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## Grand Tour

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## **Abstract**

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"We were the only ones among our friends who hadn't been to Europe yet. Most of them went on the fourteen-day-five- countries deal, and they were led from place to place. They had become experts in everything European and talked about the trip in great detail. They all came back raving about their "Grand Tour" and about all the good places they had found to eat and the fine stores to shop in. For weeks, we heard little else but "When we walked into the lobby of the *Excelsior*, we saw Sophia Loren," and "The gloves we bought at Vincoli's are double the price at Saks." The boys got tired of it soon, but the girls kept it up even during the Wednesday night Canasta game."

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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# Grand Tour

By Regina Zalles

We were the only ones among our friends who hadn't been to Europe yet. Most of them went on the fourteen-day-five-countries deal, and they were led from place to place. They had become experts in everything European and talked about the trip in great detail. They all came back raving about their "Grand Tour" and about all the good places they had found to eat and the fine stores to shop in. For weeks, we heard little else but "When we walked into the lobby of the *Excelsior*, we saw Sophia Loren," and "The gloves we bought at Vincoli's are double the price at Saks." The boys got tired of it soon, but the girls kept it up even during the Wednesday night Canasta game.

I had nagged right along with the girls, but my Sam was harder to convince. He used to say that his parents left the old country for good reasons, so why should he go back there? I tried the "instant education" bid, "the chance to see something new" bid, but he wasn't in the least bit interested. Whenever I brought it up, he would say, "Why don't you go without me? I'll give you the money," knowing fully well that I didn't have the guts to make it on my own. He always had good excuses. Our winters were long and grey, and Florida had the sunshine, so we chased the sun all the way to Miami Beach. Sam played a lot of

golf and there was always something to do. In the spring, it was his busy season and who goes away in the summer anyway, with the beautiful golf course practically in the backyard and the dues at the club going up from year to year? Then came fall and with it the Jewish High Holy Days and the cry "We can't afford it this year."

I make Sam sound like a difficult person. He isn't really. It's just that he's set in his ways and loves his golf. Not that he's such a good golfer. He's more like a duffer who's trying hard, like most of the guys he plays with. One day he can come home from a game real happy and ready to give out with the post-mortems of every shot. The next time just the opposite; he is quiet about the game and only mumbles about having to take more lessons from the pro. He tells me he likes the game because it gets him out in the air and for the comradeship it brings. I know some of the guys he plays with, and I'm convinced that it isn't really the fellows but the gambling that goes on from hole to hole. He even takes off in bad weather and I worry about his catching cold. But he never does.

Sometimes I wonder why he runs all the time. I feel that he doesn't want to hang around the house on Saturdays and Sundays not knowing what to do with himself. Maybe if we had had a couple of kids, he might have spent time with them, taking them to the zoo and

playing with them. We'll never know, I guess. I really felt awful after I found out I couldn't have any. "Sam," I said, "Why don't we adopt a kid? What good is your working so hard if you have nobody to leave it to? I would have had someone to love. With Mom and Dad gone, who's around?"

I remember the long look he gave me before he said, "How'd you know he would want my business? Look at Joe Rosen's kid. Joe slaves to make a professor or something out of him and that wiseguy comes home and tells him he knows nothing." Sam was right, of course, he could always see the future much better than I. I was only thinking of a little baby to hold, but he saw already what could happen later on. He likes to act the big shot with his family. No wonder they all look up to him, the way he treats them when he's with them. Even his kid brother who went to college seeks his advice on money.

I really have no reason to complain. He's been a good husband and a good provider. He likes it when we go out and I'm dressed well. He always wants me to buy the best. The girls at the office where I used to work all agreed that Sam was a great catch, and that I would have a full-length mink before I was thirty. I knew they were jealous. Some of the guys they were dating weren't even making a living.

At one time I nagged him a lot about his staying out at night to play gin with

*Regina Zalles, a Brighton writer, is especially interested in the relations between Europeans*

the boys. For a while, he used to be out three nights a week. Now it's only two, and one is on Wednesday that I have my Canasta game with the girls. Our friends are a nice bunch and we get along fine. We go to Florida together and we always have a lot of fun. We have known each other a long time and some of us went to school together. We even go to a concert once in a while. I get the tickets and Sam goes with me without too much protest. I just love to sit there and listen to the music and see all those dressed-up people. Sam usually falls asleep halfway through the program. It isn't that he doesn't like the music, it's because he works so hard during the day and he's tired. I am glad that he takes me. I sometimes read a bestseller and tell Sam about it when he gets home at night. He doesn't read much and hardly has the patience to look through the daily paper. I always tell him he works too hard and he gets too exhausted, then he tells me to quit nagging.

Well, I really wanted to talk about our trip to Europe. We did go, finally. He didn't know what to get me for our twenty-fifth anniversary. I had all the jewelry I ever wanted and my fur coat from two years ago was still in good condition. I didn't know either what to get for him. It's hard to buy anything for him besides clothes. One night when we were sitting around after dinner, he said he couldn't think of a thing to buy me, so I sprang it on him. "Why don't we buy each other that trip to Europe? Our anniversary is in May and what could be nicer than Paris in the spring?" I had caught him the right moment and he gave in.

The next morning I was at the travel office. They suggested a two-week tour to Rome, Florence, Venice, Nice and Paris. Sam didn't want to go on a group tour; he didn't want to be told where to go and what to see. This plan sounded just fine. I was real excited and I planned my wardrobe for weeks in advance. Sam wasn't excited at all. As a matter of fact, he didn't give it a thought; he was so busy at the office trying to get everything in shape before he left. It was spring and his busy season. It used to hurt me a little at times when he said that he did it just to please me; but I figured that once he saw the beauty of the places we were going to, he'd change his mind. I thought of romance

on a gondola in the moonlight on the canals of Venice. I even bought the sexiest nightgown I could find. It had been so long since we had romance on our minds. After all, how can a man feel romantic when he works so hard and his wife complains a lot?

I loved Rome and though we were tired for a couple of days from the long flight, I dragged Sam around quite a bit. He didn't have much to say when he saw all the ruins and churches. I think he enjoyed the Vatican though; the size of it impressed him. For me, everything was exciting and I was ready to sign up for every tour advertised in the hotel. But Sam stopped me and said to hold it right there. After seeing three churches, he had enough and the ruins were all the same to him. I could see that he was not quite over the time change, but I was sure that once he got to the other places he would be rested and enjoy it all so much more. So we sat in a restaurant that has tables on the sidewalk and watched the world go by. He said those studs strutting by in their tight pants and their shirts open to the belly button made him sick. I told him he was jealous because he could never look like them the way he eats. When he got up and said he had enough, I stopped right then. I had made up my mind that on this trip we were going to have no arguments.

Then came the two days in Florence and there he started to get crabby. He said he didn't have to travel thousands of miles to see pictures. After all, he didn't go to museums back home so why walk off his feet here? I must admit I was a little tired myself, and I had enough too. I enjoyed the old hotel we were staying in. It had giant beds and nice antique furniture. Sam said for what he was paying a night, we should take some of those antiques home with us. He was joking, of course. We looked out on the little side streets where women were hanging out their washing in the morning and some were singing along with the noisy radio.

The next place was Venice. In the train Sam bitched about the tipping, how everyone had his hand out, how dirty and poor the country looked. With all the Americans there, how come that so few people spoke English? I tried to tell him that in New York City you also have dirt, and that every city in America has its share of slums, and that every-

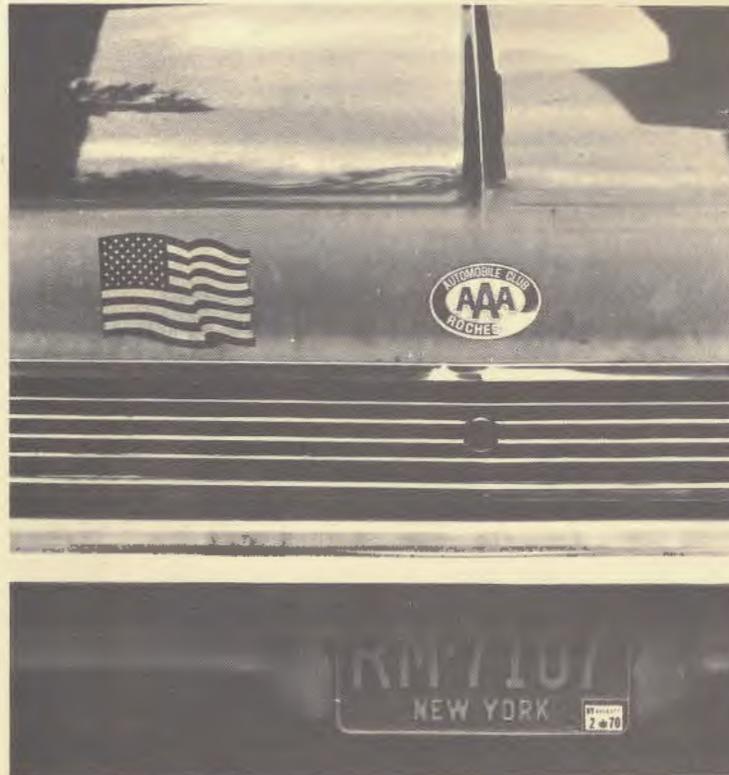
body in the tourist business has his hand out everywhere, including America.

Venice was dirty and the canals looked filthy. It was interesting for a few hours to ride around in a gondola and look at the houses the way they stand in the water. Too bad they are so shabby with the paint peeling off. Someone at the hotel said that the insides are like real palaces and nobody is allowed to modernize the outside. It has something to do with preserving the old look of the city. Sam said that he preferred Fort Lauderdale, which also has canals, and is much cleaner and prettier. I can understand that it is cleaner, it isn't hundreds of years old.

The next stop was Nice on the Riviera. There we stayed for three days. I just loved the place with the mountains in the back and the sea in front. The houses and streets were clean and flowers were growing everywhere. The scenery even impressed Sam, and I was so glad that he seemed to like it. We walked around a lot and once took a taxi to the top of the mountain. The view was just terrific and Sam decided we would rent a car for the next day and drive a bit along the coast.

Sam got real romantic that night. We stood on the terrace and he took me in his arms, and said that this was the place he would remember most about the trip. I knew that Sam could still be romantic, but he just can't find the right moment at home. Then he said right afterwards, when we were lying in bed and looking at the ceiling bright with the light of the moon that this wasn't enough to make such a trip worthwhile. I said nothing because I didn't want to spoil the beautiful moment we had just had. I know when he says something sharp he doesn't always mean it that way. He is really soft inside and embarrassed to say something real sweet and nice. I will always think about that night as long as I live.

The next day we rented a little car. It was the cutest little thing and drove almost as well as our Cadillac. Even Sam had to agree that it was fun to drive it. We stopped at a nice village for lunch. The food was good but Sam thought it was highly overpriced. The waiter understood little English and that annoyed Sam too. After lunch we drove on and Sam kept on talking about the waiter and how much he had tipped him.



"Much too much," he said. "Did you see his face when I handed him the five-franc note?"

"Well," I said, "you gave him another five, didn't you?" I told him again, patiently, that we overtip in New York too and that the waiters there are just as unfriendly. But with Sam, you can't win and I gave up.

I remember when we stopped at a look-out and I wanted to get out and see the scenery. Below us was a village sitting on a rock as if someone had just thrown it there and it hung on for dear life. Sam couldn't imagine anyone living there. How narrow the little alleys had to be and no car could ever go through.

Out of nowhere, a boy about ten or eleven appeared and planted himself next to me. He had lovely black eyes, deep and shiny, and a head of black curly hair that fell in bangs over his forehead. He looked at me with the nicest smile and said something in French I didn't understand. He mo-

tioned with his arms which must have meant, "What a beautiful view!" He just stood next to me, still smiling. I smiled back and felt like hugging him. He wore those tiny shorts, real short, like many of the kids we had seen and a white shirt that must have seen many washings. It looked grey and worn. His eyes gazed at my face with a look much older than his years. Sam looked at him and said that that little beggar wasn't going to leave us until we gave him some money. He was spoiling it all for me. So I dared him to offer money to the kid. I knew he wouldn't take it. It would show Sam that not everyone in Europe was out for his money.

Sam took out a few coins and offered them to the kid. The little boy smiled at him and shook his head. "You see, just what I said," I told Sam, and I started to walk back to the car. Sam followed me quietly and suddenly had nothing to say. He put the coins back in his pocket, when the kid ran ahead of him and, with a real flourish and a deep bow, opened the car door for me to get in. Then he

ran around to the other side and did the same for Sam.

When Sam was ready to start the motor and I had said thank you, the boy stuck his hand into the car and demanded "Money" in clearly pronounced English. Sam started to laugh. His whole body shook with laughter as if he couldn't or wouldn't stop. He took out a real bill and handed it to the kid. He stepped on the accelerator and took off, still laughing. Slowly, he calmed down and a slow grin spread all over his face. He said nothing for a while and I felt sick. I felt the tears coming and turned my head. I just couldn't look at Sam. I had thought that I had glimpsed something. I didn't know what it was but it wasn't for me. We shouldn't have come to Europe in the first place. Sam was right as usual.

After a while, still smiling, he asked me why I was so quiet, and, without waiting for my answer, he said as if nothing had happened, "I think we'll try Fort Lauderdale next winter. It'll be a nice change."