

Mum Knows Best

A Short Story

By

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Samantha warmed the pot just in case Matilda, her mother, really could tell the difference, before pouring the boiling water onto the tea inside.

“I’m coming Mum!” She called to the sitting room. “Do you have biscuits?”

The faint voice in reply directed her to the usual tin in the larder and Samantha made her way back, tray held aloft. Once back in the ‘front room’ as it was known, tray, china set and biscuits were neatly arranged on the ornate polished table in the middle of the room exactly where a ray of sunlight sliced through the open window and landed, brightening their surroundings with a lemon glow.

She took her usual seat next to her mother on the settee, she wasn’t allowed to call it a ‘sofa’ , and waiting for it to brew.

“My dear you must look after yourself better.” Mother imparted wisely. “That boyfriend of yours doesn’t pay you enough attention. Where is he anyway, didn’t he bring you?”

“Mum, you know Tom has to work on Saturdays, anyway I like to see you on my own sometimes. You know, just the two of us having our girly chats.”

Matilda looked knowingly at her daughter. She knew when something was wrong.

The two women looked remarkably alike considering Matilda was in her late sixties and her daughter barely out of her teens. They had had her late in life, Harold and her, and she was a blessing as her husband had passed away only a year earlier at the tender age of sixty-one. ‘No age at all’ as everyone kept reminding her. Both Matilda and Samantha kept their blond hair long but the former typically held hers in a bun and the blondness was now interspersed with a whitish grey. They were both slight women, elegantly dressed in their own styles in keeping with their age and the fashion of the day. It was their facial expressions that revealed their relationship most profoundly; especially their smile but also, to a slightly lesser extent, their frown.

Samantha was attempting to conceal a frown now.

“Has he gone off the rails again?”

“No, of course not mother. It’s just difficult at the moment.” She looked away.

“What do you mean difficult, my dear? What’s the matter?” Although sometimes overbearing as some mothers can be towards their daughters, Matilda was genuinely concerned for her daughter’s welfare and had no intention of scoring points.

“His work keeps taking him away and when he’s back there always seems to be something that pre-occupies him.” The gulp would have been imperceptible to anyone but her mother and a tiny tear had formed in the corner of her eye. “I do trust him, but ... well she keeps going away with him. His secretary I mean, Joan.” She took a deep breath and leaned forward to pour the tea.

“Leave that my dear, come here.” Matilda reached out to her daughter and drew her closer, placing her arm around Samantha’s shoulder. “Do you think he’s having an affair with this, Joan? You can tell me you know, if you want to. I am your Mum you know, if you can’t talk to me, who can you talk to? ”

Samantha smiled, and ignored the rhetorical question. “I don’t know Mum. I mean I know that’s what’s bothering me but I don’t know if I’m right to be worried. You see I couldn’t really blame him if he did have an affair.”

“What sort of talk is that, of course he’d be to blame?”

“The thing is, I haven’t been much of wife to him lately. I just feel so insecure the whole time. I don’t know what it is but I can’t seem to get motivated about anything. Then he wants to, you know, and I find myself going through the motions just to please him. I want to enjoy it more but it just isn’t happening and it’s not as if I don’t fancy him, I do. Of course, he realises I’m not fully enjoying it and gets the wrong idea. The truth is I think he thinks I’m the one having an affair.”

Matilda poured the tea and forlornly offered her daughter a biscuit. They both paused and looked out through the sunlit window into the garden beyond.

After a sip of tea, Matilda asked; “Do you still love him?”

“Yes, oh yes, I do, but this fear of him going off me or leaving me for Joan makes me put up a barrier. I know I’m cold with him; it’s like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If I could just trust him totally, I could relax; I know I could feel more spontaneous with him.

Matilda squeezed her daughter.

“My darling sometimes you just have to be brave and trust your heart. If you know he’s being, or has been unfaithful, that’s a different matter and I can only say what I would do in your shoes. But if you have no reasons for your fears and you love him, you must dispel your doubts and take the risk. It’s what you do when you commit in a relationship and I know it’s hard but there will always be temptation for both of you. You may be right, or partly so, he might think you’ve gone off him. He might think he should keep his options open to avoid being hurt.”

The gravel outside her open window provided an early warning system for Matilda when a visitor arrived and today her unexpected guest seemed to arrive at a most inopportune moment.

“Oh dear, you’ve got a guest and feel a mess. I’m just going to powder my nose whilst you see who it is.”

As she dabbed the corner of her nose to absorb the tears and forced herself to be more resolute, Samantha heard her mother through the door.

“My dear, what are you doing here? Samantha said you were working.”

Samantha’s heart missed beat. She felt excited at thought of seeing Tom but deceitful about her revelation even though it was to her own mother. She waited for them to go through to the front room before making her entrance.

“Tom, what are you doing here?”

“Let the poor boy sit down first darling, would you like some tea Tom?”

He sat nervously in an armchair by the window.

“I wanted to catch both of you together. You see I’ve something to say and it affects you both but I’m not quite sure how to put it.”

Samantha felt devastated, this was it, and he wanted to soften the blow by dumping her where her mother could pick up the pieces. She didn’t know where to look and the tell tale blushes were forming rapidly on her cheeks. Matilda on the other hand seemed calm, how could she be when her daughter was about to face such humiliation.

Tom continued; “You see, I’ve felt for a while now something has been missing from our relationship.”

The two women now also sat for fear of losing their balance.

“If John was alive I would of course speak to him.”

Samantha’s thoughts were spiralling; ‘No you wouldn’t you coward, Dad would have soon sorted you out’. She struggled to hold back the tears.

“But he isn’t and I couldn’t very well make plans without knowing you see. No, of course you don’t see do you? The thing is that I didn’t know what Samantha would say and I’ve never done this before so I thought, why not kill two birds with one stone?”

At this point, although the quintessential English lady, Matilda had to restrain herself from the physical urge that rose in her stomach and filled her breasts to violently assault Tom.

“So Matilda ...” Bizarrely he now seemed to be sliding off his chair. He fumbled in his pocket and seemed be attempting to get up.

“So Matilda, might I have the honour of requesting your beautiful daughter’s hand in marriage?”

Samantha almost passed out as he adeptly offered her a ring from his clumsy position on one knee.

“Will you do me the honour darling, and put me out of my misery. I’ve been out of sorts for weeks worrying if you’ll have me!”

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