

## Devastation

by Marion Umney

“Oh No! Not Bobby”

Maud clambered over the rubble, scrapping her hands and legs as she went. She knelt by the prostrate body and gently lifted his head onto her lap. Why, oh why hadn't they held onto him tighter? Poor boy, he'd been so scared, dashing off through the fence into God knows where. They should have stayed and looked for him – he'd have come back – they could have saved him.

It was already gone midnight – her birthday. What a way to start your birthday. Your house in ruins and now this. It was exactly 11 years ago Bobby had arrived. Her fortieth birthday. She remembered her joy when she'd looked in the basket and seen this sweet face. Stan would be devastated. He'd adored Bobby. He was the one who had lifted him out of the basket “Oh Mum, look – he's licking me. He likes me. Come on boy, come on.” They'd played together all day.

The others had taken a turn, but it was Stan who came back over and over. They were inseparable. It had been such a happy day, her fortieth birthday. Fred sitting holding her hand “You alright love?”. Oh Fred – course I'm alright, I have everything in life I've ever wanted. A home, a good man, three lovely children and now – we'll call him Bobby” “That's a good name love”.

Maud looked around her in disbelief. Now she had nothing. Her home was in ruins, Stan...her chest always tightened when she thought of Stan. Was he Ok? She knew that in some ways as a POW he was safer than when he'd been fighting, but still; she'd heard some dreadful things about those camps. And now Bobby was dead. She heard a noise from somewhere, a deep wailing sound. It took some minutes for her to realise it was her own sobbing. There was a pain in her chest as if a heavy weight were pushing all the life out of her.

“Come on love, let’s get down to the church hall. They’ll make you a nice cup of tea”. Fred was lifting her gently up. His face was white and drawn, but his arm was strong and steady. “What about?” she pointed to the dog. “We’ll sort him out later love – come and say our goodbyes. It’s not safe here, they’re cordoning it off and bringing the fire engines in. we must go”

Still sobbing, she allowed herself to be half led, have carried to the relative safety of the church hall.