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Did You Hear That?

by Miriam Silver

“Did you hear that?” I heard as I walked past the communal lounge.

I didn't wait to hear what it was about knowing that my fellow inmate, Tom would tell me, he enjoyed gossip, he would find me soon enough.

It was a grey day, dark clouds heralding early evening although it was lunchtime. I knew all that officious lot would be busy with lunch which gave me the opportunity to avoid the mush they called spaghetti bolognese, nothing like the real thing of course, rather have a cheese roll down the pub.

Ignoring the notices which warned me to tell the desk if I was either out or didn't want anything to eat I went straight ahead, down the drive. It was a convenient place to live, near all I wanted, post office, pub, coffee shop, and an hourly bus to the nearest town, which had a bank, library and quite a nice choice of restaurants.

My previous life was busy, travel, rich, unlike my current one which is becoming increasingly local and slothful. Age brings worse than these things I suppose and in my own way I'm content, except for the food at the place I call home. They obviously economise, poor cook with limited budget, nothing can disguise inferior ingredients.

It's a pity they don't appreciate that some us residents know quite a lot about food. I especially miss Italy where they really know all about pasta, however it was presented, it was always so beautifully tasty. No one here makes that properly. And where's our fresh fruit and salad?

Even at breakfast there's nothing fresh, the bread is served in toasted slabs which makes me pine for France their crusty baguettes and properly made coffee. I only moved myself into residential care a few months ago after a seriously broken leg which left me unable to cook.

Moving in with any of my children was out of the question. Their ways are not mine, especially their turkey twizzlers and unruly children. Love them all of course, at a distance.

As I made my way back I started thinking about those responsible for the food who are the centre of our campaign instigated by Tom a retired politician, plus me a modestly well known chef, and some of our more active fellow residents all agreeing that if the food was better, we'd be much happier and healthier. No one liked the tinned spaghetti or the turkey twizzlers and all questioned lack of fresh fruit and vegetables. It was rumoured that a couple had died of malnutrition.

I remembered it was 'book club' afternoon as we called ourselves, and hurried, determinedly avoiding the busybody on the desk and made my way to the games room, where they were, looking excited, all talking together.

"Thought you'd got lost mate," Tom's voice rang out, "looks like you've started something."

"You missed the announcement."

"Should have stayed," he added.

The group had grown in number and was quite noisy.

"I hope no one else has died?" I said.

"Yes, that's it, those two did have a bit of malnutrition, manager admitted that much at lunch."

"You missed it all, implied it was all our own fault."

"How could they?" I managed to query, "I know some of us have small appetites."

"Apparently not only are we all too choosy but some people do miss meals," Tom pointed out, adding, "no worries now, all's going to be well, I offered your expertise, the cook will consult you," he said looking hopefully at me.

