bag. (*He presses the buzzer*)
Diana (*grimly*) I would like a drink, please.
Sandy (*starting back across to the drinks*) There's no ice.
Diana Whoever heard of an Italian hotel with ice? Just—get me—a drink.
Sandy Yep.
Diana (*glaring out at Rome*) Damn Italy. Damn Rome. Damn all those church bells. (*With true despair, a cry from the heart*) Can't anyone turn off those church bells? (*She turns and slams her bag down on the desk*)
Sandy (*pouring the drink*) Only God or the Pope. Simmer down, Diana.
Diana (*moving towards him; urgently*) Sandy, I want you to fly home with me.
Sandy (*bringing her the drink*) I have got to find my father.
Diana You said it would take two days: we've been here almost a week.
Sandy I didn't know about Italy then. The land of blue skies and red tape. (*Ruefully, as he hands her the drink*) Wouldn't you think when a man dies, someone would remember where they put him?
Diana (*taking the glass*) And what happens in the meantime?
Sandy They're bound to find him sooner or later.
Diana Sandy, they're still looking for the remains of Julius Caesar. (*She takes a belt of the drink and her eyes widen in horror. She stares at it*) What—is—this?
Sandy That Italian drink you said you liked.
Diana (*handing it to him*) Pour it down the sink. It may clear the drains.
Sandy (*moving back to the drinks table*) Do you want some whisky?
Diana (*following him*) No. You could fly home with me and then come back.
Sandy What's so important about me being at your sister's wedding?
Diana (*firmly*) It is important to me.
Sandy And what do I say to my mother! "No, Mother, I have not found Father's body yet, but I shall return to search for him as soon as I've danced with the bride."
Diana (*her eyes narrowing*) Who is more important? Your mother or me?
Sandy That is no question to ask a gentleman. As a matter of fact both of you . . . (*He reconsiders, and starts away to the desk*) Never mind.
Diana Both of us what?
Sandy Nothing. Where the hell is that porter?

Diana (*following him to the desk*) Are you comparing me to your mother?
Sandy (*pressing the buzzer*) Don't hassle me, Diana. I know I've put you through a bad time and I'm sorry, I am sorry.

There is a knock at the door

Ah. Come in.

The door opens and John Wesley appears. He is young and American and scholarly-looking, with horn-rimmed glasses. He is unsure and eager to please. He takes his job seriously and has a tendency to trip over his own feet. He works for the United States Embassy in Rome and carries a briefcase, of course

Wesley Good morning.
Sandy Well, good morning, Mr Wesley, and where the hell have you been?
Wesley (*coming down the* L *stairs to* C) I tried to call you from the Embassy, but your phone's out of order. Did you know your phone's out of order?
Sandy (*grimly*) Yes, we know our phone's out of order. It is one of the great disasters of the twentieth century. The hotel manager in the striped pants says so, the assistant manager in the striped pants says so. They wring their hands and cry, "Un disastro". What happens in Italy when there really is a disaster?
Diana They wring their hands and lie down.
Wesley That's not fair. The Italians are really very obliging; they're just not very well organized.
Sandy What's so complicated about fixing a phone?
Wesley This isn't America, Mr Claiborne. You've just got to get used to that idea.
Sandy I sure as hell am getting used to it. (*Resigned*) O.K. What's new, what have you got for us? What great defeats have we suffered today?
Wesley (*happily*) Oh no. I've got good news. We have finally and definitely ascertained that your father's body is in Rome.
Diana (*eagerly*) Ah. Where in Rome?
Wesley We don't know.
Sandy Oh, great.
Wesley But that's progress, isn't it? (*With pride*) I knew darned well he wasn't in Naples.
Sandy No. What would he be doing in Naples? Isn't there anyone—anyone at all—who knows where the body is?
Wesley Yes, there is one key official who knows. But no-one can find him.
Diana (*moving to her suitcase with luggage tags*) Maybe he's dead too, sitting next to his phone. (*She sits on the stool next to the armchair and proceeds to put tags on her luggage*)
Wesley (*to Diana*) We'll find him, Mrs Claiborne, don't you worry. Are you going somewhere?
Diana (*with bitter emphasis*) I am going back to America.
Wesley (*horrified*) Without Mr Claiborne's father?
Diana Without Mr Claiborne.

Wesley looks at Sandy questioningly

Sandy (*explaining gently*) My wife's sister is getting married tomorrow, in faraway St Louis, Missouri.
Wesley Can't you postpone it?
Diana Until you find the body? She could be a spinster for the rest of her life.
Sandy Don't be frightened, Mr Wesley. I'm staying.
Wesley Oh.

There is a knock at the door

Waiter Permesso?
Wesley Avanti!

The door opens

Sandy (*looking at Wesley in pain*) Come in.

The Waiter appears. He is a sweet old gentleman

Waiter Signore, you wish for something?
Sandy Me? No.
Diana You rang, remember?
Sandy Oh yes. But I want a porter. (*He moves up to address the Waiter, who remains on the landing*)
Waiter (*in Italian*) Come?
Sandy Porter. I want a porter.
Waiter No, I am not porter. I am waiter.
Sandy But I rang for a porter.
Waiter (*kind but firm*) I am waiter.
Sandy (*hazarding*) How about some coffee?
Waiter Subito, Signore.

The Waiter goes, closing the door

Sandy turns away, rather pleased with himself

Diana How about that? The Great American Tycoon; Harvard Business School; President of The Claiborne-Missouri Tool Company; wants a porter, gets a waiter, settles for coffee.
Sandy (*genially*) In business, that is known as making a deal. Well, Mr Wesley?

Wesley immediately moves to him, fishing a paper out of his briefcase as he goes

Wesley I've brought you that list of top Government officials you asked for. (*He hands Sandy the paper*) The ones marked in red speak English. We think.
Sandy Thank you.
Wesley But frankly, I'm afraid that's not the way to go about it.
Sandy Why not?

Wesley At the Embassy, we have learned that the Italians don't like it if you don't go through channels. (*He puts the briefcase on the table*)

Sandy We've been going through channels for over a week, now. When do we reach the end?

Wesley (*cheerfully*) Well, we just have to keep on trying.

Sandy (*breaking out desperately*) For how long? Mr Wesley! My father died! Suddenly! Tragically! Four thousand miles from home, in a strange country! And I, his son, have come to get him to bring him home. And I *can't get at him*! (*He is deeply moved, close to tears, and turns away quickly to hide his emotion. He stares out of the windows*)

Wesley (*miserably*) I'm terribly sorry.

Sandy (*turning back*) It's O.K.

Wesley notices, for the first time, the bandage on Sandy's hand

Wesley What did you do to your hand?

Sandy (*grimly*) I burned it. In the bathroom. Under the water tap marked "C".

Wesley Oh. You turned on the *Caldo* instead of the *Freddo*. "C" doesn't mean "cold" in Italian. It means "hot".

Sandy I know. I forgot.

Wesley It's really quite simple. "C" for *Caldo*—"Hot". "F" for *Freddo*—"Cold". You've got to remember.

Sandy Or be boiled alive.

Diana As a matter of fact that was the last time we had hot water. (*She rises and picks up her hat from the armchair*)

There is a knock on the door

Waiter (*off*) Permesso?

Wesley Avan . . .

But Sandy stops him with a gesture

Sandy Come in.

Diana goes to tie a tag on her travel bag on the sofa table

The door opens and the Waiter enters with a silver tray on which are tiny cups and saucers, a pot of coffee and a bowl of sugar. He comes down the L *stairs to a small coffee table behind the drinks trolley. During the following he puts the tray on the table and puts the table upstage of the stool near the armchair*

Diana (*commandingly*) Now, Mr Wesley. Why isn't the American Ambassador doing something about us?

Wesley Oh, he knows about the situation, Mrs Claiborne, and he's very concerned. Honest.

Diana He hasn't returned any of our calls.

Wesley He's very busy.

Diana And very rude. Why can't he see my husband today?

Wesley He had to go north to Florence.

Sandy What for?

Wesley His daughter's competing in a Modern Dance Festival.
Diana Oh, God. (*Defeated, she goes to the mirror on the* R *wall to put on her hat*)
Sandy (*moving to the Waiter*) I hope she does our country proud. Here, let me take that.

The Waiter hands Sandy the bill, and Sandy goes on speaking conversationally as he signs

Do you always use those teeny little cups for coffee?
Waiter Signore?
Sandy (*picking up one of the cups*) This. Don't you ever serve coffee in real cups? I shouldn't have started this. (*He puts down the cup*)
Wesley (*coming to the rescue*) Allow me. (*He approaches the Waiter confidently*) Il signore vorebbe sapere se lei—(*his accent is pretty bad, and his confidence begins to wane*)—forse—qualche volta—puo servire—il caffe nel—una—una . . . (*He can't remember the word for "cup", and desperately grasps for a way out*)—cosa—piu grande!
Waiter (*puzzled*) You mean like for soup?
Sandy (*hastily; returning to the Waiter*) Never mind, forget it, it's O.K., here. (*He hands the Waiter the bill and a tip*)
Waiter Mille grazie, Signore.

The Waiter hurries out

Wesley turns, to find Diana staring at him

Diana (*sweetly*) Mr Wesley, how long have you been in Italy?
Wesley Almost a year.
Diana You have a remarkable gift for languages.

The doors are thrown open and the Assistant Manager appears. He is a cheerful Italian, about forty years old, and he is dressed in a morning coat and striped trousers. Behind him is a Porter. The Waiter passes them, going out. The Porter comes down the L *stairs, gets the luggage and goes out*

Assistant Manager (*as he enters*) Mr Claiborne, Mrs Claiborne, hello! We are ready for you! The car is downstairs!
Diana (*picking up her handbag*) Does it run?
Assistant Manager But of course, it is a Buick! (*To the Porter, as he goes out*) Presto! Presto!

During this, Diana gets her travel bag off the sofa table, pops her handbag into it and goes to Sandy near the stairs L

Diana Well?
Sandy Give my love to the kids.
Diana They may never see their father again. (*She kisses him briefly on the cheek, then turns on Wesley*) I want my husband home for that wedding. I want this finished today, and him on a plane home tonight!
Wesley I'll do my best, Mrs Claiborne.

Diana Don't do your best, make a superhuman effort. Throw your weight around. You're from the United States Embassy. For whatever that means. (*She turns back to the* L *stairs*)
Assistant Manager Everything is going to be all right, Mrs Claiborne.
Diana How old is that Buick?
Assistant Manager Oh, only from nineteen hundred and . . . Not old.
Diana (*to Sandy*) Let's keep in touch, shall we?
Sandy I'll put a note in a bottle.

Diana sails up the stairs

Diana A wonderful invention, the Italian telephone. It ensures total privacy.
Assistant Manager But no, Mrs Claiborne, believe me, there is someone repairing the telephone at this very moment.
Diana (*sweetly*) Leonardo da Vinci, no doubt.

Diana sails out

The Assistant Manager shrugs and starts after her. Sandy turns to the coffee table and sits on the armchair stool next to it, facing downstage

Sandy Coffee?
Wesley (*moving to him*) Yes, please.

As the Assistant Manager starts out, Baldassare Pantaleone slips in through the open doorway, nodding pleasantly to him. The Assistant Manager exits. The doors are closed, leaving Baldassare Pantaleone on the landing looking down at the two men

Baldo (as we shall discover he is called) is a cheerful, laughing Italian in his twenties, quick, darting, smartly dressed. He has dark hair and brilliant, laughing, liquid black eyes. Baldo is an enterprising young Italian, who makes a living being useful to foreigners. He is cunning, intelligent, life-loving, deceitful, affectionate, amoral, cool, shrewd and clever. He is a happy man who has come to terms with life completely. Now, he stands on the landing and watches the men below with a delighted smile. Here is a new adventure

Sandy (*as he pours the coffee*) The thing that gripes me, and it really gripes me, is that we weren't notified of my father's death until two days after the accident.
Wesley Ah, but Mr Claiborne! The accident happened way up in the hills, miles from Rome. By the time the people came from the nearest village, climbed down the mountain to the wreck of the car, gathered up the bodies, brought them back up the mountain . . .
Sandy They've got some kind of communication in Italy, haven't they?
Wesley Oh, when you get up in some of those hill towns, you're back in the nineteenth century.
Sandy We at least had the Pony Express in the nineteenth century.

Baldo lets out a hoot of appreciative laughter, and runs down the R *stairs into the room*

Baldo Ah, that is marvellous! The Pony Express! Cowboys! Indians! Bang, bang! (*With sudden formality*) Buon giorno. Good morning. You understand, of course, that your telephone is not working.
Sandy It's all yours, pal. Get it done, will you? I've got calls to make.
Baldo (*protesting*) Ma, Signore . . .
Sandy Now, come on! The last guy who was here blew into it twice, put it down and walked out. You can do better than that.
Baldo Ma, si, but I am not the one who fixes the telephone.
Sandy You're not?
Baldo But if you wish, I will try. (*He goes to the telephone*)
Sandy (*to Wesley*) Isn't there such a thing in Italy as an ordinary, telephone repair-man?

Baldo picks up the telephone and bangs at the cradle

Baldo Pronto! Pronto! (*He blows into the phone twice, then shrugs and puts it back in its cradle. He bangs the table hard, then turns back to the others*) I am sorry, but it is not . . .

The telephone rings

It is working! (*He picks up the phone*) Pronto! Si! E Baldo! Chi e? . . . Mario! Tu hai reparato il telefono? . . . Ah, bravo! Bravo! . . . Benissimo! . . . Ah, bravo! . . . Si, bravo! Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! (*He hangs up. With a flourish*) That was my cousin. He fixed the telephone. (*He goes smoothly to Sandy*) Mr Claiborne, you must know that I did not come here because the telephone was not working. No. I came because the telephone was not working and so I could not tell you I was coming, and so I came. My name is Baldassare Pantaleone.
Wesley Oh!
Baldo You know me.
Wesley The Embassy uses him, sometimes, for special problems . . .
Baldo Si! I have come to help you, Mr Claiborne. Mr Alexander Ben Claiborne, from San' Louee, Missouri. (*He refers to a small notebook which he takes out of his pocket*)
Sandy (*mechanically*) Saint Louis.
Baldo Va bene. San' Louee. (*With sad, liquid eyes*) I am sorry for you, Mr Claiborne, in this tremendous disastro, the loss of your beloved father, Joseph Claiborne. I will tell you truly, all of my country mourns for him, this good friend of the Italian people, this great and famous American . . .
Sandy You knew him.
Baldo No. This lady I have seen go out: this is your wife?
Sandy Yes.
Baldo Very good-looking. She could not stay?
Sandy No.
Baldo You Americans are always in a hurry. Ah, but now! I am here to help you: you wish to take your father back to America for the funeral: it is for this the Ambassador has sent me.
Sandy The American Ambassador?

Baldo Certo. We are old friends. He calls me many times, when the visiting Americans are getting in his hair . . .
Wesley (*quickly*) Mr Pantaleone . . .
Baldo But not you. No. No. No. The Ambassador has called me yesterday and he has said: "Baldo, I have this good friend, Mr Alexander Ben Claiborne from San' Louee, Missouri . . ."
Sandy (*mechanically*) St Louis.
Baldo Va bene, San' Louee, "a rich and famous American of great position and high birth, who makes tools. And he has suffered this sad disastro and I would like to help him, but I must go to Florence . . ."
Sandy (*impassively*) What do you charge?
Baldo Pardon?
Sandy What do you charge?
Baldo (*forgiving him*) I have come to help you . . .
Sandy (*inexorably*) What do you charge?
Baldo (*tightening*) I do this for you in your distress because I love America and all Americans . . .
Sandy (*to Wesley*) Does the Ambassador pay for this, or do I?
Baldo (*with a small, polite bow*) Buon giorno. (*He turns and starts to walk out*)
Sandy (*rising*) Wait a minute!
Baldo (*immediately and joyfully returning to him*) No, you are right, we must not quarrel, we are friends! (*He shakes Sandy's hand vigorously*) We will not speak of money . . .

At this moment the telephone rings, and Baldo immediately starts for it quickly

Sandy Wait a minute!

Baldo stops

I'll get it. (*He crosses past Baldo and picks up the phone*) Hello! . . . Hello! . . . Hello! (*He is getting no answer*) God damn it!

Baldo glides swiftly to Sandy's side and stamps hard on the floor, making Sandy jump a little in surprise)

Hello! . . . Yes, this is Mr Claiborne.

Sandy glances at Baldo, who shrugs modestly

Yes, I know: It's been out of order since yesterday. Who is this? . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Am I supposed to know you? . . . Alison Ames? (*He looks over at Wesley*)

Wesley shakes his head

Well, is it about my father's death? . . . Oh! Well, where are you? . . . Yes! Please! Come right up! (*He hangs up*) Alison Ames.
Wesley No, never heard of her. Here. I forgot. I'm sorry. (*He takes a paper from his briefcase*)
Sandy What is it?
Wesley Another form for you to sign. (*He moves to Sandy, so that Baldo is between them*)

Sandy That's all I do.
Wesley Oh, they've got a million of 'em.
Baldo (*taking the outstretched paper*) Prego. Allow me. (*He scans it*) Ho, si. It is very necessary. (*Reading*) "*Responsibilita della Republica Ital . . .*" si. (*Moving below the desk*) You can do nothing without this. It is the guarantee.
Sandy Of what?
Baldo That you will not sue the Italian Government.
Sandy For what?
Baldo Oh, say you find your father, and he does not look so good . . .
Sandy Tear it up! God damn it! (*He tries to take the paper*)
Baldo (*resisting*) No, no, you must sign it. Sign everything. It is the only way. Please. You will sign, yes? Please? (*He leans towards Sandy across the desk, offering the paper and a pen, and smiles at him with warm pleading charm. His smile is almost coquettish*)

After a moment, Sandy reluctantly takes the pen and signs the paper. Baldo retrieves the pen and paper, folds the paper and puts it in his pocket with a grand flourish

Good. Done. From now on, you have no worry: Baldo is here.

There is a knock at the door

Avanti!
Wesley Avanti!
Sandy Come in!

The door opens, and Alison Ames appears on the landing. She is a young Englishwoman, slim, straight and fair. The first impact of this girl is to suggest a unique directness in the way she looks at the world. There is sophistication here in the true sense, coupled with straightforwardness and an almost painful lack of guile. Alison is an actress, and a not very successful one, perhaps because she has too much humour and too much of a sense of the ridiculous to be able to take herself seriously. This is a girl of honest appetites and a felicity for living. But at this moment she is serious and self-contained, giving the sense of troubled anxiety deep within, and a feeling of loss. She looks down at the men

Alison Mr Claiborne?
Sandy (*moving to the foot of the* L *stairs*) Miss Ames? Please come down.

Alison comes down, and Sandy leads her into the room as he introduces the others

This is John Wesley of the American Embassy . . .

Alison and Wesley shake hands. Wesley moves down L

And Mr . . .
Baldo (*coming to Alison*) Pantaleone. Baldassare Pantaleone. (*He kisses her hand, and backs away*)

Alison turns to Sandy and smiles gravely

Alison I'm sorry about your father.
Sandy You said you had something to tell me.
Alison No, I came in the hope that you might have something to tell me.
Sandy About what?
Alison My mother. The British Embassy is no help at all. They seem quite bewildered at finding themselves in a foreign country. (*She smiles at Wesley*) You're not like that, are you? (*To Sandy*) But at least they did know your father's name, and called the American Embassy and found out you were here. And so I came to see you.
Sandy Why?
Alison To see if we should join forces, so to speak. I can *not* get permission to see my mother. I really do think . . . (*To Baldo—her sense of helplessness is beginning to show*) I thought Italians were supposed to be so obliging!

Baldo makes a gesture as she turns back to Sandy

It isn't that I want to see her, really. I'd much rather remember her as she was. But I do want to know that she's there! (*And she is suddenly close to tears. She sits down on the sofa, and catches hold of herself*) Damn. I'm sorry. But it's all been so sudden and strange. To find yourself whisking off to another country to . . . (*She almost visibly shakes away her distress, and makes an attempt at a smile*) I am sorry. Have you been able to see your father?
Sandy (*wondering*) No, I haven't.
Alison It is maddening, isn't it? One can't even find out where they are.
Sandy "They?"
Alison My mother and your father.
Sandy What have they to do with each other?
Alison Why, they're together, I believe. Side by side, I expect.
Baldo (*understanding the situation*) Madonna mia! (*And, wringing his hands, he moves away from them towards the windows*)
Alison Does he know where they are? Mr . . .?
Baldo (*with a gesture of innocence*) No, no—I do not know.
Alison Do you think it's the public mortuary, or the morgue, or whatever they call it, here?
Sandy Why?
Alison What?
Sandy Why are they together? Side by side? Your mother and my father?
Alison (*staring at him*) Wasn't your father killed in a car accident?
Sandy Yes.
Alison My mother was killed in the same accident.
Sandy You mean they ran into each other?
Alison That would have been difficult, since they were in the same car.
Wesley Oh, my!
Sandy Your mother was in my father's car?
Alison Yes.
Sandy What was she doing there?
Alison Travelling.

Sandy With my father?
Alison Yes.
Sandy Why?
Alison Why do you think people travel together? For company.
Sandy But how did she . . . (*He whirls on Wesley*) What is this?
Wesley I don't know!
Sandy You told me it was an Italian hitch-hiker!
Alison (*rising*) A what?
Wesley That's what we thought.
Sandy Thought!
Wesley Well, the police told us that the person riding with your father was not an American . . .
Alison (*sharply*) Of course not, she was English!
Sandy (*driving*) And you didn't bother to check?
Wesley We don't automatically. We're only concerned with Americans.
Sandy (*appalled*) Only concerned with . . .
Alison Ah, no, he's quite right. Do not ask for whom the bell tolls, if it doesn't toll for an American.
Wesley I'm terribly sorry.
Sandy (*in cold anger*) And I would be terribly obliged if you would look into this matter. And find out exactly what happened. (*He moves swiftly round the room gathering Wesley's hat and briefcase*) And when. And how. And why my father was responsible for the death of Miss Ames's mother.
Alison (*quickly*) But he wasn't!

Sandy dumps the hat and briefcase into Wesley's arms, and Wesley starts up the stairs, chagrined and embarrassed

Wesley Yes, of course, I'll go right back to the Embassy . . .
Sandy (*at the foot of the stairs, with fierce command*) And let me know at once!

And with that, Wesley takes his hand off the doorknob, turns on Sandy bravely, and speaks from the landing, his voice trembling a little

Wesley Mr Claiborne, I know you're an important businessman, but I don't think you understand exactly what an American Embassy is supposed to do.
Sandy I don't give a damn what you're supposed to . . .
Wesley I do! (*He gathers himself, and pours it out with all the dignity he can muster*) The role of the American Embassy abroad is to support United States foreign policy. That is all! Anything we do for Americans coming through here is a politeness, a courtesy, and not an obligation. Do you know what I'm called on to do for my fellow Americans? (*He is now addressing them all, and God*) I find shirt-makers! And foot doctors! And baby-sitters! And opera tickets! I send flowers, I send packages, I find umbrellas, I take care of dogs! And for this I went to the Graduate School of International Studies at Washington. I'm expected to find hotel accommodations when there aren't any to be found. I found yours, and you don't like them . . .

Sandy (*moving away with a wave that takes in the room*) All I wanted was a room and bath, not this bower of cupids!

Wesley It's all I could get! And it isn't exactly a hovel! (*By now he is pretty emotional and close to tears*) I'm sorry about your father. I'm sorry we're having such difficulties. I'm sorry about this mix-up, I think it's awful. But I didn't invent two thousand years of Italian red tape, I'm just a second assistant secretary! And if you want to report me to your Congressman when you get home, *please feel free*! (*And, holding back the tears, he turns quickly to go out*)

Sandy (*whipping back to the foot of the stairs*) Mr Wesley! I apologize!

At the same time, Wesley whips around to him desperately

Wesley (*simultaneously*) Mr Claiborne, I apologize! I shouldn't have said that. You've been very patient.

Sandy Not at all, I've been a son-of-a-bitch.

Wesley Oh, no! When you consider what you've been through . . .

Sandy No, I've been a real bastard, forgive me.

Wesley But I should have done better . . .

Sandy You did all that you could.

Wesley No, really, I'm sorry . . .

Wesley takes one step down, Sandy takes one step up, and they shake hands vigorously

Sandy I'm the one to be sorry.

Wesley Not at all.

Sandy Yes, I am.

Wesley Not at all.

Sandy Not at all.

They are still shaking hands

Wesley Miss Ames , . .

Alison Oh, please don't stop. I've never seen two Americans make love before.

Sandy looks down at her, surprised and amused

Wesley (*sincerely*) Miss Ames, I don't know how to apologize for this. But if there's anything I can do, any way I can make up for it, I'd be grateful if you'd call me and . . . (*Then, hopelessly*) Ah, hell, I probably couldn't do anything anyway.

Wesley turns and goes out

They look after him. Baldo comes alive

Baldo Mr Wesley, wait! (*He runs up the* R *stairs*) I must find out who he has talked to, where he has been, who in the Government . . . (*To Sandy and Alison, hastily*) Stay! Wait! Don't go away! (*He dashes out of the door, calling*) Mr Wesley! I have a cousin who is obliging the foreign minister!

And Baldo is gone

Sandy comes down the stairs to Alison

Sandy I'm sorry. I must have seemed terribly rude.
Alison I'd no idea you didn't know about my mother.
Sandy No, I didn't. I do apologize.
Alison (*echoing Wesley*) Not at all. I apologize! (*And she puts out her hand*)
Sandy (*laughing*) Not at all. (*He shakes her hand*) I shouldn't have blown my stack like that.
Alison It was understandable. (*Admiring the room*) He did well by you, you know. The British Embassy, with majestic grace and favour, actually found me a hovel.
Sandy (*moving the coffee table out of the way*) It is quite a room, isn't it? This is the Royal Suite.
Alison (*gazing about, wandering*) Can you afford it?
Sandy Yes.
Alison Of course. It's super.
Sandy It used to be an Italian palazzo. You should see the bedroom.
Alison Big?
Sandy Enormous. I kept losing my wife.
Alison Your wife?
Sandy She went back to America this morning.
Alison Ah. (*Still wandering*) How marvellous—I've an affection for seedy grandeur.
Sandy I suppose that's because you're English. (*And then he curses himself*) I'm terribly sorry.
Alison Not at all, you're right. Seedy grandeur *is* the affliction, isn't it?
Sandy I suppose I am lucky to have this. It was being held for the Prime Minister of some African country, but they cancelled at the last minute.
Alison Oh? Did somebody shoot him?
Sandy (*with a delighted yelp*) Yes! Really!
Alison Well, it's an ill wind . . . (*She turns to the terrace*) What a heavenly view!
Sandy (*behind her, pointing*) Those are the Pines of Rome.
Alison I didn't know they had special pines. I'm awfully ignorant. (*She notices the bandage*) What happened to your hand?
Sandy I turned on the *Caldo* instead of the *Freddo*.
Alison (*grinning*) So did I. And made a flying leap out of the bath. It was quite a sight.
Sandy I'll bet.

They smile companionably. She turns down to the sofa

(*Looking serious*) Miss Ames, I can't tell you . . .
Alison (*turning*) Ah, you're about to apologize again. Please don't. Your father didn't kill my mother.
Sandy In a way.
Alison What nonsense. They were travelling together.
Sandy And he was driving.
Alison And they had an accident, that's all. Unless you think he was making a pass at her at the moment, and took his eyes off the road and his hands off the wheel. Do you suppose that's how it happened?

Sandy My father wasn't the kind of man who makes passes at strange women.
Alison (*coldly*) My mother was not a strange woman. (*She sits on the sofa*)
Sandy No, obviously they'd met. How did they meet? Do you know? (*He sits on the desk stool, facing her*)

She measures him speculatively

Alison My mother and your father.
Sandy Mmm.
Alison You don't know.
Sandy No. Do you?
Alison (*at the moment of decision*) No.
Sandy Well, I suppose they met the way tourists usually do . . .
Alison Most likely.
Sandy They were probably staying at the same hotel in Florence or Venice . . .
Alison Perugia.

He looks at her. She smiles brightly

Florence and Venice have been done so much, don't you think?
Sandy (*conceding*) Ah, well—yes—Perugia—and they probably happened to speak to each other in the lobby . . .
Alison (*helping along*) Probably at the desk, getting their mail . . .
Sandy Yes! The sort of thing people do. Don't you think so?
Alison Or a shop? What about a shop?
Sandy (*considering*) Yes . . .
Alison A shop sounds more fun.
Sandy (*getting into the spirit of it*) Yes, all those tourists. And your mother might have been trying to buy something from a salesman who didn't speak English, and my father came to her rescue . . .
Alison Lovely idea. Make a good film.
Sandy Yes!
Alison Cary Grant and my mother.
Sandy (*enjoying it*) I don't think Cary Grant speaks Italian.
Alison I don't think it would matter.
Sandy (*laughing*) And my father's Italian was very good. He came to Italy every year.
Alison Alone?
Sandy (*very much at ease now*) Yes. His yearly sabbatical, from the family and the job. He loved to wander about Italy alone, for a month every year.
Alison Sounds lovely. And then what?
Sandy (*working it out logically*) Well—my father had a car—and I guess he was on his way to Rome——
Alison —and he discovered that my mother was going to Rome——
Sandy —and so he offered her a lift——
Alison —for which she was eternally grateful.
Sandy (*rising, startled*) Well . . .

Alison And they lived happily ever after for several hours, and then went over the side of a mountain, and were killed.
Sandy (*crossing the room*) What a damned-fool senseless thing. And so cruelly ironic that your mother, a stranger . . .
Alison (*firmly*) Please stop calling her a stranger.
Sandy (*startled*) Oh! I'm sorry!
Alison (*with a touch of hardness*) I wonder what they said to each other as they went over the edge?

He stares at her

Do you never think of things like that? I've often wished I could collect the last words of people as they go hurtling to their death. Or do you suppose they say something terrible prosaic, like "Damn!"?
Sandy I've said something to annoy you.
Alison No, really not. I think you've worked out a very acceptable story.
Sandy It makes sense, doesn't it?
Alison Oh, very good sense.
Sandy I just hope I don't have to use it, that's all.
Alison What do you mean?
Sandy (*wandering down* L) I've got a problem. How do I go about explaining to my mother that my father was found dead with a . . . another woman?
Alison Do you have to make it sound so—improper?
Sandy (*with a small smile*) No matter how it's told to my mother, it will sound improper.
Alison Ah. Of the old school, is she?
Sandy Yes.
Alison (*rising and moving to him as she speaks*) I suspect you come of an intensely respectable American family. Do you?
Sandy Yes.
Alison Heartland of America, and all that?

He nods

Puritan stock? Oh pioneers?
Sandy Yes.

Alison considers him with grave amusement for a moment

Alison Don't tell her. Tell her it was that Italian hitch-hiker. Mr Wesley and the American Embassy will swear to it.

Sandy laughs, liking her very much

Sandy Would you like a drink?
Alison I'd love one.
Sandy (*going to the drinks table*) Something Italian, or bourbon, from the Heartland of America?
Alison Oh, Heartland of America, of course!

Baldo opens the door and puts his head in

Baldo Permesso!

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