

liveArgyll Flash Fiction – April 2024 Challenge

'OPENING'

by Lindsay Campbell

I opened the curtains that morning wondering if the world was about to be a different place. They were saying something was imminent. The village was quiet as I walked down our garden path. Smashing display of cabbages I had this year. Down the road to the old, damp, grey-stone, faithful building at the end of the street, its spire just being touched by the morning sun.

Unlocked and opened the great dark oak West door, creaking as it always did on damp mornings. Went up the side aisle - didn't need a light, I'd been working here for forty years. Luckily I'd started when I was in my forties, or else they'd have taken me away a few years ago, like they did my assistant. Fine young man he was - still is, came back home sick, and managed to stay home, but he can't do this work anymore because of his injuries. I know every shadow in this old place though, every creaky chair, every leak in the roof, every key which needs gentle easing in the lock. Down to the vestry first; set up for the early service. I used to follow that by opening up the belltower, but it's been a few years since I've done that properly. I've only opened up that door to check things over, or rescue the odd jackdaw who's found his way in.

I was just finishing in the vestry when there was a fast pattering of feet on the tiles in the nave.

"Mr.Watson, Mr.Watson," came a young voice - in other circumstances the boy who lived in the cottage next door (an excellent chorister he was) would have known better than to run, let alone shout, in church.

"Mr.Watson," he called again; his voice was almost trembly with excitement, "Mr.Watson, it's over - it's over - my mam heard it on the radio - it's over!"

Then he was gone with another pattering of shoes on the floor tiles.

The vestry and the side altar was all set up for the service, but I couldn't quite believe what I was hearing. If his mam had heard it, it was certainly to be believed; she was the post mistress, the most reliable source of information in the village. I was trembling myself as I walked back down the aisle, fingering the keys in my pocket, searching for the belltower key.

Put it in the lock - wondered if I'd remember how to do it; it's been six years. The rope felt good in my hands. One careful pull. Nothing happened. Had I lost my touch, or was the old gal seized up? Another pull, more accurate this time. A noise overhead; not quite the elegant sound we used to make before the - then it came - that loud, reverberating, triumphant, glorious noise:

DONG, DONG, DONG! ...

I'd barely started when someone else slipped into the room. A dog-collar and a black frock coat joined me and the vicar was there as well pulling for all his worth on a bell rope. Before we'd finished, half the old team were there with us - the grocer's elderly father, the undertaker's cousin, the blacksmith, the newspaper boy and the others, all pulling, a bit unsteadily for lack of practise, but with joy in their faces, matching the joy we could hear coming over the fields from the neighbouring villages. All the bells in the county, it seemed were ringing and continued

to ring, for hours afterwards. We all went down again to the church later that morning and had another go, just because we could.

As for me, I didn't sleep much that night for sheer adrenalin I think they call it. I hadn't dared hope, but now it was true. The world was indeed a different place to the one I'd opened the black-out curtains onto that morning, and although at 87 I wouldn't have many more years left in this same world, the opening of the belltower door that May morning in 1945 when the war in Europe ended, was the finest opening I'd ever experienced in all those 87 years.