

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to my two children; my son David Berner, and my daughter Debbie Tunstall. Without the emotional and physical support I would not have got through the last 16 years. My husband had a quadruple by-pass, stomach operation and years and years of Altsheimers. My two angels are still looking after me as I now have to go and have an operation at Barts in December. My love and thanks have no ending where David and Debbie are concerned. I love them to bits, sounds sloppy but it is true.

Of course the other person I must dedicate this book to is my mother, Sara Ann Martin. She was so wise, where did she find all this knowledge to know how to deal with every situation that came up, she had had very little education, I firmly believe that it came via her genes, and what a gene pool that must have been.

SYNOPSIS OF ELIZABETH A NOVEL BY ROSINA P. BERNER

Elizabeth is a young girl growing up in the thirties and forties era. The conflict between Elizabeth and her father affects all her relationships in life. She is seeking the love she feels she does not get from her father. She wants desperately to escape her awful life and so she joins the ATS, but loathes the discipline.

The men in her life are Johnny Marino, a young American soldier posted in England, he is married unknown to Elizabeth, her second boyfriend is a no good Irish boxer Casey Collins who becomes violent towards her. The third man in her life is the gentlemanly Charles Bradley, who is twice her age, and comes from the upper classes. He loves her with all her faults. Elizabeth finds true love with Ray, her mothers' lodger.

This story is based on my sister Elizabeth's life and my family the Martins, who lived in Laburnum Street, Shoreditch, and London. It is therefore a social

history of the times of the terrible deprivation of the people living in the East End of London, as well as a time full of the joy of parties and weddings, which are spread throughout the novel.

ELIZABETH

BY

ROSINA P. BERNER

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Chapter One

She stood no more than five feet tall and as slender as a reed.

“Right you bastard, that’s the last time you’ll ever take your belt to me.”

Bill Martin had got Elizabeth by the hair with one hand and was hitting her with his army belt with the other.

Elizabeth grabbed hold of the belt and with her energetic anger yanked it from Bill Martin’s grasp.

Her mother, who had been standing in a corner afraid to get between the two of them, now rushed forward.

“Now Elizabeth don’t you dare raise your hand to your father.”

“If I was a man, I’d use this belt on him, and more. Look what he’s done to my back.”

She peeled her blouse off carefully, she hurt so much. Her back was covered in red wheals.

“That’s the last time he ever touches me, the next time I’ll go for him with a knife.”

“You wicked girl, how can you talk so?!”

“What do you expect me to do, let him carry on until he kills me? It was only last month that he threw that record at me and it stuck in my head! Did you take me to the hospital? Oh no, you just stuck some Germolene on the cut and told me it would soon heal. All you cared about was keeping it quiet from the neighbours. Why do you care, all their husbands beat them up when they get back from the pub. Look at the times he’s beaten you up, and all you say is, he can’t help it, you know he’s a sick man.”

Sarah Martin, who was called Dolly for some obscure reason, should have had all the life knocked out of her years ago, but her love for her children made her strong. She was only forty-six but looked older. Her hair was streaked with grey, and her face was care worn. After having born nine children, her last one at forty-two, she often wished that she could run away, but never had she vowed, would she leave them.

Rose who was only six ran to Elizabeth and hugged her around the knees,

“Don’t cry Elizabeth, tell him it didn’t hurt like I do.”

Taking little Rose’s hand, Elizabeth led her upstairs to the bedroom. It was sparsely furnished, just two very large cast iron beds filled the room. There was

one tatty old feather quilt on the bed, and on top of this to keep four youngsters warm were two old coats. One of which was Bill Martin's old army coat.

The house should have been condemned years ago. Not only was it falling apart, as were all the houses in Maria Street, but it was filled with vermin. Every night an army of bugs would creep forward to suck the blood from sleeping innocents. They were impossible to get rid of, they lived in the joints of the beds, even a blow torch didn't kill all of them, others were behind the blood spattered wallpaper, and those which it was almost impossible to kill, lived behind the putty in the window frames.

Besides the bugs there were mice to kill, and mouse traps were in all of the rooms. Flies were another health hazard. In the living room above the old scrubbed wooden table, hung a fly paper. Many a time Rose whiled away the time by counting how many dead flies were on it, and how many were squirming to escape the gluey substance they had alighted upon.

Sixteen year old Elizabeth cuddled Rose to her as they sat upon the bed, "You wait and see Rose, I'm not going to stay on this street forever, I'm going to get out."

"Oh please Elizabeth, don't go and leave us. You're the only one who can stand up to Dad. I know that when I'm in bed late at night with Violet and Alan, and the three of us keep on calling down for bread because we're starving hungry, we deserve to be belted, but he seems to pick on you for nothing."

She squeezed her big sister's hand, "Oh please don't go away."

"Now stop crying Rosie, it was me that got the belting not you. Trouble with Dad, is that if you don't do exactly what he thinks you should, he lashes out. When I'm seventeen and a half I'll be able to get away from this bug-hole, but I'm not telling anyone yet, because Dad would kill me. Come on Sis, let's go downstairs, his temper will have cooled down by now."

'What did he hit you for this time?'

"Mum was nagging that she didn't have any money left to buy our dinner, and Dad said ask your daughter for it, she always has enough money to go to the pictures, and buy makeup so that she looks like a Jezebel."

"What's a Jezebel?" Skinny, sallow faced Rosie looked up at her sister.

"Oh it's a lady in the bible who wore a lot of makeup and wasn't very nice." Elizabeth tossed her long dark brown hair back over her shoulder. She was very attractive, with her large shiny brown eyes and dark skin, she could have been Italian or Spanish, and with a name like Martin, it was quite probable that the family name had originally been Martini or Martinez, and like the Mediterranean people she was full of fire.

Elizabeth went on as they walked down the uncarpeted wooden stairs, "It wasn't that I didn't want to give her the money, but I had already on Friday given her half my wages, and I wanted some left to go to see that new Bette

Davis film with Nellie. Nellie was two years older than Elizabeth, and was nothing like her. She was terrified of her father.

They entered the shabby living room, their father was seated in the big old armchair by the fire. His hands were stretched out towards the flames, he always felt cold. He was a small man, only five feet tall, but what he lacked in height he made up for in personality, and temper. As a young man, he had been dapper, and had a new girlfriend every few weeks, he held on to them by sweet talking them, and telling them jokes. When he was finished with them, it was just "Goodbye", and on to the next conquest.

Meeting Sarah Watkinson was a totally different story. She mirrored him in looks, both being small and dark.

She had never had a boyfriend so she was a pushover for Bill Martin. He took her to the pictures, and to the old music hall in Hoxton, and one warm evening he held her close and made love to her in Victoria Park. Afterwards she stood up brushed her long skirt down, tucked in her leg of mutton sleeved blouse, and said matter of factly, " I think you'd better take me home now Bill, my Dad will be waiting up for me."

Two months later Sarah realised she must be pregnant. Families didn't talk too much about sex and babies, so things were hushed up, and Sarah and Bill were duly married at The Town Hall. Bill Martin couldn't believe that he had been snared by what he thought of as his little mouse.

If Elizabeth thought her father was brutal, her grandfather was worse, he was a monster to her grandmother. Dolly said he should have had "six-six- six" branded across his forehead. Many were the times Dolly's mother had been out scrubbing, or doing laundry. When she returned home with the money she had earned, if she refused to hand it over to her husband, he would beat her with a poker. She didn't want the money for herself, it was to feed the children. She was hospitalised several times, but she always said "It was an accident".

She never betrayed her husband; all she wanted was to get home to her little ones.

"Do you want a cup of tea Elizabeth?" Mrs. Martin asked her daughter. She ignored Rose - she wasn't a wage earner so she could have a cup of tea later on. This was a sweetener for Elizabeth alone.

"Thanks, Mum."

Mrs. Martin returned with a cup of steaming tea, and placed it in front of Elizabeth.

Her father started up again. "Tea, I'd give her tea, I'd give her poison. You mark my words, she's going to be nothing but trouble her."

Elizabeth looked across at her father, why did he hate her so. Surely she thought she was entitled to think for herself.

She wasn't mature enough to realise that life was turning him into a brute. He had always been violent but he was getting worse.

All Bill Martin had ever really wanted was a wife and children. He had never been registered and it was as though he was going to show the world, he had been here. Hadn't he got nine children to prove it.

The trouble was that with everyone out of work, there was no way to feed and clothe nine children. He had walked his legs of looking for work, he was a skilled plasterer, but so were many others. He hated all foreigners, the Irish took the jobs away, the Jews had all the money, and of course the only good German was a dead German.

He had fought in the First World War, and had been bayoneted in both legs and arms. So every day there was the ritual of creaming and bandaging his old wounds, which for some reason never completely healed. He was a very bitter, angry man. The only joy he got was when he patrolled the streets at night for the A.R.P. he could then have authority once again by yelling out to some poor sod, "Get that light out, do you want the fucking Germans to bomb us."

Elizabeth sat at the table drinking her tea. 'Why did things always happen to her?' She thought back to the time she had got a job at Tyzack's in Old Street. She was only fourteen, and had just returned from being evacuated, and had found it exciting to be selling tools, scissors and cutlery. The men that came into the shop were cheered when they saw her happy smiling face, and would wait to be served by her, rather than the sourpuss at the other end of the counter.

She had only been there three weeks when she was called into the office to see the manager.

"Oh my God, it must be about those scissors I pinched for Mum." She had been sick and tired of listening to her mother moan about, "These bloody scissors wouldn't cut butter hot," so when she was alone she had slipped a small pair of scissors into her jacket pocket. When she got home she just put them in the knife drawer, and never mentioned them to her mother or any of the family. She knew that her mother and father were dead against stealing, "If you can't afford something, then you just go without, you don't steal." She saw her mother using the scissors from time to time, but no mention was made as to where they had come from, but the whole family knew.

Elizabeth knocked quietly on the office manager's door. "Come in", the red faced tubby man sitting behind his desk shouted. Elizabeth was more than a little nervous, she knew her face was pink from the heat of her guilt.

Never mind, another old motto of the Martin family was, "Never own up to anything, if it was going to get you into trouble."

In the office standing either side of the manager's highly polished desk, were two huge men wearing Macs, and fedoras. She knew instinctively that they were the police.

"This is really serious", Elizabeth trembled, and thought, 'Why did I take those bloody scissors, I knew it was wrong. Oh God, please help me, I promise I'll never steal anything again."

Her bargaining with God didn't help her. The two men stood either side of her, saying *gruffly*, 'We would like you to come to the station with us, we have a few questions we would like to ask you.'" She looked like a little doll walking between the two burly detectives. Old street police station was fortunately next door to Tyzack's, so the humiliating walk took only a couple of minutes.

Once inside they sat her on a hard wooden chair, while they stood the other side of the table which was between them, leaning on it with their hands. She looked down at their hands, one pair was smooth as though they had never done an honest day's work in their life, but the other detective's hands were almost frightening. They were covered with so much thick black curly hair that they reminded her of the film, *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

She felt very afraid, and could feel her heart hammering away in her chest. Her hands were sweating, and a little trickle of perspiration rolled down the back of her neck.

Immediately the questioning began, 'Who were her friends in work, who were her friends outside of work, what men had she been out with, did she know any foreign gentlemen?'"

Then came the question, 'Why have you got two identity cards?'

After an hour of questioning, the penny dropped. She wasn't being questioned, because she had stolen the scissors - the silly bastards thought she was a spy. She wanted to laugh, but still felt intimidated by the two detectives, "Me a spy, a real life Mata Hari, what a joke, she had only had a couple of boyfriends since arriving home from the country."

She felt angry as well as frightened, but she knew that you could never get one over on the police, so she stated plainly, "That she had been issued with an identity card, but when she was evacuated she forgot to bring it home with her, and had just applied for a new one."

Both men looked at each other, as if to say, "It was too simple a story to be made up."

"Alright Miss, you're free to go, just keep your nose clean." One actually half smiled, and tipped his fedora in her direction.

She ignored them both, rose, and walked back to Tyzack's.

She held her herself regally like the princess she was named after.

CHAPTER 2

The war years were hard on everyone, everything was rationed, even clothes. There was a healthy black market in clothing coupons, people who could not afford to buy new clothes, sold theirs for a shilling each.

For Elizabeth the war years were a mixture of pleasure and pain. She went to work all day long, did fire watching on the roof tops some evenings, no choice, you were just told where to go and you went. Everyone did their bit. Last thing at night she would fall asleep along with the rest of the family in a shelter in the garden. The family grew a mass of Marigolds on the top of the shelter hoping to fool Jerry.

The heat and smell in the shelter with all the family, and most nights the cat and the dog, were too much for her to bear. She would decide to sleep in the house occasionally.

If the air raid warning hadn't actually gone, Sarah Martin would pop up to the kitchen and make a pot of tea, and cut up a loaf for jam sandwiches. The little ones, Alan, Violet and Rose, would look on it as a picnic.

The cinema, and dancing was what Elizabeth lived for now. She would go to the pictures, and for a few hours she would escape to another world.

The film stars like Bette Davis, Dorothy Lamour, and Lana Turner would wear magnificent jewellery, gorgeous dresses, and live in sumptuous houses with swimming pools. Each beautiful actress would win her handsome young man by the time the film ended. That's the life Elizabeth dreamed of.

When Elizabeth and Nellie got home from the cinema, Violet and Rose would be curled up at the bottom of the big iron bed.

"Quick Elizabeth we have been waiting for you to come home. We're dying to hear all about the film. Who was in it?"

The two girls carefully took off their cotton dresses, and put them on hangers, and hung them behind the bedroom door. They both wore cami-knickers made of parachute silk, Elizabeth was a dab hand with a needle, and had made them both in two evenings. They didn't want the dresses to crease up, because their mother had so many to wash and iron for, that it could be a week before they got done.

"I reckon I'll get another two days out of my dress, being navy blue it doesn't show the marks." Nellie ran her hands down the short, puff sleeved dress. She was the same height as her sister Elizabeth, but plumper. Her hair and eyes were dark brown, as were all the Martin children's. Neighbours would say, "If you've seen one, you've seen them all."

Just before they slipped into bed, Mrs. Martin popped her head around the door. Now you two, don't keep the kids awake all night, get to sleep the lot of you. The kids have got school in the morning and you two have got to get to work. Tomorrow night you've got to do fire fighting on top of the school roof, so as I just said, Get to sleep."

Mrs. Martin was a bit of a nagger, but then she had plenty to nag about. Her day started at six lighting the coal fire, black leading the grate, and whitening the hearth with hearthstone. It was madness to use the chalky white stone, as the first bit of ash that fell onto it spoiled it straight away. Never the less, the ritual went on in millions of homes all over England, not just Maria Street.

Mrs. Martin went out and closed the bedroom door.

Immediately Elizabeth began to tell the story of the lovely Deanna Durbin who fell in love with a handsome young man. The young man sadly didn't love her in return, he loved her sister, but there was a happy ending when Deanna Durbin met his younger brother, and fell in love with him. In between telling the story, Nellie who had a beautiful singing voice, would sing all the songs from the film.

All four of them snuggled up together, the cat and dog were on top of the bed, and apart from a few "Ouch a bleeding bug just bit me", they all slept tight until morning.

Elizabeth attracted young men like bees around a honey pot. She would wear her white crepe dress, and high-heeled shoes, looking like a beautiful exotic flower she would walk down Maria Street with her head held high. Although she looked very worldly she wasn't. When the young local men kissed her that was fine, she needed the warmth she didn't get from her father, but when their hands began to explore her trim young figure, they would get a slap. "Don't do that, I'm not that kind of a girl," she would say angrily, her eyes would be hard and bright. She knew that if she got pregnant, her mother and father would send her off to the convent to have the baby. A girl down the road had been in the convent, and when she came home there was no sign of the baby, her family had made sure that it was adopted. The tales she had told them of how cruel the nuns were made Elizabeth feel very sorry for the poor girls who were sent there.

She said angrily to her sister Nellie, "I thought the Church and God were supposed to teach people to be kind to one another. Fancy making heavily pregnant girls, carry heavy buckets of water, to scrub the church floor. Every day they were lectured on how evil they had been, and if they did it again, they would burn in Hell forever. Fancy being told that sex was a sin. Our mother has sinned at least nine times." They both burst out laughing.

"I've met a nice American, Nell, I'm thinking of asking him home to meet Mum, what do you think?"

"Be careful Elizabeth, you and Dad haven't been getting on too badly lately, you don't want to go and upset the apple cart."

Sighing, Elizabeth answered, "That's just because I'm so busy working, fire fighting, and going out, that he hardly ever sees me now to pick on. Why do you think it's always me he goes for."

"Now be fair, every one of us has had a taste of his belt, but you are the only one that dares to stand up to him. He can't bear to think that you question his authority, he thinks he's the master in his own home. Which he is."

The next morning Elizabeth and Nellie crept out of bed, trying hard not to wake the two little ones curled up like pair of kittens, so entwined were the arms and legs. They were both working at the doll factory in Kingsland Road, all day long they made, bodies, arms and legs, or stuck eyes onto the little chubby faces. Elizabeth's favourite job was painting on the rosebud lips, and sooty black eyelashes, she used to imagine she was making up the film stars, and would call across the work floor, "Look, this one looks like Rita Hayworth." Nellie would chide her, "Get on with your work, Elizabeth, or we'll both get the sack". Nellie didn't want Elizabeth to get the sack. She went to work wherever her sister was, because she hadn't got the confidence to face the workplace on her own. Elizabeth knew this, but she didn't mind, like all the Martins, they might fight like cats and dogs, but they loved each other, and looked out for each other.

"Stop worrying Nellie, if they sack me, we can just go and get another job. How many have we had so far, ten?"

They strolled home down grimy Maria Street arm in arm.

"After we've done our fire watching tonight, I'm going to ask Mum, if I can bring Johnny home. He's dying to meet a real English family, what do you reckon Nell?"

"I've told you before you know Dad won't like it, say he starts swearing at him, what will you do?"

Elizabeth said with a laugh, "I'll just take him by the arm, and say "Come on Johnny, leave old misery guts toasting himself by the fire, with a bit of luck he might set fire to himself, and we'll be rid of him forever."

"Elizabeth how can you be so wicked. Do you really hate him that much?"

"Have you no sense of humour, I'm joking. Don't you know Nellie, I really do love the old devil, but he acts as though I'm pure evil. Be honest, what have I ever done that was really bad? OK I know I'm cheeky to Mum, especially on Sunday mornings when she hasn't burnt my bacon enough, and I know I get on their nerves always going out, but be honest what is there to stay in for. The highlight of their day is listening to the wireless."

After a tea of cheese on toast, followed by a big mug of tea, Elizabeth turned towards her mother who was busy poking the coal fire, ensuring that the sparks flew and a small amount of smoke filled the room. She asked, "Will it be alright if I bring my boyfriend Johnny home tonight, Mum, to meet you? He's longing to meet a real English family."

"Yes, of course you can, but I wish you wouldn't have so many boyfriends, I can't keep track of them all."

"Johnny's an American soldier Mum, everyone likes him the minute they meet him."

Mr. Martin, sitting in his usual place in front of the now roaring fire, snarled, "Ooh another one of those is he. Lots of money to give the girls a good time. I wonder what the girls give him in return."

CHAPTER 3

Nellie and Elizabeth were up at seven sharp. Mrs. Martin had given them both tea and toast in bed, and had boiled a kettle of hot water for them to have a quick wash before setting off for work. Arm in arm they set off down the road. "God its cold this morning," Elizabeth moaned.

It's your own fault, like Mum says you never wear enough warm clothes. Anyway, don't talk about the weather, how did it go with Dad and Johnny boy last night? I was lying in bed, straining my ears, but I couldn't hear a thing. I kept on telling the kids to be quiet. They were giggling, and said, 'Why don't you creep out onto the landing, you'll hear better from there'. I thought I'd better not in case Dad decided to go to bed early and catch me."

"I'm not going to tell you, I'm going to keep you in suspense until we get to work, otherwise I'll only have to repeat it all over again for the girls. Elizabeth was like the cat that had swallowed the cream, knowing that her sister was dying to hear what had happened. As they reached Kingsland Road they met four more of the girls, all hurrying to get in work on time. If they were late by as much as fifteen minutes, their wages would be docked accordingly.

The girls aged between fourteen and eighteen were now all seated around their workbenches. "Come on Elizabeth, spill the beans, did your Dad kill Johnny?"

"Get on with your work girls, we've got two gross of dolls to finish by dinner time, or Mr. Mendes will sack the lot of you." Amy was the forelady.

'Were you born miserable Amy, or do you just like taking the fun out of everything, because it gives you pleasure? No wonder you never got married," Elizabeth took great delight in taunting Amy.

The girls got their heads down, and started to assemble arms, legs, heads and bodies. The faces had been painted on the day before.

Elizabeth encouraged the girls to pull faces, and stick their tongues out at the receding figure of Amy. Not one of them knew that her boyfriend of five years standing, had been shot down over France. She wasn't a local girl, so no one really knew anything about her. She kept herself to herself. When Amy had gone, Elizabeth began to unfold her story. They all admired Elizabeth, because she didn't seem to be afraid of anyone or anything, now all eyes were glued to her face.

'Well, Mum, Johnny and myself sat around the table, and Dad as usual sat with his hands outstretched over the last of the smouldering coals, we had got home about eleven o'clock so it wasn't worth putting more coal on the fire. While we were drinking our tea the light went out. My God you should have heard Johnny. 'What the hell's going on. What's happened to the lights?

"Don't worry John, the money's run out in the meter, I'll just find my purse and put a penny in." Mum got up and looked in her purse, and as was usual she was stony broke, not a farthing. She looked at me and asked, "Elizabeth have you got a penny?" I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So I just said, "Sorry Mum, I'm broke until Friday."

Dad just sniggered. He was enjoying our embarrassment.

Johnny fished around in his pockets, and came up with six pennies. "There you are Ma, let's have a bit of light on the scene." That done we all sat down and finished our tea.

Trying to make conversation with my Dad, Johnny said, "I think the world of Elizabeth Mr. Martin. One day with your permission, I'll marry her, and takes her back to the States. What do you think of that?"

"Not much, you Yanks are all the same, all talk. The only reason our girls go out with you, is for what they can get. British boys are best, it's only because they are all away at war that they even look at you." With that he spat into the fire. I could have killed him."

Elizabeth took a deep breath, and carried on with her tale.

"Come on Johnny I'll walk down to the door with you." When we got downstairs to the dark passage we kissed, and cuddled, and entwined ourselves around each other like two snakes." The girls widened their eyes and gasped that Elizabeth was being so revealing. "Coming up for air," I asked, "Did you mean that Johnny, about marrying me, and taking me back to America?"

"Of course I did sweetheart, I love you. I want to be with you always. My family will adore you, especially your English accent."

Honestly girls, my heart was thumping away in my chest with excitement. The thought of getting away from here forever was so exciting. We kissed again. "It's getting very late Johnny, I think you had better go, I've got to get up for work in the morning," I said.

"OK, honeypie, I'll be around about tomorrow about seven o'clock, I think there's a good Bette Davis film on in the West End. Bye darling." He waved to me as he left, and then blew me a kiss.

I lay in bed all last night thinking about America. Just think, I'll have a lovely house, with a big beautiful garden, and his family will all make a big fuss of me. I just can't wait to get away from here.

The girls sitting around the table gave a big sigh, they were all thinking what a lucky girl Elizabeth was to be going to America. Only Nellie thought differently.

"Do you know Elizabeth, you're growing really horrible won't you miss, Mum and Dad, and the rest of us?"

"Of course I will, but I just want to get away from Dad. You know he hates me."

One of the Barnett twins broke in, "I haven't heard you say that you love your Johnny. Do you?" The Barnett twins were blonde with blue eyes. They had pretty faces and wore their hair hanging across their faces in true Veronica Lake style.

"I think I do. Let's be honest no one has ever treated me quite like he does. I only have to say I like something, and he gets it for me," Elizabeth let out a sigh of contentment.

"What are sighing for? I don't believe you love him. You only like what he can give you. What do you feel when he kisses you? Do you go all breathless? Do you go weak at the knees when you break away? When you are really in love, I've been told that you want to go all the way. I know that you never would, but have you ever felt like you wanted to?"

"No I have not! So don't be so bloody nosy. Elizabeth's brown eyes shone in anger. "I'm not going to tell you anything ever again. You get too personal."

"Oooh, get you Lady High and Mighty."

All the girls had gone to Maria Street School, and the education they had received, meant they had all they needed to be part of the workforce. As one teacher had told Elizabeth, "You've learnt enough to get by with, and it would be such a waste to educate you girls further, every one of you will be married by the time you're twenty."

Amy entered. "You eight girls carry on assembling the dolls, and all of you", she nodded in the direction of the eight girls sitting at a long bench further down the room, "Start making another lot of parts."

Elizabeth laughed. "It looks just like a morgue in here with dozens of body parts hanging up. Watch out girls Jack the Ripper's about." The girls all laughed like the children they were.

Nellie and Elizabeth walked home down Maria street arm in arm. Dozens of children were playing. Games were innumerable, whip and top, "keyses", off ground touch, tin can Tommy, all accompanied by screams and yells of delight, or disgruntled, "That's not fair." Their favourite game was skipping. With skipping all the children could join in, you just had to be patient and wait your

turn. Elizabeth's sister Rosie and Gwenny Baker were at that moment turning the huge rope which stretched across the road from one pavement to the other. Each child took it in turn to jump in, depending on the rhyme, as many as six children were all skipping at once.

"Come on Nellie, let's have a quick skip before we go in, go on you first."

After about five minutes the girls decided they had had enough, and the children were pleased to see them go, it held up their turn. They ran up the wooden stairs, making a loud clattering noise, and burst into the living room.

"Where have you two been, I've had your tea ready ten minutes ago. You can't keep chips hot, mind you the Spam looks all right. I've made a nice rice pudding for afters." Mrs. Martin wiped her hands on her apron, not that they were dirty, it had become a habit, she always wore a cross over her pinny like all the women in the street, and didn't realise she was doing it.

"Must rush and get ready Mum, Johnny will be here soon."

"You're always rushing off to meet some young man. You be careful my girl or you'll end up dead in a ditch."

Listening to this piece of information for the hundredth time, Elizabeth thought, 'Where is there a ditch near here. London Fields, and Victoria Park were the nearest green places, maybe she was thinking of Epping Forest.'

She quickly washed down, standing in a bowl to do her feet. "How marvellous it must be to have a bathroom. It was all right going to the public baths on Saturdays, but in the films everyone seemed to have their own bath, complete with lovely soft towels, and sweet smelling soaps. They didn't have to wash all over with a bar of Sunlight soap, which also did the washing and the floors. If you weren't careful you could find yourself with a splinter in your hand, or even worse in your bum. Oh God, I must stop thinking like this, I know I'm luckier than most. Johnny will be here in an hour, I'd better get a move on."

Pulling on her white parachute cami-knickers, she hurriedly grabbed for her white crepe dress hanging behind the door. She slowed down now, she had to get her precious nylons on without laddering them. She didn't know when Johnny would be able to bring her another pair, they were in big demand by all the girls. Until the Americans came, it was a case of painting your legs with a light tan stain, and getting one of your sisters to paint a straight seam down the back of them.

Quickly she rushed to the big mirror hanging over the fireplace. She tried not to get in her father's way, he was as usual sitting by the fire. She applied

her makeup, pan-stick on her face, and lots of black mascara, followed by bright red lipstick, and a touch of rose pink Phulnana rouge, now she was ready. At that moment the youngest member of the family came dashing in, four year old Alan.

"Elizabeth, your boyfriend's coming down the street. He gave all us kids some chewing gum, but I can see he's got boxes of chocolates under his arm, and on his shoulder he's got a khaki bag with a red cross on it. What do you think he's got in it?"

Before she could answer, there was a knock at the door.

"I'll let him in for you, you give your hair another brush." Elizabeth's hair didn't need another brush, it was shining like silk already, but Mrs. Martin was quite taken by Johnny, and so she deigned to be the one to let Johnny in, instead of sending one of her children.

"Come on in Johnny, Elizabeth's just ready." She rubbed her hands on her pinny, and followed him up the stairs.

Johnny had the good sense not to walk over to Elizabeth and kiss her. Instead he said, "Hello Mr. Martin," there was no reply from the armchair.

"I've brought some candy for you and the children Mrs. Martin, I know that you can only have sweets with a ration book, and we get supplied with plenty."

Mrs. Martin stepped forward, rubbing her hands yet again on her pinny, "Thank you Johnny, that's really kind."

"Alan," she said sharply, "Don't touch. These sweets and chocolates will be shared out between all the families."

Then Johnny put down the khaki bag he had been carrying on his shoulder, and tipped the contents on to the table.

"There you are Ma, no need for you to worry about pennies for your meter anymore." On the table stood a mountain of coppers. In her mind Mrs. Martin had already spent the money down at Mrs. Signal's corner shop, she didn't know how much was there, but it certainly looked as though she would be able to pay her slate this week. Although Elizabeth, Nellie and Lenny were all working, their pay was so bad, that every day was a struggle to make ends meet. She felt very warm towards Johnny.

"Come on John, let's go." Before she left the room, she whispered to Alan, "Save me some chocolates, if you eat them all before I get home, I'll box your ears."

"I don't fancy the pictures, John. Do you mind if we go dancing again. The Shoreditch Town Hall has got a dance on tonight."

"Lead on, I'd go to the ends of the earth with you."

"Oh do stop larking about." She took his arm and squeezed it, but Johnny moved his arm, slipped it about her tiny waist saying, "Ooh you look so beautiful, I could eat you all up."

The dance was in full swing when they arrived. After dancing five jive numbers on the trot, Elizabeth was so hot the nape of her neck was damp. "Excuse me Johnny, I'm just going to powder my nose." She loved this expression, it was much nicer than saying 'I'm off to the toilet'. As she walked across the dance floor she took in what the other girls were wearing. Most, like herself, wore figure hugging dresses, with their hair swept up in bangs or sweeps in front and the remainder of their glossy hair framed their faces. She noticed more and more girls in uniform. It had been her intention to join the A.T.S as soon as she was old enough, but now that she was going to marry Johnny, there was no need, she had found her escape.

Pushing her way through the crowds she opened the door to the ladies room and was nearly knocked over by the powerful smells of Evening in Paris, Californian Poppy, and one of her favourites, June. There were four girls powdering their noses, applying more red lipstick or washing their hands. All four left together. Elizabeth wiped the nape of her neck with a hanky, and when she looked in the mirror, was surprised to see Amy coming through the door.

Elizabeth gave her a tight little smile, and said, "Surprised to see you here Amy."

"Oh I get out occasionally, one of my brother's friends brought me here. Not that I'm much of a dancer, but you, you're really good. When you and Johnny were dancing, some people stopped to watch you. I think they wanted to copy your steps." Amy looked down into the hand-basin, and started to run the water. She made no attempt to wash her hands. She turned towards Elizabeth.

"What do you know about Johnny Marino, Elizabeth?"

"Amy I know that you have never liked me, so I won't beat about the bush. Mind your own business."

"Well you're wrong. I do like you Elizabeth, in fact I admire you very much. That's why I don't want to see you get hurt. I couldn't help overhearing you tell the girls that you were going to marry Johnny, and go and live in America.

Elizabeth, my brother's friend is American, and he told me that Johnny is married, and has a family. Two little boys.”

"You liar, you bloody liar. I don't believe a word of it." She shook with anger, and her face went bright red. If this had been one of her sisters talking, she would have grabbed them by the hair, and given them a good hiding. Instead she drew herself up to her full height of five feet, and walked towards the door.

"Bitch, bloody bitch," was Elizabeth's parting shot.

"Elizabeth, please. Go out there, and ask Johnny yourself. I just don't want to see you get hurt, and I swear I'll never mention it in work."

Elizabeth felt a terrible pain in her heart, and her throat felt strangely dry as she strode across the dance floor. She found Johnny talking at the bar with his friends. He looked at her red face, and noticed that her eyes were hard and bright.

'What's wrong Elizabeth? Someone upset you?'

She came straight to the point, "Are you married Johnny?"

His mouth dropped open like a fish on the end of a line, he hadn't expected anything like this. Who could have told her? Not his friends, they were all doing the same.

"Elizabeth," he fought to get control of himself.

"Don't Elizabeth me, tell me," she shouted across the music. "Are you married?"

He looked down at the floor, his face too was now bright red. "Yes Elizabeth. I wanted to tell you at the beginning, but the longer we went out together, the fonder I got of you, and I could never do it. Honestly I didn't want to hurt you."

Her hand came up, and with all the strength she could muster, she slapped Johnny Marino hard around his face. She turned on her high-heeled shoes, and swept out of the dance hall. No one moved in Johnny's crowd, and everyone kept on dancing, they had seen that kind of thing before. No big deal.

Elizabeth grabbed her short swing coat from the cloakroom, and ran down the Town Hall steps. She made her way in the pitch black along Kingsland Road, and only then did she let the red hot tears fall.

She stumbled along in the darkness. She was used to the blackout and knew every inch of the road, but tonight her legs didn't seem to belong to her. They were bending under her, and her whole body was racked by her sobbing. Her tears were flowing so fast, that her hanky could not mop them up quick enough, and they splashed down onto her chest.

The air raid warning started to wail, and the beams of the searchlights lit up the sky. Bombs were being dropped close by, she could smell the smoke, and hear the bangs.

"That's the answer God, please let one of Hitler's bombs fall on me. Kill me so that I won't have to suffer the humiliation in front of all my friends and family. Do it for me please God, and take away this pain that is crushing my chest."

Panic set in. "I mustn't let Mum and Dad see me like this. Especially Dad, he would laugh and say I told you those Yanks were rubbish, and Mum would come up with one of her old expressions, "there's plenty more fish in the sea." She didn't want a fish, she wanted to marry Johnny Marino, and go and live in America. She knew what she would do. She would rush up the stairs, past the living room, and go straight to bed. With luck Nellie and the kids would be asleep. She stumbled along Maria Street, and managed to compose herself a little. The sobs were quieter now.

As she passed the living room door, her mother called out, "Is that you Elizabeth. Where are you going, don't you want a cup of tea before going to bed?"

"Goodnight Mum," Elizabeth managed to get out, "I'm a bit tired." She entered the bedroom quietly, the two little ones, Violet and Rosie were fast asleep at the bottom of the huge bed that practically filled the room. She felt sure that Nellie was still awake, but was pretending to be asleep. She must have guessed that something was very wrong for Elizabeth to be home so early. Her mother too knew that something was up. Home early, and no cup of tea before bed, that was not like Elizabeth.

CHAPTER 4

The sunlight streamed through the old thin cotton curtains, Elizabeth screwed her eyes up to keep it out. She had finally cried herself to sleep. She looked around at the bedroom, just a big old iron bed, one rickety old chair, and something that was supposed to be a dressing table, she knew that much because it had an old mirror on it. You couldn't see in it properly to make your face up, it was so worn.

She had decided not to go into work today, her eyes she knew would be all puffy, and she was terrified Amy might tell the girls. Elizabeth thought, "It's not as though she owes me any favours. I've done my best to torment her every day, and to turn the girls against her."

When Mrs. Martin had come up to give the girls their tea and toast in bed, Elizabeth had pulled the clothes tightly around her, and covered her face.

"Come on Elizabeth, you'll be late for work."

Elizabeth mumbled, "I'm not going in today, Nellie can tell them I'm not well"

"Don't be silly girl, you can't afford to lose a day's pay." Mrs. Martin gently tried to pull the bedclothes back from Elizabeth's face. They were quickly grasped.

"Leave me alone will you. I just told you I'm not going in. Nellie tell them I'm not well," she demanded.

Mrs. Martin shook the two little ones, Rosie and Violet, sleeping at the bottom of the bed. "I know it's a bit early for you two, but you might as well come down now and get ready for school. There's a nice fire roaring in the grate, so you can have a longer warm while you drink your tea."

Mrs. Martin trudged down the stairs with the two youngsters following her. They rubbed the sleep out of their eyes, and sat on the mat as close to the fire as they dared, each held a steaming cup of tea.

"What's wrong with Elizabeth, is she really ill Mum?" Alan was more curious than concerned, he was only four, and had been thoroughly spoilt being the youngest in the family.

"No I don't think she's ill, I think someone's upset her. She went out with Johnny last night as happy as Larry, something must have happened then, maybe they've had a quarrel. They'll soon make it up, look at us lot, always rowing and fighting, but we always make it up later, don't we."

Neither child replied, they were too occupied with grabbing the toast as soon as it was buttered.

Elizabeth crawled out of bed an hour after Nellie set off to work, Nellie didn't want to go alone, but Mrs. Martin persuaded her that they might both lose their jobs if she didn't go in.

"You know what that Mr. Mendes is like, he'll think you've both gone to the pictures or something."

Walking across the room, Elizabeth tried to see what her face looked like in the remaining bit of silver left on the mirror. "God I look terrible." She quickly cleaned her face with cold cream, and tried to apply her mascara, her hands were shaking so much that she didn't make a good job of it, and applying her lipstick was even more hazardous as her lips were still quivering with sorrow.

"How could he do that to me, what a bastard." On rare occasions did Elizabeth swear out loud, or to herself, but what he had done to her, warranted it she felt.

She looked out of the fourth floor window at the gasworks wall opposite, "All my dreams have gone," she sighed. Then as she dressed her mood changed from one of feeling sorry for herself to one of anger. "No, no they haven't, it's right what Mum's always saying, there are plenty more fish in the sea, and I'm

going to get myself a rich one, I'm not living in this bug-hole for the rest of my natural. I'll show the Johnny Marino's of this world."

She bounced down the stairs, as a show of bravado, not so much for her mother, but for her father, who she knew would give her an inquisition.

"Morning Lady Muck, decided to come down at last have we?" He sat in his usual place, doing what he did every morning, stretching his hands out towards the flames of the fire. Probably thinking back to the days when he would get up early for work, work hard all day, and at the end of the day come home to his wife and children that he provided for. His dignity had gone during the depression, when he couldn't get a job, but then neither could thousands of others. The men all looked the same then, tired, old before their time, and they seemed to wear a uniform of muffler, and flat cap. Many poor devils like himself had walked the street with cardboard in their shoes to cover the holes, it did at least keep your feet from freezing on the pavement. He would not beg to feed his children, he had left that to his wife. When the little ones had absolutely nothing to eat in the house, she had gone to the Relief office, and they had sent a man around to see what they had to sell. Looking around, this well-fed, bowler hatted gent decided, they had better sell their wireless to one of the neighbours, and then they would have money for bread.

Bill Martin wanted to throw this unfeeling monster through the window, although only five feet tall his temper would have enabled him to do it.

Mrs. Martin saw the look on his face and calmed him down. "That won't help us Bill", she said.

Selling the radio to Mrs. Bywaters for two and six, Mrs. Martin was able to feed the kids for a couple of days, but then she trotted off to the Relief office again.

After a good talking to from the bowler hatted gent about managing money, he handed her seven loaves, and a lump of meat.

"Don't come begging here again, that's got to last you lot for at least a week."

Mrs. Martin arrived home, and hardly had she got in the door, than the ravenous children set about the bread. They ran around the room waving bits of bread in their hands, they were so happy not to have to go to bed hungry for a second night. The meat Mrs. Martin stewed with a few veg she managed to cadge from her neighbour, Mrs. Taylor, and that also went in one meal. When the children said "The meat's tough Mum, " she rolled out her usual answer, "Tougher still when there's none."

"I said, morning Lady Muck." he turned to look at Elizabeth, he quickly turned to his wife, "What's up with her? She looks as if she's seen a ghost."

"She'll be alright Bill, she's just not feeling very well" Mrs. Martin started to rub her hands on her apron, come on you two off to school, Elizabeth, you wash these cups up while I do your Dad's bandages.

Taking the cups into the backroom kitchen, Elizabeth heard her mother say, "Don't go on at her today Bill. I think she's very upset, probably had a row with her Johnny." Mrs. Martin was a dab hand at bandaging Mr. Martin's old war wounds, she had done them a hundred times, she didn't worry over them too much, it was his cough that made her brow furrow.

"Do you think that you ought to go and see Rd. Statnigross about that cough Bill?"

Sarah Martin knew better than to actually tell him to go, she didn't want to start another of their innumerable rows.

'What for? He can't cure it, he just gives me another bottle of linctus. Anyway I'm all right, as long as I can get out in the evenings to do my A.R.P. work.

Mrs. Martin lapsed into dreaming now. When he had worked what fun they had had, going to South end for the day, having a drink together down at the Duke.

Bill still went to the Duke on Friday nights to meet his old cronies, and play on the old piano. Funny the little ones still thought their father could play, they never cottoned on to the fact that his feet were doing all the work. The children would hang around the pub doorway calling out "Dad, buy us an arrow root biscuit", out would come the reply, "get back home to your mother, before you feel the back of my

hand." Sarah Martin didn't begrudge him those few hours now, he had so little left since he had become ill. When they were young, they used to fight like cat and dog over his trips to the pub. Often on a Sunday he would come staggering home the worse for wear, and Mrs. Martin would be waiting for him. Nag, nag, nag. After ten minutes of this he would lash out, but Sarah was a good match for him, she threw everything she could lay her hands on at him, and finally would wallop him over the head with a saucepan. This generally ended the fighting. Nothing put Bill of his love for her though, he would kiss and cuddle her until she promised to go upstairs with him to read the Sunday News of the World. The children often heard her say, "It's lust with you Bill Martin not love," but still every Sunday afternoon was spent in bed, with a warning to the children, "On no account to come upstairs."

When Nellie arrived home from work, Elizabeth asked her "What Amy had to say."

"Not a lot," she just said "She wished you better, and hoped to see you back at work tomorrow. In fact she was very nice to me, and gave me all the easy jobs."

Going into work the next morning, Elizabeth held her head high.

"How are you feeling, better?" the pretty blonde sisters asked in unison.

"Yes thanks, just a stomach upset. Before any of you ask about my date with Johnny Marino, let me tell you girls, he's married and I've finished with him." Elizabeth's face pinked.

"Oh what a rotter, poor Elizabeth," poor plain Mavis declared.

"Don't worry about me girls, you know what my mother's favourite saying is, there's plenty more fish in the sea, and believe me I'm going after them. Tonight Nellie and I are going to the pictures to see Nelson Eddy, and Jeanette McDonald in Rose Marie, and by the time we come out of the flicks I'll have a boy on each arm."

Mavis looked up with admiration at Elizabeth.

"I wish I looked like you, then I would have a boyfriend."

"It's not your fault you haven't got a boyfriend, your mother never lets you move away from your street door. How do you expect to meet anyone, or do anything interesting if you never go anywhere."

Elizabeth looked at Mavis, poor little devil didn't have much going for her. Round face, pudding basin haircut, and piggy glasses, add to that a continuously runny nose, "Don't suppose any fella would go out with her, even if her Mum did let her go out. 'Still there is supposed to be someone in this world for everyone, maybe

Mavis would somehow meet an ugly man, and they would click," Elizabeth daydreamed.

Amy called Elizabeth into her office, normal procedure after a day off work. So the rest of the staff didn't strain their ears to listen.

"Are you feeling better Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth just nodded.

"I think you were very brave to tell the girls about Johnny being married. You know I never would have told them." Amy emphasised the never.

"Thanks Amy. I'm sorry if I've given you trouble from time to time, I promise I won't do it again." She hung her head sheepishly, it had been very hard for Elizabeth to apologise, but she had learnt a very valuable lesson.

"That's OK maybe you'd like to paint the faces on today, you and Nellie generally enjoy that."

CHAPTER 5

Not feeling at all well, Elizabeth put a brave face on, and called to her sister Nellie still washing in the kitchen, "Hurry up slow coach, or all the best fellas will be gone."

"A lot of good it will do me, early or late no one looks at me with you around!"

"Come off it Nell, I've seen the men eyeing you up and down. I think it's your big round, you-know-whats that get them going." They both laughed.

"Is that Jezebel talking dirty? She'll feel my belt if she carries on like that." He looked menacingly at Elizabeth.

"Don't try it Dad, I told you that the last belting you gave me was the last. If you as much as lay a finger on me, I'll kill you." She curled her lip as she spoke.

Nellie came rushing in from the kitchen, "Sorry Dad, come on Elizabeth I'm ready now."

They both took a last look in the mirrored over-mantle, pursed their lips like rabbits to check their bright red lips, and ran down the stairs yelling, "Bye Mum."

They loved the film, musicals were their favourites. They had also caught the attention of two soldiers sitting directly behind them. The two handsome young men began to play with their hair, and they leaned forward and whispered, "How about meeting us outside after the film and we will walk you home?"

Elizabeth was still feeling very unhappy, but she agreed for Nell's sake. Nellie though shy, was determined not to mess this meeting up, and when young Fred leaned towards her to kiss her "Goodnight", she didn't pull away. Elizabeth just gave his brother Jim a quick peck on the cheek, saying "I'm tired, I'm going in Nell, you coming." She pulled the string hanging through the hole in the door where once there had been a letter box, and marched in leaving a red faced Jim standing on the doorstep.

"I think you were very rude Elizabeth", Nellie declared as they undressed for bed.

"I really liked Fred, he's asked to see me tomorrow."

"Are you going?" Elizabeth looked at Nell in surprise.

"Yes, I'm going, he's the first fellow to ask me out in the last six months. Will you help me to get ready tomorrow Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth crossed the room to where she stood in her camiknickers, and hugged her.

"Of course I will. Don't worry, you'll be fine. You know you'll have to shave your legs, and under your armpits."

"Stop it Elizabeth you're making me feel nervous already." Laughing they fell into bed.

The next morning while they were rushing round getting ready for work, and the children were sitting by the fire drinking their morning tea, there was a knock at the door.

There would be no more smiling faces in this house for a long time to come.

Lenny had not left for work, he was late. "I'll see who it is, Mum." He ran down the stairs with all the agility that fourteen year olds possess, on opening the door, he saw a telegram boy standing there.

"Is your mother or father in, I've got to give them this telegram. It's addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Martin." Lenny backed off slowly, he knew what that horrible yellow coloured envelope held. He was afraid, so he yelled Mum there's a telegram for you, and sat on the bottom of the stairs. He sat there knowing that his mother would need an arm to lean on to get back up the stairs. He was heartbreakingly handsome, chiselled nose, strong chin, and merry brown eyes. A double for the film stars, he was often teased by the local girls. Already a tear was

rolling gently down his cheek, as his mother pushed past him, she leaned down and gently squeezed his shoulder.

She thanked the telegram boy, and quietly closed the street door. She looked at Lenny's face, and a matching tear rolled down her own. There had been too many of these yellow envelopes delivered in the surrounding streets, not to know what message it held.

Climbing the stairs slowly, her body already bent over, she let the tears fall. Entering the living room, she leaned on the table for support, "I think you had better open this Bill." she whispered.

He moved as quietly as he could, and took the envelope from his wife's hand, easing the envelope open, and began to sob as he read the words, "Dear Mr. and Mrs. Martin we regret to inform you that your son James has been killed in action."

They clung to each other sobbing, "Go to school kids, be good, Dad and I will see you all at dinner time."

Alan, Violet, and Rosie were so stunned at seeing their father cry, that they fled. They were frightened. They didn't know what had happened, and it must be something really terrible, because Dads don't cry. In school a boy called Tom told young Rosie that her brother Jimmy had been killed fighting for his country. He said

his Mum had told him, because she had seen the telegram boy go to their house. She cried and she thought about her Dad. He loved his three boys so much. He was always saying "Boys were best." Rosie could understand her Dad's thinking, he had six daughters but only three sons. Now he only had two.

Rosie was the one member of the family who could see no wrong in her father. OK so sometimes he gave her a good hiding, but then he gave everyone a good hiding, but she felt her mother didn't love her like she did Violet and Alan. She would watch every morning as the two little ones were pampered. They were always being told how lovely they were. Why couldn't I look like them. She wailed inwardly, they were plump, with rosy apple faces and she was plain skinny and sallow faced. Her mother was always telling her. "You're as yellow as a guinea pig."

No wonder Rosie refused to get her mother's shopping, and was continuously getting belted by her for her cheek. It was the only way of getting back at her mother. Her favourite sayings were. "Oh no, you wouldn't ask your darling Violet to go to Mrs. Bignal's. it's always me." or "I wish I'd never been born." Her mother's answer was. "When I get my hands on you girl you really will wish that you had never been born." She wasn't jealous of Alan like she was of Violet because Alan was a boy and her Dad loved boys best. So Rosie loved boys best.

On returning home from school at lunchtime, Rosie found the whole family still crying. Elizabeth, Lenny, and Nellie were very close being the elder children of the family, they had grown up with Jimmy.

That night the children were sent to bed early with some sweets from the sweet ration. Mr. and Mrs. Martin sat around the big old wooden table with Elizabeth, Lenny and Nellie. Mrs. Martin pushed a strand of dark brown hair back from her white face. Elizabeth was the first to break the silence.

"It was only last week that we got one of those funny little photograph letters from Jimmy, telling us that he was as fit as a fiddle, and as brown as a berry, " Elizabeth spoke in a dull monotone.

"Poor Jimmy, he tried to tell us how terrible it was out there in Burma, but the government used to block out anything that they didn't want us to read." Mrs. Martin paused but didn't even look up as she quietly informed them. "I killed him." She paused again to let this sink in. "You know he was on the run with the Clark brothers, well the police came here and said, "It would be better if I told them where he was hiding, because they would find him eventually." So I did, and after living through the horror of Dunkirk, they sent him to Burma where the Japs killed him. I will hate them forever, because of them I will never see the smile of my eldest son again."

Lenny and Nellie sitting either side of Mrs. Martin, put their arms around her to comfort her.

"Now Mum, why don't you go to bed, I'll bring you up a nice cup of tea. It's not doing you any good sitting here torturing yourself." Lenny's swollen eyes pleaded with her.

"Alright son, I think we had all better get some sleep, you must go in to work tomorrow."

Mrs. Martin was always bothered about anyone losing their job, having lived through the thirties, a job to her was of paramount importance, even at a sad time like this.

"Are you coming to bed Bill?" she gently asked. He hadn't spoken one word. Sarah knew that he wouldn't blame her for what had happened. During the first world war he had shot the toes off many a fourteen year old boy to get them back home to England. "War" he had told her. "Turns men into animals, and some men into heroes." She guessed her Bill had been a bit of both.

Next morning the sun streamed through the curtains, even the sticky paper stuck on the windows to keep the bomb blast from shattering the glass, could not keep it out, but Sarah and Bill weren't aware of it. The house was silent now that the children had gone to school and the elder ones to work.

Sarah pulled a chair up beside Bill's old armchair, "You don't blame me do you Bill?"

"No of course not, who could guess how things would turn out. When he went away I knew it would not be a joyride, but let's be honest, I really thought it might straighten him out. He was such a tormented soul. That night he tried to kill himself with pills, will live with me forever. If it hadn't been for old Dr. Statnigross we would have lost him then. We were very lucky he didn't call the police in, they are supposed to report suicides."

Looking at Bill's sad pale face, Sarah asked, "Where do you think he got all those ideas from? You know, "Kill the rich, they are starving the poor." She stopped talking for a minute and thought about this, and then continued." When he started getting in with the wrong crowd, I couldn't believe he was a son of mine. I've always tried to bring the kids up, not to steal, or lie. I've always told them education is what will get them through life. I thought when he started taking Julie Brown out, he might have gone straight, but even that didn't work. Nellie said she had heard a rumour that Jimmy had made her pregnant before he went to Burma. Wouldn't it have been wonderful, we would still have had part of Jimmy with us," she lowered her voice, and her lips quivered, " but I know it's not true, her mother would have been round here like a shot."

Bill squeezed her hand tenderly.

"If anyone is to blame it's me. When he kept on dodging about to escape the army, I called him a coward. Do you know what his answer was?"

'Well you shouldn't have told me about the poor sods, who came back with no limbs at all. How they have put them in nursing homes far out in the countryside until they die, because they couldn't stand the thought of their families looking down at just a head and a trunk lying in bed. Poor devils couldn't even kill themselves." See Doily," this was Bill's pet name for her in times of great joy, or great distress, "no one is really to blame, it's fate."

Elizabeth went to work with a heavy heart, she couldn't stop thinking about Jimmy. She remembered how he would terrify them by sitting in the dark and telling them ghost stories. Another of his tricks was to jump out at them whenever they were least expecting it, and they would scream, and jump out of their skins. Then they would all punch each other playfully, and fall about laughing.

She decided, she was going to put herself on hold, men only seemed to break your heart whichever way you looked at life.