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Come Back, Come Back, Wherever You Are

Arthur Laurents

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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COME BACK, COME BACK, WHEREVER YOU ARE was first produced by the George Street Playhouse (David Saint, artistic director; Todd Schmidt, managing director) in New Brunswick, New Jersey on October 9, 2009. The performance was directed by Arthur Laurents, with sets by James Youmans, costumes by Esther Arroyo, lighting by Howell Binkley, sound by Christopher J. Bailey, and musical direction by Christopher Howatt. The production stage manager was Thomas Clewell. The cast was as follows:

SARA	Alison Fraser
DOUGAL	Jim Bracchitta
MARION	Shirley Knight
RICHARD	John Carter
MICHELLE	Leslie Lyles

CHARACTERS

Sara
Dougal
Marion
Richard
Michelle

ACT ONE

Scene One

*(Darkness. Fading in, a piano and bass backing SARA singing a melancholy tinged **Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries**. As her voice fades in, a spot on her fades in. She is wearing a simple black summery dress.)*

SARA.

Life is just a bowl of cherries.
Don't take it serious, it's too mysterious.
You work, you slave, you worry so
but when the end comes around,
you've got to go go go.

So keep repeating it's the berries.
The strongest oak must fall.

The great things in life to you were just loaned
so how can you lose what you've never owned.

(She stops for a moment. The bass continues to pluck away. Then she comes back in:)

Life is just a bowl of cherries,
so live and laugh,
laugh and love,
live and love and laugh at it all."

(There is applause which fades out as the light does. Darkness. Then light comes up on a back door in an alleyway. A man is waiting: DOUGAL. He is 40 something, younger than Sara, dressed casually, as attractive as his easy chatter. But like her song, there is something sad there. SARA comes out the door, a little jacket over the dress and carrying a purse. The mutual sexual attraction is unacknowledged.)

DOUGAL. Welcome back.

SARA. Thank you.

DOUGAL. I'd just about given up on hearing you again.

When I asked that blowhard doorman who acts as though he owns the place –

SARA. He does.

DOUGAL. He does?

SARA. He does.

DOUGAL. You like him?

SARA. I wouldn't sing here if I didn't.

DOUGAL. Well, this hasn't been my year anyway. When I asked him if you were ever coming back, he said he didn't know.

SARA. He didn't. Neither did I.

DOUGAL. You didn't?

SARA. No.

DOUGAL. That doesn't make sense.

SARA. Maybe not but I didn't know.

DOUGAL. Why not?

SARA. You don't know me well enough to ask.

DOUGAL. I know you better than you think. You're a very personal singer and I've heard you sing a lot. You're singing very differently now.

SARA. Yes, I am.

DOUGAL. I like it.

SARA. That's nice to hear.

DOUGAL. It suits how I'm feeling these days.

SARA. (*smiles*) And how are you feeling these days?

DOUGAL. Bittersweet.

SARA. You listen.

DOUGAL. Oh, I listen. But I was listening for a song I didn't hear.

SARA. Which?

DOUGAL. "The Best Things In Life Are Free."

SARA. *(a moment)* You came to hear that.

DOUGAL. Yes.

SARA. *(a moment)* No. I didn't sing it.

(She starts to walk. As she does, the doorway slowly recedes off and from the opposite side, a bench with a small tree behind it slowly slides on)

DOUGAL. *(walking with her)* Would you sing it tomorrow night?

SARA. It's not in the set I'm doing.

DOUGAL. Your musicians could play it in their sleep –

SARA. They don't sing it.

DOUGAL. It was my girlfriend's favorite. It made her laugh.

SARA. "The Best Things In Life Are Free" made her laugh?

DOUGAL. She works on Wall Street.

SARA. *(stopping at the bench)* Here's where one of us gets off.

(sits)

DOUGAL. They're not very happy people on Wall Street. It made her happy to laugh. It made me happy to see her happy.

(He sits.)

I had a fantasy I would be listening to you sing "The Best Things in Life Are Free" and she would walk in.

SARA. And laugh.

DOUGAL. She could anything as long as she walked in. The thing about fantasies, you should always remember they're fantasies. She's never going to walk in. She married a short seller.

SARA. Then why do you still want to hear "The Best Things"?

DOUGAL. You made me believe it.

SARA. But it didn't come true for you.

DOUGAL. Not with her. But it will.

SARA. That song means that much?

DOUGAL. Life, she is funny.

SARA. (*after a moment*) Do you believe in coincidence?

DOUGAL. No.

SARA. Don't flirt.

DOUGAL. I don't believe in accidents either. That song means a lot to someone you know, doesn't it?

SARA. Someone I had just met years ago. it was the first song he told me to sing.

DOUGAL. Who was he? Your accompanist?

SARA. (*laughs*) He wasn't even a musician. He had a great ear, though. He was a landscaper. This is his tree. You can't imagine how many bureaucrats he had to work on to get it planted. But he wanted it and here it is – and it's growing. Typical Paolo. He made me grow.

DOUGAL. How?

SARA. The songs he picked – he'd suggest them and say what they meant to him. Making them mean that to me changed how I sang.

DOUGAL. You wanted to do that for a landscaper. Jesus. Why?

SARA. He was Paolo.

DOUGAL. Who was what to you?

SARA. Husband. For 27 years.

DOUGAL. Well, there you have it. My girlfriend lasted a record breaking five.

SARA. His mother says I was fortunate to have had 27 but she's a therapist.

DOUGAL. He had a therapist for a mother and you married him?

SARA. Oh, she paints, too. No lessons. She just began painting flowers, I think it was.

DOUGAL. It usually is.

SARA. But she isn't usual. She began when she got Social Security. Now she can't wait for her patients to go so she can pick up her brushes. He loved her. Really loved her.

DOUGAL. What happened?

SARA. Between her and me?

DOUGAL. Between her and you? She's a therapist, she's your mother-in-law and your husband was mad about her. No. What happened to him?

SARA. *(a long moment)* Colon cancer. Last October 26th, just before midnight.

(a pause)

He was in the hospital and I wasn't there. His doctor had told me he was getting out in the morning so I was home, watering his plants in the greenhouse.

(another pause)

He said you die in hospitals. I hate hospitals. When they called, it was as though they were telling me my order had been cancelled.

DOUGAL. Still, you had 27 years. That's fortunate all right.

SARA. I realized that but it took me too long.

DOUGAL. Well, it meant admitting his mother was right.

SARA. *(laughs)* You certainly say it as it is.

DOUGAL. You don't?

SARA. I don't always know what it is anymore. I talk to Paolo to find out. You believe that?

DOUGAL. Why not?

SARA. Don't flirt.

DOUGAL. I'm not.

SARA. You know why I'm singing again? Bursting into tears was the only way I knew I had any feelings. I could sit with people without hearing a word. I didn't make any effort either. What was the point? I'd had a marvelous marriage to an extraordinary man. He was gone. He wouldn't be back. Then one day, I was watering plants in the greenhouse and there he was. Paolo. We began talking.

(laughs)

SARA. (*cont.*) I washed my hair. Last month, he told me to start singing again. It would help. I've always loved to sing. So I did and he was right. You saw tonight. I'm sort of coming back together. Just as he said I would. Do you believe that?

DOUGAL. Yes.

SARA. Why?

DOUGAL. I believe you.

SARA. Have you lost someone?

DOUGAL. No but my parents lost me when I was born.

SARA. You are flirting.

DOUGAL. I'm not.

SARA. It won't do you any good.

DOUGAL. It would if I were flirting but as it happens, for the moment, I'm not. Look. Either you believe I believe you or you don't.

(*a moment*)

No. Believe me.

(*He takes her hand.*)

SARA. (*withdrawing her hand*) Don't.

DOUGAL. You read me wrong.

SARA. I read your basics and I'm trying to help you read me. You know the expression: a hard act to follow?

DOUGAL. Yeah. You know the expression: a good man is hard to find?

(*She laughs.*)

Thank you! Happy days! There's hope!

(*The light fades out.*)

Scene Two

(Part of a den converted into a makeshift studio. Water color materials are on an end table next to a tilted board which serves as an easel for the water color MARION is painting on drawing paper pinned to the board. She is a good looking older woman, dressed simply. RICHARD sits in a large easy chair, trying to pretend he is still the big, tall, attractive man he once was. He plays with a little rubber ball to strengthen his hand. MARION sometimes pauses mid-sentence for a brush stroke.)

MARION. So because the song he came to hear her sing is the same song that was Paolo's favorite, a higher power is on the job.

RICHARD. That's what she says.

MARION. Poor Freud.

RICHARD. OK. What would you say it was?

MARION. How about coincidence?

RICHARD. She doesn't believe in coincidence.

MARION. Do you?

RICHARD. I don't believe in believing in anything.

MARION. Yes, I know, but do you believe she began singing again because Paolo told her to?

RICHARD. That's what she said.

MARION. I know that's what she said but do you believe it?

RICHARD. I'm not a believer, I'm a thinker. I think if it makes her happy, he told her to start singing again. What do you think?

MARION. I think it's bullshit.

RICHARD. Surprise!

MARION. Richard –

RICHARD. I will say you're consistent.

MARION. I'm upsetting you.

RICHARD. You are not.

MARION. The doctor warned me not to –

RICHARD. Christ, Marion. I'm fine. I am enormously fine.

MARION. I am enormously pleased.

(as she paints)

Richard, I'm glad she's singing again whatever the reason. It's good for her to be busy doing. It'll help. But sooner or later – sweetheart, Sara has got to accept that Paolo is dead. Then she can move on and get a life going without him.

RICHARD. She accepts that he's dead.

MARION. She does.

RICHARD. Oh, yes.

MARION. She accepts he's dead but she's singing again because he told her to. How did he manage that?

RICHARD. He's Paolo. You wouldn't understand.

MARION. No. I'm his mother.

RICHARD. Well, Sara does. He's here for her.

MARION. Dead but here.

RICHARD. That may seem odd to you but it's not a contradiction. You don't have a drop of poetry in you.

MARION. Thank you for marrying me anyway. Do you accept Paolo's dead?

RICHARD. Every fucking morning.

MARION. Is he here for you?

RICHARD. No.

MARION. But you wish he were.

RICHARD. Lay off, Marion.

MARION. I wish he were but I accept that he's dead and I move on. More patients, more paintings. He's dead, Richard. Not passed away, not gone, not just not here, dead. Merely saying the word helps.

RICHARD. Helps you. You know what helps me? Sara. She keeps him alive.

MARION. For you?

RICHARD. Yes. How about that?

MARION. Good for her. No, you're wrong. I meant that.
Anything that helps.

RICHARD. Well, she does.

MARION. And I don't.

RICHARD. It's not your job. I'm your husband, not your
patient – at least I hope I'm not.

MARION. I'm not telling.

RICHARD. I'm not paying.

MARION. Richard – he was our son. Feel whatever you have
to.

(A moment. She paints.)

RICHARD. OK. What's today's candidate for the Metro-
politan?

MARION. Blue horses.

RICHARD. Jesus. Still?

MARION. They're flying now.

RICHARD. Flying. I'd drink to that if I drank.

(a moment)

Why are they flying?

MARION. Why are they blue?

RICHARD. Are you ever going to know?

MARION. I doubt it.

RICHARD. Suppose you were one of your patients?

MARION. I wouldn't go to me.

(SARA walks in.)

I was just about to call you.

(to RICHARD)

That's a coincidence.

(to SARA)

You look lovely, sweetie. I want to ask a favor.

SARA. You look lovely.

RICHARD. *(to SARA)* Ask her your favor.

MARION. She goes first?

RICHARD. She's the best thing that ever happened to Paolo.

MARION. AA was the best thing that ever happened to Paolo.

(to SARA)

Well, he wouldn't have married you otherwise. Or anyone.

(to SARA)

You knew I meant "or anyone," didn't you?

SARA. I knew what you meant, Marion.

RICHARD. OK, girls.

(gets up carefully)

Mickey's on her way over –

MARION. Michelle. Richard, please take it easy.

RICHARD. I'm fine! Michelle's on her way over and the accounts still aren't ready.

(to SARA)

Swap favors with Marion, beauty. Then come by my office and brighten my day.

(He goes.)

SARA. How is he?

MARION. Very well, fingers crossed. Can I ask my favor? I know you're busy again – which is good. Exactly what you need. I mean that. But if I'm asking at the wrong time, just say so.

SARA. No, ask away.

MARION. I did a painting for Paolo's birthday and took it to the framer just before he went to the hospital. Then he died and I forgot all about it. Yesterday, I was looking at my birthday list –

SARA. His is coming up.

MARION. Yes.

(A moment. They're both still.)

Milestones are reminders.

SARA. There's not much that isn't.

MARION. But once you accept –

SARA. What about the painting, Marion?

MARION. It's still at the framer's. Would you mind picking it up for me? I don't want to ask Michelle –

SARA. I don't mind, Marion.

MARION. Why she persists in calling herself Mickey is beyond me. I know it wasn't easy to be Paolo's kid sister. And not being a beauty in the bargain –

SARA. Marion –

MARION. Well, God knows Richard and I didn't help. Frankly, I think she's basically our fault.

SARA. Marion, I said I didn't mind. It's no trouble. I'll pick up the painting.

MARION. Oh. You will?

SARA. Gladly.

MARION. Thank you. I spend so damn much time listening that given half a chance to talk, I can't shut up. The receipt with the framer's address – it's all paid for – here we are.

(hands SARA the receipt)

SARA. Where do you want me to bring it?

MARION. Here. Why?

SARA. Well, weren't you going to give it to Paolo for his birthday?

MARION. Yes.

SARA. You still can.

MARION. Oh? And how can I do that?

SARA. Give it to me to hang in his greenhouse.

MARION. Oh, spare me.

SARA. Better than you hanging it here where it would remind Richard.

MARION. *(after a moment)* Name your favor.

SARA. I'd like you and Richard to come hear me sing.

MARION. Sweetie, Richard's in bed by 9:30.

SARA. Truthfully, it's you I'd like to come hear me.

MARION. I can't leave Richard alone.

SARA. Michelle could stay with him.

MARION. I've heard you sing, Sara. Quite a few times.

SARA. To please Paolo.

MARION. Why does it matter now?

SARA. I want you to know me. If you hear me sing, you'll know me.

MARION. I know you, Sara.

SARA. No, you don't, Marion. Even if you ever did, you don't now. I'm different. I sing differently.

MARION. If I hear you, I'll know you and then what?

SARA. You'll let me know you.

MARION. You know me, Sara. You just aren't too fond of what you know.

SARA. Paolo really loved you.

MARION. And you can't figure out why.

SARA. I don't know you.

MARION. But there must be something more to me than what you do know.

SARA. Yes.

MARION. The trust people put in Paolo is frightening. I say that about my own son.

SARA. He was always right about people.

MARION. Heavens. Even his mother? Maybe I should hear you sing.

SARA. He wanted us to love each other, Marion.

MARION. You just blew it.

SARA. Like each other.

MARION. He told you that.

SARA. That's what he wanted.

MARION. He told you that. You heard him.

SARA. (*a moment*) Marion, I didn't leave the house for five months after Paolo died. I didn't sing a note. I didn't answer the phone. I'd go into his greenhouse and

burst into tears. I could barely see to water his plants. I didn't know a thing about plants until Paolo but my last anniversary present to him was a rare kind of orchid. Maybe what happened happened because I realized that was our last anniversary. Or maybe it was your department – my unconscious. Anyway – orchids take very little water. That orchid didn't need watering but one day, I lifted the can to pour. I was about to drown it. To kill it in revenge for his death, I guess. Paolo stopped me. He was right there. In the greenhouse. I began talking to him. I know, Marion, but I did. We began having conversations. I started going out of the house, first to buy things for the plants. Then one day, he told me to begin singing again. I did. Even though it was summer and I never sang in summer because that was his busiest time. I like singing warm nights now. I look forward to it. Life's getting better. It would be even better if we were friends, Marion.

MARION. So said Paolo.

SARA. Yes. He did.

MARION. How's the orchid doing?

SARA. Very well, fingers crossed.

MARION. I don't need to hear you sing, Sara.

SARA. Come anyway. You might enjoy it.

MARION. Anything's possible.

SARA. Oh, Marion. You're –

MARION. I always have been.

SARA. Well – I want time with Richard before Michelle arrives.

(She starts out.)

MARION. Sara – aren't you still lonely anyway?

SARA. *(a moment)* I'm a work in progress, Marion. I used to visualize him and cry away. Now I don't let myself visualize him but there are photographs of him – by our bed, on the piano, all over the house. So I cry sometimes anyway. Of course I'm still lonely, Marion. Aren't you?

(The light is fading as she goes.)

Scene Three

(The front of a framing shop.)

(SARA is waiting. She sees an old fashioned bell on the counter. She taps it. A moment after it rings, DOUGAL comes from the back, lugging a picture wrapped in brown paper.)

DOUGAL. Sorry. I was so wrapped up in wrapping this –

(sees her)

Sometimes you're wide awake and it's happening.

(She just stares at him.)

Sara? Sara, you're not going to faint on me?

SARA. This is your shop.

DOUGAL. Yes. Do you want some water? I'll get you a chair.

(He does and seats her as:)

I don't have brandy. You're supposed to for an emergency but so many painters are alcoholics. Sara. Sara, let me –

(She waves him away.)

Sara, I'm harmless.

SARA. *(fishing the receipt from her bag)* You're the framer.

DOUGAL. Yes. Guilty.

SARA. *(handing him the receipt)* This is your receipt.

DOUGAL. *(examines the receipt)* Yep. It's over a year old.

SARA. But you still have the picture.

DOUGAL. Oh yes. One reason I'm still in business. I learned early on: make 'em pay in advance.

(examining the receipt)

It's not a print or a poster.

SARA. How do you know?

DOUGAL. From the price. Do you know what it is?

SARA. A water color, probably.

DOUGAL. Of what?

SARA. Oh, dear. I forgot to ask.

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