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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Rule of Thumb

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

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The Rats

CHARACTERS

SANDRA GREY
JENNIFER BRICE
DAVID FORRESTER
ALEC HANBURY

THE RATS was first presented by Peter Saunders at the Duchess Theatre, London on 20 December 1962. The performance was directed by Hubert Gregg, with sets by Peter Rice. The cast was as follows:

SANDRA GREY . . . . . Betty McDowall
JENNIFER BRICE . . . . . Mercy Haystead
DAVID FORRESTER . . . . . David Langton
ALEC HANBURY . . . . . Raymond Bowers

(The Michael Torrance's flat in Hampstead. A fine summer evening, about 6:30 p.m. The flat is a studio. There is a door leading on to a small balcony and a long window running across the back showing a view over the roof tops. Inside there is the front door and a hallway leading to the bathroom and kitchenette. Below the window is a very big chest, known as a Damascus Bridal Chest, dark wood studded with ornamental brass nails. Prominent is a line of Baghdad coffee pots with large beaked spouts. There are also one or two pieces of Persian or Islamic pottery and a Kurdish knife held in a sheaf. Otherwise the furnishings of the flat are severely modern. There is a big double divan covered with cushions and a low table with modern armchairs either side of it. On the table is a tray with drinks and a few glasses. There is also a budgerigar in a cage. The entrance buzzer and knocker sound. This is repeated impatiently then **SANDRA***'s voice is heard offstage.)*

SANDRA. *(Offstage.)* Anyone there? Anyone at home?

(She knocks on the door and gives a surprised exclamation as it opens. **SANDRA** *enters. She is a smart and very attractive woman of thirty.)*

Pat – Michael?

(She looks around then crosses to the hallway, exits, re-enters, then moves to the balcony door and looks out. Puzzled, she removes her wrap, puts it over the back of an armchair

then sits. She reaches for a cigarette box on the coffee table but finds it empty. Taking one from her handbag she lights it then gets up and walks about, puffing with increasing irritability.)

How extraordinary!

(She glances at her watch.)

Nice manners, I must say.

(She goes out on to the balcony. There is the sound of a key in the lock.)

JENNIFER. *(Offstage.)* Oh, it's open!

*(***JENNIFER** *pushes the door and enters. She is a vacant faced young woman of thirty-odd, a bit of a cat and not so silly as she seems. She has rather an affected manner. Seeing the wrap, she stops and turns towards the balcony.)*

Hello, Sandra.

*(***SANDRA** *enters.)*

SANDRA. Jennifer – haven't seen you for ages.

JENNIFER. What are you doing here?

SANDRA. I'm like you – too early for the party. It's always so shaming to be early, isn't it?

JENNIFER. What's this about a party? Whose party?

SANDRA. Well, not a party exactly. The Torrances just said come in for drinks.

JENNIFER. *(Surprised.)* They asked you in for drinks *today*?

SANDRA. Why not? *(Sharply.)* Isn't that why you're here?

JENNIFER. Not exactly.

(She turns away, amused.)

SANDRA. Why shouldn't the Torrances ask me in for drinks?

JENNIFER. No reason at all –

(She pauses.)

The Patient

CHARACTERS

LANSEN
NURSE
DR GINSBERG
INSPECTOR CRAY
BRYAN WINGFIELD
EMMELINE ROSS
WILLIAM ROSS
BRENDA JACKSON

THE PATIENT was first presented by Peter Saunders at the Duchess Theatre, London on 29 December 1962. The director was Hubert Gregg, with sets by Peter Rice. The cast was as follows:

LANSEN . . . . . Raymond Bowers
NURSE . . . . . Mercy Haystead
DR. GINSBERG . . . . . Robert Raglan
INSPECTOR CRAY . . . . . David Langhn
BRYAN WINGFIELD . . . . . Michael Beint
EMMELINE ROSS . . . . . Vera Cook
WILLIAM ROSS . . . . . Robin May
BRENDA JACKSON . . . . . Betty McDowall
THE PATIENT . . . . . Rosemary Martin

(A private room in a nursing home. The room is plain and hygienic looking. There is a set of double doors leading to other parts of the nursing home and across the back a large window covered by Venetian blinds which are at present down but not closed. There is also a small alcove which currently has a curtain drawn across it. There is a piece of electrical apparatus with dials and a red light, a hospital trolley with a steriliser on top and a wall telephone with a bell next to it. There is also a small table with an elbow chair next to it and four small chairs in a rough semicircle. These chairs have the appearance of having been brought into the room for a purpose and not really belonging to it. **LANSEN***, a tall gangling young man with spectacles, wearing a long white hospital overall, is fiddling with the electrical apparatus. The* **NURSE***, a tall, good looking woman, competent and correct, is at the trolley. She lifts the lid of the steriliser, removes a needle with some forceps then places it on a tray. Crossing to the alcove she draws back the curtain, takes out a towel and crosses back to the trolley. A buzzer sounds.* **DR. GINSBERG** *enters through the double doors. He is a dark, clever looking man in his middle forties. He makes for the telephone.)*

GINSBERG. All right, Nurse, I'll answer it.

(He picks up the telephone.)

Yes? … Oh, Inspector Cray, good. Ask him to come up to Room Fourteen, will you?

(He puts down the telephone and crosses to **LANSEN** *and the electrical apparatus.)*

GINSBERG. How are you doing, Lansen? Got it fixed up?

LANSEN. Yes, everything's in order. I'll plug in here, Dr. Ginsberg.

GINSBERG. You're quite sure about this, now? We can't afford to have a slip up.

LANSEN. Quite sure, Doctor. It'll work a treat.

GINSBERG. Good.

(He turns and looks at the chairs.)

Oh, a little less formal I think, Nurse. Let's move these chairs a bit.

(He moves one to the corner.)

Er – that one over there against the wall.

NURSE. Yes, Doctor.

*(***GINSBERG** *exits. The* **NURSE** *lifts a chair, taking it passed the electrical apparatus.)*

LANSEN. Careful!

(He takes it from her and places it against the wall. The **NURSE** *indicates the apparatus with slight curiosity.)*

NURSE. What is this thing?

LANSEN. *(Grinning.)* New electrical gadget.

NURSE. *(Bored.)* Oh, one of those.

LANSEN. Trouble with you people is you've no respect for science.

*(***INSPECTOR CRAY** *enters. He is a middle-aged man of delusively mild appearance.* **GINSBERG** *follows.)*

INSPECTOR. Good afternoon.

GINSBERG. Everything's ready.

(The **INSPECTOR** *indicates the apparatus.)*

INSPECTOR. Is this the contraption?

LANSEN. Good afternoon, Inspector.

GINSBERG. Yes. It's been well tested, Inspector.

LANSEN. It works perfectly. The least touch will make a connection. I guarantee there will be no hitch.

GINSBERG. All right, Lansen. We'll call you when we need you.

*(***LANSEN** *exits.* **GINSBERG** *turns to the* **NURSE**.*)*

Has Nurse Cartwright got the patient ready?

NURSE. Yes, Doctor. Quite ready.

GINSBERG. Nurse Bond here is going to stay and assist me during the experiment.

INSPECTOR. Oh, good. That's very kind of you.

NURSE. Not at all, Inspector. I'll do anything I can to help. I'd never have gone off duty if I'd thought that Mrs. Wingfield was unduly depressed.

GINSBERG. Nobody's blaming you, Nurse.

(He turns to the **INSPECTOR**.*)*

You say the others have arrived?

INSPECTOR. Yes, they're downstairs.

GINSBERG. All four of them?

INSPECTOR. All four of them. Bryan Wingfield, Emmeline Ross, William Ross and Brenda Jackson. They can't leave, I've posted my men.

GINSBERG. *(Formally.)* You must understand Inspector, that the well-being of my patient comes before anything else. At the first sign of collapse or undue excitement, any indication that the experiment is having an adverse effect, I shall stop the proceedings.

(He turns to the **NURSE**.*)*

You understand that, Nurse?

NURSE. Yes, Doctor.

INSPECTOR. Quite so, quite so, I shouldn't expect anything else. *(Uneasily.)* You don't think it's too risky?

The Wasp's Nest

CHARACTERS

CHARLES HARBOROUGH
CLAUD LANGDON
NINA BELLAMY
HERCULE POIROT

SETTING

The garden of Charles Harborough's house about half an hour before sunset on a summer's evening.

THE WASP'S NEST was originally a television play broadcast on the BBC on 18 June 1937. It was broadcast live from Alexandra Palace as part of the programme Theatre Parade. It was directed by George More O'Ferrall and the cast was as follows:

CHARLES HARBOROUGH ..... D.A. Clarke-Smith
CLAUD LANGDON ..... Wallace Douglas
NINA BELLAMY ..... Antoinette Cellier
HERCULE POIROT ..... Francis L. Sullivan

(The garden of **CHARLES HARBOROUGH***'s house. There is a wall with a door leading to the road. Near the door is a tall shrub. There is a table with drinks and garden chairs and an old tree root can be seen which contains a wasp's nest.* **NINA BELLAMY** *and* **CLAUD LANGDON** *are together. She is a pretty girl of twenty. At the moment she looks worried and upset. He is a good looking fellow of twenty-seven. He has a sullen expression on his face and is refusing to look at her.)*

NINA. *(Pleadingly.)* You do see how it was, don't you, Claud?

CLAUD. *(Reluctantly.)* Yes, I see.

NINA. And you forgive me?

(He does not answer.)

You do forgive me?

CLAUD. *(Impatiently.)* Oh, of course, of course! We've been over all that.

(He speaks to himself.)

But it's a bad show.

NINA. What?

CLAUD. Nothing, my dear.

NINA. You're so queer and unlike yourself.

CLAUD. Well, I feel rather badly about the business that's all.

NINA. It was my fault – all my fault. I blame myself bitterly.

CLAUD. You mustn't do that. It was my fault as much as yours. I was a bad tempered overbearing brute. No wonder you couldn't put up with me.

*(**HERCULE POIROT** enters. He stands in the doorway unnoticed, observing the two young people.)*

NINA. Yes, but I needn't have –

CLAUD. *(Impatiently.)* Oh, don't let's go over it all again.

NINA. I want you to understand.

CLAUD. I do understand.

NINA. And you do forgive me?

*(**CLAUD** takes **NINA** in his arms and kisses her gently.)*

And now you really have forgiven me?

CLAUD. For the thousandth time, yes!

NINA. *(Recoiling.)* But you are still angry, though.

CLAUD. Let's wash the subject out once and for all. Are you coming?

NINA. Not now. I'm waiting to see Charles.

CLAUD. *(Rudely.)* And more talk – talk – talk! Sorry, Nina, I'm in a bad mood today.

*(He turns sharply to exit and collides with **POIROT**.)*

POIROT. Pardon!

CLAUD. Sorry. My fault.

POIROT. Not at all, Mr. Langdon.

CLAUD. *(Surprised.)* You know me?

POIROT. I saw your name, *(Pause.)* at the chemist's shop.

*(**CLAUD** looks a little disconcerted.)*

CLAUD. Oh! The chemist's shop…

POIROT. Precisely. The chemist's shop.

CLAUD. *(Uncertainly.)* Oh!

*(He exits brusquely. **POIROT** bows politely to **NINA**.)*

POIROT. Mademoiselle!

(He looks slowly round as though in search of something.)

NINA. *(Coldly.)* Do you – er – want anything?

POIROT. It is true that I search for something.

NINA. What?

POIROT. A wasp's nest.

*(***NINA** *looks at him as if he is mad.)*

NINA. These are private grounds, you know.

POIROT. *(Searching.)* Mais oui, mais oui.

NINA. So unless you wish to see Mr. Harborough –

POIROT. *(Absently.)* Monsieur Harborough, yes.

NINA. *(Sharply.)* This is Mr. Harborough's estate.

POIROT. I know. It is to see my friend Monsieur Harborough that I come.

NINA. *(Relieved.)* Oh, I see!

POIROT. *(Cheekily.)* So you see, Mademoiselle, I am not quite so mad as you think.

NINA. Oh, I didn't –

POIROT. But you did. You showed it most plainly. Now however, you are reassured. I am the friend of the family. My character is cleared.

NINA. I did think that perhaps –

(She breaks off and laughs.)

I suppose I showed it rather plainly.

POIROT. I am very quick to see things.

(He looks at her attentively.)

I can see something else. That you are worried, Mademoiselle.

NINA. Oh!

(She turns abruptly away. **CHARLES HARBOROUGH***, a man of about forty, enters.)*

CHARLES. *(Surprised.)* Nina!

NINA. *(Nervously.)* Yes, I – I wanted to see you.

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