

ACT II
TERRY I can understand Karen feeling the way she does. But you've got no excuse. For all his faults Henry at least appreciates everything Mum has done for him. But not you. Never you.

(MUM quickly enters, wearing a cocktail dress.)
MUM (to HENRY) Here, do me up at the back, will you? It's come undone again.

(HENRY fastens the top hook of the dress. MUM gives SHIRLEY a dark look and SHIRLEY removes her feet from the sofa.)

(Smiling.) Isn't it a lovely dress, Shirley?
SHIRLEY (crossing D.R.) Yes, lovely.

MUM Yes, I thought you've been looking a bit green round the gills lately. We'll light the bonfire and set off the fireworks after we've done our party pieces. Don't little boys love fireworks, Shirley? Especially bangers; and I've got them a lot of bangers.

HENRY (stepping back) How's that, Mum?
(MUM feels the dress and sees if the arms fit.)
MUM (amazed) Brilliant, quite brilliant. You've done a magnificent job, Henry. Fits skin tight now it does, and yet I've got all the movement I need. (Turning.) What a tragedy for us women you didn't take up dress-designing. With those dexterous fingers and that imagination, you'd have conquered Paris.

HENRY (embarrassed) It was only the top hook that needed fastening. Mum.
MUM It's his modesty that's so humbling. I find. If he climbed Everest it would be the same. It was only twenty-nine thousand feet that needed climbing. No wonder you can bring on my tears, son.
(The doorbell rings.)
(Flicking her fingers.) Answer it, Henry. (Gliding D.S. as HENRY goes out.) Hand round the champagne, Tommy. It's time to drink the loyal toast.
(TOM crosses to the cocktail cabinet and takes a glass to KAREN.)

KAREN Forty years ago, the beginning of a wonderful marriage—two people becoming one. (Gazing at SHIRLEY who moves

along to make room for MUM.) I was a bit like you, Shirley, at the time. (Sitting.) Wanting to disappear through the plaster when somebody looked at me—fumbling for words—not really pretty, either. But I did have one magical quality, and this is where we differ, Shirley. I had a delicious sense of humour, which I've still got, of course. TOM (grinning as he hands a glass of champagne to MUM) And you can't suppress it, can you, Mum?

MUM (chuckling as she takes the glass) No, I can't.

TOM (handing SHIRLEY the second glass) It keeps wafting over us all like poison gas.

(TOM bends over the sofa and MUM holds his head down.)
MUM (merrily) And he takes after me, Shirley. He's got the same sense of fun. No wonder we're inseparable, Tommy. It's frightening really. I believe one can be jailed for it.

SHIRLEY For what?

MUM Incest, Shirley. Incest.

(SHIRLEY quickly rises and backs away as TOM frees himself.)

TOM I'd see a bus run over you first. (He crosses to the cocktail cabinet.)

MUM (with renewed chuckling) All these quips of his. I suppose I should write them down, let posterity have a good chuckle.

(TERRY wanders D.R. with his glass as a worried-looking HENRY enters.)

HENRY It's plot twelve at the door, Mum.

(TOM hands him a glass and then returns to the cocktail cabinet.)

MUM (surprised) What's he want?

HENRY He's a bit annoyed, Mum. He and his wife moved in a couple of hours ago, after coming all the way from Edinburgh, only to find the floorboards weren't down in the kitchen.

MUM (frowning) So what's he expect us to do, then?

HENRY Go and put the floorboards down.

MUM (staring at HENRY) You're not serious?

HENRY I am. And he certainly is.