

Perfect Peter

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'Holiday air,' he liked to call it. You could be just a few miles from home, but as far as my husband was concerned, you were breathing 'holiday air.' He inhaled the stuff through his funny, narrow nostrils, only to release it with a definitive *whoooosh* noise that turned the hairs on my arms into soldiers, pencil-straight.

He knows this phrase gets at me. I am the sensible one. Logical Lydia, my Mum called me. He is the artist - long, spindly limbs that tan easily, a perfect dusting of freckles across his perfect nose, a knack for telling a joke at the right moment, a knack for talking to strangers in such a charming way it made me jealous. Perfect Peter. *Of course, you weren't breathing different air!* "You're ludicrous," I would yawn the moment he replaced his words with a half-smirk. It would roll off his back, just like most things. Perfect Peter is untouchable.

I'm breathing holiday air right now, as a matter of fact. Somehow it doesn't feel bouncy and full of promise. The air at the motor inn is thick. It chokes me, bearhugs my windpipe, taunts me to say something I'll regret. I swallow, kicking my legs against the cool tiles of the swimming pool, hard.

A sparrow appears to have one foot, staggering near the water's edge. Pushing myself back onto my elbows, I peer - the new David Attenborough. My husband loves to despise the fact that I find animals boring. It is the sort of comment he enjoys using against me, regularly, as if it is something to brag about, "Well, see, I'd have loved to come and meet your darling new kitten, but Lydia just can't - isn't the biggest of fans. So sorry!" *Look at me now, Peter. Out here observing sparrows and everything!*

I forget I'm still staring at the sparrow, and the shudder of the pool filter startles it. It sets down another foot from beneath its feathers, and pointedly stares at me. I'm the first to break the competition. A noise, small, but frantic by the second, is coming from the motel's yellowing reception. I can see a woman scurrying towards me, the fat on her arms jiggling with haste, noticeable from at least a dozen metres away. I tilt my head to one side, like a dumb blonde in a chick-flick, noting the sparrow fluttering away in my peripheral vision. In situations like this, I like to imagine that I am anything but myself. I am not *Logical Lydia*, absent-mindedly tearing off the skin from around her fingernails with her teeth, razor-sharp. I am a beady-eyed one-legged sparrow off to Africa, or Spain, or Indonesia. I am not *Logical Lydia*, hating her husband and this stupid motel and this holiday air I am breathing. I am the pool filter, gurgling chlorine like the last sip of my drink.

I gaze at the woman. Up close, she is prettier, with dark features and what I imagine is a pearly, toothy smile (Peter calls me conceited for examining physical features so intently, I

like to call it looking for the best in others.) Unfortunately, her lips have formed a flat line, a significant wrinkle in her forehead the only indent on her face. I scrunch up my face. *Smile, woman!*

“Mrs Hughson?” I run through how I should respond. In my mind, it sounds sophisticated, with an air of ‘I-don’t-care’, as though I am a very important person ordering a cocktail. It comes out mousey, croaky. “May I help you?” I’ll have to work on that.

“It’s your husband. We’ve found him.”