



TEA  
By Paul Smith

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## Characters

VICAR – 40's

MADELINE – 70's

***A simple living room with a door/entrance one side. VICAR is on the telephone. He is in his early 40s.***

VICAR        ....and the upshot is that I thought we needed to clear the air. ***(pause)*** No, maybe 'showdown' is too strong a word, but we will definitely be telling a few home truths. ***(pause)*** Exactly. I can't do my job anymore. She objects to anything and everything I do and is making my life a merry hell – not that hell is particularly merry – at least my idea of it isn't. ***(pause)*** I wish I could laugh but she is chair of so many constituent groups associated with the Church and is the most vocal of anyone on the Parochial Church Council – the meetings get nowhere. ***(pause)*** Yes, she does seem to garner support from throughout the parish and beyond. ***(pause)*** Yes I think people are scared of her. ***(pause)*** Not especially I am not. I am afraid it's more anger than anything else. And I don't like her either. ***(pause)*** Yes, there's only so much a man can take whether he be of the cloth or not! ***(pause)*** Yes, I hope this will be an end of it. I have taken ***(a doorbell rings)*** oh that will be her. Yes, come round for tea and a chat. Speak soon ***(doorbell rings again)***. Bye.

***VICAR rises as the doorbell rings again. He exits.***

VICAR        ***(as he goes)*** Coming!

VICAR        ***(off)*** Ah, Madeline, welcome.

MADELINE    ***(off)*** I thought you were hiding, the length of time I had to wait for you to answer.

VICAR        ***(off)*** It was only a minute or less.

MADELINE    ***(off)*** Time I could have spent better elsewhere.

VICAR *(off)* Sorry I was on the phone.

MADELINE *(off)* To the Bishop?

VICAR *(off)* No. Just a friend.

MADELINE *(off)* Thought you might have been offering your resignation.

VICAR *(off)* No.

MADELINE *(off)* Pity.

VICAR *(off)* Well come into the sitting room.

***MADELINE enters – she is in her early to mid-70s. Smartly dressed and with a shopping bag – not a paper or plastic bag. She is followed into the room by the VICAR.***

MADELINE *(entering)* And?

VICAR *(entering)* Do sit down. The kettle has just boiled.

MADELINE *(sitting)* Well boil it again, I'm not having lukewarm tea. But just before you do, as it might save us both some time, I have some paperwork here which if you sign we can put this whole sorry episode behind us once and for all.

VICAR What is it?

MADELINE *(taking a document from her bag and handing it to the VICAR)* A letter to your parishioners proffering your resignation.

VICAR I beg your pardon.

MADELINE Here it is, all laid out, ready for you to sign.

VICAR I certainly won't do anything of the kind.

MADELINE Well don't say I didn't try the easy way.

VICAR What do you mean by that?

MADELINE Never mind. Go and boil that kettle.

VICAR *(leaving the room)* I will.

MADELINE I can offer you some lemon drizzle.

**MADLINE removes a tin from her bag and removes a cake which is on a plate and covered over. She has a knife which she uses to cut a slice.**

VICAR *(off)* Oh, that is a treat.

MADLINE I am watching my diet currently, so I will hold back. It's homemade of course.

**VICAR enters with teapot, cups, saucers, plate, milk jug and bowl of granulated sweetener.**

VICAR Of course. I wish I could find the time to bake.

MADLINE If you organised yourself better you would. Now just set it down here and then you can serve me.

**MADLINE takes a plate that the VICAR has brought in and places the slice of cake on it and offers it to the VICAR.**

VICAR Of course.

MADLINE Try the cake.

VICAR Thank you.

MADLINE Are you pouring the tea or are we just going to sit here and look at it?

VICAR ***(assuming a position of prayer, followed by MADLINE)*** For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.

MADLINE Amen.

**He pours the tea and adds several spoonfuls of sweetener to her cup and eats the cake during the following.**

VICAR A little milk and sweetener?

MADLINE Plenty of sweetener.

VICAR I think I should cut straight to the chase though...

MADLINE If you are about to start haranguing me about this that and the other I think you should take time to pause.

VICAR I just think this might be an opportunity to clear the fug of air that has built up recently and made our relationship rather toxic, if that's not too strong a word.

MADELINE Well, it's certainly provocative.

VICAR And you preparing a resignation letter isn't?

MADELINE As I said, that was the easy way.

VICAR For everyone's sake we should talk.

MADELINE Fair enough. What's that strange taste?

VICAR Not sure. Oh, it might be that I have started to use oat milk.

MADELINE Oat milk? What on God's Earth is that?

VICAR I have developed a slight lactose intolerance and thought I would try and adapt my diet accordingly.

MADELINE And force feed others with it.

VICAR I am afraid I don't have an alternative at the moment.

MADELINE Thoughtlessness and inefficiency. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Galatians 6:7. Well we move on.

VICAR Thank goodness for that.

MADELINE Can we talk sermons?

VICAR We can.

MADELINE For some considerable time now, you have been giving us short shrift. Ten minutes is not a sermon, it's a casual address. If you are intent on offering us lessons from our Lord, then you need to work harder at it. I mean, the other week you gave us 7 minutes and 27 seconds on being a good neighbour. When did you run that off? While in the shower? No thought, no detail, no research, no inspiration and no real message we didn't already know. Devoid of worth.

VICAR I had mentioned some time ago that I was aiming to engage more parishioners by keeping down the rhetoric.

MADELINE One would have thought it was the most important part of your job.

VICAR It is and I take it seriously. This is very tasty lemon drizzle cake.

MADELINE Have some more.

VICAR Thank you. It's very good. Unusual.

MADELINE My own recipe. Unique. Not unusual.

VICAR I stand corrected. Very lemony with a strong almond flavour

MADELINE Almond essence makes it extra moist.

VICAR Ah, I see

MADELINE Now, your attendance at meetings is sadly something you certainly don't put very high on your priority list. Missing the Mother's Union meeting last week was unforgivable.

VICAR A small lapse. I had already had several meetings that day.

MADELINE Then you want to get hold of your diary and regulate it better.

VICAR I agree that I need to have less meetings in a day, but at least three of those were for organisations of which you are the chair.

MADELINE I take my roles very seriously in the parish. We are all getting a little tired of your laissez-faire attitude to them.

VICAR I am fully committed to helping and supporting all groups associated with the Church.

MADELINE "The soul of the lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich" Proverbs 13:4

VICAR Oh please don't start quoting the Scriptures at me.

MADELINE Too close for comfort eh? Cuts to the core doesn't it?

VICAR No, it doesn't as I am not lazy.

MADELINE "A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring." Proverbs 25:26

VICAR What on Earth are you talking about?

MADELINE *(proffers her cup)* More tea vicar.

***VICAR pours more tea and adds milk and sweeteners which he stirs.***

VICAR Look I don't want us to argue. It won't get us anywhere.

MADELINE Patently. Now, you must do something about Mrs Jenkins and the church flowers. She is completely hopeless. Her displays are pushing the boundaries of being sacrilegious.

VICAR Mrs Jenkins is an award-winning florist and is highly experienced.

MADELINE Oh I am sure she is, after all she's constantly reminding us, but she is in this for herself. You will get rid of her.

VICAR I won't.

MADELINE So we reach another impasse. Let's us move on to the Babies and Toddler Group.

VICAR What of it?

MADELINE It is a disgrace. I found myself sitting in on one of their sessions; it was akin to Bedlam. Screaming children and muck all over the place; the bins were full of their detritus. They need leadership; there wasn't a mention of the Good Book at all either. So, I will take over.

VICAR Jenny is quite capable.

MADELINE Quite obviously you haven't witnessed the shenanigans going on in the name of the Lord. I will take over.

VICAR With all due respect Madeline, you are the wrong side of seventy and have never had a child. I don't think it is for you to tell the young mothers how to rear their offspring.

MADELINE Ageist as well and a hefty dose of sexism. Homosexual are you?

VICAR This is getting us nowhere, I think we should call a halt to this meeting.

MADELINE Throwing in the towel already.

VICAR You are a very nasty piece of work aren't you?

MADELINE I didn't come here to listen to insults from my local priest. In the eyes of God you are a complete let down. I will lead a delegation to the Bishop to have you unseated and meanwhile we will move to St Benedict's in town. You are a shepherd who has lost his flock.

VICAR Go if you wish. Go now and take your vipers with you. I, the members of the parish and the Church will be well rid of you and I pity Reverend Andrew if you are going to spread your poison in his parish.

MADELINE I'm not going to..... oh..... goodness.... I think.....

VICAR Not feeling too well?

MADELINE No, I feel awful.

VICAR Oh dear what a pity.

MADELINE Call an ambulance.

VICAR Now why would I do that?

MADELINE Please.

VICAR I... hang on a moment.....

MADELINE Call an ambulance.

VICAR I must sit down. I don't feel too good myself. Oh God I'm going to be sick I think.

MADELINE Serves you right. I gave you an easy option, you left me no choice.

VICAR What did you put in that cake?

MADELINE Cyanide. In the drizzle. What did you put in the tea?

VICAR Strychnine. In the sweetener. I had no choice either, you have made my life unbearable.

***They are both in agony – doubled up in pain.***

MADELINE Are you trying to kill me?

VICAR Yes. Are you trying to kill me?

MADELINE Yes. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4

VICAR Oh shut up you stupid woman.

***They are convulsed in pain and one after another they collapse and pass out, unconscious.***

***LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK***