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Lost Mothers

by Marion Umney

“It was Charlie wasn’t it?”

Maud felt her heart race and the blood flow to her cheeks. He knew.

“What do you mean?”

“You and Charlie. That evening. When you came back, you were so upset and confused, I wondered.”

She let out a sigh and deflated like a balloon.

“Yes. I didn’t mean to....”

“It’s OK. These things happen. It must have been hard for Charlie – the thought of going away to war never having done it, and maybe never coming back. He clearly adored you Maud, although I’m not sure you felt the same way.”

“No I didn’t. He was just a kid as far as I was concerned but, that night...well he was pretty determined, and I didn’t expect.... Do you mind very much?” she turned to him pleadingly.

“Course not. I’d be a fine one to criticise you with my family history.”

“What do you mean?” Maud sat up in bed, intrigued now. Who was this man she’d married?”

“My Uncle John, and my father,” he replied.

“John’s not my uncle, he’s my brother, or half-brother at least. Most people guess, but the family still swear blind that’s the way it is.”

“So, your mother had him out of wedlock?” she pondered on this for a moment. Her first instinct was to condemn, but....hadn’t she too been very afraid that would happen to her?

“That’s terrible,” she whispered, “what happened?”

“I don’t know. No-one talks about it. As far as the family’s concerned he’s her brother and there’s an end to it. Our Grandparents claimed he was theirs, but it never added up. Mum left to get work to support him and to get herself away from wagging tongues I imagine.”

“It must have been hard for her, to have to leave him. I can’t imagine having to walk away like that.”

“Hard for him too, to lose his mother, but that’s the way it was. Still is. At least my father was Ok about John coming to live with them. He’d lost his own mother too you see – same reason. Seventeen she was. She left too and unlike John he rarely saw her. The man she married wasn’t so accommodating. I met her once. She came to visit and introduced herself as ‘Aunt Charlotte’. I saw my father raise his eyebrows at that, but he held his peace. No-one spoke about it, but we knew just the same.”

He sighed and turned towards her, then grinned, “ours’ll be Ok though love. How many do you think?”

“About a dozen,” she answered with a giggle.

“Crikey better start now then,” he murmured as he reached out for her under the already dishevelled sheets.