



# BARBARA PYM

## SOME TAME GAZELLE



"Jane Austen recreated, but...  
Barbara Pym is funnier."—New York Times



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*Some Tame Gazelle* was Barbara Pym's first novel to be published in England. In it Pym introduces her renowned "expert women," clergymen, and lovable eccentrics.

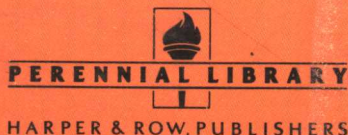
Harriet and Belinda Bede are middle-aged spinsters. Harriet is a bubbly, chubby coquette, while Belinda is a meek, thin romantic who has nurtured an unexpressed love for the town's vicar since her youth. Other men in our heroines' lives include the pompous Archdeacon Hoccleve; Edgar Donne, a young curate taken under Harriet's wing; and Count Bianco, a nice old man whose periodic proposals to Harriet are always gently rejected. Within the quiet rhythms of this English provincial life, Pym creates a world that is alive and ready for the seizing.

"[A] literary miracle, an entertaining novel whose two central characters are intelligent, contented, and good."

—*Harper's*

"A nice blend of light and sharp, pitch-perfect."

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# SOME TAME GAZELLE

*Barbara Pym*

Some tame gazelle, or some gentle dove:  
Something to love, oh, something to love!

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY



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**SOME TAME  
GAZELLE**



## CHAPTER ONE

THE new curate seemed quite a nice young man, but what a pity it was that his combinations showed, tucked carelessly into his socks, when he sat down. Belinda had noticed it when they had met him for the first time at the vicarage last week and had felt quite embarrassed. Perhaps Harriet could say something to him about it. Her blunt jolly manner could carry off these little awkwardnesses much better than Belinda's timidity. Of course he might think it none of their business, as indeed it was not, but Belinda rather doubted whether he thought at all, if one were to judge by the quality of his first sermon.

'If only we could get back some of the fervour and eloquence of the seventeenth century in the pulpit today,' she had said to her sister Harriet, a plump elegant spinster in the middle fifties.

'Oh, we don't want that kind of thing *here*,' Harriet had said in her downright way, for she had long ago given up all intellectual pursuits, while Belinda, who had never been considered the clever one, still retained some smattering of the culture acquired in her college days. Even now a light would shine in her mild greenish eyes, so decorously hidden behind horn-rimmed spectacles, at the mention of Young's *Night Thoughts* or the dear Earl of Rochester's *Poems on Several Occasions*.

Neither she nor Harriet had ever married, but Harriet was making her usual fuss over the new curate and was obviously prepared to be quite as silly over him as she had been over his predecessors. She was especially given to cherishing *young* clergymen, and her frequent excursions to the curates' lodgings had often given rise to talk, for people did like a bit of gossip, especially about a respectable spinster and church worker like Miss Harriet Bede.



There was naturally nothing scandalous about these visits, as she always took with her a newly baked cake, some fresh eggs or fruit — for the poor young men always looked half starved — or even a hand-knitted pullover or pair of socks, begun by her in a burst of enthusiasm and usually finished, more soberly, by Belinda. And then of course she would ask them to supper.

Was it tonight he was coming? Belinda wondered vaguely. It must be tonight, she decided, catching sight of a bowl of exceptionally fine pears on the little table by the window, and expensive bought chrysanthemums in the vases when there were perfectly good Michaelmas daisies in the garden. Dear Harriet, she wasn't really extravagant, only rather too lavish in her hospitality. The Reverend Edgar Donne was surely a simple young man and would not expect much. Naturally one did not think of the clergy as expecting anything in the way of material luxuries . . . Belinda paused, for she was remembering the vicar, Archdeacon Hoccleve, and how one couldn't really say that about him. But then dear Henry was different, in some ways not like a clergyman at all. For although Belinda had loved him faithfully for over thirty years, she sometimes had to admit that he had very few of the obvious virtues that one somehow expected of one's parish priest. His letter in this month's parish magazine, announcing the arrival of the new curate, had a peevish and condescending tone that a stranger might have thought not quite the thing for an archdeacon. But the village was used to it.

'The Reverend Edgar Donne — the name is of course pronounced *Dunne* — will be with us by the time you read these words', he wrote. 'Nobody will be more glad to welcome him than I myself, for whom these last few weeks have been more trying than any of you can possibly imagine. Without a curate it has been impossible for me to take the holiday I so badly need and I have been forced

to cancel some of the services because I have not felt equal to taking them, as the ready help I looked for from fellow priests in neighbouring parishes has not been forthcoming. . . .’

Of course that was a dig at the Reverend Edward Plowman, who disliked the Archdeacon so much, and as he had quarrelled with Canon Glover what could he expect? thought Belinda, almost wishing that she were Deaconess Bede and could enter the pulpit herself. But even a deaconess was not permitted to celebrate Holy Communion — it was of course the *early* services which had been cancelled — whereas in the Nonconformist churches, she believed, women ministers had equal status with men. . . .

‘B’linda!’ Harriet’s impatient voice interrupted her thoughts, ‘it’s nearly seven and Mr. Donne will soon be here.’ Harriet appeared in the doorway, wearing only a celanese vest and knickers, as if her actual presence in the room would make Belinda realize more fully how late it was.

‘Why, Harriet, the curtains aren’t drawn,’ exclaimed Belinda in an agitated tone. ‘Anybody might see into the room! And you know I never take as long to get ready as you do.’

‘All the same Mr. Donne will probably be punctual,’ said Harriet, ‘and it would be terrible if neither of us was ready. I’ve borrowed your lace scarf, as I must have something to cover up the neck of my green frock. Perhaps it would have been better if I hadn’t tried to alter it to a Vee.’

‘Yes, dear.’ Belinda spoke rather absently, for by now she was occupied with the problem of what *she* should wear. She hoped that Harriet had not also borrowed her black velvet bridge coat, as she wanted it herself on these late September evenings. But then Harriet was probably too stout for it, although she liked her clothes to fit tightly and always wore an elastic roll-on corset.

In her room Belinda took out her blue marocain, a rather dim dress of the kind known as 'semi-evening'. Quite good enough for the curate, she decided, though if the Archdeacon had been coming as well she would probably have worn her velvet. She did hope that Harriet wouldn't put on a lot of lipstick, it was so unsuitable. . . .

At that moment there was a ring at the bell and an agitated call from Harriet.

'Belinda, you go! I haven't finished doing my hair.'

'But surely Emily will go?' said Belinda. She was wondering whether to wear her little seed-pearl brooch or not.

'No, Emily can't go. She's putting the sauce on the chicken.'

Belinda hurried downstairs without the little brooch. She felt flustered and incomplete.

The figure on the doorstep might have been any of the other curates, except that Mr. Donne favoured a rather unfashionably high clerical collar. He doesn't remember me, thought Belinda, as she replied to his rather puzzled greeting.

'This is Miss Bede's house?' he asked, hesitating on the threshold.

'Yes, I am Miss Bede,' said Belinda with simple dignity, 'but I expect you know my sister better.'

'Ah, you must be Miss *Belinda* Bede,' he announced, triumphant at having placed her. 'I've heard a lot about you from the Archdeacon.'

'Oh, really? What did he say?' Belinda tried not to sound too coy and eager.

'He — er — said you did a lot of good work in the parish,' replied the curate primly.

'Oh . . .' Belinda could not help feeling disappointed. It made her sound almost unpleasant. If that was what he had really said, of course. It didn't sound at all like the Archdeacon, who never said the sort of things clergy-

men ought to say. It was so odd to think of him as being a clergyman at all . . . Belinda's thoughts slipped back to her college days when they had been students together. *Most* odd . . . and yet there was no sadness or bitterness in her mind as she thought of him. It was obvious that poor Agatha had a very difficult time with him, although by her scheming she had made him an archdeacon. Their cook had told the Bedes' Emily who had told Harriet that the Archdeacon was very difficult to get up in the mornings, and of course one knew that he always made his curates do the early services which was really rather slack, because it wasn't as if he were very old or weak in health. And yet he had such charm, even now. . . .

The curate coughed nervously and ventured a remark about the weather.

'Yes, I love September,' agreed Belinda, guilty at having let her thoughts wander from her guest. 'Michaelmas daisies and blackberries and comforting things like fires in the evening again and knitting.'

'Ah, knitting,' he smiled, and Belinda could see him glancing round the room as if he already expected to see the beginnings of a pullover for himself. But all that Belinda's cretonne work bag contained was a pink lacy-looking garment, a winter vest for herself. It was so annoying of Miss Jenner not to have any more 'Perliknit' left. She had had to buy a slightly thicker wool of a rather brighter pink to finish it off.

Fortunately at this moment, for the conversational going was heavy, a firm step was heard on the stairs and Harriet came into the room, radiant in flowered voile. Tropical flowers rioted over her plump body. The background was the green of the jungle, the blossoms were crimson and mauve, of an unknown species. Harriet was still attractive in a fat Teutonic way. She did not wear her pince-nez when curates came to supper.

The curate sprang up eagerly and seemed suddenly to lose some of his shyness.

'Good evening, Mr. Donne,' said Harriet, 'I'm afraid I haven't my sister's punctual ways, but I'm sure she has been entertaining you better than I could have done. I had a classical education and it isn't a very good training for scintillating conversation.' She sat down rather heavily on the sofa beside him. 'Now we must not forget that the name is pronounced *Dunne*,' she declared roguishly.

'Well, actually, as a matter of fact . . .' the curate looked embarrassed, 'I don't pronounce it that way. I can't imagine why the Archdeacon thought I did.'

'He was of course thinking of the seventeenth-century poet of that name,' said Belinda stoutly. The truth was, of course, that dear Henry could never resist a literary allusion and was delighted, in the way that children and scholars sometimes are, if it was one that the majority of his parishioners did not understand.

'He will have to put a correction in the magazine next month,' chortled Harriet. 'I should like to see the Archdeacon having to climb down.'

'It makes one feel quite odd to have one's name mispronounced or misspelt,' said Belinda evenly. 'Almost like a different person.'

'Oh, yes,' agreed Harriet, 'like Gorrings's catalogue.'

The curate looked politely interested but puzzled.

'You see,' Harriet explained, 'they once sent me a catalogue addressed to Miss *Bode*, and somehow I'm so lazy that I never bothered to correct it. So now I have a dual personality. I always feel Miss Bode is my dowdy self, rather a frumpish old thing.'

'She must certainly be most unlike Miss *Bede*,' blurted out Mr. Donne with surprising gallantry.

Harriet protested amid delighted giggles. Belinda felt rather left out and found her eyes fixed on the curate's combinations, which still showed. Surely it was much too

warm for such garments, unless perhaps he wore them all the year round?

During the short silence which followed, the tinkling of a cowbell was heard. The sisters had brought it back from a holiday in Switzerland and it was now used as a gong.

'Ah, dinner,' said Harriet. 'Come, Mr. Donne, you shall take me in,' she added with mock solemnity.

Mr. Donne was quite equal to the occasion, for he had all the qualifications of a typical curate. Indeed, his maternal grandfather had been a bishop.

In the dining-room Harriet sat at one end of the table and Belinda at the other, with the curate in the middle. Harriet carved the boiled chicken smothered in white sauce very capably. She gave the curate all the best white meat.

Were all new curates everywhere always given boiled chicken when they came to supper for the first time? Belinda wondered. It was certainly an established ritual at their house and it seemed somehow right for a new curate. The coldness, the whiteness, the muffling with sauce, perhaps even the sharpness added by the slices of lemon, there was something appropriate here, even if Belinda could not see exactly what it was.

'I called at the vicarage on the way here,' said the curate. 'Mrs. Hoccleve very kindly promised me some apples.'

Harriet looked rather annoyed. 'Their apples haven't done at all well this year,' she said, 'and I always think those red ones are rather tasteless. You must take some of our Cox's Oranges with you when you go.'

The curate murmured grateful thanks.

'How is Mrs. Hoccleve's rheumatism?' asked Belinda.

'Not very much better,' he replied. 'I hear she is going to Karlsbad in October. Apparently the waters there are very good.'

'Nettles are an excellent thing, I believe,' said Harriet.

'Indeed?' Mr. Donne looked so interested that he must have found it quite a strain. 'How should they be used?'

'Oh, I don't really know,' Harriet beamed. 'Just nettles. Boiled, perhaps. People will try all sorts of odd remedies,' she added, with the complacency of one who is perfectly healthy.

'Poor Agatha,' murmured Belinda, although she could not really feel very sympathetic.

There was a slight lapse in the conversation.

'I hear you are a rowing man,' said Belinda, with what she felt was rather forced enthusiasm.

'Oh, how splendid!' Harriet was of course delighted, as she would have been with any piece of information. 'I can just imagine you stroking an eight.'

'Well, actually, I haven't done any for some time, but I used to be very keen.' The curate looked down at his chicken bone as if he would like to take it up in his fingers and gnaw it. He was not very well fed at his lodgings and the evening meal was particularly scrappy.

Harriet picked up her bone and began to eat it in her fingers. She beamed on Mr. Donne and said brightly, 'Like Queen Victoria, you know, so much more sensible and convenient.'

He followed her example eagerly. Belinda looked on with some distaste. If only Harriet could see how foolish she looked. The white sauce was beginning to smear itself on her face.

'I expect you are quite bewildered meeting so many new people,' she said, leading the conversation back into suitable channels.

'Yes, in a way I am, but I find it fairly easy to remember them so far. I came across Miss Liversidge this afternoon in the village and have persuaded her to address a meeting of the Mothers' Union. She seems to have had a great many interesting experiences.'

Belinda smiled. The idea of Edith Liversidge addressing



the Mothers' Union amused her. One never knew what she might say to them and she would hardly set them a good example of tidiness. Dear Edith, she was always such a mess.

'She's a kind of decayed gentlewoman,' said Harriet comfortably, helping the curate to trifle.

'Oh *no*, Harriet,' Belinda protested. Nobody could call Edith decayed and sometimes one almost forgot that she was a gentlewoman, with her cropped grey hair, her shabby clothes which weren't even the legendary 'good tweeds' of her kind and her blunt, almost rough, way of speaking. 'Miss Liversidge is really splendid,' she declared and then wondered why one always said that Edith was 'splendid'. It was probably because she hadn't very much money, was tough and wiry, dug vigorously in her garden and kept goats. Also, she had travelled abroad a good deal and had done some relief work after the 1914 war among refugees in the Balkans. Work of rather an unpleasant nature too, something to do with sanitation. Belinda hoped that Harriet wouldn't mention it in front of Mr. Donne. 'Of course she has made a home for poor Miss Aspinall, who's a kind of relation,' she said hastily. 'I always thinks it's very unselfish to have a comparative stranger to live with you when you've been used to living alone.'

'Ah, well, we ought to share what we have with others,' said Mr. Donne with rather disagreeable unctuousness.

'Oh, Mr. Donne, I can't imagine you sharing your home with Connie Aspinall,' Harriet burst out, 'she's so dreary.'

Mr. Donne smiled. 'Well, perhaps I didn't mean to be taken quite literally,' he said.

'Now she's a decayed gentlewoman if you like,' said Harriet. 'She can talk of nothing but the days when she used to be companion to a lady in Belgrave Square who was a kind of relation of one of Queen Alexandra's Ladies-in-Waiting.'

'She plays the harp very beautifully,' murmured Belinda

weakly, for poor Connie was really rather uninteresting and it was hard to think of anything nice to say about her.

‘Let’s have coffee in the drawing-room,’ said Harriet rather grandly. At one time she had wanted to call it the lounge, but Belinda would not hear of it. She had finally won her point by reminding Harriet of how much their dear mother would have disliked it.

In the drawing-room they arranged themselves as before, Harriet on the sofa with the curate and Belinda in one of the armchairs. Belinda took out her knitting and went on doing it rather self-consciously. It was beginning to look so very much like an undergarment for herself. The curate’s combinations must be ‘Meridian’, she thought. It was nice and warm for pyjamas, too, in fact Harriet herself wore it in the winter. The close fabric fitted her plump body like a woolly skin.

While they were drinking their coffee, Harriet went to the little table by the window and took up the bowl of pears which Belinda had noticed earlier in the evening.

‘Now you must have a pear,’ she insisted. ‘Do you know, when we were children our mother used to say that we could never keep fruit on the sideboard.’

Belinda would have liked to add that they couldn’t now, and that it was only because they had been having the curate to supper that there had been anything more than a withered apple or orange in the bowl this evening. Harriet’s appetite was just as rapacious in her fifties as it had been in her teens.

The curate helped himself to a pear and began to peel it. He seemed to be getting rather sticky and there was some giggling and interchange of large handkerchiefs between him and Harriet.

Belinda went on quietly with her knitting. The evening promised to be just like so many other evenings when other curates had come to supper. There was something almost frightening and at the same time comforting about the