

Edith has arrived in the hotel dining room to have breakfast.

Edith has sat down at a table. A waiter approaches.

“Good morning madam, what would you like for breakfast?”

“Could I start with half of a melon please?”

“Certainly madam, would you prefer honeydew or galia?”

“Galiam please.”

Edith notices Caroline approaching.

“Good morning, would you like to start your breakfast with half a melon?”

“Good morning, yes please.”

“I am having half of a galiam melon, but you may have honeydew if you prefer.”

“I’ll have galiam please.” replies Caroline.

Edith and Caroline are eating their halves of melon, sitting on the opposite sides of a table for two, facing each other.

A man in a grey suit approaches and notices Caroline. He is to Caroline’s right and a little forward of her.

“What are you doing here?” exclaims the man.

Edith realizes from the tone of voice that this is not some friend from long ago delighted at meeting Caroline here by chance.

“I am eating half of a melon, enjoying its exquisite taste and composing a haiku as I delight in it,

The taste of melon

Fine hand-crafted English lace

The delicacy of both

though at the moment there seem to be too many syllables in the last line, though I think that that is alright sometimes if that is what is needed.”

Edith decides to intervene.

“Perhaps I can help” says Edith.

“Who are you?” demands the man, somewhat curtly.

“Edith Gatford”

“Is that meant to mean something?”

“Well, it is my name, and an honest name too. I was answering your question.

“But anyway,” continues Edith “the lady is here to attend the conference at my request.”

“Are you her employer or something?”

“Well, her employer is a company limited by guarantee, namely Localizable Sentences and their Applications Research Association: I am the human being who is in everyday charge of running things.”

“Are you the Chief Executive or something?”

“Well my job title is Secretary-General.”

“Well, the conference is invitation only, and your organization has not been invited how did you get to be here?”

“Well, in the early afternoon of the day before yesterday I received a telephone call asking if I was attending the conference on localizable sentences and I said that I was unaware that such a conference was being held and I was told that it was being held in this hotel starting today. So I looked up the hotel on the web and found a telephone number and I rang and asked about the conference and I was informed that the hotel and all the accommodation had been reserved by a conference company and I was provided with the contact number. I checked it on the web and in a few directories and then rang and I asked about the conference and if any places were available and I was told that there were and so I booked four places. The lady asked if I would like to book an extra day in the hotel for each of us so as to provide an opportunity to visit the museum while here and I said ‘yes please’. It was all a bit of a rush but the four of us arrived yesterday evening, fortunately in time for dinner.”

“This is awkward, it is a private conference by invitation only. It is not for the public or the press.”

“Ah.”

A pause.

Caroline speaks “This gentleman chaired the conference where I gave the Quick Talk.”

Caroline says this straightforwardly, there is no irony in the way that she says the word ‘gentleman’ - that is not Caroline’s style.

Caroline notices that a few people - not quite a crowd - has gathered to listen to what has been said. Caroline notices the elderly journalist from the New York newspaper a little way behind the man.

“Good morning.” says Caroline to the elderly gentleman.

The man turns, wondering to whom Caroline is speaking.

“Good morning ma’am, good morning Jim.” says the elderly gentleman.

Jim looks shocked.

“Er what” says Jim.

“Well Jim,” says the elderly gentleman, “there seem to be at least two ways out of this - one is that of some of us are not allowed to stay and then I can organize a conference on localizable sentences at another hotel and anyone here who wants to come can and I can try to get some evening entertainment arranged, like some German volksmusik singers and a band, or, and it is just another possibility, you might like to restructure your conference and everybody can stay - and, hey, if you can do that and if you can get approval from the management here, my newspaper will pay to have some volksmusik here as evening entertainment - it's the middle of the night in New York at the moment but there are always people on duty at the newspaper in case a story breaks, so I can telephone the office and have a couple of them get it arranged.”

There is silence, people are watching, wondering what will happen.

“Their delicacy” says a female voice from behind Caroline.

Edith looks in that direction. It is Jane Hove.

People look at Jane, some looking puzzled as they were not there when Caroline read out the poem.

“The last line of the haiku, their delicacy their t h e i r.” says Jane, spelling out the word lest people think she said ‘there’ or ‘they’re’.

A pause.

“Would you like to try the poem with that last line?” Edith asks Caroline, with the idea of breaking the tense situation.

“Yes, alright.” says Caroline.

“As in now, out loud please.” says Edith.

Caroline seizes the moment and stands and performs the haiku.

“

The taste of melon

Fine hand-crafted English lace

Their delicacy

”

There is a ripple of applause.

“So Jim”, says the elderly gentleman “if you can try to clear it with the hotel management I’ll call the office and try to arrange the entertainment.”

Jim looks a bit concerned.

“Very well.” says Jim, with perhaps a little reluctance in his voice.

Someone claps.

Edith looks to her left to see who it was who clapped.

It is John.

So Edith claps.

Caroline and Jane see Edith clap and join in, as do a few other people for a short round of applause.

“Very good, thank you.” says Jim.

The dining room quickly becomes an ordinary scene of people having breakfast.

John and Edward approach. Simon Eastleigh is with them.

“We bumped into Simon. Can he join us for breakfast please?” says John.

“Certainly,” says Edith “how are you Simon”.

“Fine ma’am, thank you.”

Edith calls to Jane and invites her to join them. Jane joins them.

“Caroline and I each have half a melon. Would you like the same? We are an even number so maybe there won’t be any wastage - it depends how many people accept and which type of melon people prefer.”

Everyone accepts.

Edith catches the eye of a waiter and arranges for the half melons. In the event everybody chooses galia melon, so no wastage.

Caroline explains that the elderly gentleman is the journalist who wrote about her talks in the New York newspaper.

Jane speaks “I heard you say about finding out about the conference the day before yesterday. I only found out yesterday morning, when in the office. Anyway I keep a ready-packed bag at the office in case I need to travel somewhere promptly and so I was able to get a taxi round to St Pancras and catch a train to Brussels and from Brussels a train to Cologne and then a train to here. It was rather late when I got here but I keep a packet of instant mashed potato powder in my bag and a tube of tomato purée with herbs and so with the tea making facilities in the room I knocked together a couple of cupfuls of flavoured mash. It was quite good actually. I had eaten on the way as well though.”

“When we have all each eaten a half melon, I will try to arrange for some hot gluten-free toast and a selection of jams and the like - I hope they have greengage.” says Edith.