

Tea Time Story

by JM Prescott

Three men loved her - although she wouldn't have used the word love or the word men - the second of which sat across from her. He scrapped his knife over the bread. They had long since run out of butter, but it was a habit. The bread pulled and rolled, chasing his knife and falling into his tea.

"Tell me a story," he said and threw the slice of bread over his shoulder. Something scurried behind him, picked it up in it's teeth and scurried away into the shadows beyond the trees.

She thought for a moment, then nodded. "There once was a girl who was dearly loved and favored wherever she went. Important people invited her to tea. Poets serenaded her. Great deeds were done in her name."

His brow furrowed under his hat. She considered it rude for him to drink his tea with his hat on, but she said nothing of that. He didn't look himself without his hat - in fact she'd never seen him without his hat and wondered if he needed it keep his brains from falling out of his ears.

"She must have been very happy," he said with a frown.

"Not at all," she said. "She was miserable."

"Well that doesn't make any sense."

She clenched her fist and then quickly released it, willing herself to stay calm. "Who is telling this story?" She asked and waited for him to argue. He didn't and she went on, "The girl had a great secret, one that she spoke to no one."

"Is that why she was unhappy?"

"Yes."

"Then she should tell someone, perhaps he could help her out."

She smiled at him. "You want to know the secret, that's why you want her to tell - not because you want her to be happy."

His shoulders dropped and mumbled in a sulk. "I don't see why we both can't get what we want."

She suppressed her frustration again, took a breath and then when it was safe to speak, she said: "shall I continue?"

"Please do."

"The girl had a secret, " he opened his mouth but she spoke first, "which she spoke to no one. But one day her secret was found out. It happened on a day just like this one." She looked around at the perfect summer afternoon. "The kind of day that begs you to take your tea in the garden."

"Who found it out?"

"I'm getting to that part, please don't interrupt again." She sighed and waited, but he froze with his hand on the handle of his tea cup. He could have been a waxwork.

"She was in the Queen's garden among all the other guests, just after tea, enjoying the pre-evening breeze that is so welcome on a hot summer afternoon. And the Queen approached her. She curtsied and thanked the Queen kindly for inviting her. The Queen smiled and nodded, ready to move on to receive her next thank you, when she stopped.

"The Queen turned back to the girl, a curious frown had replaced the smile. "Who?" The queen stopped and began again, "What is your name?" The girl curtsied again and bowed her head, giving her time to consider her answer. Because the truth was - and this is her secret truth I mentioned - although she had a name to give the Queen, it wasn't her own."

"What did she tell the Queen," he tried to look disinterested, but she knew he was wondering too. It was the question he had been wondering all along.

She smiled. "She told her your name."

He knocked his tea cup over and jumped out of the way as the tea spilled off the table and down onto his chair.

Then he looked around in horror, and back at his love who'd betrayed him. Her smile held and she turned. Just at the edge of her sight, she saw the approaching army, led by love number three.

