



Not Under My Pew !

'Lord ! At last a few minutes peace'. Jenny, as was her custom, had finished dusting the pews a few minutes before the first of the congregation arrived. 'It's my time with the Lord !' she often announced proudly with an inflexion which clearly said, 'And woe betide any member of the congregation who arrives early and spoils it for me.'

Jenny called it meditation time. Others, if they knew her mind would probably have called it 'wandering thoughts time'. This morning was no exception. With a nod to the cross and the table she acknowledged it was God's house. 'I love this seat in the back pew,' she assured herself. Jack and I sat here all our married life, and I've gone on another twenty years, sitting here for both of us. And to think that Mrs. Emerson had the nerve to try to push me out. Oh, I knew her game. The trumpet was just an excuse. She's only been here, what....ten years... no more, and thinks she can change things. It wouldn't be so bad if the vicar didn't encourage her. She's been on for ages about everybody sitting nearer the front. I'll sit down in the front pew when my hearing goes..and not before. It wouldn't seem right. I don't think you'd miss me Lord if I sat somewhere else,' Jenny remembered she was supposed to be praying. 'But I'm not going to move, just in case you thought I'd left the parish. Do you know what that May Emerson tried to do ? Of course you do. You were there I suppose, weren't you ! She's sneaky really. I think she came to the Parish Council just to make trouble. I don't know how she managed to get on the Parish Council anyway, being here only ten years or so. The vicar's for dropping us old ones and getting new blood into the parish. Huh ! There's nothing wrong with old blood if it's still flowing round the body. She waited till right at the end of the meeting. She knew the heating would have gone off by then and we'd all be dying to get home. Then she stood up and made her speech. Yes, it was a speech. She could have said it in half a minute, but no, she had to make a speech.'

Jenny's thoughts transferred to the verger. He had just rushed in as usual and looked as though he'd dropped into his cassock from a great height. He was fumbling with a box of damp matches, trying to light a taper for the candles. 'He'd better not get candle-grease on that table again,' Jenny muttered under her breath. 'It took me a whole hour to get the last lot cleared up. My goodness, Mrs. Binns' has got another new coat ! I'm sure I haven't seen that one before !'

The small congregation began to arrive now. From her perch at the back of the church, Jenny could see every one of them. She knew exactly how they would arrive. 'Morning Arthur ! Yes, a lovely one.' Jenny shouted back at him. Arthur would always sit down, then get up and take his coat off, fold it to make a cushion, then sit down again, and again, and again....like an old cat making itself comfortable. Mrs. Juniper, would lift her hat and pat her hair several times between adjusting her prayer book on the ledge in front of her. Suddenly, a few minutes before service time, in walked Mrs. Emerson, dragging Jamie behind her. Second to front pew. She wanted to make a point. Jenny scowled, 'Obnoxious woman,' she muttered. 'Look at her looking around at everyone, as though to say, you all ought to be sitting here. Oh, yes, that's what I was thinking about in my meditation ! You know, Lord don't you. 'We haven't room for Jamie's trumpet.' she announced. It was like a text for her speech. She went on to say that with the new baby and Jamie having to share a room with Thomas, they haven't room to keep Jamie's trumpet and Thomas' trombone. And as the vicar wants them to play sometimes in Church, could they keep them here. She went on and on - all the details of their house and how small it was for their family. I wanted to say it was her fault she had so many children, but instead I asked, 'Where do you think we can keep them safe ?' She looked straight at me with a gleam in her eye and said as bold as brass, 'I thought we could keep them under the back pew. They're hidden away safe there where no-one will see them.' 'The back pew ! My pew ! When I got my breath I fair exploded. And what about me, sitting with a trombone and a trumpet between my legs ?' 'You could move forward,' she said and without a word of a lie, she grinned and said, 'The vicar would like you to come forward a bit.'

I don't know how I kept my tongue. Fortunately, the vicar spoke before I could say anything. He had an idea about the kitchen, but that didn't suit her ladyship. 'It's damp in the kitchen,' she said. In the end the vicar remembered an empty cupboard in the vestry. 'I'm not so sure about musical instruments in the church anyway. What's wrong with the organ. It's been good enough for us all these years. We bend over backward to please the newcomers and the youngsters. And what happens ? That Thomas Emerson, he hasn't been inside the place except to play the trombone now and again. It wasn't like it in my day. Lord, when will the real old days of church come back ?'

Jenny stood for the hymn. The organ played, but somehow seemed out of key. At last Jenny decided it was a trumpet playing along with the organ. 'Was it young Jamie ? I didn't see him bring his trumpet in with him,' she puzzled. No, he wasn't playing, and the sound came from much nearer. It was getting louder - all around her. She looked round the church. No-one else seemed to be noticing. Most of them had their heads down as usual. Then the words went through her mind, just like a voice speaking, 'The last trumpet shall sound !' She remembered how the Bible said, when the last day comes, some will be taken and others left. 'Lord!' she cried under her breath. 'Lord, is it me, you're calling and none of them ? Am I the only one who can hear it. ?'

Jenny looked around her. No angels. No heavenly brightness. Just the words pumping through her head, 'When the last trumpet sounds !' and that trumpet getting louder and louder till the noise seemed to lift her off her seat. Was she rising ! 'Lord,' she cried, 'Lord, I'm ready. Where are you Lord !' The congregation sang on. The trumpet stopped. A gently reproving yet humorous voice whispered. 'I'm here Jenny. Here under the back pew, playing the trumpet !'