

The Cover Up

Christine lifted another hat off the display racks and handed it to Stephen.

‘How about this one?’

Although he took it, his expression suggested a rank smell was emanating from the hat, which was trilby style, and he scarcely let it rest on his short, reddish curls before removing it again with a swift, decisive movement and a sharp shake of the head, and handing it back.

She said softly, ‘You didn’t really even look at it... alright, what do **you** like?’

He stood, arms folded, head still and just scanning with his eyes. She knew what he was going to say.

‘None of ‘em.’

She looked at him. He did look okay. His hair might be thinner now, but it wasn’t too noticeable yet.

‘Listen, I just know you don’t like feeling cold, and we were saying yesterday how the weather is turning colder now.’

He did then start to move slightly as if condescending to at least look at the selection. Christine reflected that she should’ve warned Stephen they might look at hats today; he’d thought he was only there to help carry her bags. Her plan was to casually start looking at hats as they passed, so it would be less of a big deal. But perhaps he needed more time.

Christine almost held her breath as Stephen’s hand hovered over a flat cap. But then it moved to a baseball cap, which he lifted down and put on. Christine suppressed a laugh, but turned him towards the mirror with a wry smile. He nodded, and took it off again.

‘I looked like I haven’t grown up!’

Christine then allowed herself a little giggle, ‘Well, there are some that might agree with that!’

He caught her eye in the mirror and smiled. That familiar warm smile that made his grey eyes sparkle and always melted her heart.

‘Do you know, Stephen, I really think that flat cap might suit you – I think you’ve got the face for it.’

He eyed her suspiciously, but put a brown cap on. He stood there for a moment. ‘I don’t know,’ he said softly. With sadness in his eyes, ‘I don’t recognise myself anymore. Is this me, now?’

The Cover Up

Christine put her hand on his arm tenderly. She must make the most of this moment; he hadn't yet wanted to talk about the hair loss.

'Look, *I* don't mind how much hair you've got. It's how comfortable *you* feel. And warm!'

He said nothing, but looked again at himself in the mirror. He didn't seem to be focusing on the hat.

'I know you've always been proud of your lovely thick hair. It was one of the first things I noticed about you! But after all the treatment is over, it may even grow back. Hey, here's a flat cap that's sort of blue/grey; I think that'll set off your eyes beautifully.'

His eyes were moist now, but he swapped the hats and nodded his approval.

'I agree; this *will* be warmer.'

[500 words]