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Brothers

by Miriam Silver

We had grown up together like brothers, went to the same school, never apart really, welcome in each other's house for food, celebration and disappointment.

He and his family helped me through that awful time when my mother died, too young. My father went to pieces and I, an only child gratefully used my friend Tom's family house as a place where I could eat and continue to go to school concentrating on getting a scholarship. In my ignorance at twelve oblivious of my father's need of his son, I just accepted Tom's parents hospitality and care.

We both achieved our aim and went to the school of our choice, where I became somewhat of a recluse unresponsive to pleas of, 'we need another in our cricket, football whatever'. On looking back I suppose I was grieving for my mother whilst hiding under academic achievement, which I knew was what my father understood and appreciated.

He never discussed her with me, she moved in, took over all things domestic while I was able to take my A levels, obtaining grades good enough to go to university and study medicine. She did not replace my mother but enabled my father to live normally while she accepted me as part of the deal, only ever calling her Chloe, which suited us both.

During these years, Tom and his family remained friends going our separate ways during term time enjoying the holidays together during which Tom confided in me that he wanted to give up his course and get out there, earn some money, enjoy life.

This left me in a difficult position, so I stayed away saying I had to work in the hospital going home only at Christmas when I heard that Tom was working for himself, doing well, visiting occasionally, when he had time. I didn't tell his parents that we had lost touch, just asked them for his email saying my laptop had done something funny with my contacts.

On the other hand I was so focused on my career, experiencing every aspect of medicine available at my hospital. I soon acquired the name 'workaholic' which I knew I had become. I did well, opting to go into surgery as my specialty.

Too busy for a social life, I hardly took any time out and when a colleague asked me to assist him I was more than willing in spite of the late hour, there was no one waiting at home for me, a studio flat close to the hospital.

The patient was on the operation table unconscious when I entered having been informed that we were to try and save this man's legs, which had been crushed in a car accident.

We worked hard and long emerging exhausted knowing that only time would tell if we had been successful and I made my way to the ICU just to look in on things.

Lying on the bed, tubes everywhere, deathly white, lay Tom, older, tattooed arms, long matted hair but definitely him, I would have recognised him anywhere even though it must be ten, even fifteen years since we had had anything to do with each other. My past came crowding in, guilt predominated, where had he been all these years? Do his parents know about this? His notes did not disclose any next of kin.

He would remain in an unconscious condition for at least the next twenty-four hours, then reading on I saw he had been brought in by the police.