

The Red Cross charity shop

Peter leaned on the counter, elbows bent, chin in hands. The radio had been blaring the same three songs from its tinny speaker since 9am that morning, and his ears felt like they were starting to bleed. He drummed his fingers against his cheek whilst his eyes drifted over to Olivia Gracia admiring a dress that must have been medieval, who didn't seem to notice the repetitive music.

“Stand up straight young man!” Agnes snapped, whipping Peter into action “We have a customer!”

The charity shop manager glared so hard that he felt her eyes burn into the back of his head and all the way into the wall, her bottle cap glasses only intensifying her Superman-like stare.

“Oh don't worry about me” An ancient lady who had been patiently waiting by the till chuckled before carefully placing a tacky ceramic bird in front of Peter. He pinched it between his index finger and thumb, as if to save himself from being contaminated with elderly-itis.

Agnes, satisfied the customer had her newest volunteer's fullest attention, scurried away to the back office to drink her tea, chomp on biscuits and read a book on feline psychology called *‘how to make your cat love you...for free!’*.

Peter looked at the price tag, £6.99 for a shabby Robin? He could buy a whole new character in Fortnite for that! But he was here, in the smelliest second-hand shop in the world, clocking in hours for a prize he didn't care for.

Peter clumsily wrapped up the songbird in a newspaper he assumed would have to be around his dad's age, its wings jutted out and kept on ripping through the thin paper so by the time he was finished, it had lost any avian shape and looked like a pass the parcel present. He stuck out his tongue as he reached for the sellotape to finish his shoddy work.

He glanced over to see if Olivia was looking, impressed that he had actually shown up to this volunteer gig. Instead, she was in fits of silent laughter, pointing and giggling at Poppy who was showing off underwear from a bag of donations which consisted of only pants whilst trying not to alert Agnes.

Peter scowled.

The grey-haired woman, now comfortably resting on her stick, tilted her head. She smelt like his granny Iris, who always made him Spam sandwiches for dinner.

"You don't seem overly keen on being here, do you young man?"

Peter shrugged, he wasn't here for the pensioners, and he wasn't quite sure why he was here at all.

—

Peter had walked in late to home room and the class was abuzz with a mix of excitement and groans. Miss Jacobs had announced a new competition, and Olivia Gracia, head of the student council, was in charge of it.

Each home room class had to clock in as many volunteer hours as they could between all students, and whoever got the most won a trip to a theme park and a day off school. Peter didn't even like theme parks, but with someone as bossy as Olivia running it, there was no chance he'd get out of this.

To make matters worse, Poppy, Olivia's annoyingly obnoxious best friend started pleading in her whiny voice, writing down his name on a clipboard before he had even sat down.

"Pete!" she squealed "I'll put you down for this Saturday, eight hours at the Red Cross, what else would you do, right?"

Peter tried to protest but Harry butted in, throwing his arm around Peter's neck, Peter tried to pry his forearm away from his throat without showing how much it hurt.

"yeah, he'll do it, won't you Peter?" Harry tightened his grip. "What else would you do? And anyway, I want to go to that theme park."

—

"Am I distracting you from your day dreaming?" Peter's customer said, raising one eyebrow returning her head to the center of her neck.

Peter shook himself out of the memory "no, no sorry ma'am" he handed her the ball of newspaper and tape and she eyed it curiously.

"This used to be a bird"

Peter shrugged and returned to his slouched position.

"I have something to donate, something interesting for you" the woman announced, pulling something out from her shopping trolley, swapping it for her new treasure.

She placed the glossy dark box gently on the counter, shot Peter a wink and waddled away, pulling her trolley behind her.

The top was engraved with gilded gold writing in a language Peter didn't recognise, with a clasp on the front secured by a padlock, but with no hole for a key.

"Huh" Olivia had made her way over to the till, interested by the interaction.

“What’cha got there Pete, and why does that box look so familiar?”