



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# Martha's Son

Charlotte Mayo



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A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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# MARTHA'S SON

**By Charlotte Mayo**

## **Preface**

Lady Jacqueline turned over in her warm bed and looked at her alarm clock: 7:30 AM. She needed to get up; she had a busy day ahead of her. She clambered out of bed and walked uneasily to the bathroom. The hormones she took sometimes made her feel a bit unsteady first thing in the morning. Since Ceil died, her mornings had been more leisurely. She no longer had to get up first and prepare his breakfast – for, although they employed maids, he always insisted that his wife prepare his breakfast. No, now she had time to herself. She ran a warm bath and lay in the luxury of the soft foam.

After a brief soak, she started to shave her legs. When she finished, she got out of the bath and wrapped her robe around her. Today was a big day. She pulled open her wardrobe doors and was immediately hit by an almost limitless choice of clothes – what to wear? What to wear? It was always such a problem. Of course, if Ceil had been alive, he would have had some opinion – he may have even insisted that she change her clothes if she put on something he did not feel was quiet right for the occasion. She had liked that; the discipline of someone else's decision.

After much agonising over what to wear, she chose a knee-length black leather skirt which had cost over £1000 and was handmade. Then she selected a black, polo neck wool jumper, courtesy of a top London boutique. She was going racing and she knew from experience that the wind bellowed around Cleave Hill at Cheltenham. She'd been frozen to the bone on more than one occasion.

She removed the chosen clothes from the wardrobe and laid them on the bed; then she started to get ready. Her red silky knickers and bra set cost over £200 and were flown in

from a contact she had in a Parisian fashion house. The girdle she always wore was hand-made and cut inches off her waist; the stockings were ten denier and silky to the touch. She pulled on a camisole top, then stepped into her skirt. She always felt a thrill when she pulled on a skirt; it reminded her of her childhood in war torn London when pulling on a skirt or dress had been exciting and exhilarating due to the element of fear that went with such dressing forages. There was always the risk of being caught and punished. Next, she pulled on the black jumper and sat on the bed, thinking about whether to wear shoes or boots.

"Definitely boots," she said to herself. "But I'll wear shoes later in the restaurant."

That was the thing with Jacqueline: she could never make up her mind!

She walked elegantly to her mirrored wardrobe and drew it back, exposing row after row of boots and shoes. She pulled forth a pair of patent leather boots with 4" heels. She sat on the bed and pulled them on, zipping them up. She then went back to the wardrobe and selected a pair of tiger-patterned kitten-heeled shoes, which she wrapped in a bag. She stood up and inspected herself. She was tall and slim and the girdle gave her an hourglass figure but the electrolysis she regularly had on her face had left it blotchy and red.

Lady Jacqueline sat down at the makeup table and went to work on her face, expertly concealing any blemishes with brushes and enhancing her features with the aid of dark and light makeup. Finally, she was ready. She fluffed up her auburn hair and stood up.

"Not bad for my age," she said to her reflection. "No one would believe I was 62... and even fewer would believe I used to be a male."

She smiled, revealing a fine line of even, sparkling white teeth.

Moments later, she heard a car drive up the gravel path; she went down to meet the driver. Since her husband died, she lived on her own. Apart from the housekeeper, the days of maids and flunkies were over, though her step-son, Andrew, who had inherited the manor house, did allow her use of his car and a chauffeur. Lady Jacqueline pinned a small hat to her head, pulled on a long black wool coat and picked up her handbag, scarf, gloves and the bag containing her evening shoes.

Soon she was seated in the back of the Rolls Royce as Perkins drove her steadily to Cheltenham. Once settled, she unfolded the Racing Post which Perkins had bought for her and started to scan the race cards and opinion pieces. For the next hour or so, she tried to work out winners of the six races. Of course, she intended to bet a fair amount on her own horse; the patent leather handbag that rested on the seat beside her contained over £5,000 in cash. £4,000 of it was to be bet on her horse which was running in the Queen Mother Chase later that afternoon. It was the main feature race of the day.

When the Rolls arrived at Cheltenham, Lady Jacqueline went to the owner's enclosure and soon found her place in the box with her racing friends. It wasn't long before Georgina and her husband arrived along with their three children, various spouses and their children. Lady Jacqueline was delighted; quite an entourage had turned out to see her horse run. As she sipped Champaign, she looked at the race card and marked out potential winners. She didn't normally drink and had given up smoking once she had married as Ceil did not approve of it. She missed his masterful voice at her shoulder saying, "That's enough, dear, that's enough."

## CHAPTER ONE

White beams of light stretched out across the sky. The large, wide beams criss-crossed in a constant search, penetrating the blackness. Jack knelt by the window and watched the light cross and part, cross and part. Then Jack heard the heavy boom, boom, boom of anti-aircraft fire. Jack shuddered. It would not be long now. It would not be long before the first bomb was dropped, then the second, then the third. Like rain drops, the bombs would start their descent. Slowly, at first the metallic lumps of Hell would fall onto London. Fall, fall, fall.

Jack felt wetness down below. His pajama bottom was damp. He shivered. In the distance, a thunderclap heralded the explosion of the first bombs. Soon the bangs grew louder and gathered frequency. Jack clambered to his feet.

"Mummy, mummy," he cried. He stood paralyzed with fear. Below him, he could hear the soft voice of a singer.

"There'll always be an England..."

He could hear applause and laughter.

"Mummy, Mummy," he repeated.

He looked back into the darkness of the room. A light shown under the door. The boom, boom, kerbang and snap of anti-aircraft fire was all around him. The thunder of the bombs falling. He ran. Sanctuary. Sanctuary. Into his mother's bedroom. Sanctuary.

The room was suddenly lit up by "triple A." He stood for a moment, taking in the thick smooth eiderdown quilt on the bed, the dressing table filled with pots and creams, untidy, cluttered and somewhat discordant with the rest of the room. Jack stood. Another thunder burst sent him crashing to the floor; the ceiling light swung and plaster fell from above. Jack's ears rung from the deafening explosion. Slowly, he got to his knees. He muttered a short pray.

"Please God, please God, look after me and Mummy."

His eyes were wet with tears. He began to crawl on all fours like a baby.

"Mummy, Mummy," he whined. He reached a big thick brown object – an old, walnut wardrobe door. He knelt up and turned the small golden key in the lock.

The door came open and instantly Jack was overcome with a cocktail of stale perfume and "woman's smells" – his mother's smells. They were protective smells, embracing smells, welcoming smells. He scrambled into the wardrobe, conscious he was standing on shoes and handbags. Once settled, he lay still amongst the dresses, the silks and taffeta. He felt their soft smoothness against his skin. He pulled the door of the wardrobe shut; as the bombs continued to explode around him, he felt safe. Safe amongst the dresses and boas and the blouses and the skirts. Safe amongst the soft female things. He fell asleep.

"Come on Jack, out of there. The air raid's over and Mummy's home."

Jack rubbed his tired eyes. He smiled. His mother stood before him wearing a crushed orange dress; long and flowing with a tight bodice with spaghetti straps. Her breast was white except for a gold necklace around her neck. Unsteadily, Jack got to his feet.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Well, just as long as you haven't ruined my dresses. Here, come to me." She pulled him to her and hugged him and kissed him on the head and led him back to his own bed. Jack snuggled up with his teddy bear as his mother knelt beside him.

"The bombs scared me, Mum," he said. "The bombs scared me."

His mother wiped a hand over his cheek.

"It'll soon be over. The war will soon be over." She kissed him gently on the forehead and left the room, softly closing the door behind her.

Jack had found his shelter from the metallic storm. Every night, when the air raid siren sounded, he would make his way out of bed and into his mother's wardrobe. He would sit there amongst the dresses and skirts and feel comforted by their closeness, enveloped in their safety. He really believed that the flimsy evening dresses and the soft fabrics of his mother's closet would protect him from Adolph Hitler's bombers. Secure in his wardrobe nest, Jack would sleep. Sometimes he was awoken by his mother, sometimes he would wake up – the sleeping position being somewhat uncomfortable when sustained over many hours – and he would then go back to his own bed. Sometimes, when asleep in the wardrobe, he was awakened by the sound of a male voice accompanying his mother's light tones, followed by strange guttural noises and his mother laughing, giggling, shouting and screaming. He would sit in silence and listen. Listen as his mother made love to a stranger.

Jack knew he was not like most children. For a start, he did not have a father. Secondly, he had not been moved away from London and into the countryside like most children – evacuated, they called it. Thirdly, his mother was young – very young – and blond and attractive. She had a voice like an angel and didn't look like a "mum" – something that was reinforced by her instance to strangers that Jack was her younger brother and she was looking after him because their parents had been killed in a car crash before the War. The strangers who were told such a tearful story would ruffle his hair and say, "Aren't you lucky to have a big sister to look after you?"

The last thing that was odd about Jack was that he didn't go to school. He didn't know it at the time, of course, but there was no official record of him existing. He was illegitimate; his mother had never registered his birth which had occurred some five years before the Nazis decided to Blitz London. Hence, she did not want him leaving the flat without her or going to a public air raid shelter. Jack was *persona non grata*.

Jack loved watching his mother get ready for work. It was not conventional work of course; nothing in Jack's life was conventional. She was a singer in a night club. A star! She rented a small flat above the dance hall where she worked; the flat had a shared bathroom

and toilet for use by other staff members, not the public. Every night, his mother would dress in a long flowing dress, place curlers in her hair and apply her makeup. Often, the bedroom door was left ajar so Jack got to see almost every aspect of the operation – the transformation from mother to glamorous singer.

His mother would wind a corset around her waist. She would pull on silky shimmering stockings and attach a suspender belt. She would then snap the stockings onto the belt. She would attach her bra and pull a white silky slip over the top. Lastly, she would step into a dress. Sometimes, Jack was called upon to help with the zip. At other times, he would stand and watch in wonder as his mother sat at her dressing table mirror and applied creams to her face and powders and lipstick. He watched her reflection in the mirror as his mum expertly applied brooches, earrings, rings and necklaces. Occasionally, she would see him in the mirror and wink.

At other times, she would let him sit on her lap so he got a closer view of her transformation. In that way he learned how the lip brush was used to enhance the red of her lips or the powder brush was used to create a canvas on which the rouge was applied which in turn gave color and warmth to his mother's face. Jack saw it all and Jack learned. Jack learned that in his mother's world, a long transformation took place before she emerged onto the stage. Though a shorter transformation took place when she wasn't working, his mother would never leave the flat without the application of potions and creams and scents. Never. This was her world and this was also his world. Sometimes, his young mother would apply a lip brush to his lips, rouge to his cheeks or a dab of powder to his chin. She would turn his face to the mirror and laugh; unlike the object of beauty she had become, such cosmetics only made Jack appear to be a clown. They looked unnatural, comical and Jack was always quick to wash them off. Still, Jack liked sitting on his mother's knee, her legs encased in tight silks and satins. He liked the feel of the brush strokes across his lips, the feel of the rouge of his cheeks – so, even if the resultant reflection wasn't to his liking, he enjoyed the process.

## CHAPTER TWO

One night, while sheltering from the bombs in his mother's wardrobe haven, Jack heard the all-clear sirens and left the sanctuary – but did not leave her room. It was still early and he heard his mother's sweet voice as she continued to entertain in the dance hall below. Jack usually went straight back to his own bed when he heard the all-clear siren or when he woke up and realized the "coast was clear" but on this occasion he remained in the room. He felt comfortable there. The clock ticked on the bedside cabinet and the air was full of the smells of his mother. He switched on the light. He had a sudden urge to look at the dresses that formed his protective shield.

Opening the door of the wardrobe again, he took them out – one by one – and inspected them. He felt them between his fingers; he let them fall against his legs, held them up to his thin body. He knew, of course, that they were too big for him to wear but just feeling them was satisfying enough. What else had he seen his mother wear? He pulled

forth a drawer, reached inside and felt the strange objects it contained: slips, pink and white, purple and peach, silky and smooth to the touch, suspender belts and stockings that he held close to him and caressed. He gathered them up and gazed at them. Examined his mother's world. With sudden decision, he unbuttoned his pajama jacket and took off his trousers. He pulled a slip over his head and stood before the mirror; the straps fell off his bony young shoulders and the slip was too big but he liked the sensual feel of it against his skin. He pirouetted in front of the mirror, gazed at his reflection, smelled his mother's scent.

It became a habit. A trip to the wardrobe would mean delving into his mother's chest of drawers first. He would search for a slip – the easiest thing for him to wear – take off his pajamas and pull the opulent silk or satin over his head. Then Jack would snuggle amidst the soft fabrics of his mother's dresses in the wardrobe. Even without the excuse of the air raids, Jack found he liked sleeping in the wardrobe, liked being embraced by his mother's clothes; he adored luxuriating in her slips. Whenever his mother was working - which was most nights - Jack found himself in her bedroom, wearing her slips and sleeping amongst her clothes. His mother owned lovely silky and lacy knickers too. Although they were too big for him, he found the elasticized waists would grip his thin body, so sometimes he wore those as well.

On occasions, he left the rooms to use the shared toilet and bathroom which was along the hall. Jack didn't like leaving the room; he was scared the door would slam shut and he would be locked out. But soon he found himself going to the toilet, still wearing a slip. It was an adventure, an act of daring. Then one night he got caught.

"Hey, lad, what have you got on there?"

Jack had left the toilet at the same time as Peter, the manager of the club, had waddled upstairs to use the communal toilet. Jack stood, transfixed.

"Does your mother know you dress in her clothes?" Peter asked in his loud, husky voice.

Jack shook his head a second time. Peter grabbed his arm.

"Well, what do you think she'll do when I tell her I've caught you on the landing in one of her garments?"

Jack shook his head. He felt scared.

"I think she'll give you a spanking, my boy, that's what I think."

Jack nodded in agreement. Peter bent down and put his fat, pudgy face close to Jack's. Jack could smell alcohol and nicotine on his breath; his stale aftershave polluted the air. They weren't nice odors like his mother's smells.

"Now, if I ever catch you out here again, indecently dressed, I'll spank you myself. Is that clear?"

Jack nodded. He shook with fear. He felt his arms prickle with goose pimples. He hated Peter.



“And it won’t be a spanking like your mother gives you. Not a soft spanking with her delicate little hand.” Peter raised one of his fat hands. “Look at that, Son. No, when I do it, you won’t be able to sit down for a week, I’ll tan your hide hard. Is that clear?”

Jack nodded again.

Peter drew himself up to his full imposing height. “Now, go back to bed. I’ll tell Martha I caught you wearing her slip – so be prepared for a sound punishment, my boy – but thank your lucky stars it ain’t me that’s beating you on this occasion.”

Jack went to bed but could not sleep. He was worried. He now knew what he did was wrong. He had suspected as much. It was theft and it wasn’t right. He wanted to apologize. He wanted to tell his mother how sorry he was for wearing her clothes and that he would never do it again. He would never touch her clothes again. It was wrong! Wrong! Wrong! He scrunched his eyes shut so tight the tears had to force their way through. They leaked out onto his face, slowly at first, but then a steady stream rolled down Jack’s face. He had never felt so sad, never felt so alone.

After breakfast the following day, Martha took him into the living area and sat him on her lap.

“Jack, I know Peter caught you wearing my slip last night, didn’t he?” she began.

Jack said he had, there were tears in his eyes again. He knew any minute he would be turned over her knee, his trousers would be pulled down and he’d be spanked.

“I know you sleep in my wardrobe and go through my drawers when I’m away.” His mother paused. “I don’t like leaving you, Jack. I know you’re scared but you shouldn’t go through Mummy’s wardrobe, should you?”

“No, Mum,” Jack said softly.

“I love you, Jack and I want the best for you. I know you’ve got no sisters or brothers to play with and I know you’ve not got many toys and I know children play dressing-up games. I really don’t mind, Jack, honest I don’t, but you need to ask me first. That’s all I ask. Maybe, I’ll buy you some dressing-up clothes. You could have your own clothes. How about that?”

Jack said he would like that and he wouldn’t go into his mother’s room again.

“Promise me?”

Jack promised. He couldn’t understand it – the spanking must be coming soon but his Mum seemed sad, upset; disappointed in herself more than anything. “You’re not like most boys, Jack. You’ve not got a father. All you’ve got is me and I’m not a very good mother to you. Not very good at all.”

“You are!” Jack insisted.

His mother laughed through her tears, she gave him a squeeze. “So, Jack, is that a deal? You can play dressing-up games and go through my wardrobe and wear my dresses but only when I’m about and give you permission?”

Jack nodded.

“And if you stick to your promise, I’ll buy you some clothes of your own. I really don’t mind you dressing-up. But don’t go out on the landing. Peter is really not that tolerant of people who, well, who do that sort of thing. If he had his way, you would be caned or spanked. He thinks I’m much too soft with you, so please don’t go outside again.”

So Jack didn’t. He had learned his lesson. For the remainder of the war, he dressed in his mother’s clothes in the privacy of her bedroom and only when she had given her permission. Sometimes she got clothes out for him and sometimes she chided him for making a mess or creasing a new dress. Mostly, though, she didn’t appear to mind. Jack found he enjoyed his past-time; other boys played soldiers or football but for Jack, the perfect game was dressing up, holding up a hairbrush as if it was a microphone and pretending he was a singer, like his mother. His mother didn’t buy him any dresses but when he said he wanted a doll for his birthday, his mother bought it for him. He dressed it and wondered what outfits “Little Susan” would look best in. He loved playing with his doll.

As he grew older, he stopped playing with his doll and his mother stopped sitting him on her knee and applying makeup to his face. Eventually, Jack broke his promise to his mother. After the war, while she was at work, he started to go to his mother’s room and try on her dresses. He was old enough now to understand gender differences and that her clothes were not his clothes but he couldn’t resist. For her part, his mother said nothing about his nocturnal forages into her bedroom.

Jack began to grow into her dresses which meant he could wear her evening dresses, skirts and blouses. He had been four when the war had started in 1939, five at the time of the Blitz. He was eleven when the war ended and that was when he broke his vow to his mother. She was still a singer and they still lived in a set of shabby rooms above the night-club. Jack’s life had not changed.

## CHAPTER THREE

“I’m going to marry Peter,” his mother casually announced one cold February day in 1947. “He’s selling the club and we’re going to get married and be together.”

Jack was close to tears. “But I don’t like him!”

“You’re not marrying him, are you? He’ll be a good father to you... once you get to know him.”

Jack was not convinced. He had seen the way Peter bullied the staff and shouted when things went wrong. But his mum was going to marry him and there was nothing he could do about it.

The wedding was a small registry office affair. Some of the backing singers attended. He was a page boy and wore a tartan skirt, or “kilt” as his mother insisted on calling it. There weren’t many guests that day. Not many at all.

One of the chorus girls, who was a bridesmaid on the day of the wedding, looked after Jack while his mother and Peter went to the coast for their honeymoon. By that time, Peter had sold the dance hall and bought a house in the country. On their return, Martha and Peter collected Jack in a large Triumph Mayflower car and took him to his new home. Jack

loved it - he had never been in a car before. It transported them to the countryside and a lovely, large house.

As the car rolled up the drive, Jack felt a sense of happiness overwhelm him. While he didn't like "Uncle" Peter, he was delighted to be away from the flat where he had been awoken every night by the noise of the punters downstairs and traffic noise. In Uncle Peter's house, birds sang and the only other sounds were the cows mooing in the field. Jack jumped out of the Triumph as happy as could be. He dragged his case to the door and his twelve-year-old frame lifted it over the step.

"I love this house, Uncle Peter," he said.

Uncle Peter looked down at him and smiled.

Jack loved his room as well. It was large, tastefully furnished and even had a set of encyclopedias on the book shelf. The family soon settled into a routine. A house warming party was held. All the neighbors were invited and, once more, his mother was introduced as his elder sister. Their parents, his mother said, had been killed in a car crash before the war. Jack did not understand why his mother had to lie but knew that it was wrong to question adults.

Martha soon settled into her role as a dutiful housewife and Jack was left to play in the large garden on his own.

"We'll have to send the boy to boarding school," Uncle Peter announced one day. Jack was playing in the garden and overheard the conversation.

"No!" his mother retorted. "We can't do that!"

"But he needs an education and I'm not having a snotty nosed kid under my feet all day."

Martha was indignant. "No! He can't be sent away! He just can't!"

A row ensued. A row over him.

Jack couldn't be sure if it was that night or sometime later that he saw his mother with a black eye.

"How did you get that, Mummy?" Jack asked.

"I fell over..."

"It's a real shiner."

"SSSHH... be quiet... enough of your questions."

Jack knew his mother was lying, just as she lied about his parents. He knew Uncle Peter had punched her. He heard them argue. He heard his mother crying.

It wasn't long before Jack found himself incurring the wrath of his stepfather. The three of them were having their evening meal. Jack refused to eat something on his plate despite being told to do so by Uncle Peter. He was sent to his room and told to get into bed. A little while later, there were heavy footfalls on the stair and the door was opened. Uncle Peter stood before him, brandishing a cane. The bedclothes were pulled down and he was given six of the best - with just his pajama bottoms for protection.

"Don't defy me again," Uncle Peter said as he left the room.

The thrashings became more frequent, the bruises on his mother's face became more frequent. Jack found himself hunting out the magic wardrobe again, the wardrobe where he felt safe and secure and warm and comfortable. It was a different wardrobe from the one in their flat as it was larger and filled with even more clothes; despite his growing stature, he easily nestled amongst the dresses and clothes. On the frequent occasions when his mother and Uncle Peter went out for the evening, he would try on dresses. He was growing into them and they began to fall about him and make patterns on the floor. He longed for the day when his mother's dresses fitted him properly, the day when he had a bust like his mother's, and hips and a waist. Though he knew that was not what nature had intended, it could not stop him from longing for the day when he would stand in front of the mirror and look like a woman. For now though, a dab of rouge and a smudge of lipstick was all he could entertain.

What he didn't long for was the day when he would get caught wearing his mother's clothes by Uncle Peter. It happened a few months after his mother had given birth to his younger sister, Georgina. Uncle Peter had gone out and his mother was watching television downstairs. He stole into her room and took a dress which he smuggled back to his own bedroom. The dress was tight and shimmering and fit his adolescent body to perfection. Now, when he put his mother's dresses on, he felt aroused; a feeling of euphoria enveloped his virgin body. He heard footsteps on the stair but did not worry as Uncle Peter rarely bothered him. On this occasion, Jack was wrong. Terribly, terribly wrong.

"Jack, I've found you a home tutor...!"

The door was pushed open. Uncle Peter stood before him. His elephant-like head moved forward and his jaw dropped.



“You... you.... in your mother’s dress... you... pervert.”

Martha was called upstairs to look at the freak. She stood in the doorway, taking in the scene before her. Jack burst into tears. He cried and sobbed but not as much as when Uncle Peter returned to the bedroom with a cane and thrashed him – while he still wore his mother’s dress.

Maybe six months later, his mother awoke him in the middle of the night. She was dressed in a grey mac and had baby Georgina in her arms. She whispered to him.

“Come on Jack, get up, don’t make a noise, you can’t take anything. Just get dressed.”

Jack was excited. It was going to be an adventure. He dressed, then helped his mother with her heavy suit case. They made their way downstairs.

“Uncle Peter’s in a drunken stupor – he won’t wake up.”

They carefully opened the front door and slipped out. It was a long walk to the train station, then they had to wait until 6.30 AM before the first train arrived. They headed away from the country and back into London. By midday, the small family was back on the dirty grey streets of the Capital.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Martha had saved some money each week from the housekeeping money that Peter had given her. When the time was right, she left him and returned to London. One of the chorus girls from the old revue was now married to a publican so Martha sought out her small pub, the Golden Keys, which was by Waterloo Station.

“Did you get my letter, Sophie?” Martha said as she made her way through the highly polished bar.

“Yes, come around the back.”

The bar was opened and Martha made her way through to the back room with Georgina in her arms and Jack in close attendance.

“You must need a nice cup of tea after your long journey.” Sophie said, indicating a chair and taking Georgina from Martha’s tired arms. “I’ve spoken to Mrs Worthington and she has a room for you down the road so you’ll have somewhere to stay tonight.”

“Oh, thanks, Sophie, you are a love.” Martha kissed her old friend and tears rolled down her cheeks. “I don’t know what would have become of me if I’d stayed married to that oaf.”

Sophie looked knowingly at Martha, “Well, we did try to warn you. Peter is a bully who thinks women should be at his beck and call. He’s got old-fashioned attitudes and doesn’t realize things have changed, what with women taking men’s job during the War.

We're not all fluffy-headed idiots who need telling what to do. No, women want more of a say now!"

That night, Sophie took them a few doors down the street to Mrs. Worthington's lodgings. Mrs. Worthington was a large lady with beady eyes and hands like great hams. They followed her up the narrow dark stairs to an equally dark room.

Mrs. Worthington opened the door and started to inform Martha of the "house rules." No one was allowed back into the house after 10 PM when "the bolts were fastened" and no single men were allowed on the premises.

"And I don't want any noise, do you hear?" Mrs. Worthington said as she handed over the key. "If that baby of yours cries too much. I may have to sling you out on the street. We've got other guests staying here to think about."

Jack wandered into the room, his hands thrust into his pockets, deep in thought. There was an ex-Army camp bed and a cot. The toilet and bathroom were down the hall. Three people in one room seemed like a bit of a squash. Jack had enjoyed having his own room back at Uncle Peter's house and wondered if his mother's life with Uncle Peter had really been so bad. OK, Uncle Peter liked to use the cane but that was true of a lot of fathers. Jack had kept out of his way and tried to "do as he was told" and he wondered why his mother had found it so difficult to do the same. Despite what Sophie said, everyone knew that a husband was the master in his own house and that his wife and children had to be obedient. Jack couldn't see that Uncle Peter had been any different from any other man. The men Jack has seen on television at Uncle Peter's house were mostly like him and he guessed that was just how men were.

Uncle Peter had offered a financially secure future. Jack would have willingly kept that in exchange for a few strokes of the cane occasionally when he did things wrong. That was preferable to living in squalor; all his life, he had lived in one or two rooms. Now, having tasted the freedom of his own room, a large garden, a television and a motor car, Jack was disappointed that his mother had returned him to a life of "make do and mend" and "making ends meet."

As if reading his thoughts his mother said, "At least we're away from Peter. It'll only be temporary and then we'll get a bigger place." She held his shoulders and looked into his eyes. "Come on, Jack. We'll get through this together."

He reflected that maybe he was being selfish and that at least his mother was safe now.

The following day, Jack watched his mother get ready and leave the house for her evening shift at the Golden Keys. The war was over but Jack was now awoken by the siren call of his baby sister crying in the night. Jack did his best to comfort her until his mother returned. He feared Mrs. Worthington would come up to the room and tell him to pack their bags and get out but she never appeared. Jack could hear the television downstairs and surmised that this drowned out the noise of Georgina. If only he had a television to watch! He had enjoyed watching television at Uncle Peter's house, especially actresses in their glorious gowns! It had been paradise and it had opened a whole new world to him.

Jack was relieved that his mother no longer worked through the night and was often home before midnight. Although he still sneaked into his mother's wardrobe and got out clothes to try on, he had less opportunity to do so as his mother was around more often.