

Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

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h ~ y ~ e ~ // ~ y ~ h ~ e ~ h ~ e ~

. ~ e ~ - ~) ~ ~ e ~ y ~ y ~ y ~ h ~ i ~

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Temptation And Hesitation

Let me just say first of all that I am all for hesitation, in the right place. In shorthand it is an occupational hazard, to be reduced and demolished with persistent study and practice. Other hesitations can be perfectly acceptable, as a means of keeping one alive and well. Temptations are what one hesitates over. It seems to me that something is only called a temptation when by its nature it is an action that should not be taken, being wrong, bad for you or your pocket, or just unwise. Hesitation is the antidote, giving you time to think properly about it and weigh up the options, consider the danger versus the satisfaction, the advantage and disadvantage.

This has been happening in my garden. The sparrows seem to be on about their third set of nestlings, with all the warm weather and abundance of seeds and insects. The bushes outside my kitchen window have become a parking place for baby sparrows. When really young, they cannot be tempted by anything. Even if they are sitting on the grass, crumbs lying round about them are ignored and only the parent sparrow's beak full of food is of any interest. After a while though temptation sets in. The parent is busy breaking up a piece of bread or feeding the others, and the young one realises that this bit of food lying on the grass is identical to what it has been eating. A little peck starts the process, and the more intelligent ones will carry it back to the cover of the bushes for dismantling.

Here is where the real temptation arises. The sparrow is not quite so young, and sits patiently in the bush, tweeting and chirruping to let the parent know where it is, even though the parent is nowhere to be seen. I throw out a compressed pellet of bread (to make it easier to aim) and the sparrow's head swivels down in interest. Another piece flies past, and another, the neck swivels again and the bird leans forward with the rising temptation, despite the possible danger of going out alone onto the lawn. The bird hops down a few twigs to get closer. I aim a piece under the bush and that is when temptation wins. The piece can be approached and eaten without going out in the open.

At present I have a little scheme to get all my visiting birds fed. It is for my pleasure, to see them nearby, as I know there is plenty more natural food elsewhere in the gardens. There are four blackbirds, the black male with a bent foot (hence the bread and sympathy), a female blackbird and two young ones of almost full size, each ready to chase the others off. There is a resident wood pigeon who lost half of his tail feathers and was looking rather scraggly (so more bread and sympathy). My scheme is to throw pellets of bread in different directions at different times. I lead the pigeon away to the lawn on the right with his pieces, then aim more pieces immediately ahead for the blackbirds (scattered about so that they all get some) and lastly smaller pellets into the bushes for the sparrows to eat unseen. If Woodie starts walking towards the sparrows' bread, I throw another piece to lead him off in the opposite direction.

Temptation And Hesitation

There is also the little robin who sits very close to the kitchen window on his favourite branch low down and he will not dive in daringly amongst the others like the sparrows do. I drop a tiny piece straight down, behind the hose reel and watering can, and he instantly goes for that, as he can get it easily without competition. Lastly the dunnocks might be seen hopping about, getting slowly closer to the house. They are very rarely tempted by anything, in fact bits falling their way just makes them retreat. But left to themselves, they slowly hop their way back again and clear up the tiniest of crumbs.

Sometimes I have to step back so that my looming figure behind the glass becomes mostly hidden behind the curtain, and that encourages any hesitating customers. All this generally happens in the morning, and then they all go off and forage elsewhere, and get back to their normal behaviour and diet. The only time my plans are foiled is when there is a sudden fright, a loud noise or a bird alarm call, then they all disappear in an instant. After that I have to go out and retrieve the bits from the grass and give them to the goldfish, who do not know what temptation and hesitation are. They will just glide past, scoop up the pieces and swim away in total composure and relaxation. (800 words)