

THE WALLS OF AFRICA

Mrs. Fields' living room.

MR. PYM remains standing, stiff and uncomfortable.

MRS. FIELDS:

Oh please, do sit down, Mr. Pym.

MR. PYM:

Thank you.

MR. PYM does not, however, take a seat until MRS. FIELDS does first, as she offers him his glass.

MRS. FIELDS:

Here you are.

MR. PYM:

(Accepting the glass and taking a seat, once again at the most distant corner from her.)

Thank you, Mrs. Fields. This is awfully kind of you.

MRS. FIELDS;

Oh, it's nothing at all, Mr. Pym. It's nice to have company for supper. We'll give the stew just a few more minutes, shall we? It's gotten so I hardly cook any more. Now that the children are gone.

MR. PYM:

I see.

MRS. FIELDS:

Would be different if they were living in the city. But one's in Ceylon and the other one's in Africa. Travelling.

MR. PYM:

Ah, yes. Africa.

MRS. FIELDS:

Have you been there, Mr. Pym?

MR. PYM:

During the war, yes. Libya. Benghazi.

MRS. FIELDS:

Ah, yes. Benghazi. I know it well.

MR. PYM:

Do you really?

The music has now subtly been replaced by Mozart which curiously has the same beat of the previous piece.

MUSIC: Mozart's 'Piano Concerto no. 21 in C' is heard gently in the air. The Andante, soothing and calm.

MRS. FIELDS:

Yes. We used to travel a lot. My husband and I. My ex-husband. Before the war. We spent a year in Africa. Several weeks on the beach at Benghazi.

MR. PYM:

(Remembering his own war-time experience.) Yes...the beach at Benghazi.

MRS. FIELDS:

The Casbah. *(Absent-mindedly feels her bracelet, an ornate Arabian trinket.)* He still travels a lot, from what I hear.

MR. PYM:

I beg your pardon?

MRS. FIELDS:

My ex-husband. With his new wife.

MR. PYM:

(Uneasy) Oh.

MRS. FIELDS:

Yes, he went and got himself a brand new wife.

An uncomfortable silence. MR. PYM fidgets slightly. MRS. FIELDS has another generous gulp of her wine.

And you, Mr. Pym, have you never been married?

MR. PYM:

No, Mrs. Fields, I never have.

MRS. FIELDS:

Haven't found the right woman yet, have you?

MR. PYM:

(Uncomfortable.) Well, to tell the truth, I haven't really given it much thought, Mrs. Fields. Perhaps after I finish my doctorate.

MRS. FIELDS:

I see. And how is your doctorate coming along?

MR. PYM:

Oh, very well. Thank you.

MRS. FIELDS:

Comparative literature, is it?

MR. PYM:

Yes.

MRS. FIELDS:

And you lecture as well, I believe. Do you not?

MR. PYM:

Yes, I do.

MRS. FIELDS:

Well, you certainly have your hands full, Mr. Pym.

MR. PYM:

I'm afraid so, Mrs. Fields.

MRS. FIELDS:

Still, one ought to allow some time for companionship, don't you think?

MR. PYM:

It is a luxury I cannot afford, I'm afraid, Mrs. Fields.

MRS. FIELDS:

But a necessary tonic for the soul, Mr. Pym, unaffordable as it may be.

MR. PYM:

Yes. You probably have a point there, Mrs. Fields.

A pensive moment.

MRS. FIELDS:

There is no greater blessing, I have found, than to have a companion to travel with through this journey of life. And no greater panic than when one suffers the loss of that companionship.

A polite silence. They gently drink their wine. MRS. FIELDS tries not to give in to her fragile emotions.

MRS. FIELDS:

(Very quiet.) That was very kind of you to make me comfortable on the couch, last night.

MR. PYM freezes. His heart stops as he feels the world come to an end.

MR. PYM:

(Small.) Oh. Not at all. *(Beat.)* You seemed so uncomfortable. *(Beat.)* I was under the impression that you were asleep.

MRS. FIELDS;

Oh, I was. I was only aware that you had helped after I had woken up.

MR. PYM can breath again.

MR. PYM:

(Relieved.) Oh, I'm sorry. I really shouldn't have intruded.

MRS. FIELDS:

Oh, not at all. It's me who should apologize for the state I was in last night. I'm sorry. I really shouldn't have intruded.

MR.PYM:

No apology necessary.

Long pause.

MR. PYM &
MRS. FIELDS:

(Together.) Tolstoy!

They laugh out loud as they think of the reason almost simultaneously. Of course, the humour continues to be tinged with an undercurrent of melancholia, which they are both aware of, but pretend to ignore.

MRS. FIELDS:

(Gently.) Come, Mr. Pym, let's dine.

MR. PYM:

Yes, thank you. Smells delightful.

She smiles as she leads him to the kitchen.