

MUM *(talking to her as if she were a four-year-old)* Would you like to stay, Shirley?

SHIRLEY Er, thank you.

*(MUM holds out her hand and SHIRLEY quickly shakes it.)*

MUM We'll see you get home before your mummy starts worrying about you.

*(MUM brings up her spy glass and gazes at KAREN's coat draped over the arm of the sofa. TERRY hurriedly picks it up and places it on the piano stool. MUM sits on the sofa while SHIRLEY and TOM exchange glances. SHIRLEY then sits D.R.)*

And now, where are my grandchildren?

TERRY Upstairs.

MUM *(surprised)* Why aren't the little darlings playing in here?

TOM We didn't want them to break another egg-cup.

MUM *(with a roguish chuckle as she eyes TOM)* You sadist, you. *(Frowning as she glances at KAREN.)* They're not thieving around in my room, are they, Karen?

KAREN They're with their Uncle Henry.

MUM *(melting)* Then no wonder they're behaving themselves. He knows how to handle children, does Henry. No brute force with him. It's all done with gentleness and the soothing hand, Shirley.

*(KAREN takes exception to MUM's remark, picks up her basket and coat and goes into the hall with them.)*

I do hope he'll have some of his own soon. He deserves to. *(TERRY sits on left arm of sofa.)*

SHIRLEY Oh, I thought he wasn't married.

MUM *(amused)* I don't know, you youngsters: anyone over twenty, and he's ready for burning. *(She gazes at SHIRLEY for a moment or two before continuing, kindly, almost sadly)* You can't hide it, I'm afraid, Shirley.

SHIRLEY *(surprised)* Hide what?

MUM A tossed-off remark like that gives it away.

*(KAREN closes the door as she re-enters and wanders over to the left of TERRY. They give each other a smile of encouragement.)*

**SHIRLEY Gives what away?**

MUM How you was brought up, dear. You see, with the aristo-

cracy, thirty-six is thought the correct age for a man to marry.

KAREN But Henry's no longer thirty-six, Mum.

MUM He happens to be waiting for his true love, Karen. He's not like some who'll marry the first bint who winks him over to the nearest bed; eh, Terry? We know, don't we? *(TERRY grins and glances up at KAREN who gives his arm a slap with her hand. TERRY's grin fades.)*

No, he's got ideals, has Henry. Of course his difficulty, Shirley, is trying to stop greedy skinny gold-diggers from slipping inside his wallet. But he always manages to smell them out, flick them off. I don't know how, but he does. How did you get on with him, Shirley; all right?

SHIRLEY All right.

MUM Yes, he's very polite always. He'd have been an ambassador by now if he'd gone into the diplomatic. *(Sitting in arm-chair R.)*

TOM That's perfectly true, Shirley. It took him ages when he left elementary school at fourteen deciding between the diplomatic and the building trade.

MUM *(annoyed)* Don't belittle your brother, Tommy.

TOM I'm not belittling him—

MUM He's the head of the house. He deserves your respect. He's the one who'd have got the title, not you. *(With her roguish look.)* Oh, you know how to pull me down, don't you, you little ravisher. *(Opening her handbag.)* I suppose I'd better go and take the brats their presents.

TERRY You shouldn't have bothered, Mum.

MUM But I like doing it. I like to see their little faces light up.

KAREN What have you brought them, Mum?

MUM Notice, Shirley, there's no subtleties with Karen. Straight to the basic essential. What have you brought them? If you want to know, I'm giving them the money. *(She opens her handbag and takes out an envelope.)*

KAREN Good idea. Let them buy what they want.

MUM Thank you for your advice, but I've already bought it. I've had the money put into unit trusts where no one can get her hands on it.

*(MUM beams at KAREN who returns the beam as she*

Mum

Karen

Shirley

Tom

Terry