

Know-it-all

by Georgina Burrows

It was terribly hot and crowded in Jonty's drawing room, and the air was slowly becoming impenetrably fusty with a combination of cigarette smoke and champagne breath. Having come straight from the office, I was damnably warm in my shirt and tie, and longed to remove my jacket, but it wasn't that sort of do. Jonty had been in the Home Guards - a smart Kensington apartment was not the place to start removing ones outer layers, even if it was 1989.

Moving sideways through the crush for some fresh air, I spied a rather attractive girl, stroking a Persian cat, who I happened to know was called Cuthbert.

'Jolly good chap, old Cuthbert, but he does have rather sharp claws,' I began, noting with approval her blonde hair and Princess Di-style boucle jacket. She smiled, and so, rather sinisterly, did Cuthbert, who reminded more of a Cheshire cat.

'Lucinda,' said the blonde, holding out a hand.

'Charles,' I replied. A plate of vol-au-vents were on the windowsill, rather handily, and I took one and bit into it gingerly, before making a face.

'Not keen?' asked Lucinda.

'Well, one doesn't like to be rude, but these are terribly heavy and dull,' I said. 'The thing is, you see, is that you have to have a very light hand with a puff pastry, otherwise it just turns into this hideous cement with a smear of something on top.'

'I see,' she said, raising an eyebrow. 'Do you know much about food?'

'Well, I do consider myself rather a gourmet,' I replied, inwardly congratulating myself on my correct French pronunciation.

'For example, this scampi has been cooked for far too long. It's tough and rubbery and the caterer should be jolly embarrassed to serve it up at all. Did you know that 'prawns' refer to any decapod crustacean, but a smaller one is called a shrimp? It's quite interesting really, because people refer to prawns and scampi, but actually, scampi is a culinary term, much like beef and cows –' I paused to draw breath and swig some more champagne 'i.e. they are prawn and shrimps when alive but scampi when on the plate.'

'How fascinating,' said Lucinda.

'Well, quite. As for these devilled eggs – well! Devil is quite the word. Under-seasoned, unimaginative and unattractive, and that's just for starters. Literally!' I chortled.

'Mmm,' said Lucinda. 'And do you work as a chef or a food critic?'

'Me? Oh, no I work on the trading desk at the Stock Exchange, bit of a money man to be honest. I just rather enjoy the finer things in life, you know? So few people know how to make a proper canape, I find. Anyway, enough about me – what is it that you do?'

'I'm a chef,' said Lucinda.

I blanched. 'Golly, well, they should have asked you to cook for this party then!'

'They did,' said Lucinda.

Exit Charles, stage left, pursued by a cat.