

Resist Everything but Temptation

a timed exercise

by Victoria Cooper

The village hall was laid out spectacularly with pastel bunting from old sheets and duvet covers. Katherine looked up to see if she recognised her own striped pillow case. She didn't. At that moment a man with a trilby shoved her in the back and mumbled something at her as he pushed past. She turned round with indignation, but he had sidestepped around her and all she could see was his brown checked coat moving along the trestle tables.

She could not help it as she found herself meandering along, attempting to look interested in the crochet teddy bears and the pots of bramble jelly, when her eyes were fixed only on the trilby.

The hall was full of steaming wool coats and dripping umbrellas as people shook themselves as they poured in through the open doors. She had assumed the poor weather would put people off but they all seemed as bored as her and had ventured out on this wet Saturday afternoon.

The trilby had reached the kitchen hatch and was helping himself to a free cup of tea and a custard cream just as she knew he would. He crouched over the steaming brew and it reminded her of one those rooks she could hear nesting in the chimney. The clatter they made was so loud she dreaded waking up in the morning, with all their bickering and fuss.

She had moved up to pass the tombola table and had to smile at the Scouts Leader who had a sunburnt nose; she mouthed she would be back and waved a ten-pound note at him reassuringly. He nodded back, his eyes peering back at her through thick glasses, the look of someone who knows you are lying.

Then she saw him, just where she had expected, the cake stall. Battenbergs, brownies, those horrid rock cakes that nobody likes, and centre stage a big Salted Caramel Double layer Chocolate Cake. She stood so close to him that she could smell stale pipe tobacco and Listerine. The tea and biscuits were gone now and he was licking his dry lips with anticipation. He pointed a bony finger at an iced bun to the woman with dinner lady arms behind the table. She was laughing before he had said anything, she was the sort that did that thought Katherine.

“Just the one dear or can I tempt you to anything else?” she winked suggestively.

He tipped the trilby at her in a mock salute, “Resist everything but temptation. That’s’s me.”

He sniggered and it ended in a little phlegmy cough that Katherine recoiled from. He joked again when he handed her a 50p coin, “keep the change,” he snigger-coughed.

Katherine seized her moment and dropped the wet umbrella with full force. He howled as it landed directly on his brown lace up toe. The iced bun fell to the floor with perfection.