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## INSPIRATION SPINSTER

by

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The highways leading to the beaches were crowded that Saturday morning. Cars with carriers on top and trailers behind carrying camping and picnic equipment and filled to capacity with children and adults were traveling in an almost unbroken line out of the hot city for a week end by the sea. Roseanne Merton holding two-year-old Elizabeth on her lap and keeping an eye on four-year-old Timmy alone in the back seat of the car made mental notes as her sister gave instructions for the week that was to come.

"Whatever would we do without Annie Rose to call on in an emergency?" Marian commented as she drove along in



the great procession. "The decorators promised all summer to come, and then chose the week we planned to go to the beach."

"What could be nicer for a place to baby sit than a house right on the beach," Roseanne said meaning every word of it. "And how much you can get accomplished at home with no children under foot for a whole week." She held on to Elizabeth as she squirmed her way to a standing position the better to communicate with Timmy behind.

"It will be a mess," sighed Marian, "but at least I can give my whole attention to the work to be done. I'll be starting down to join you the minute the last workman clears the place."

"Roseanne Norton, spinster, that's the way I was classified the other day on a legal paper," Roseanne remarked with a grimace. "Such a person should be of some use in the world as there is no glamor in the title."

"Legal terms are never glamorous," Marian said slowing down for the entrance to the mile long road leading to their beach. "Benefactress would be a much more suitable term for a person like you who drops everything of her own to answer the call of distress as you have so many times."

The beach road was narrow and winding. Tall pine trees, their dark trunks primeval in their lofty symmetry, lined the road on either side. Blueberry bushes crowded to the very edge of the road. Timmy reached out through the open window



and grabbed a handful of the juicy berries. He crammed them into Elizabeth's mouth before Roseanne could stop him. The purple-red juice stained the faces and hands of the children and threatened the car seats until Roseanne mopped up.

Around a bend in the road they came up behind a car pulling a house trailer. Marian became impatient as they were slowed down. "Trailers shouldn't be allowed on this narrow road," she fumed.

"Trailer Camp, 200 yards," Roseanne read aloud from a sign along the road. Just then the driver of the car ahead signalled his intention of turning into the camp. As he made the turn, he smiled an apology for the delay.

"How remarkable, blue eyes in a tanned face," Roseanne remarked irrelevantly.

They drove along Ocean Street until they came to their cottage. Except for the glass of its windows it resembled a huge piece of driftwood lying inert upon the beach. Sand dunes encroached upon its porch and clumps of sea grass grew around the house.

The day was hot with sunshine but a strong sea breeze flapped the umbrellas along the beach into singing tones. They unloaded the car quickly for the children were anxious to get out on the beach.

"Get going, Sis," said Roseanne, "so we can put on our swim suits," holding on to the children while their mother got into the car.



"I'll stop on my way out and leave our names and address at the Post Office and have milk delivery started in the morning," she called back. Roséanne saw her sister's shoulders straighten as responsibility rolled off them.

Roséanne was glad for the sun baths she had taken when she saw how becoming her new blue swim suit was against the brown of her skin. Brown hair, brown eyes, brown skin, the blue color intensified them. She had chosen well.

They made several trips between the cottage and the beach before they were settled. While the children ran down to the water to wet their feet, Roséanne adjusted her beach chair so that she could have a good view out to sea. She tilted the beach umbrella for both a sun shade and a wind break and spread out the beach mats for the children. The lunch basket which Marian had prepared before they left home was within easy reach. Roséanne was awash with contentment as she lay back in her chair. The Navy guns at target practice far out at sea boomed at intervals. The gulls circled and dived into the waves and came back up with their prey. The little sandpipers kept up their constant game with the surf always on the winning side.

After they had eaten their lunch the children lay down on their mats. Roséanne covered them with beach towels and they were soon asleep. Then to the rhythmic boom of the guns, there came new sounds, long rolls of thunder. Jagged lightning cut across the sky that had suddenly filled with clouds. The



wind took on a moaning wound, sweeping before it beach paraphernalia of all kinds. The children awoke and clung to Roséanne as she tried to put down the umbrella.

Then a commanding voice said, "Take the children and run to the house. I'll bring everything."

The rain, great sheets of it, caught them on the way. They stood shivering and dripping in the kitchen as their benefactor brought in their things. He removed his raincoat and hung it over a chair and took off his soaked shoes.

"How did you happen to have on a raincoat," Roséanne gasped, pulling her wet beach robe tighter around her.

"I saw the clouds forming and wanted a walk along the beach in the rain. Naturally, I put on my raincoat," he answered. He stood the wet umbrella in the sink and spread the other things out on the table and chairs.

"Why you are the man who turned into the trailer camp this morning," Roséanne exclaimed as she wiped the faces of the children.

"Yes, I checked in at 11:00 this morning. You were in the car right behind me. I imagined I could hear you swearing at the delay all along that narrow searoad."

"Well, we were in a hurry to get here," Roséanne said defensively.

"I'm used to impatient drivers behind me," he said cheerfully. "Having lived in a trailer for the past two years



I am used to a lot of things. But you must get into dry clothes. I hope you have firewood. I'll build a fire in the fireplace to get you warm again. This squall will bring chilly weather with it."

He went into the bedroom and returned with blankets from the beds which he wrapped mummy-fashion around each child.

"There's wood in the wood box on the back porch," Roséanne called and disappeared into the back bedroom. When she returned in warm slacks and a heavy sweater and with dry clothes for the children, there was a blazing fire in the fireplace. The man was sitting in the big wing chair with Elizabeth on his lap and Timmy snuggled in beside him.

"You take care of the little one while I dress the boy," he said. "And don't take her away from the fire."

Roséanne obeyed his orders, smiling to herself as he fumbled with Timmy's straps. She reached over and deftly fastened them. He smiled as he admitted, "I don't know too much about children's clothes."

Rain hit the window panes in smacking gusts, the wind was screeching around the house like the Furies, waves were crashing far up on the beach. We are storm bound and it is not at all unpleasant, Roséanne thought. Suddenly she jumped up and started for the kitchen. "I'm starving," she announced, "and I know these children are. And you, too, after your rescue



mission. I'll cook ham and eggs for us all. Unless," she stopped in the doorway to inquire, "you are expected back at the trailer for supper."

"I live alone and intended cooking ham and eggs for my supper tonight. I would much rather eat yours," he answered with an ingratiating smile. Roséanne felt a warmth that didn't come from the fire.

They sat on cushions around a low table in front of the fire to eat their supper. Roséanne toasted bread on a long fork over the fire, then covered it with butter. She answered the cries for more until the fork was taken out of her hand. "You aren't the only one who can make good toast. Eat your supper while I take over the job," he ordered. Roséanne ate three pieces, declaring each piece better than the one before.

The children, drowsy from the heat of the fire, went to sleep on their cushions. She turned down their beds while he carried them in. She washed their faces and hands and covered them warmly. They tiptoed out of the room and back to the fire.

"It's about time for introductions, isn't it?" Roséanne asked as she tossed him a cushion and adjusted one behind her head.

"I'm Jim Robertson, adventurer, writer, no home but a trailer, no responsibilities, and until tonight I never thought I wanted any," he answered. When he stooped to stir the fire,



Roseanne thought again, blue eyes in a tanned face, how remarkable.

"You see I have the jump on you," he continued. "I overheard your sister give your name at the Post Office this afternoon on her way out of town. The name caught my fancy. I shall call my next heroine, 'Roseanne'."

"You didn't know when you first heard it that the name, Roseanne Merton, had spinster written after it, did you?" Roseanne asked.

"No, but I would have been glad to know it. I located you on the beach this afternoon from the conversation I heard between your sister and the postmistress. By the process of deduction I have found out a few things about you tonight." He lighted a cigarette and wafted the smoke toward the chimney.

Roseanne closed her eyes in comfort. The day, eventful from beginning to end, had been too much for her. When she awakened, she was alone before a dying fire. A blanket had been thrown over her and a footstool put under her feet. She smiled dreamingly and decided to spend the rest of the night just where she was.

The wind had spent its strength in trying to move the unmovable and was only a gentle breeze the next morning. Roseanne and the children went out early to gather driftwood to replenish the wood box. Only wood gatherers were out in the shocking cold air. Jim Robertson was nowhere along the



beach. Of course, thought Roséanne, he wouldn't use drift-wood in his trailer. Roséanne spent most of the day playing with the children in front of the fire. They were having a wild game of cowboys and Indians when there was a knock on the door. Timmy ran to open it. "Annie Rose, here's our man," he shouted.

Jim Robertson with a grin on his face and carrying a big sack came in. "I smelled wood smoke all over the beach when I went for a walk. It made me wish for a fireplace fire. May I cook over your fire tonight?" he asked.

"You've saved the day again," Roséanne said. "I was beginning to think there was no end to the number of games that could be played in one day."

It was a gay evening. They roasted weiners over the fire until the juice ran out the bursted skins and fell hissing onto the coals. They laughed at Elizabeth sitting crosslegged by the fire with a fat weiner in each hand waiting for them to be cooked. Timmy ran errands between the kitchen and living room thereby earning the first cooked weiner. Roséanne made a pot of coffee and brought milk for the children. The brown sack yielded everything even to after dinner mints and corn to pop. When the children began to get tired, Roséanne went for their night clothes.

"No more sleeping in their clothes. I would never dare to let my sister know that I did not undress them for bed last



night," she said, undressing Elizabeth while Jim took care of Timmy.

After some wiggling and turning on their cushions, sleep caught up with them and they were quiet. Jim carried them to bed as he had done the night before.

Roséanne was contrite when they returned to the fire. "Oh, I forgot their prayers two nights in succession. I hope it will not warp them in any way." She picked up the little clothes and folded them neatly on a chair and carried the dishes back to the kitchen.

Jim watched her lazily, being careful that his cigarette ashes did not fall on the floor. "You wouldn't like the disorder in my place," he said. "I suppose now you will want to do the dishes so that everything will be shipshape for morning."

"And leave you enjoying the fire all alone?" Roséanne asked.

"I'd help you if you insisted but I really don't want to," was his lazy answer.

"Don't worry. No dishes tonight. Besides I feel like talking. And I won't go to sleep either." Roséanne pulled one of the pillows out from behind her head. "Since you already know so much about me from conversations you have overheard and your own deductions and observations, it would only be fair if you would tell me about yourself."

"I'm a bachelor, a confirmed one. But," and he looked



at her quizzically, "bachelor meets spinster, no telling what might happen."

Roséanne watched a spider that was dropping from the ceiling on its tenuous thread, then recoiling until it was safe overhead again. She listened as Jim talked of his writing and the life he had lived while seeking adventure for his stories. "I never thought I should ask a woman to share my wanderings. When I get ready to settle down, I might not be so confirmed," he said.

Roséanne thought, I'm falling, falling for a man with graying hair, the bluest eyes I have ever seen, tall, shoulders a little stooped no doubt from bending over a typewriter. She watched his long brown fingers as he moved them restlessly over the arms of the chair. She wanted to use her own fingers to smooth the lines from his forehead.

When he pulled himself up from his chair preparing to leave she wanted to catch hold of his hands and pull him down again, to keep him there a while longer. But she did none of those things.

He went over to look at the barometer on the wall. "It's rising," he said, "tomorrow should be a nice day. Will you be on the beach in the morning?"

"Yes," Roséanne answered, "and I'll bring a hamper of lunch so we can spend the whole day. Will you join us?"

"If I am not in the mood for writing. I'll be there waiting for you," he said holding out both hands to Roséanne



to help her from her chair. He held her hand as they moved to the door giving it a little squeeze before he released it. Then he said, "Goodnight," and closed the door quietly behind him.

The outside world was so inviting with sunshine and warm air the next morning that Roséanne let the children play near the cottage while she filled the lunch basket. She heard them shouting a welcome to someone, and in a minute they were coming up the steps bringing Jim with them.

"They told me that you needed help," he grinned and began at once to gather up the beach things.

Roséanne felt that it was indeed a wonderful world as they took over their part of the beach and made it their home for the day. She put on her dark glasses lest the eagerness in her eyes might scare him back to his typewriter. But she removed them at intervals during the day when she was sure he wasn't looking her way so she could study him in the different moods he showed. The fine points of his personality became clear as he played with the children in the sand building them a castle to illustrate the story he was telling. When the children played by themselves, he gave all his attention to Roséanne, looking out for her comfort in every way. They did not talk much for words were not necessary when there was blue sky, a sea of many shades of blue, a caressing sea breeze, white sand to bring contentment. Once he reached for her hand and held it until Timmy brought his sea treasures to them to keep for him.



The water was too cold to enjoy, but while the children napped, they walked along the beach letting the waves roll over their feet.

"What are you writing down?" she asked once when he pulled a notebook out of his pocket and made a few penciled notes.

"Just a few impressions I can use later on," he answered. "A writer makes use of all the material at hand."

"Good or bad impressions?" Roseanne inquired, reaching for her sweater.

Jim placed the sweater around her shoulders standing for a moment behind her chair. "With this perfect day and the company I have kept all day they couldn't be anything but good," he answered. He picked up a strand of her hair and examined it closely. "An artist would use every color on his palette if he were painting your hair as the sun shines on it. I must remember that for my next story. I'm afraid I'll end up by writing romance if I stay by the sea too long."

"There's nothing wrong with romance," Roseanne replied. "My favorite stories all have it in them."

"I have sworn to lay off it in my writing. Just he-man stuff for my market." He stretched out in his chair burying his feet in the sand.

They discussed books, music, art, sports, agreeing and disagreeing until the sun lost its warmth and the evening chill began.



"Let's cook on the beach tonight," Jim suggested.

"Hamburgers with pickles," Timmy demanded scattering sand over Elizabeth until Jim held him between his knees while Roséanne brushed the sand out of her hair.

"It'll be bread and water for you young fellow if you do that to your sister again," Jim's voice was stern, and Timmy subsided, but kept up his chant for hamburgers.

"There are hamburgers all made out in the ice box at the cottage. And buns left from last night. And all the fixings," Roséanne said.

Fires were appearing all along the beach and the smell of food cooking brought all stragglers for their food. Jim made their fire and when the wood had burned down to red coals, they cooked their hamburgers in wire racks. The moon with a lopsided air of inquisitiveness, came up out of the ocean, and the black water became silver. The strumming of guitars and ukeleles was soon joined by singing voices. A medley of songs caught on from group to group around the beach fires until the night was filled with music.

The evening was over too soon for the children were tired from their long day of play and talked about going to bed. Jim helped them back to the cottage. He put away the beach things while Roséanne put the children to bed. Then she saw that the day was ending for her also. Jim was leaving, too, and she could think of no way to keep him there longer. He said "Goodnight" abruptly, and left.



The book Roséanne picked up after he left had no interest for her. His face, his words, his actions came between her and the book until she gave up and went to bed.

For two days the beach, at least to Roséanne, was as empty as a stage after the actors have all gone. There was the usual amount of activity in the water and on the sand, children and adults enjoying the warm sun and sea breezes. Sandpipers, sea gulls, extremes in size and pursuits, matched their strength with the never quiet sea. Each day Roséanne packed the lunch basket and moved to the beach for the day. Each day through her dark glasses, she watched for Jim. When she napped in her chair with the children asleep on mats beside her, she awoke with a start thinking he had spoken to her.

The children missed him, too. "I want my friend," Timmy wailed when a big wave caught his sand fort. "He could build a sea wall that would keep out the water. Annie Rose doesn't know how."

It was Timmy, too, who suggested that they go to find their friend. I never ran after a man in my life, Roséanne reflected. But I do need some things from the store. We could walk by the trailer camp on our way.

That evening after their supper of cereal and milk with emphasis on the prize hidden in the bottom of the box, Roséanne and the children started out. Sand ran in and out of their sandals as they walked between the sand dunes.



The trailer camp was not a quiet place. Children and dogs bounded in and out the trailers. Men sat in folding chairs under the awnings and called back and forth to each other. From inside the compact mobile homes came the sound of dishes and pans rattling, and the smell of frying food lay over the whole camp. A writer would have to be able to concentrate well in order to produce in such a bombardment of sounds and smells, Roséanne thought.

Roséanne was at a loss to know which trailer was Jim's. They were all so much alike with their picture windows, gay colors, and general air of livableness. And nowhere was there a tall man with stooped shoulders and graying hair who might answer to the name of Jim.

They were back home again on their porch just as the sun, looking no larger than a beach ball, dropped behind the tops of the tall pine trees. Roséanne put an arm around each child and pulled them down beside her on the steps to watch the burning red color diffuse over the land and sea. Darkness brought the hordes of plaguing insects born by the land breeze until deposited upon the screens of lighted houses and upon the persons of unwary people who were still out of doors.

Roséanne brought the children in, showered them, treated their bites and sunburn, sprayed their room against invaders, told them a story, and listened to their prayers, which were



never finished by the drowsy voices. She was as restless as the sea that pounded rhythmically on the shore. Her thoughts had reached a barrier as to Jim's whereabouts.

She told herself that she had no claim upon his time, that a writer's hours were erratic, the writing mood being unpredictable, the writer helpless before it. She turned the pages of a magazine until she saw a pictured cake which gave her an idea. "I'll bake a cake," she announced to the quiet room. "At least my evening won't be entirely lost."

Soon chocolately smells filled the house as the cake rose to the top of the pan in the oven. While it cooled on a wire rack, Roséanne made the icing, white and fluffy and full of promise. As she spread the first spoonful over the dark surface of the cake, the screen door was brushed clear of its clinging hordes, the door opened and shut in a split second, and Jim was beside her.

"I've done it, Roséanne, I've done it," he cried.

Roséanne dropped her spoon and caught his outstretched hands. "Done what?" she asked as they went into the living room.

"Written a story with a love interest. It's all finished, typed, and mailed off to my editor."

"Do you mean you have been writing in all that cacophony of sound and disturbances in your trailer camp?" Roséanne asked, unaware that a kitchen apron over shorts was not romantic attire.



"Oh, I took a room in a house at the far end of the village and shut myself up for two days and nights. My landlady brought me food on a tray and left it outside my door." Jim held on to her hands as they sat down on the sofa. "It's a good story, and I know it will sell for I feel that I was inspired to write it."

Roséanne, who had not been able to take her eyes away from Jim's haggard face, now turned away from the intensity of the blue eyes.

"And I know I can do it again if I keep my inspiration," he continued and moved closer to Roséanne.

"You mean the sea, and the gulls and the sandpipers, and all the beach life?" she asked.

"I do not mean any of those. They all help, but it's a woman who inspired me, and her name is Roséanne. I'm asking her now, will she marry me?"

The yes that had been waiting on Roséanne's lips slipped out easily. An hour later Roséanne said contritely, "You must be hungry. I don't believe that landlady gave you anything worth eating. I think I remember that I was icing a cake in the kitchen when you came. What's better than a chocolate cake with white icing to celebrate an engagement between a bachelor and a spinster?" She pulled herself away from his arms and went to the kitchen.



"Oh, the frosting has all reverted to its syrupy stage," she called back. "The cake is all right, I'll bring it in. But soda pop is the nearest thing to champagne that I have."

"We'll get the champagne tomorrow," Jim called back.

Roséanne stopped in the doorway with the tray in her hands. "What name did you give the heroine in your story?" she asked, her eyes dark with eagerness.

"The only name I could have given her, 'Roséanne,'" he answered as he took the tray from her hands.

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