

## Lapford Tea Shop

### The Real Meaning

*A table in the local tea shop. Jan and Viv are sitting at a table. Jan has lots of Christmas shopping; Viv has lots of evangelistic tracts, leaflets about meetings, Christmas appeals, etc, perhaps even some suitably 'spiritual' books as presents. They are both exhausted and have just 'collapsed' at the table with a very welcome cuppa.*

*Jan:* Phew! I really needed this.

*Viv:* That's right! I was just about dead on my feet. There's so much to do at this time of year, isn't there?

*Jan:* Yes, and I'm not sure if I've finished. (*Looks at list*) No, I don't think I've got everyone's presents yet. I still need to find something for Noel - do you think he would prefer some new secateurs or a pair of comfy slippers?

*Viv:* Well, I certainly haven't done everything yet. There are so many opportunities to tell people the real meaning of Christmas. Are you coming to the Carols by Candlelight on Sunday night? Roy is speaking and he is so good at putting over the message.

*Jan:* As far as I'm concerned, I just want to make sure that all my family have a really happy time - lots of good food, nice presents, a bit of a party together, maybe a few drinks - it is the season of good cheer, after all, isn't it?

*Viv:* Don't you think you're missing something, though? After all, Christmas is the time when we are supposed to be celebrating the birth of Jesus. You believe that, don't you, Jan?

*Jan:* Well, yes - I think the old stories are really lovely, especially for the children. Have you seen the nativity crib down at the Parish Church? It's been really well done this year. I remember when we used to make one of those at Primary School, every year.

*Viv:* That's not quite what I meant. Jesus didn't just come as a baby 2000 years ago - he wants to come into our lives and make a difference to them. Have you ever really thought about that, Jan . . .

*Gaby:* (*interrupting*) Excuse me, ladies, can I join you at this table? There doesn't seem to be any room anywhere else.

*Jan & Viv:* Of course... That's fine... You're very welcome... (etc...)

*Gaby:* You both look as though you're very busy. I don't understand all those parcels and leaflets you've got . . . What's it all about?

*Jan:* We're up to our eyes with all our Christmas preparations - pretty exhausting, really. Anyway, what's your name? I'm Jan and this is Viv. We live just up the road, but you're not from round here, are you?

*Gaby:* No, I'm not local. I've travelled quite a long way to come here. You can call me Gaby, if you like.

*Viv:* Nice to meet you, Gaby. Don't you have Christmas where you come from, then?

*Gaby:* No, we don't . . . Christmas, what's that?

*Jan (excited):* Oh, it's the most wonderful time of the year! Everyone gets lots of nice presents, all the old films are on the telly, we try to get all our relations together, we eat as much good food as we can and even have our neighbours round for a party! You could come if you like - are you free next Friday evening?

*Viv (earnestly):* What Jan's not told you is what it's all really about. This is how we celebrate the birth of Jesus about 2000 years ago. You must have heard of him, surely? (*Gaby nods but can't get a word in edgeways*) I've got a leaflet about him here, how he came into the world and how he can change your life. (*Viv scrabbles around and finds a tract to give to Gaby, Jan is a bit embarrassed by the way the conversation is going, but she can't interrupt either*) That's the great thing about Christmas - we get lots of opportunities to tell people about Jesus. We've got a special carol service next Sunday evening, would you like to come? There will be lots of everyone's favourite carols, Bible readings and even a talk about the real meaning of Christmas . . . oh, did I say there will be lots of singing and mince pies afterwards? You will come, won't you?

*Gaby: (thoughtfully)* Yes, I certainly know about Jesus - quite a bit actually - but not quite as you describe him. (*Viv begins to look a bit disappointed*) Tell me, is there more to this 'real meaning' of Christmas?

*Jan:* Do we really want to get into all of this stuff right now? I've got quite a bit more shopping to do. (*She fidgets as if she would like to go, but doesn't want to leave the conversation*)

*Viv: (feeling a little awkward now)* Well, yes, we would like people to believe in Jesus and join our church. That way, they can learn a lot more about the Bible and the message of Jesus. But tell us a bit about yourself. What work do you do and what brings you here to Lapford?

*Gaby:* I suppose you could call me a government employee. My boss is really great, but he sends me on some pretty tough assignments sometimes . . .

*Jan:* Ooh, that sounds interesting - is it like a James Bond movie, all sorts of fights and chases, and the hero always gets his man? *(She is beginning to like this stranger)*

*Gaby:* Well, yes, I have been in some strange situations, but the fighting bit is mainly handled by my colleague Mike. He's got a lot of trained fighters working with him - all over the world.

*Viv:* So what sort of things do you do? What's your speciality? Spying? Sabotage?

*Gaby:* No, I'm much more in Public Relations myself. *(Slowly and confidentially, in a stage whisper, and Jan and Viv lean closer to listen)* The point is, my boss and his son are planning to take over the world, to make it the sort of place we would all like to live in. You know, no war, no stealing, no greed, no murder, no lying - none of that stuff - just real peace and everyone able to live happily as they're supposed to . . .

*Jan:* *(interrupting)* So is that where your friend Mike comes in, with all his troops - bumping off the bad guys so that your boss can take over? Sounds exciting! But is that really happening right now, and where? In the Middle East? Surely there's nothing like that going on here? *(Looks over her shoulder as if she is afraid that someone might overhear her talking with this 'terrorist')*

*Viv:* Sounds a bit violent to me. I'm a bit suspicious about these so-called 'benevolent dictators'. They say they want to bring a reign of peace, but it always seems to be just an excuse to take over and have lots of wealth and power for themselves.

*Gaby:* Oh, you don't need to worry about that with my boss! He is already richer and more powerful than anyone else. No, his plan is to get together groups of people who will co-operate with him and allow him to train them, ready for the time when his son actually steps in. Of course, by then they will be equipped to work with him and form part of his new government - a real world take-over!

*Jan:* So you're on a sort of recruiting drive, are you? *(Sceptically)* Trying to get people to sign up for this under-cover operation? I agree with Viv - it sounds a bit suspicious. *(To Viv)* What do you think, Viv? Is this fellow winding us up, is he a nutter, or should we report him to the police? He could be dangerous!

*(Jan and Viv huddle together closer, cutting Gaby out of their conversation)*

*Viv:* I'm not sure, Jan. Some of what he says sounds good, but it's a bit way out, isn't it? Surely no-one believes in a peaceful revolution, and certainly not world-wide?

*(Gaby quietly gets up from the table and slips away while Jan and Viv are talking together. They don't notice him go.)*

*Jan:* I'm a bit worried about people like him. They use times like this, when everyone's distracted with Christmas, and start trying to spread trouble. Shall we make a citizen's arrest and hand him over to the police?

*Viv:* How do we know he's not armed? He said it was a peaceful revolution, but he could be a terrorist! Perhaps he's a suicide bomber!

*(They both look round, slowly and cautiously, to where Gaby was sitting, and then realise he's gone)*

*Jan (jumping up to look for him):* Where's he gone? We ought to stop him - he's probably dangerous!

*Viv (also on her feet by now, and looking round):* I don't know. Can't see him anywhere. Too late, couldn't catch him now, even if we could see him. Let's hope he's harmless after all!

*(They both sit down again)*

*Jan:* Well, I suppose I had better get on with that shopping now. It was interesting, though, wasn't it - all that stuff about his boss and his son planning to take over the world. It couldn't really happen, could it?

*Viv (puzzled):* I still don't know. Some of the things he said sounded a bit familiar in a funny sort of way. Strange that he didn't know anything about Christmas, but did seem to know about Jesus, almost as if he knew him personally.

*Jan:* Yes, and I'd like to know a bit more about his boss and his son. He didn't give us their names, did he? I wonder if we've ever heard of them?

*Viv:* Talking of names, he had quite an unusual one, didn't he? Gaby . . . Gaby . . . Do you think that's his nickname because he talks a lot, or is it short for something?

*Jan:* Only name I can think of is Gabriel . . . *(They look at each other in total disbelief)* Surely not...?

**END**

Dave Taylor     November 2002

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