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## Cat Among the Pigeons

by Ivor John

'At last' he thought, as he saw her car pull in to the car park from Hitchin Road. There were plenty of spaces, it wasn't busy. Corey's Mill, family restaurant, carvery and steakhouse was busier at weekends, with families more than business lunches. As it was Wednesday, there would be more than the usual number of retired couples, enjoying a cheap steak dinner after a trip to the DIY shop or the garden centre. This had been her choice, rather than his, but he was pleased she had agreed to meet him. Looking at his watch again, ten to one, she was slightly early. He wondered if that was a good sign. It was overcast, drizzling and cold, even for November. Pulling a fold up anorak over his jacket he walked towards her as she reversed into a vacant parking space.

'Hi Berni, great to see you'

'Peter, it was only three days ago, I know this isn't really your sort of place, but I really don't have very long. We can get some lunch though'

She was still wearing her wedding ring he noticed. He moved his hand toward hers as they walked toward the pub, but she didn't take the offer to hold hands. An attractive young woman in her twenties greeted them at the reception desk. She was wearing a blazer in colours which coordinated with the soft furnishings. The breast pocket was embroidered, 'Corey's Mill'.

'Welcome to Corey's Mill this afternoon, two of you?'

Without waiting for an answer, she walked them towards a table across the large restaurant, and invited them to sit and handed them each a large, laminated menu.

'You need to order at the bar, specials are on the blackboard' She said as she walked away. There was a wine list combined with a desert menu, a triangular cardboard tube, standing in the centre of the table. She came back and put a small bucket on the table, which contained cutlery, a knife and fork and spoon, wrapped together with serviettes into a little bundle.

'Pick what you want Berni, I think I'll have the lasagna with the free salad cart.'

The pub was quiet, and even though he had thought to turn off the ringer previously, he could hear his iphone vibrating in his pocket. He fumbled with his coat, moving it to the back of his chair as he tried stifle the vibration. He could sense that he looked flustered, this probably was exaggerated by efforts to appear casual. If Bernadette had heard, she didn't say so and had continued looking half heartedly at the menu. He looked closely at her and tried to discern if she had heard. He reassured himself that she hadn't, but didn't allow him the comfort of certainty.

'I'll just have the egg and avocado salad I think, you know I don't eat lunch. I won't have anything to drink, I have a meeting when I get back'.

That she had spoken and not mentioned the phone, reassured him. He hadn't needed to look at his phone, who knew who had been calling. He thought about deleting the call as he walked to the counter, the other side of the room, to place their order. He decided against it, thinking that taking his phone out would attract more attention and invite Berni to comment.

He returned to their table, with a large wooden spoon in a jar. It had number 27 on it, and would allow the servers to bring their food.

'So, Paul, what did you want to talk about? As if I needed to ask. We spoke only a couple of days ago, at the House'

'Berni, do we have to do this? You know how I feel about you, about us, could I move back home? I miss you and I miss the kids'

'You'll see them at the girls at the weekend, you're supposed to be taking them to netball, I hope you remembered. And you promised me that she wouldn't be there, please don't let me down'

He thought for a while about his two girls, how much he missed seeing them every morning. How he allowed himself to get to this, where he had to arrange lunch dates with his wife to be able to speak to her.

'Have you seen her?'

'Berni please, don't do this, you know how I feel about this'

'Was that her on the phone earlier? That rather put the cat among the pigeons didn't it?'