**3 DON’T LOOK NOW**

**“I am sure that is her lover,” whispered Harriet.**

**“Not even a man of business in that shabby little tweed suit. So unsuitable for the Lakes in summer, “ Alexandra replied whilst finishing her glass of champagne.**

**The sisters shared a subdued laugh on the terrace of Hotel Cervo as slowly, after another dazzling day, with the warm air encircling them, the full orbed sun settled down behind the mountains.**

**“And she is so much older. Portly. They say she has abandoned her children in England. Can you believe such a story!?”**

**“Harriet, sometimes your imagination and listening to gossip gets the better of you. I know you struggle with ladylike behaviour but on this occasion a little decorum would be desired.”**

**The couple passed their table and the gentleman nodded in greeting.**

**“Good evening ladies.”**

**Thankfully, at least for Alexandra who sensed the obvious interest of her sister to seize this opportunity to begin a conversation with the man -frankly any man. His companion pulled roughly on the man’s jacket and muttered something in an unfamiliar language under her breath. Within seconds they were headed away from the terrace and disappeared into the open doors of the Hotel’s dining room.**

**“Did you hear her. She may be German!” exclaimed Harriet. Despite her lack of interest in much, academically languages came easily to her and Alexandra admitted her knowledge of Italian had proved essential on the holiday.**

**“Well we must make nothing of it Harriet. It seems their match is of the mind and not of beauty.” Finishing the last drops of champagne Alexandra looked across at her sister. Harriet was strikingly beautiful. She knew this, as did the many men that she met. Alexandra accepted it and constantly dampened her envy, guiding Harriet where possible but wondering about the inevitability of arrangements in love and marriage that such beauty would conclude for her sister.**

**Earlier that day there had been such a moment. Alexandra had stood at the reception placing postcards on the desk. The Hotel Manager was distracted as Harriet stood in the entrance porch bathed in sunlight.**

**“Your sister. She is beautiful.” He paused in awe. Then realising his unprofessional neglect of Alexandra turned to say, “Of course Signorina, you are equally charming!”**

**There are of course no husbands to be found with charm. She gathered up her bag and walked towards her angelic sister who would float into another day of admiration and desire.**

**2.**

**This was the third week of their holiday in Italy. Alexandra had been glad to leave Rome after they had alighted there first after sailing across the Mediterranean. Having escaped the smog of London and the greyness of life Rome was also dirty. Despite its wealth of history and art which took miles to observe, the clearer skies here by Lake Garda made Alexandra breathe easier. Their Father had engaged a local tutor, Signore Frazzini to give Italian lessons. Harriet was soon bored thinking she already knew enough and this atmosphere prevented Alexandra feeling comfortable as they sat together.**

**Boredom was not good for Harriet. She had already become distracted by the Italian men she met. In Rome there had been no time for admiring glances to become more than that. Now settled into the quieter resort the opportunity and searching eyes allowed Harriet to take up her habit of flirting outrageously.**

**As the older sister, Alexandra still commanded respect but it was under threat on this trip. She was determined to keep them busy, not just parading around the hotel and nearby town where piercing dark Italian male eyes soon latched onto Harriet. There was a timetable to the holiday.**

**“I really do not want to go to Verona tomorrow, “repeated Harriet, stamping her foot before they set off for dinner. “It’s just more old buildings. And you know I hate the opera.”**

**Alexandra had wavered. After the long and arduous trip to Venice, which she had so coveted and which her sister had ruined with constant sighs and demands to ‘just sit and have a gelato’, perhaps this excursion might be put off. Then Alexandra recalled something of the city that might engage her distracted sister.**

**“Harriet darling. We must go. We will see the balcony from which it is said Juliet saw Romeo in that famous scene by Shakespeare. Think how much it will inspire your own little poems!”**

**There was silence. Just as they were about to sit at their table Harriet threw her arms around her sister.**

**“Why of course how wonderful. I will go! I think with such inspiration I may well write something worthy of even the most critical in literature. Love poetry is so worthy.”**

**Yet yours is so awful thought Alexandra silently. Then wondered had she made the most awful mistake latching this silliness of Harriet’s scribbles into something more than they were. She had also seen Harriet pass a note to the waiter two evenings ago. The waiter who had latched himself onto them by whispering close to Harriet, ‘Signorinas both of my utmost attention’. Though only one Signorina gained most attention.**

**If only Harriet had seen that the handsome attentive waiter who could understand not one word of the poem, throw it in the kitchen bin, laughed amongst the other male staff of the silliness of another rich English girl and the hope that he would be left a large tip at the end of their holiday.**

**3**

**Unfortunately, the decision to adhere to her sister’s plans seemed to stimulate Harriet into a kind of hysteria. They usually managed only a glass of wine each at dinner. Harriet swiftly emptied her glass and the waiter, suitably encouraged, filled it not once but twice. In a hiatus of madness Harriet took out her little notebook and pencil scribbling what could only be poems once again even, at one point, threatening to read them aloud.**

**Worryingly, the other diners in the room seemed to be listening intently. Alexandra even observed the matronly German woman and her strange companion observing their table. Some even laughed behind napkins at Harriet’s excitability. Suddenly this was all too much for the older sister.**

**“Now come Harriet we are finished here,” she exclaimed wanting to be invisible. Pushing aside her chair and waving away the waiter balancing their desserts, Alexandra grabbed her sister’s arm and pulled her from her chair. “If you continue being so silly we shall not go to Verona tomorrow.”**

**Taken by surprise Harriet knew she had pushed her sister’s patience too far. She did so want to see the balcony. As they swept from the dining room, ignoring the obvious interest from staff and guests and ascending the elegant gilt staircase Harriet remained silent. Alexandra seethed with shame that they had been made the centre of attention. Without further words the sisters went to their separate rooms.**

**The next morning Harriet was subdued almost wondering if her sister had decided to cancel the trip. But Alexandra joined her for an early breakfast and they settled with the small group on the carriage to Verona. Despite it being obvious some of the party may have observed the events of the previous evening they politely talked of other things and the day was a spectacular success.**

**On the return journey there was much discussion about the balcony and of poetry and Harriet said, “It will inspire my own writing especially my love poems.”**

**Alexandra stared. This surely emphasised the mindset of this beautiful young woman. Nothing serious to be heard here.**

**“Another writer in the hotel. How intriguing,” said one of the men.**

**“A writer. In our hotel. Are they famous? Which guest is it?” questioned Harriet.**

**“Well,” whispered the man loud enough for all to hear, “It seems he has escaped England with his German lover and he writes – well dear ladies I am embarrassed to say -slightly risqué novels.”**

**“Oh, that man!” exclaimed Harriet, “How wonderfully exciting. I need to talk to him though it seems slightly dangerous”.**

**4.**

**There was laughter. But not from Alexandra. Dangerous. It was utterly absurd for Harriet to speak to such a man under these circumstances.**

**“What is his name?” asked Harriet enthused to learn more.**

**“His name is Mr Lawrence. I think he is from the north” said one of the ladies.**

**Once again that evening the two sisters were seated at a table sipping champagne cooling themselves with fans after the heat of the day and the excitement of the trip.**

**“I am sorry to be so silly sometimes, “said Harriet putting her hand over her sister’s arm. “I just get so excited about things especially poetry and love.”**

**Alexandra smiled. More of those silly poems she supposed. Well what harm might it do? Love was a strange thing. She pondered whether she might ever experience it herself.**

**Suddenly Harriet’s grip on her sister’s arm tightened.**

**“Don’t look now but that naughty Mr Lawrence approaches. How exciting!”**

**1497 words**