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The Vacationers

by Victoria Watson

Miss Pym walked magestically into the Breakfast Room and disdainfully surveyed the other residents seated at the numerous tables clattering with their forks and knives. She smiled primly at Colonel Montperrier who was making light work of his black pudding and fried eggs. He raised a bushy eyebrow but continued ploughing through, egg yolk dripping from his substantial bushy moustache.

She neatly curtailed the table of the two Miss Barncombes and both their heads turned in perfect orchestration to watch her find the central table next to the window. The younger Barncombe sister mumbled a good morning and offered some pleasantries over the weather. Miss Pym nodded dismissively and looked away; she was not willing to enter into frivolous discussions over “times of year” or last year’s rainfall. She sat down and adjusted the table settings, noted the mismatched salt and pepper pots with dismay, straightened the cutlery and adjusted the cup in the saucer, before sitting back to observe all around her.

Mrs Fickerton was holding up a fringed shawl for the Barncombe sisters to admire; her purchase from yesterday. Mr Fickerton was throwing out interjections from behind the Financial Times, the two sisters transfixed by the disembodied voice booming from the shaking headlines, continued nodding their heads like mechanical monkeys at a fairground. Mrs Fickerton was elaborating over the needlework while Mr Fickerton was giving directions to the shop and the purchase price.

Mrs Florence Bishop at the opposite table was holidaying with her sickly silent niece, and was tucking in her chin at this flagrant display of uncouth commercialism, something she pertained upon the lower classes, it did not stop her from pouring the tea. Miss Pym raised a knowing eyebrow to Mrs Bishop who finally stopped pouring and nodded back in collaborative disgust.

Miss Pym had had the benefit of meeting Mrs Bishop at a tennis party held on the lawn the day before so was well acquainted with her views on dress sense, dining room decorum and the vulgarity of certain holiday makers.

Miss Pym nibbled on her buttered toast but her eyes continued to scour the room. Despite the sunlight pouring in allowing tiny motes to dance around their heads, she made out the young Mr James Milton sipping coffee with his elderly parents. Miss Pym knew that he was here to convalesce from the war, his eager talkative nature had already alerted some to his slightly strange mannerisms. Some of the unluckier residents had had the unfortunate experience of being sat next to him at the croquet tea party where his demonstrations with the mallet as an armed rifle had left some quite shaken, while others had sidled past the deckchairs and made for the tea urn in great haste.

Miss Pym carefully wiped the corners of her mouth and placed her hands contentedly in her lap. She stared out of the window to the rising waves and wondered if she felt robust enough to take a morning stroll. At home she had considered the many possible ailments she could be suffering from and was perfectly satisfied to consider more now that she was away. While she was a medical enigma to most of her doctors, the general consensus had been to take some sea air and recuperate with daily constitutions and long salt baths.

She decided that in fact a walk along the seafront would be a good idea, for if she were to collapse from exhaustion, she would only be demonstrating the depths of her ill health and the delicate hands that would be required to nurse her. Upon this conclusion, Miss Fitzgerald, her trusted companion appeared in the doorway. The young girl, always a trifle absent-minded, nervously searched for the sanctity of Miss Pym. Miss Pym raised her hand, trying to avoid either of the Barncombes, while ensuring Miss Fitzgerald could join her immediately so that she could be briefed of the outline of their morning pursuits.

Miss Fitzgerald gave a small smile in acknowledgement and aiming for the most direct route to her benefactress jolted Colonel Montperrier's sawing arm as she rushed past him, who was now tucking into kippers with gusto; knocked the elder Miss Barncombe's pince nez from her eagle-beaked nose while all the time apologising and curtseying in alternate gestures.

Miss Pym bristled at the chaos that lay in her wake and turned her head to the window, wondering whether a solitary retreat to the Austrian Alps at her Great Aunt's expense would have been a better choice of destination. Maybe the mountain air would calm her nerves far better than a bracing sea breeze.