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Adam's Family

by Vera Gajic

Adam had never liked his parents. He didn't know why but from an early age he would take any opportunity to get away from them hiding for hours, occasionally days in the house or grounds. He used to think it was because three was never a good number, a crowd as they say, but that's when two of them get on and he never saw much of a bond of any kind between his parents, presumably that was why he was an only child.

His parents mostly ignored each other and him. He had vague memories of Mother holding him and feeding him when he was small but they were fleeting, he was mostly looked after by a line of ever-changing young women from surrounding villages, and latterly eastern European countries who couldn't speak English. Mother was in the garden in most weathers or poring over her gardening books. Father in his mysterious room, securely locked when he wasn't inside.

Adam would sometimes enter uninvited, for which he got scolded, just to see what he was doing, but it was never as outlandish as he imagined, usually reading, drinking his treasured whiskey or polishing his guns, surrounded by portraits of various ancestors who he never introduced to Adam. Father often over-did the whiskey and as his speech slurred it turned into that of an east end Londoner, not a Kent landowner and he'd disappear back into his musty room until the next day.

As Adam got older he begged to be sent to boarding school to get away. At first Father said no, citing his stupidity as the barrier to getting into a decent school, but after a concerted campaign by Adam of being perfectly obnoxious they agreed he could go to a second rate school in the depths of Lincolnshire. If he was going to go away he might as well go as far away as possible, no chance of a parental visit, not that his parents went anywhere. This suited all of them.

Adam was quite successful at getting invitations to friend's homes during the holidays thus avoiding going home at all. He never invited anyone to his place of course, he didn't want them to see the loveless miserable home life he'd come from. Every time he returned they seemed greater strangers than before.

It was in his last year at Durham university that he got the call that his father had died. He felt no sadness, in fact the opposite though he tried to suppress the feeling. Reluctantly he returned to Kent, to comfort a mother he hardly knew. By the time he got back she'd been in bed for what looked and smelt like weeks. Adam was shocked and realised it had been over year since his last visit. How she'd aged since then, a scrawny, tiny, wrinkled prune of a woman trying to sit up when he entered the room. Adam suddenly felt a wave of shame and sorrow come over him, realising it was now too late to have a relationship with his mother and probably too late to find out anything about either of them. When she spoke it was in a whisper and he had to strain to hear her.

"I saved the papers for you Adam," she said, "you have a right to know, Archie was going to burn them but I stopped him, please forgive us."

Adam had no idea what she was talking about but said yes of course and held her hand as she slipped away.

After the double funeral where he was the only mourner he finally opened the box of papers. Thankfully there was some of the treasured whiskey in the house to fortify him going through the bundles of papers finding out that his entire life had been built on deceit. It took days to piece bits of his life together, his parents weren't his parents at all but his Father's solicitor and his housekeeper. His real Father, who was raising him alone following his mother's death in childbirth, had made Archie the executor of his will and Adam's guardian when he became ill, but when he died Archie had taken it all for himself and pretended that Adam was his son.

Or had he pretended, did he ever call Adam son, had he ever said, "I am your father," had Adam just presumed it and so it became reality? Were there any other members of the family? Who were his family? The deceit was so big and so all-encompassing that Adam knew he might never get over it. It might take years to find out what really happened and who he was, but he knew one thing now and that was why he never liked his parents and that was enough for now, as he drained the last bottle of very fine whiskey.