

CHAPTER 6

Eighteen months after Jimmy's death. Elizabeth found herself getting very restless once again. She was still toying with the idea of joining the ATS. It must be wonderful to be sent abroad she thought. Working at the doll factory was quite enjoyable now that she and Amy had become good friends. and Nellie's Fred had put an engagement ring on her finger before he was posted to Italy. It was his letters home to Nellie that had once again made her think about joining up. He didn't write of war, he wrote about a sun-kissed land. filled with wonderful fruit and vegetables. She wondered what red and orange peppers looked like. and how marvellous to look at thousands of bunches of grapes growing on the vines. The only fruit she ever saw was a few specky apples or pears. If you had children or were pregnant. you had a green ration book. and this entitled you to oranges when they finally came to market. This happened rarely.

She started going out with as many young men as she could after her heartache over Jimmy finally eased a little. But the young men bored her even when they were kissing and cuddling her she felt nothing. The memory of what Johnny Marino had done to her seemed to have stunted her emotionally. Never mind they came in handy they always paid for everything. Everything being the pictures, shows, sweets and cigarettes. This left her with enough money to buy her make up, or if she saved - enough money to pop around to Mrs. Musgrave, and get her to run her up a new dress.

Mrs. Musgrave was one of those resourceful ladies, who seemed to be able to knock up a dinner for her brood of seven without batting an eyelid. She had taught her children to help and wash the little ones, and to help with the household chores. Her husband Ken was in the army, as were all the men between the ages of eighteen and forty, so to make ends meet, she would make clothes on her little sewing machine. She was Mrs. Martin's friend, but the difference between the households was, chaos to calm. Mrs. Musgrave was organised, and Mrs. Martin was definitely not.

Elizabeth and Nellie had both bought enough material from one of the "boys" to have a dress made, and so they set off arm in arm on the Saturday morning to ask Mrs. Musgrave had she got time to make their dresses.

"Come in, come in girls, how nice to see you both. How's Mum?"

"She's fine", said Nellie, "She said to tell you that she'll try and get round to see you in a couple of days' time."

Mrs. Musgrave got out her tape measure, while the girls were busy slipping off their jumpers and skirts.

"Go into the other room and play children while I'm busy." Like a dutiful little army all seven children tripped out of the room laughing. They all looked the image of their mother, all blonde and blue eyed. Size was another matter, the children were all slender, but Mrs. Musgrave was as fat as butter. Her arms at

the top wobbled as she measured both girls, and her whole body wobbled when she laughed.

"Righto girls, you can get dressed now I've finished. I'll make them with scooped necks with a drawstring, and put in little puff sleeves. Do you want them just touching your knees like the last ones."

Nellie and Elizabeth were thrilled at having new dresses, and nodded. You couldn't get clothes without coupons, so meeting up with one of the "boys" who had been out on the thief was a wonderful stroke of luck.

"My material is the pink with the polka dots, and Nellie said she would have the blue. For once we didn't have a fight over the colour."

Mrs. Musgrave smiled and laid the material on the big old iron bed which was in the living room. She only had three rooms and a kitchen, so she slept with her youngest in this room. It was a huge black iron bed with brass knobs on its four corners, but looked very pretty as Mrs. Musgrave had crocheted a cream lacy cover, and had added two ribbon covered cushions.

Just as the girls were about to leave, the front door burst open, and a man in uniform rushed in, and swept Mrs. Musgrave into his arms with such force that they both fell onto the bed. Elizabeth and Nellie recognised Mr.

Musgrave at once, but they had never seen such passion, and both blushed scarlet. Mr. Musgrave seemed oblivious of them both, he was kissing and

caressing Mrs. Musgrave, and trying to lift her dress up. The girls both rushed for the door at once bumping into each other.

Once outside in Harman Street, Nellie said, "Oh wasn't that embarrassing. He might have waited until we had left."

Elizabeth had got over the shock by now, 'Well Nellie it's months since he's seen his wife, I suppose he couldn't help himself. You know what they write about in the magazines, unbridled passion."

"I know, I've read about it, but I've never seen a man lift a woman's dress up like that before."

"Oh come off it, what about little Joe at the doll factory?"

"Yes but that's different. Joe only flicks the hem of your skirt up to torment, nothing more."

Joe pushed the containers of dolls' parts around the little factory. and he was glad to. Being a dwarf made it hard for him to find employment, although he could work as hard as the next man. He kept the girls laughing by telling them jokes about French letters, and smelly fingers. Most of the young girls laughed at his jokes, but only a few actually knew what a French letter was. They laughed because they didn't want to feel out of things.

Joe laughed a lot, it hid his aching heart. The girls in the factory never looked at him as a likely boyfriend. He was just Joe. The only time he had lost his temper at work was when a new girl arrived, and she patted Joe on the head while talking to him. His handsome face changed to something a kin to the devil. He ranted and raved about being a man, the only difference being was that his arms and legs were a bit shorter. The new girl fled, never to return. It was left to Amy to deal with Joe.

Amy calmed him down by saying, "Come into my office Joe, let's have a cup of tea together, and we can discuss what jobs need to be done next." Amy didn't patronise him, "Maybe it would be best if you brought another basket of do" up for me Joe? When you've finished your tea of course." She purposely didn't mention dolls arms and legs. She understood that at nineteen all his friends that he had grown up, and who had accepted him, were at the front.

Joe had devised a way to make friends with girls even if it was only for a short span of time. He would go to Victoria Park, and sit on a bench next to a young girl, it didn't matter to him if she was pretty or not. He understood too well what it was like not to be perfect. He would strike up a conversation, commenting on the ducks and swans swimming by on the lake, or if she had a dog with her, there was no problem, everyone liked you if you patted their dog. If the girl did not get up and walk away indignantly, Joe would carry on talking and telling her clean little jokes, and would eventually ask her if she would like to walk in the park with him. Nine times out of ten, this is when the rebuff would come, but Joe thought it was worth a try, because when the tenth girl said "Yes" and didn't walk two feet away from him, he felt as tall as any man. Several times he had got to the kissing and cuddling stage, even the hand on the bosom stage, but no luck going further. Still he thought, there's time yet, I'm

only nineteen, and my poor bloody friends are not even this lucky, they are out in France getting blown to bits by the Germans.

Jeannie Maidstone was busy hooking the legs and arms into the bodies of the dolls, when she suddenly looked up and asked Elizabeth, "How would you like to see a boxing match?"

"Oh I don't know, isn't it all bloody and sweaty?", she wriggled her body as though the thought of blood made her feel sick.

"Yes it can be, but it's no bloodier than the fights outside the Duke on a Saturday night. Blimey, they nearly killed that poor sod who wandered in to have a drink. I know he shouldn't have been so rude, asking Greg behind the bar, 'What's the matter am I invisible?', but they cracked his head open on the windowsill, and the poor bugger needed six stitches in his head. Greg really started that fight, he shouldn't have taken the mickey out of his Yorkshire accent. Well Elizabeth, are you coming or not?"

"When is it?" Elizabeth asked non-committedly.

"Saturday. I'm only asking you because my brother's fighting, and I thought you could keep me company. Say yes. We'll have a good old laugh."

"OK, where is it, at the Shoreditch town hall?" Elizabeth wasn't keen on going, but as she had nothing better to do, she said "Yes".

"No it's at the Bethnal Green town hall, but we'll be alright my Mum and Dad will be with us. We can get two buses home from there."

Flinching inwardly every time a blow was landed, Elizabeth pretended she was enjoying the matches. It reminded her of the beatings she had received at the hands of her father over the years. It wasn't until a big blonde giant of a man entered the ring that Elizabeth started to pay attention. Not of the boxing, but of the man himself. He had a fine physic, and he had a lovely nose. Not a punched flat nose like so many of the boxers. He laid his opponent out flat in just two rounds. Elizabeth began to feel excited, and when the crowd erupted clapping and stamping their feet, much to her amazement she found herself joining in. The blonde giant caught sight of her in the crowd, and gave her a wink. She in return gave him a stunning smile back.

"See I told you, you would enjoy it. What did you think of my brother Barry, wasn't he the best boxer up there?"

Elizabeth answered her friend absentmindedly. "Yes, yes of course he was," but her eyes were searching the crowds for the blonde giant. Just as the five of them, Barry had now joined them, were leaving the town hall, two hands clasped her firmly from behind on the shoulders. She nearly fell down the steps.

"No running away beautiful, come and have a drink with me."

She turned to look at him. He was even more handsome dressed. He had on a dark suit, and over the top of it he wore a white overcoat. He smiled a broad smile, showing his gleaming white teeth. The white coat was a bit flash thought Elizabeth, but then people like him wouldn't be seen dead in boring clothes. Not even in wartime.

"I am sorry, but I have to go home with my friend Jeannie, and her mother and father."

He looked down at Mr. Mrs. Maidstone, and the slightly jealous Barry, and the even more jealous Jeannie, "You don't think I would let any harm come to this beautiful young lady, do you? You go on home, I'll see that she gets home safely."

Reluctantly, Mr. and Mrs. Maidstone, Barry and Jeannie made their way across the busy road to the bus stop where a queue was forming already.

Taking Elizabeth gently by the elbow he guided her across the road, and they waved to the Maidstone's as they boarded a trolley bus. They entered the Red Deer public house where many of the boxing fans had gathered. Pushing his way through, and acknowledging the congratulations on his win, he looked about for a vacant table. Immediately two men stood up, and said, "It's an honour Casey."

"Casey" as Elizabeth had just discovered his name, put his strong arm about her tiny waist, and gently guided her to the table. If there was one thing

Elizabeth loved, it was to be treated like a princess, and Casey was giving it his all. He went to the bar where everyone shuffled along to let him through, and ordered a gin and tonic that she had asked for and a pint for himself. This blonde giant of a man had fallen hook, line and sinker the moment he had laid eyes on Elizabeth. It was a case of love at first sight.

Casey told Elizabeth that he had been brought up in Ireland, hence the name Casey, but he made more money from boxing in England. The blonde looks came from his Swedish ancestors, they had travelled to England, but for some reason had decided to travel on to Ireland where they settled. He said he loved Ireland, but could never live there again because of the incessant rain. He told her that it depressed him.

Elizabeth felt an eagerness inside her to hear all about Casey's life, she didn't have to talk much, because Casey was so full of himself that he never stopped talking. She loved hearing about his travels and how many men he had knocked out. He leaned across the table as he talked, and looked deep into her big brown eyes, she gazed back in fascination into his blue ones. Blue eyes were beautiful to Elizabeth, because the whole of her family had brown.

He picked her hand up from the table, and held it gently, he would love to have kissed that sweet pink palm there and then, but thought better of it, as they were surrounded by people. They finished their drinks, and stubbed

their cigarettes out, and Casey walked Elizabeth home. It was a long walk to Maria Street, but Casey didn't want the night to end.

Over the next six weeks Elizabeth was completely swept off her feet, by her handsome boxer. They went out whenever he was in London, mostly to pubs and clubs, but on fine weekends she found walking hand in hand with Casey through Epping Forest a real joy. The forest was dressed in summer green and the streams were full and bubbly as they ran down the hills at High Beach. Elizabeth loved to curl up in his arms like a kitten, while Casey told her she was beautiful, and how much he cared for her. Casey was always telling her he loved her, she just smiled, but made no reply. After Johnny Marino she was afraid of getting hurt, she would not commit herself to telling him that she loved him.

She confided in Nellie, "I think I might be falling in love, but don't go saying anything to Mum and Dad though, because I'm not sure. I do like him a lot, and we have great times together, but I'm not sure what love feels like anymore."

Nellie promised not to mention it to their mother and father, because Elizabeth was still a slut to her father for wearing makeup, and a brassiere.

Casey made Elizabeth's mind up for her, he went down on one knee, asked her to marry him, and produced an engagement ring.

Elizabeth's heart fluttered, was this just the excitement of the moment, or

was she really in love with Casey "Crusher" Collins. She looked down at the exquisite diamond solitaire ring. She quietly said "Yes" to Casey, and he slipped the ring on her finger. He stood up, and swept her up in his gigantic arms almost knocking the breath out of her. "You have made me the happiest man alive Elizabeth, I love you, and I'll always love and cherish you. You'll want for nothing, I'll see to that."

CHAPTER 7

During the summer evenings when Elizabeth couldn't see Casey, because he was away in training or was fighting in some remote part of England, she found herself becoming bored. She went to the pictures still with Nellie or Jeannie, her friend from the doll factory, but it was the shows, and dancing she missed. Sitting in the pictures one night, she was idly admiring the sumptuous Egyptian decorations in gold and turquoise, when the young man sitting next to her put his hand upon her knee, she did not wait for his next move, she just stubbed her cigarette out on the back of his hand. He let out a yell. This night her friend big Nora had accompanied her to the cinema, she asked Elizabeth what had happened, when told, she grabbed the young man out of his seat, threw him into the aisle, where she promptly laid into him like a man. Shouting and swearing and holding his burnt hand to his chest he ran from the cinema. Big Nora, wasn't called big Nora for nothing.

I know what I need, I need to change my job. Wonder what I could do, I don't fancy working in Woolworth's or the Co-op, maybe I could get a job in the West End, I'll have to travel, all these thoughts went through Elizabeth's head one night as she was walking home from work with Nellie. Nellie was very content, she lived for the moment her Fred's love letters arrived.

It was while she idly read through the paper that she spotted a recruitment form for the AIS. She filled it in quickly, she didn't want to discuss it with her mother and father, she already knew what they would say.

When the official forms came, she got her parents to sign them. Her father jeered from his armchair, "What are you going to do there, become an officers groundsheet? And what about this Casey fellow you're supposed to be engaged to?"

Elizabeth ignored him.

Her mother shook her head as she was signing, "I do hope you know what you're doing Elizabeth, you never have liked authority. You won't be able to do just as you please in the army, you will be disciplined."

"Don't spoil things Mum, I'm feeling really excited. Just imagine I could be sent abroad, like Fred. Imagine sitting in the sun like Fred eating grapes, and sunbathing."

"That girl's got a screw loose, does she think our boys out there are having a picnic?" Mr. Martin spoke as though Elizabeth wasn't in the room.

On the day that Elizabeth was waved off at the station to go to Dorchester in Dorset, a place she had never heard of, all the kids, Alan, Violet and Rosie cried. Joanie was still evacuated so she wasn't there, Lenny and Nellie were at work, and poor Doris was back in hospital again.

The bombing had become frightening of late, the houses at the back of Maria street were bombed. It seemed to young Rosie that a bolt of lightning had hit

them. Clouds of dust accompanied the huge bang, and everything went quiet for a few minutes, and then the cries of the people trapped underneath the debris were heard. The people in Maria Street acted immediately, everything was dropped, and without stopping for coats or bags, which held their precious papers, or photographs, as one body they descended on the debris tearing at it with their hands.

Many a life was saved that day, because of the prompt action of the people from Maria Street. At number 42, a little girl and boy had been found sheltered beneath the bodies of their parents. After dusting the pair down, and rubbing some Germolene onto their grazes, they were promptly taken in by Mrs. Fellowes who had a family of ten already. She said, "What difference will two more make."

There were many dead, and these were left for the right authorities to deal with, but those that were still alive were taken into homes, given cups of tea, until they could contact relatives, or friends.

Nellie and big Nora were there helping wherever they were needed. At last they went home and left the rest to the police, A.R.P. and the medical crews. Their nails were broken, and knees scraped, but both felt hugely satisfied that they had done their bit. Especially Nellie she often felt less important than the rest of the family, yet it was she that helped her mother in the house, and looked after the children at every opportunity.

The bombing continued until the Martin's, along with their neighbours hardly had a window left in the house. The whole of Hoxton seemed to be alight one evening, the flames could be seen for miles. The little ones didn't understand the danger, young Alan would run as fast as his legs could carry him to keep up with the fire engines, to wherever a blaze had taken hold. They would stand gazing up at the burning buildings, watching with delight as the firemen tried to extinguish the flames.

Mrs. Martin would scold him, "How many times have I told you to stay away from those fires, one of these days you're going to see something really horrible, or get burnt yourself. Now be a good boy and promise me that you won't go near those fires again."

"Yes Mum, I promise," young Alan lied, his face all dimples.

Elizabeth came home for a weekend leave, she hated the discipline just as her mother had told her she would. One night when it was freezing cold in their hut, one of the girls a Shirley Barton called to her, "Come and get in my bed Elizabeth, we'll snuggle up and get warm together?"

Eagerly Elizabeth leapt from her bed to Shirley's, and they snuggled up like two kittens. The next morning the lance corporal came in, and went berserk, "Get out of that bed immediately Martin, if I ever see you two in bed together again you'll be on a charge. That goes for the rest of you too," Her face was contorted with rage.

It was in the bar that night at the local pub, that sweet-faced Angela explained to Elizabeth that some girls liked girls, just like a man liked girls. Elizabeth was shocked and felt disgusted with herself for having been in bed with Shirley. She purposely avoided all contact with Shirley for the rest of her stay in Dorchester.

When she came home on leave she felt very proud in her uniform, she had always been a show off, and now she walked with her head high, she knew that if anything her uniform made her look even more attractive.

Trouble was never far away from Elizabeth, she was put on cookhouse duties for cutting the bottom of her great coat off. She had decided it was much too long, but in her eagerness, she went too far with the scissors, and made it too short to wear with her skirt. It wasn't long before it came to the notice of her lance corporal, he demanded to know where her great coat was when she was shivering on parade.

She wrote a letter home to her mother, telling her how frightened she was of walking through the forest early in the morning to get to the cookhouse.

She continued, the deer make the most awful noises, and although I run most of the way in the dark, it still takes me nearly an hour.

Mrs. Martin was furious that her daughter was being treated so. It was bad enough she said to Bill, that the poor girl hadn't been sent abroad, but not only was she peeling sacks of potatoes, but she was being terrorised by animals in the forest. Mrs. Martin sympathised with Elizabeth, she was a true townie and hated the countryside. When they sent her evacuation with the smallest children, she was back in three weeks saying that Bill had missed her so much that he wanted her to come home. She preferred the bombs to the countryside.

Mrs. Martin wrote a letter to Elizabeth's Lance Corporal. The first Elizabeth knew of the letter was when on waking up in the morning, she was standing beside her bed.

"Come on Martin, I'll show you how to get to the cookhouse in fifteen minutes flat, I've never heard such rubbish, one hour indeed. The animals Martin, are more afraid of you than you of them, so don't let's have anymore of this nonsense, writing letters home to mother, if you wanted to be babied then you shouldn't have joined the army." She ran Elizabeth all the way to the cookhouse, and it did take just fifteen minutes. Elizabeth thought, if it wasn't that she didn't know where to run to, she would go AWOL. She knew the first place they would look for her would be her home, so no point in going there. She had told Nellie that she thought she might have made a mistake joining up, she should have stayed at home where she was spoilt by Casey.

CHAPTER 8

It was after the fall of the houses in Whiston Road, that Elizabeth thought, I could be killed tomorrow, I'll have to think of a way of telling Casey that it's all over between us. She wanted her freedom more than anything else, she hadn't been able to resist all the handsome young men in uniform in Dorset, already she must have been out with about ten of them. She danced, drunk and partied, no matter how late she got off duty, she always managed to find the energy for yet another night on the tiles.

She took off her engagement ring, and went to see a show with a handsome older man. His name was Charles, and she had bumped into him one night when she had to make a dash for a street shelter, because the air raid warning had gone. Elizabeth hated the air raid shelters, they stunk of urine, and because people had to sleep in their clothes at night huddled together, fleas and bugs were rife.

Charles was everything that Casey was not. He came from a well to do family, he was well spoken. His first words to her were, "Are you alright young lady", as she rushed into the shelter, and bumped her nose on his chest. He was handsome in a Clark Gable fashion, but old, Elizabeth mused. The uniform of course bowled her over, she wasn't sure what his rank in the army might be, but it didn't matter he looked fantastic. She wondered just how old he might be? At least forty she said to herself.

"Fine thank you, sorry if I nearly knocked you over."

From then on she saw Charles whenever she could, Charles started to educate her. He suggested what books she might read, and took her to the museums that were still open. She in turn took him to the beautiful Geffrye Museum in Kingsland Road, he was enchanted with the beauty of the alms houses that were now a museum. Elizabeth told him how as a little child, she would sit and draw the cardboard figures dressed in period clothes and the furniture that filled the rooms. She particularly loved the fifteenth century room, she told Charles that she so admired a woman like Queen Elizabeth, brave and fearless.

"You're like Queen Elizabeth, you're brave and fearless."

"Don't talk daft, Charles, how can I be anything like her, I'm named after Princess Elizabeth, not good Queen Bess."

"I will take you to meet my mother and sister. My father is dying in hospital, and then maybe you will understand what I mean." Charles gently tucked her arm through his, and gave it a little squeeze.

The winter had been very severe, icicles had hung from roof tops, and the poor little children still ran around in their rags, no warm boots on their feet, only tatty old shoes with cardboard packed inside them. Mr. Martin tried to

keep his children well shod, he would buy a piece of leather from the Kingsland Road market, and with the aid of his trusty old hobbling foot would repair their boots and shoes. He was still no better, weak and coughing, he would spend the best part of his day leaning over the smoky old coal fire.

When Elizabeth decided to bring Charles home to meet her mother and father it was with great trepidation. Charles was posh. She wondered what he would make of them all, especially her father. To her amazement Charles and her father got on like a house on fire.

He didn't seem to notice the squalor of the house, and he spoke to Mr. Martin as an equal. Both being army men they had much in common, they talked of wars, and the bravery of the men. Elizabeth's father was in his element. He told Charles of the terrible suffering of the working classes, and Charles agreed that the rich had far too much, and that they should take care of the poor. Mr. Martin felt as though he had found a friend, his attitude to Elizabeth changed, he no longer swore at her, and picked on her for nothing, in fact he secretly hoped that Elizabeth would marry Charles. "That bloody Casey will never be any good to her, he's always away fighting. What woman's going to stand for that?" he would say.

"Have you got a pass for this weekend," asked Charles.

"Yes, I believe so," Elizabeth hated being devious, but she knew that if Casey was home, then she had to be there for him. He had told her in no

uncertain terms, that he hated her being in the forces, she was his girl and he wasn't sharing her with anyone." She did enjoy his company, he made her feel so alive and wanted. He always swept her off her feet, and kissed her as soon as they met. They travelled everywhere in cars, she never asked who's car is this one, or where did you get the petrol for it. She just accepted it, she loved the feeling of being pampered.

When on leave they spent a lot of the time drinking in pubs where his friends were, most of the talk was about boxing, but she didn't mind because he never neglected her. He brought her presents of scarves, chocolates, nylons, or sometimes just a little box of hankies with an E embroidered on them. He was always romantic, telling her how much he adored her, and how beautiful she was, and as soon as they could they would be married.

Lying in bed at night thinking of Casey, Elizabeth wasn't sure what she actually felt for him. Did she want to marry him because she was mercenary. He promised her a big house in Muswell Hill, and told her that they would fill the house with children. "Nothing like the laughter of little children to make you happy", he would say. Elizabeth thought otherwise, her mother had a house-full of children, and they certainly hadn't made her happy.

Charles asked again, "Are you really free Elizabeth? You seemed to be somewhere else just then."

"I'm so sorry Charles, yes, yes everything is OK for the weekend. Why, where are we going somewhere exciting?"

"Why does everything have to be exciting, take life a little calmer."

"I get very bored Charles, if I don't have anything to do. Just staying in one night a week to wash my hair, bores me to tears."

Charles smiled, and shook his head, as if to say, 'What am I going to do with you.'

'Well', he said slowly, as if it was hard to get the words out, "How about meeting my mother and sister this Sunday for afternoon tea."

Elizabeth looked up at Charles and gave him one of her winning smiles, Charles heart beat faster, he really did love this slip of a girl.

"What are they like Charles, we've known each other for three months now, and you've hardly told me a thing about them. I sometimes get the feeling that you don't like them very much. Do you?"

"Stop asking questions, on Sunday you will see for yourself."

Arriving home late on Friday night, she just flopped into bed, she was deadbeat after the journey from Dorchester. Not wanting to miss any of her weekend she got up early, even making her mother and father a cup of tea. The army was making changes in Elizabeth, she would do things for other people that she had never done previously. She was becoming less selfish. It was a beautiful Spring morning, Elizabeth was glad the winter was over, the rain and cold made her feel miserable. She opened the third floor kitchen window and leaned out over the long narrow garden. She felt the warmth of the sun on her face, she glowed. She had received a letter from Casey yesterday telling her that he was sorry he couldn't make it, but that he would definitely see her the following weekend if she could get another pass. She knew that she wouldn't get two on the trot, but didn't feel disappointed, there was too much going on in her life now. The letter ended with love and kisses and how much he was missing her. It didn't seem like a love letter, on the films girls went into ecstasy when they received a letter from their beloved. She just felt relief that he wasn't coming. She didn't want Charles and Casey to bump into each other. I can't put it off much longer, I'll have to finish with Casey, I can't keep on two timing him like this, he's always been so good to me, she mused.

She looked down the long garden, only one thing grew in it. A beautiful soft pink rambling rose. Her father had brought it home one night when he was helping to demolish a house, and the bricks and rubble were being tossed on top of the rose bush. "I'll take that home and plant it in my garden, it's a bit bare."

The Martin's garden was bare because the children uprooted anything that grew. Endless plants had been stuck in jam jars to adorn yet another grave of some poor pup or kitten that had died. or else they adorned the old wooden plank that the children used to have "feasts" on. "Feasts" were great fun. All the children would gather, and share out their bread and jam, and if they were lucky enough to have a few coppers, they would buy specky apples from Pinto's, along with a couple of fizzy sweets dropped into a bottle of water. This was a feast indeed.

Still leaning with her elbows on the windowsill, she thought back to the wonderful days out she had spent with Charles. She laughed to herself remembering the first day he had called for her on a motorbike. She had worn a flat pair of canvas shoes which she had borrowed from her sister Nell, as she thought they would be more suitable for riding pillion. On arriving at the Devil's Punch Bowl she found that they had been burnt and had a hole on the side of them where they had been pressed against the exhaust.

Elizabeth had conjured up weird and wonderful thoughts about the Devil's Punch Bowl. "Is this all it is a hole in the ground?" Charles didn't have the heart to chide her, and just said. "Come on Elizabeth, I know a lovely little country pub near here, let's go and have a lunch and a drink."

It was the same when he whisked her off to Dover, she said nothing as she looked at the white cliffs. So it was Charles who broke the silence, by

saying, "Now don't tell me you expected to see blue birds flying over these white cliffs?" As he spoke the words and looked into her face, he saw her disappointment. "Oh Elizabeth you are such a wonderful child, you never fail to amaze me." He threw his head back and laughed. "Come on you dreamer let's go and get some lunch, or it will be time to go home."

On the drive home her thoughts were on the weekend ahead.

Elizabeth looked at the sun once more, marvelled at the beautiful blue of the sky, and got ready. Wasn't she going to meet Charles's mother and sister on Sunday. I will have to dress with great care, I don't want to let Charles down."

Saturday she spent at the market, she wanted a special mascara to make her lashes look even blacker, and thicker, and a new blood red lipstick. With a bit of luck I might even find a nail varnish to match. She was beginning to feel very excited about this visit. She loved meeting new people, and very seldom felt nervous.

Sunday arrived, and with it another warm spring day. Elizabeth stayed in bed, while her mother ran around bringing her up cups of tea and bacon sandwiches. She complained to her mother, "Why don't you burn my bacon to a crisp, that's how I like it."

Mrs. Martin stood in the doorway. She had put the tea and bacon sandwich on the rickety old chair standing at the side of the bed and she was now rubbing her hands on her pinny. "Elizabeth, I do most things you ask me to, but if you think that I'm going to burn good wholesome bacon just to please you, you've got another think coming," she said and, with that, she walked out and slammed the door. Elizabeth and her mother got on well, they loved each other, and felt comfortable speaking their minds. Elizabeth had saved her mother from many a good hiding from her father. When she was sixteen and had been going to work for two years, she was no longer afraid of him, she told him, "Touch her again, and I'll crash you over the head with this teapot." She had reached out and picked the huge brown earthenware pot up from the table, it was full of scalding tea. Her mother was cowering against the wall.

Still Mrs. Martin defended her husband, "Leave him alone Elizabeth, you know he's not well."

Elizabeth turned and poured herself a cup of tea, glaring at her father. That was nearly two years ago.

Her father was up now, "Good morning Dad?"

"Morning" grunted, Bill Martin. He sat in his armchair eating his bacon sandwich.

Elizabeth went into the kitchen and poured some cold water into the wash bowl, and then topped it up with hot. She had treated herself to a bar of toilet soap, she didn't want to go to meet Charles's family smelling of Fairy. Not only that but it was so awful it made all the skin on your face go tight, and she certainly wanted to make a good impression, by looking her very best. She had been to the public baths on the Saturday, so she had a quick wash all over.

About two o'clock she started to get ready, Charles was calling for her at three, she had asked him not to come on the motorbike, although she loved the thrill of the wind in her hair when they were racing along, but today she did not want to arrive dishevelled.

After painting her legs, she slipped into her neat homemade bras and French knickers, and slipped a black and white dress on, she knew the dress had class, because Charles had helped her choose it, and had generously paid for it. Searching amongst her handbags, she found what she was looking for, a small black patent one with slim handles, her high heeled black shoes completed her ensemble. She stood on a chair to look in the mirror in the living room, and knew that she had never looked better. Sometimes prettier, but never classier, and that she was aiming for.

They didn't hang about, Charles popped in, said his hellos, and they were off. Pulling up outside the house with the high white pillars overlooking Regent's Park, Elizabeth suddenly felt her confidence wane. When Charles opened

the car door for her, though, and took her hand, and smiled at her as if to say "I'm proud to be with you Elizabeth," her confidence quickly returned.

They walked up the stairs which had portraits covering the walls, "No, Elizabeth they are not my ancestors, we have a flat in this house, most of the properties are divided up now. We live on the first floor. In fact we have only moved here recently, I don't think all the unpacking has been done yet."

He rang the bell, "I don't bother to have a key, I don't come here often enough to warrant one."

Elizabeth found it strange that he seemed to know what she was thinking all the time.

The huge white door opened, and there stood a slim pretty girl of about twenty in a pink tutu. She theatrically curtsied to Elizabeth, and said in a very clear-cut voice, "*Do please come in, you are most welcome.*"

She gave Charles a quick hug, saying with a smile, "How are you brother dearest." Brother dearest hugged her back, and pecked her cheek.

The room itself was beautiful, decorated in subtle tones of turquoise, and trimmed in gold and white, but the packing cases on the carpets spoilt it. In the

corner of the room stood a grand piano, and the ballerina standing on her points walked across to the piano, and started to play, the dust flew up. Elizabeth wanted to laugh, how could someone own something so magnificent and not dust it.

Charles spoke, "I see that you and mother haven't found a cleaner yet then?"

"No Charles, it's been terrible, when the workmen were here, I made them tea in mother's best china, and one of the cups got broken. She was more than a little annoyed with me. "Camilla, she said, you do not give tea to tradesmen in my Wedgewood china."

Elizabeth wanted to laugh, she could imagine, burly workmen trying to hold the tiny cups and saucers in their fat sausage like fingers.

"I think that I had better go and make the tea, or we won't get it until tomorrow", Charles smiled at his young sister.

Camilla was a sweet girl, she told Elizabeth of her hopes of becoming a ballerina, but the war had put her career on hold, "I suppose I'll end up just like Mummy, marrying a rich man to take care of me." She sighed a little wistfully, "Are you going to marry my brother Charles, you're the only girl he's ever brought home to meet mother."

Before Elizabeth could answer, the door opened, and in walked a woman who made Elizabeth feel like a dwarf. She was at least six feet tall, dressed in a black taffeta dress that had a big bow on the hip, and over her shoulder she had a white fox fur, complete with head and paws. The fox fur reminded her of her Auntie Flo, and Auntie Marie, they never went anywhere without their furs. On her head she flaunted a little flat black saucer with a matching tall feather, that bobbed about as she walked.

She came straight over to where Elizabeth was sitting on the large pale blue and gold settee, shook her firmly by the hand, and sat opposite her, lighting up a long cigarette which was in an even longer holder. She crossed her long slim legs, and said, "So you are Elizabeth."

Now Elizabeth felt intimidated. Her courage left her, and she just murmured, "Yes."

The cross examination went on, "Where do you live, who are your people, have you been to any of the balls?"

Elizabeth gave her as little information as possible. She knew that this woman was out to humiliate her. Charles arrived with the tea on a silver tray, he placed it carefully on the coffee table, and turned to give his mother a peck on the cheek.

"How are you mother," he asked politely.

"Very well thank you dear, but all this frightful unpacking is getting me down, we can't get any staff, they are all working in factories, or on the land."

"I think they are also doing valuable work in the hospitals, and forces mother." Charles poured the tea, and passed a cup to his mother first.

"I do hope you haven't come here to be disagreeable Charles, you are so much like your father," she blew a long stream of smoke over Elizabeth. Elizabeth knew that she had done it deliberately, but it didn't bother her, because she also smoked.

"Speaking of father, how is he? Is he getting good care in the nursing home? I will get down to see him again soon."

"Oh he never stops complaining, now he says he wants new pyjamas. I ask you, new pyjamas, what does he need them for, he knows he's only got months to live. Total waste of money that Camilla and I will need when he has gone."

Charles was angry. "How can you say things like that, if father wants new pyjamas get them for him, after all it is his money. You never deny yourself anything, that's a new fox fur you have on."

"Let's not quarrel in front of Elizabeth and Camilla, it's not polite Charles."

"I'm sorry mother I shouldn't have come, we always end up arguing. If you've finished your tea Elizabeth let's go, goodbye mother, and it was lovely seeing you Camilla, you grow prettier every time I see you."

Charles stood up, kissed his mother and sister on the cheek, took hold of Elizabeth's hand and led her towards the door. He never looked back as he closed it.

A couple of weeks later Auntie Flo and Uncle Fred decided to throw a party. Auntie Flo had decided that everyone needed cheering up, people were feeling down, climbing over the debris of bombed out houses every day to get to work. Flo, Fred, Flo's sister Marie, and her husband Dick, visited Bill and Dolly Martin nearly every Saturday afternoon after they had been shopping along the Kingsland High Street. They still liked to come back to their roots, even though they now lived in Dagenham in a nice little house.

Flo and Marie would brighten up grimy Maria Street with their tight brightly coloured crepe dresses, highest of high heeled shoes with platforms, and if it was chilly a fur cape, or stole, sometimes even the whole fox, mask, paws and tail. The Martin girls loved their heavy makeup, cupid bow lips, and painted nails. When they wore their hair up in tiny curls, they thought they were every bit as glamorous as any film star.

When Auntie Flo gave a party, all the children were allowed to fish the gold fish out of her pond as long as they returned them later. It kept the little ones busy for hours. Not that the Martin children would misbehave when taken out to visit. They would become the best-behaved children in the world, because they knew that any misdemeanour, would mean a severe walloping when they got home.

Auntie Flo, and Uncle Fred both had jobs, so there was no shortage of money. Flo would provide all the food and drink, and everyone was welcome. The house would be bursting at the seams with family and friends.

At the end of the party, everyone would bed down for the night, ladies and children would all sleep on the floor in one room, and all the men in the other. Next morning Auntie Flo would be up singing away cooking everyone's breakfast, complete with high-heeled shoes and full make up.

Charles told Elizabeth, "This has been the best party I've ever been to, make sure I'm invited to her next one. Must admit I found the sleeping arrangements a bit bizarre, but what fun, we had your Uncle Fred telling saucy jokes for most of the night. We were all trying not to laugh too loud in case we woke any of the ladies or children up."

Elizabeth answered "I think my Aunties thought you were pretty wonderful.

I saw them flirting with you. Do you know Charles, I always thought my Auntie Flo couldn't have any children, but my mother told me she didn't want any, and that my Uncle Fred was like her baby. She must love him an awful lot, when he was sent away to war, all the family gathered to see him off on the train, and as the train pulled away Auntie Flo ran along the platform waving to him, and sobbing her heart out. She was only fourteen at the time."

"Yes they seem a well matched pair."

Elizabeth continued, "The three kids, Violet, Rosie and Alan, love it when they visit at weekends, because they always treat my mother first, because they know she's always short of money, and then they leave three shillings on the table to be shared between the three of them. As soon as their visit is over, and they start to go down the stairs to leave, the three kids grab the money off the table and run off with it, before my mother can get it. Not that's she's greedy, but it is hard to make ends meet."

Charles gave a little laugh saying, "And my mother thinks she's hard done by."

CHAPTER 9

Rushing back to camp Elizabeth suddenly realised how much she had missed her friend Angela. She had only been home for a weekend pass, but she had so much she wanted to share with her. Angela was sitting on her bunk bed reading a letter she had just received from her mother in Scotland.

"Hello Elizabeth, it's good to have you back. My mother writes to tell me, how happy she is that I've found a nice young man."

That's a bit of an understatement isn't it Angela? You wait until she meets your Paul. Canadian, an officer, and stinking rich." Elizabeth smiled slyly.

"Elizabeth, I keep on telling you money isn't everything. He can't help it if his father owns a large canning factory. He never talks about money, but I must admit he does talk about salmon a lot."

Elizabeth was really glad that her friend had met and fallen in love with Paul Gautier. He was a good man, and treated Angela with love and tenderness. It showed in everything he did for her, when he spoke to her, his love shone from his eyes.

Angela had the pale skin, and red gold hair of her mother, but her eyes were blue like her father's. She was a striking looking girl, and when dressed to go out, Elizabeth would say, "You're as beautiful as any film star." They hugged each other, "I bet you'll get married the day they declare this war over, and it can't be long now, we all know we are winning. That Hitler will be sorry he ever started the war. I'll never forget you Angela you've been my best friend, and no one is happier for you and Paul than me. Will you remember me when you are in far off Canada?"

Of course I will, how could I ever forget my crazy friend Elizabeth. You make me laugh when I feel down and until I met Paul, you were the only person in this camp I felt anything for. No I will never ever forget you. When I'm living in Canada, you will have to come over for a visit, we will have such wonderful times together, and we will be able to talk about old times, like the old fogies do now. The only other people I will miss, are my mother and father. That is going to be a terrible wrench, they have doted on me all my life. I honestly could not have asked for better parents." Angela sighed at the thought of leaving her parents.

'What a wonderful thing to say, I'm afraid at times I've really hated my Dad. Anyway what I wanted to tell you about was the peculiar conversation I had with Charles at the weekend. Take your shoes off, and sit up on your bed with your pillow behind your head, because this is going to take some time to tell," Elizabeth ordered.

"OK bossy boots", Angela said with a laugh. "Now I'm sitting comfortably you can begin."

"Charles", Elizabeth began, "took me to meet his mother and sister Camilla at the weekend as planned. His mother was the most hateful creature you could ever wish to meet. His sister on the other hand was sweet, but a bit dopey. Camilla was a mistake, and that's why there is such a big age gap between her and Charles." She related the whole story of Mrs. Bradley and Camilla. She looked across at Angela, who was propped up on her elbow. Angela's face showed her disgust.

"Charles told me that his mother couldn't wait for his father to die, so that she could get her hands on his money. At the moment she and Camilla are living on an allowance, but to me it looks like a pretty big allowance. I mean only the very, very rich can afford to live in a flat in the Regent's Park area. You should have seen the furniture, and the decorating. It was so beautiful, bit different to the dump that I live in."

"Elizabeth I've told you a dozen times material things don't make you happy, its caring for people that makes you feel good inside."

"I'm just coming to that part Angela. Charles said to me, can't you see Elizabeth what a lucky girl you are, to have a family that cares for you so deeply? Your mother, who you say has had hardly any education to speak of, has brought you

all up with the good values of life. No lying, swearing, stealing, and no playing around with the boys. Your sisters and brothers will play, fight, and play again. No festering grudges, everything right out in the open. I've seen your three youngest ones close ranks if an outsider dares to rebuke them. In fact I watched Rosie give a much bigger boy than her, a terrible good hiding when he hit young Alan. Can you imagine how much I envy you your colourful childhood."

Shaking her head from side to side, she practically snorted, telling Angela, "I don't think he would have found it so colourful if he had been the one to have to go to school dressed in rags, and with gaping holes in his shoes when it snowed. He thought a hard life was being sent off to boarding school. He said he never missed his mother, but he adored his father, and cried for weeks, because the pain of being parted from him at the age of seven hurt so much."

"Stop pretending you don't understand what he was getting at. You know quite well that he was telling you how much he had missed out on love, and you have an abundance of that in your family. You even love your father, but you prefer not to acknowledge the fact." Angela ducked, but not quick enough, the pillow caught her full in the face. She retaliated by leaping off the bed, and whacking Elizabeth over the head with hers. They wrestled each other, but didn't keep it up for long, because they were out of breath from laughing.

"Get back on your bed. I haven't finished yet, the last thing we discussed was my father." Angela did as she was told.

"Your father is really a good man," said Charles. I interrupted him straight away.

"Good man my fool I don't call a man who beats his wife and children a good man".

I yelled "Charles, you don't know what you are talking about." My father is nothing but a bully. He wouldn't hit a man like he has his wife and children. And why, because at five foot nothing they would wipe the floor up with him, but there was no stopping Charles, he went on:

'Why don't you try to understand him Elizabeth? When your father could no longer find work, he lost his dignity, and therefore he took it out on all of you. He was still going to maintain his status as the head of the family, and he has done remarkably well, considering his circumstances. He can be proud of all his children, and you all show him a healthy respect."

Angela didn't interrupt. She just wriggled further up the bed, leaning on her side so that she could see Elizabeth's face.

"You call that a healthy respect, I call it fear, I almost yelled at Charles. Charles then started to calm me down. When you are older Elizabeth you will realise that what your father does, is for the good of the family. Not one of your brothers goes stealing, and none of the girls has ended up on the street. You have told me that there are many that have.

Do you know Angela, I think he may be right, but I can never forget the times my father beat me with his belt, until my back was almost raw."

Elizabeth's face was sad, and she fiddled with her hair, a sure sign that she was feeling uncomfortable with her emotions.

"You must forgive and forget, always remember Elizabeth, tomorrow is another day. You can either make it a great day, or a miserable one, it's up to you. Don't live in the past, that's gone forever."

"I know you are right Angela, but the knowledge that my father doesn't love or even like me, leaves me with a pain in my heart."

Angela jumped off the bed. "Come on old lazy bones, let's take a walk through the town, we're bound to meet up with some of the other girls, and later we could all go for a drink". She knew Elizabeth was feeling depressed talking about her father, and wanted to snap her out of it.

They straightened their khaki uniforms. Both had their hair in a roll around their heads, this was achieved by tying a stocking around the head, and then rolling the hair over it. They popped their hats on at a jaunty angle, and then thought better of it, they didn't want to get put on a charge, and be confined to barracks, just for not wearing their hats straight. As they stood at the bus stop waiting for the bus to take them into Dorchester, Angela said, "I've never been one to pry Elizabeth, but

why aren't yours sisters, Joan and Doris at home. I've heard you mention their names, but nothing more.

'Well', Elizabeth drawled, "my sister Joan was evacuated when she was seven years old with me, and my brother Lenny." We all hated being away from home, we missed being with the family, so as soon as I was fourteen, old enough to go to work, my mother sent for me, and then the same thing happened to my brother Lenny. Joan is seven years younger than me, so she is still there. She won't come home until either the war ends, or she reaches the age of fourteen, old enough to go to work. Can't say I envy our Joan. The couple who took us in, fed us, clothed us, and made sure we went to school, but love they couldn't give us. They had never had any children of their own, so I suppose they just did not realise that children need a kiss and cuddle. Not once did Auntie and Uncle ever give us a kiss "goodnight." We were told to call them Auntie and Uncle, but they weren't a bit like our Aunts and Uncles."

As they stood arm in arm at the bus stop it began to rain. "I think they've cancelled the midday bus Angela, let's go back and have our dinner in the canteen. I'll tell you all about my poor sister Doris, but you must promise never to tell anyone about her. Promise?"

"Of course I promise, but if it's something you would rather keep to yourself, then don't tell me Elizabeth. I won't be offended honestly."

They reapplied their lipstick as they walked across the camp to the canteen. They joked, "Must look our best at all times."

The canteen was pretty full, but they joined the queue for sausage and mash, and both chose the syrup pudding for a sweet, although Elizabeth always referred to it as "Afters". They sighed as they both pushed down the last of the syrup pudding. "Didn't think I was going to be able to finish that", Angela and Elizabeth said in unison. They both laughed.

"I'll get the teas. You sit there old lazy bones", and Angela jumped up and joined the couple of girls waiting to be served.

The girl behind the counter was working as slowly as she dared. "Two teas", she repeated after Angela.

"Thank you Mavis", Angela didn't get ruffled easily, if it had been Elizabeth who had gone for the teas, the whole canteen would have heard, "For God's sake, get a move on Mavis, or we'll be queuing for the rest of the day." Mavis and Elizabeth had confronted each other on several occasions about her slowness. Mavis always answered by saying "After you there will be another customer, and after that one there will be another. So why should I hurry."

On returning with the teas, Angela was surprised to find that Elizabeth wanted to continue talking about her family. She had been prepared not to mention Elizabeth's sister Doris again. No one was sitting at the tables nearest to them, so Elizabeth stated, "My sister Doris is in a mental hospital in Bexley."

She paused for a moment to let this sink in.

I'll want you to know how she came to be put in there, Angela, because I don't think for one minute that she is mad, or anything like that. When Doris was a little girl, she was very slow to cotton on to the general reading, writing, and arithmetic. You know they're labelled the three "R's". So they labelled her, M.D., mentally deficient. When she grew up, she developed Parkinson's disease, and couldn't go to work. Now there were two things Doris loved: one was a packet of cigarettes every day, and the other was to have her hair set at the weekend at the hairdressers. Not working meant that she didn't have any money. If my mother had any money she would treat Doris to a packet of ciggies, but she couldn't afford for her to have her hair set. I'm afraid that on the days my mother had to say "no" to her, she used to hit my mother."

Angela leaned across the table, and squeezed Elizabeth's hand. Her face looked troubled. "Oh I am so sorry Elizabeth, it must be awful for you and your family to have a sister who is suffering so, but surely they are wrong to put her in a mental hospital for that. My Goodness half the country would need locking up."

It became worse for my mother. Doris got more violent, and when we were all out at work, and she was alone in the house, she would punch and kick my mother. In the end the police were called in to calm her down. After one episode when two policemen were struggling to hold her, they called for an ambulance. It was the beginning of the end for poor Doris. They put her on medication, and took her to Bexley Hospital." Pulling a handkerchief from her jacket pocket, Elizabeth stifled a sob.

"Oh Elizabeth I don't know what to say." Angela squeezed her friend's hand tighter. "Does she not have quiet periods when she can come home?"

"She has been home on numerous occasions, but after a while she becomes frightened, and starts accusing my mother of sending for the ambulance to take her back to hospital. Then it all starts up again, in her fright and frustration she lashes out again. You can't wonder that she's terrified of the doctors and nurses, a doctor was telling his students how he was thinking of cutting a flap in Doris' skull, to make things better for her. She was standing behind a screen and heard every word. Fortunately my mother was against it, and wouldn't give her consent."

"Do you ever visit Elizabeth?" enquired Angela. She hoped she wasn't sounding nosy, but felt sick inside that Elizabeth's sister should be locked away.

"Of course we do. We all take it in turns to go with my mother. I must admit, it is quite a frightening place. The thing that amazes me is that the patients have to do so much work. Doris is bone thin, but she has to mop and scrub the floors. One day

when she hadn't done it well enough, a nurse told her off, and banged her head on the floor. Fortunately, Doris told my mother on the next visit, and the nurse was brought into the doctor's office, and made to apologise to Doris. No one hit her after that, but I sometimes wonder how the other patients are treated who have no friends or family."

Standing up suddenly, Elizabeth said, "Oh come on Angela, I must have thoroughly depressed you. Let's see if the three o'clock bus is coming, I'll race you to the bus stop. Their shoulder bags and gas mask cases flew out behind them as they ran.

CHAPTER 10

Sitting on the floor of the crowded Friday night train that was taking them to London, Angela and Elizabeth both lit up cigarettes. They puffed away quietly for a few minutes when Angela asked, "Have you thought anymore of breaking it to Casey that you don't want to marry him?"

Elizabeth flicked some ash from her khaki jacket onto the already dirty floor.

"Yes, I've definitely made up my mind. I wrote and asked him to meet me at my house, that way if he should turn nasty, not that I think he will, I'll have my family around me. I should have broken it off with him a long time ago, but I wasn't sure of my feelings. I'm not a coward you know, but let's be fair, he is a boxer, and one right hand from him would lay me out." Elizabeth pulled on her cigarette, and blew smoke rings. "Look at them, reminds me of his engagement ring. I'll have to dig that out when I get home, I hope my mother hasn't pawned it." Elizabeth giggled.

"You are being a bit heartless Elizabeth. Remember this fellow is in love with you."

"Yeah, yeah I know, but I've got too much living to do, I don't want to be tied down to just one man. It's all right for you; you've met the man of your dreams. Talking of Paul, is he meeting you at the station?"

"Yes, my tall, dark and handsome hero will be there to meet me." Angela's eyes were soft as she thought of Paul.

It was hot and steamy in the train, and several times they had to pull their legs in to their chests to let people pass who needed the toilets.

"Thank God we're here" puffed Elizabeth, as the train pulled into the station. They stood up, and stretched their legs, and pulled their skirts straight. "I've never seen the train so crowded, boy will I be glad to get in and have a wash. My father prays every day that they will pull our bug-holes down, and give us a nice clean flat with a bathroom. The thought of having your own bathroom, it would be the height of luxury for me."

The station was full of smoke and noise, but the people seemed happy enough, most of them were in uniform like the girls, and were eagerly rushing into the arms of loved ones who had managed to come and meet them. Paul was standing at the barrier by the ticket collector; Angela rushed towards him, and threw herself into his arms. They kissed, but he did not let her go. When she turned to look for Elizabeth, his arm circled her waist. It had been six weeks since they had seen each other, because Paul had been confined to his office on confidential work. He did indeed look like a tall dark and handsome hero of the love magazines.

"Hello, Paul, it's nice to see you again." Elizabeth gave him one of her stunning smiles." I hope you won't mind if I rush away, but the queues at the bus stop will be enormous, I'll probably have to fight my way on." She shook hands with Paul, and gave Angela a kiss, "Don't do anything that I wouldn't do," she said with a saucy wink. Her "Bye" trailed after her as she ran towards the bus stop.

Being strong and pushy, she managed to scramble aboard the first bus that came along. She jumped off the bus eager to be home, and then she stopped and looked at Maria Street, it looked grimmer, and dirtier than ever. The street was full of children, cats and dogs, and women standing in the street chattering.

Elizabeth often thought that the women liked to stand outside chatting, because it was preferable to being indoors with hoards of kids around your ankles, and a husband who did nothing but moan, those that were too old for the forces that is. She looked at the door that had once been painted green, it had more bare wood showing now than paint, she reached inside the hole that once had held a letterbox, and reached for the string and pulled. She pushed the door open, and ran eagerly up the wooden stairs.

She stopped in shock; Charles was sitting in a chair talking to her father. "What are you doing here Charles?"

Her mother and father said in unison, "You might have said "Hello" first." Her mother scowled at her.

Charles stood up, walked across to Elizabeth and gave her a hug. "You didn't mind me coming here today did you Elizabeth. She pulled away from him angrily, "Yes, I do mind, I've got other plans, so if you don't mind Charles please go. Go on, go now."

"Elizabeth, what's got into you. Don't be so rude. Sit down Charles, I'm just going to make another cup of tea." Mrs. Martin rubbed her hands on her apron, and left the room.

"Don't sit down Charles, because you're not staying for tea. I'll write to you, and make arrangements for next weekend." She didn't bother to enquire if he wanted to see her the next weekend, Elizabeth just took it for granted.

Mr. Martin turned his face towards Elizabeth, and snarled, "You ungrateful bitch."

"Please don't upset yourself on my account Mr. Martin, I understand Elizabeth, she's tired after her long journey. I'll see you next week then Elizabeth, that's if you can get another pass so quickly." He took both her hands in his, and gently squeezed them, turning sharply he left the room.

"You don't deserve a good man like him, he's a real gent. No you would rather have that bloody Casey, wouldn't you? He will never be any good to you.

He'll always be away fighting, leaving you to look after his brood of

Catholic kids." Mr. Martin thought it was all right for him to have nine children, but Catholics, that was another matter entirely.

Mrs. Martin came in with the tea. "Oh Elizabeth, how could you treat Charles like that. He's a lovely man. Do you know that while you are away he often pops in here to have a chat with your Dad and me?"

"Don't try talking to her; it's like talking to that brick wall. Talk about Doris not being right in the head, more likely she's the one who's not right in the head."

Elizabeth drank her tea, and told her mother a little about life in the camp. She didn't give her too many details after the letter to her lance corporal, about the journey to the cookhouse.

"I'm going to get ready now Mum,"

She ignored her father; "Casey will be around in about an hour."

"Oh, so that's what this is all about, is it? You didn't want Casey finding you here with Charles. Would have really upset the apple cart, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Martin sneered. "One of these days my girl, when Casey finds out how you have been two timing him, you will get the biggest hiding of your life. Serve you right too." Mr. Martin began to cough, "I'm not feeling too good, think I'll go and have a lie down."

Mr. Martin walked across the room, and Elizabeth's eyes followed him. She suddenly realised just how thin he was. His face looked almost like a skull with a little parchment stretched across it. Charles's words came back to her, "I think your father should see a specialist, he looks very ill to me."

"Mum, did Dad ever see a specialist about his chest?"

"Well, he didn't exactly see a specialist, but he did see another doctor, but he just said, keep on with the linctus. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing really, I just thought he'd lost a bit of weight." She didn't want to worry her mother unduly.

"Your father's always been on the lean side, he's alright. It's just such a nuisance that his cough keeps him awake at night."

Mrs. Martin cleared the table saying, "Elizabeth, do be careful, your father's right, if Casey finds out about Charles, he'll not only kill you, he'll kill Charles as well."

Her head was full of doubt now, maybe she should pack Charles in, she didn't want Casey to kill her, but poor Charles he was the innocent in this.

She dressed carefully to meet Casey, white linen dress, matching three tiered wedges, and a pretty ice blue handbag, and a pale blue snood to cover her hair.

When Casey drove up in a black Austin she slipped in beside him, and gave him a quick peck.

"Hey, come here my darling angel, let me kiss you properly."

Elizabeth thought she would suffocate, he kissed her lips, her neck, her ears, and squeezed her tightly, too tightly.

"Stop it Casey, you're hurting me." He let her go, and pulled away. It was then that she realised that he was drunk. "Turn the car around and take me home. I'm not going out with you in this state. What a way to come and meet me." She curled her lip to show her displeasure. Casey stopped the car.

Swinging her around to face him, he gripped her arms hard, "I've waited three weeks to see you my girl. Have you been playing fast and loose behind my back, because if you have I'll kill you, and your fancy man. I will never let you leave me, when I put that ring on your finger it was forever. Do you get me, do you understand what I'm saying."

Elizabeth felt afraid, she had seen Casey drunk before, but he had never ever said one unkind word to her, she realised he meant every word. Thank God he didn't know about all the young men she flirted with down in Dorchester. She realised then and there, she would have to give Charles up, and she didn't want to see him get hurt.

Casey refused to take her home, and ten minutes later he pulled up at a house in Dalton. A party was in full swing. She entered the noisy smoky room. The imitation Veronica Lakes, and Betty Grables came over to say hello to Casey, they ignored Elizabeth for which she was grateful. Casey never left her side and pawed her continuously as if to say, this woman is mine, hands off. Not that any man there would have chosen to fight Casey for her, not even in his drunken state.

Finally at three in the morning, Casey decided he'd had enough of partying, and said, "Come on, I've had enough we're going."

On the way home, Casey hit the kerb several times, and drove on the wrong side of the road for the best part of the journey. Elizabeth thought, "Oh so what, if

we have an accident, it might put him in hospital for a few weeks." She didn't think for a minute that she would be harmed. It was blackout time, but there were so many searchlights invading the sky looking for German planes, that Casey could actually see quite well.

Pulling into the kerb and bumping the wheels, Casey stopped, and immediately began kissing, and mauling Elizabeth. When his hand went on her knee, she smacked his face, and he immediately smacked her back.

The tears welled up in her eyes, "How could I have ever imagined I loved this moron, she thought.

Casey was sorry immediately; he cuddled her close, and stroked her hair. "You made me do that. You know how much I love you, but you keep me at arm's length always. Do you know I could have practically any girl I want in that boxing crowd, but all I want is you Elizabeth? Please say you love me."

Trying to forget the stinging pain in her cheek, she muttered "I love you Casey." All she could think of was getting indoors safely. She knew now that she had never really loved Casey; she had loved the things he could give her, and the house he had promised her.

Elizabeth gave him a kiss, and ran quickly indoors, as she shut the door, she leaned against it, and a tear slowly ran down her cheek.

She slipped beneath the covers of the bed, which already held, Nellie, Violet and Rosie, and thought, giving up Charles for his own safety would be a piece of cake, but how the devil was she ever going to be rid of?

Casey.