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## The Shop was Small

by Lawrence Howard

The shop was small, and so was the house. In fact everything was minimal. Not trendy minimalist. More that it was simple without anything that might be superfluous to needs. It was somewhat understated as though the people who lived there had a modest income but also nothing to prove.

Marion – known as Maidee to her friends and family, ran the village shop. Her husband Tom worked in an office in the nearby town. It was 1942 and their 8-year-old daughter Valerie used to have lots of freedom in once sense. On the other hand, because everyone in the village used the shop, everyone knew Valerie and it seemed to her like the world was watching her. If she did anything that might be viewed as naughty or slightly against expectations the village voices would talk and Maidee would soon know about it. If Valerie was really bad she'd be given the slipper.

This was war time and the country was on high alert. There was rationing. Despite this Maidee and Tom had to take in evacuees from London and make do. Around this time Gerald came to live with them. He was also 8 but had grown up in the East End of London, near Bethnal Green. Living away from the city in a small village near Windsor, wasn't exactly his idea of fun. So he got up to all sorts of mischief. This just added to their stress, although Maidee was fond of him, despite his trouble making ways.

During this time, rationing was part of everyone's life. Maidee found that by keeping good stocks of things, people from a wide area would come to her shop because they knew she'd have what they needed.

But one day Maidee was arrested. The police arrived, she had to shut the shop and they took her to Staines police station. The whole village knew because many of them had seen the police cars turn up. Those that hadn't seen this knew something was amiss as the shop was closed.

Police officers were searching through the premises while she was being interviewed under caution. Valerie and Gerald walked home from school and couldn't understand why the shop was shut. They knocked on the door and a policeman shooed them away not knowing who they were.

"Valerie, Gerald" said a friendly voice. They looked round and recognised Mrs Aldridge as a customer.

"Yes," said Gerald, "Where's Maidee?"

"Well, she's been arrested," replied Mrs Aldridge.

“We know it’s a terrible mistake, but it seems that they think she’s been selling extra rations to people and this has been undermining the war effort. Don’t worry, we know it’ll be sorted out by tea time.”

“Can we go there now and see her?” Asked Gerald.

“No, it’s much better you stay here she replied.”

“But I really need to go” said Gerald in a quivering voice.

“You see I’ve been stealing stock and selling it and I need to confess!”