

Yevgenny

A Gladys Briggs Story

by

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I am never forgetting the day I meet Missus Briggs. I have never meet any other woman like her and I am thinking how she is the most extraordinary of women. She is like the Elizabeth Bennett – the quick whit and the fine eyes of the English beauty. But she is also... My English is not so good when I am making description of the extraordinary women.

She is reminding me of Jane Eyre. She expect very little for herself, but she is knowing precisely who she is, what she can do - and what she will not do. She is looking for happiness – like these Americans and their great pursuit – but she is knowing that happiness is many things. She is knowing people in ways they are not knowing themselves.

I meet her when first I leave the S-117. She is handing out the blankets and coffee in the big cave under the cliffs in what will be my beloved Bickering on Sea. Although I did not know this at the time. I later watch the James Bond films and I am laughing because it exactly look like British Intelligence sea cave dock in Bickering. Missus Briggs tell to me, “It was used by pirates. They had a tunnel from Beacran’s Island all the way up to the Hall. It’s like a catacomb down here.” She make me laugh as I drink my coffee and she is kind, telling to me all about Great Britain, because, “It’s not just England. The Scots and the Welsh wouldn’t like you thinking that Britain was just England. They are nations in their own right. Although they haven’t got many rights anymore.”

It is January 1953 and I am very – how you say? – homesick. Which make no sense. Why you not homesick if you stay at home too long? Missus Briggs tell to me it means sick for home and not sick of home, but this make no sense. Your language often make no sense.

Anyway, it is January 9th and it has been my first Christmas I am not seeing my family and I am knowing that I will never again see them. I feel homesick. I have finish my last mission on the S-117 and am delivering it to the British. I am telling them no one will believe 'she' (she?) sink near Japan but they are telling me to trust them. I am like the Americans and I tell them, "You the Boss," but I still not believe it. But it did work. And then I am in a cave in Bickering on Sea, sitting with the last of my crew with the little English woman and her stories about pirates and her nonsense English phrases, making us laugh.

"A stitch in time saves nine. Many hands make light work. Too many cooks spoil the broth. A rolling stone gathers no moss..."

We are only knowing American English and BBC World Service, but we are not allowed to know these things so we are not practicing our English. Missus Briggs is telling to me that my English is much better and I "will soon be dropping my aitches like a proper Cockney." Later I am hearing these Cockneys when they debrief us in London and I am not believing Missus Briggs. I am thinking she is teasing us.

Then she is listening to us tell to her stories of the Ushkuyniks and how they are beating the famous Vikings. She is sitting there like... Like... Mysh'. Mysh'? Mouse! Like little English mouse. She sits and watches and she listens, and I am seeing that she is writing it all in her mind, like little play in her mind. I am thinking to myself, "This little English girl will have us all under her belt." I am thinking I will be left with the nose.

I am tired and my watch is telling to me that it is 2 o'clock in your morning, and I am hoping someone will tell to us where we are sleeping, when an old man is calling her over and she is leaving us laughing. But I am watching her as the man tells to her, and I am seeing that she tells back to him. He is not angry, but he is doing as she says and saluting her. "Ah ha!" I am thinking, "I am right. The English girl is not so much a mouse as we are thinking." I am starting to think that the little mouse is maybe a cat.

She is coming back to us and she is telling us that people are ready to take us to some house that is safe. We are all getting up and following where she is pointing at the saluting man. But she is touching my arm as I am passing and she is pulling a book from her walking bag.

“I heard you say that you didn’t have a book to read...” which tell to me that her Russian is most excellent, “Have this. It’s called, ‘A Christmas Carol’. An English classic. I think you’ll enjoy it.”

I am looking at this book and I raise my eyebrow at her. I am thinking that the little cat is knowing me more well than I like her knowing me.

“Thank you.” I tell to her.

“Let them know when you’ve finished. I’ll bring you the next.”
