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SF PERUSALS

The Anniversary

A Play

Bill MacIlwratih

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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THE ANNIVERSARY

This play was first presented by Michael Codron at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on 28th March, 1966, and subsequently at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, with the following cast:

TOM	*Michael Crawford*
SHIRLEY	*June Ritchie*
HENRY	*James Cossins*
TERRY	*Jack Hedley*
KAREN	*Sheila Hancock*
MUM	*Mona Washbourne*

Directed by PATRICK DROMGOOLE
Designed by HUTCHINSON SCOTT

The action takes place in the living-room of Mum's house, south of London.

ACT ONE	Six p.m. on a Friday evening in November
ACT TWO	Three hours later
ACT THREE	Ten minutes later

No character in this play is intended to portray any specific person, alive or dead.

INTRODUCTION

The central character in *The Anniversary* is dear old Mum, a woman whose possessiveness is a killer. She is thoroughly evil and glories in destroying anything that is good and kind and pure; for not being able to enjoy such feelings herself she is damned if anyone else will. And yet, like the Devil, Mum has an undeniable charm. This woman would never have been drowned as a witch: she would have been crowned Queen.

She has three sons whom she has lacerated with her warped love, and it says something for man's resilience that they are as normal as they are.

Henry has long since succumbed to Mum's dominant personality and settled into a comfortable rut. He has even managed to find an ersatz love that cannot turn round and humiliate him. Terry, although married, still clings to his mother, hoping for a miracle that will never come.

Tom, the youngest son, hates Mum with such venom that he is prepared to sacrifice everyone in order to achieve his aim in life: complete victory over Mum.

Karen, Terry's wife, has fought tenaciously through the years for the body and soul of her husband; but it takes a newcomer, Tom's fiancée Shirley, to be the first to hack through the umbilical cord and free the man she loves.

Shirley and Karen prove that there is hope even where evil appears to be impregnable. There has to be, otherwise we might just as well sit on our personal bomb and blow ourselves into bits of nothing.

I have purposely used a farcical technique, not in order to make the play more palatable to an audience, but in the belief that through laughter a facet of family truth can be accepted without the loss of sanity. Perhaps I'm wrong. You're the judge.

BILL MACILWRAITH

ACT ONE

The living-room of MUM*'s house south of London. 6 p.m. on a Friday evening in November.*
The room has been furnished in the contemporary style. There is a sofa C. *in front of the glass door leading to the hall and stairs. On the table above the sofa are a telephone, an empty brass vase and an ashtray. In front of the sofa is a low tiled coffee table, on which are a cigarette box, lighter and an ashtray. There is an armchair* L. *in front of the french windows. Behind an armchair* R. *is a window overlooking the front garden; below the window is a radiator and* D.R. *of the window is a glass cabinet crammed with mementoes and souvenirs. On this wall are hung various framed certificates and diplomas. An easy chair* D.R. *completes the seating arrangements with the exception of a stool in front of the upright piano, which is inside an alcove to the left of the glass door. Lined up on top of the piano are snapshots of children, a large photograph of Dad, a framed certificate and three greetings cards. By the side of the piano is a wastepaper basket. To the right of the door in the* U.S. *corner is a very modern cocktail cabinet which when opened plays Auld Lang Syne. On top of the cocktail cabinet are a brandy bottle with sufficient drink for two glasses and a table-lamp. There is a standard-lamp to the left of the piano and suspended from the ceiling is a candelabra. On top of the glass cabinet* D.R. *are a small mirror, a china jug and a back-scratcher. The long draped curtains and the matt-finish paint on the walls are regal in colour.*

> *The curtain rises on an empty darkened stage with the hall-light casting a warm glow on the door, which* TOM *throws open as he enters. He is in his early twenties and looks very affluent. His lounge suit is immaculate, his hair stylishly groomed. He is completely relaxed without any trace of self-consciousness. He has a likeable personality and a quick mind. He is an electrician.*

TOM (*switching on the centre light*) And this is the front-room, living-room, lounge, whatever you like to call it.

(SHIRLEY *enters and looks about her as* TOM *switches on the standard-lamp.* SHIRLEY *is in her late teens with a gentle pretty face and a slim body. She appears to be self-possessed, but nervousness and anxiety are never far from the surface and she is really quite vulnerable. She works in a suburban store and is in love with* TOM.)

SHIRLEY (*impressed*) Oh, yes; very nice. Very nice indeed.

TOM (*returning to* SHIRLEY) Not bad, is it?

SHIRLEY And you and your two brothers built it all by yourselves?

TOM A good part of it.

SHIRLEY (*surprised*) You're very clever, aren't you?

TOM Well, it's our job, ain't it? (*Looking at* SHIRLEY *and giving a roguish chuckle.*) Hide that window.

(*As* SHIRLEY *goes to the window* R. TOM *hurries* L. *and presses one of two switches to the left of the french windows. The curtains automatically close.*)

(*grinning*) How about that, then?

SHIRLEY (*crossing to the sofa*) Very clever.

(TOM *presses the second switch and the french window curtains come together.*)

TOM And we did pick out the best of the lads to help us.

SHIRLEY (*sitting*) Did it take you long?

TOM (*crossing to the table-lamp on top of the cocktail cabinet*) Longer than we normally take over putting up a house. But then we was going to live in it.

(*He switches on the table-lamp and turns to* SHIRLEY, *but turns back again because the light doesn't come on. He stamps his foot on the floor and this does the trick.* SHIRLEY *glances round and receives a grin from* TOM.)

Here, I've just had a thought.

SHIRLEY What?

TOM (*sitting next to her on the sofa*) I haven't had a kiss for five minutes.

(*They go into a clinch.*)

Shall we nip upstairs for a quick one?

SHIRLEY No, we won't. (*As* TOM *again lunges at her.*) And not here either. We've left cramped sofas behind us. We're engaged.

We're going to be married. We can do it in comfort now; so just contain yourself.

TOM You're right. We've got the whole weekend, haven't we, darling?

SHIRLEY I came here to meet your mum, remember.

TOM I remember.

SHIRLEY You told her we're engaged?

TOM (*with a certain amount of satisfaction*) Tonight, Shirley. I'm telling her tonight.

SHIRLEY (*frowning*) Oh. I was rather hoping you'd already done it.

TOM No. It's got to be tonight.

SHIRLEY I mean, we'd have known where we stood, her and me, right from the start. So she don't know about the baby neither?

TOM (*kindly as he rises*) Tonight, Shirley. She'll know about it all tonight. (*Turning on his way to close the door.*) What with you a couple of months gone and Karen, that's Terry's wife, expecting hers about a month earlier, it's going to be like a pre-natal clinic here.

SHIRLEY Oh, we're not going to be on our own, then?

TOM (*wandering across to the french windows*) No, the whole family will be here. Mum will take us all out for a nosh up, and then back here for the party, and the bonfire, and the fireworks. That's when I mean to tell her about you and me. She'll be in just the right mood to hear it.

SHIRLEY We're having a bit of a party, are we?

TOM Mum always throws a party on her wedding anniversary, Shirley.

SHIRLEY (*puzzled*) Wedding anniversary? I thought your Dad died a few years ago?

TOM (*turning.*) So he did. It's Mum's way of remembering him. Have you got a party piece?

SHIRLEY (*frowning*) A what?

TOM (*crossing to the piano and lifting the lid*) A turn. We all do a turn.

SHIRLEY A turn?

TOM Sing a song, recite, play the piano. (*Vamping with his left hand.*)

SHIRLEY I'm not doing no turn.

TOM Aren't you?

SHIRLEY I'd be too embarrassed.

TOM Mum won't like it.

SHIRLEY (*indignantly*) Then Mum'll have to lump it, won't she?

TOM (*turning*) And you'll tell her, will you?

SHIRLEY She won't get me doing nothing.

TOM She'll be livid.

SHIRLEY (*pointing to the vase behind her*) She can throw that vase at me for all I, care.

TOM (*crossing to the sofa*) She probably will.

SHIRLEY Then I'll jolly well throw it back at her.

TOM (*very pleased as he sits next to her*) That's my girl!
(*They kiss until* SHIRLEY *gently pushes him away.*)

SHIRLEY (*quietly*) Will she?

TOM What?

SHIRLEY Throw a vase at me.

TOM I must admit, she don't like not getting her own way. Seems to bring out her femininity.

SHIRLEY I've always wondered why you never asked me home to meet your mum. Now I know.

TOM If I'd brought you back here first time out, I'd never have seen you again. But I knew that once you felt like I felt, you'd give as good as you got.

SHIRLEY (*worried*) I kept thinking perhaps she was a criminal, or couldn't keep off the gin. I never dreamt that you were keeping me away because she might start slinging vases at me.

TOM (*grinning kindly*) I'm sure she won't.

SHIRLEY Have you been joking then?

TOM Depends what you think's funny, don't it?

SHIRLEY Well, I don't think that is. I'm full of nerves as it is, meeting your mum for the first time.

TOM (*rising and taking* SHIRLEY *with him to the glass cabinet*) If you see her going for the vase, Shirley, grab one of these. That'll make her drop it.
(SHIRLEY *looks at the china jug* TOM *is holding.*)

SHIRLEY Why that ugly thing?

TOM (*pretending to be shocked*) Ugly? It's a thing of beauty to

my mum. (*Replacing the china jug.*) Why, Dad might have kept his shaving water in it. (*Taking hold of the back-scratcher and using it as a pointer.*) The equivalent of the crown jewels are inside here, Shirley. Veritable treasures she's collected over the years. (*Admiringly.*) My first nappy —Henry's first tooth—Terry's one and only curl—(*Straightening up.*) All beyond price because Mum's got nostalgia-itis in both legs. (*He lightly touches* SHIRLEY*'s stomach with the back-scratcher.*)

SHIRLEY Careful.

TOM (*addressing* SHIRLEY*'s stomach*) Sorry, mate.
(*Pointing to the certificates and finishing up by the piano.*) Same with these certificates. Anyone coming in here would think: aye, aye; the lads must be Doctors of Philosophy. But on closer inspection what do they find? Master Henry, second prize, sack race. Master Thomas, third prize, bible study. Master Terence, Special Prize for the best loser. I give you fair warning now, Shirley, you mock all this at your peril.
(SHIRLEY *crosses upstage.*)

SHIRLEY (*quietly*) Tom. I've been thinking. I could quite easily go home after the party.

TOM (*perturbed as he quickly joins her*) If you love me, you've got to stay, see it out.

SHIRLEY But if she turns violent.

TOM So I'll knock her on the head.

SHIRLEY (*as* TOM *returns the back-scratcher to the top of the cabinet*) I think I'd prefer to go if you don't mind.

TOM (*sincerely, as he takes hold of her*) But I do though. You see, I look on it as a sort of endurance test, Shirley. If we can get through this weekend together, we're stuck for life. Nothing'll ever be as bad again. (*Grinning as a sports car is heard screeching to a halt outside.*) We're going to have fun, Shirley. We're going to have fun. (*Crossing to window* R.) That'll be Henry. (*Looking out as* SHIRLEY *joins him.*)

SHIRLEY (*impressed*) Snazzy sports car, isn't it?

TOM He can afford it. He hasn't made the long trek down the aisle yet.

SHIRLEY (*patting her hair into position*) Must be quite a bit of money in building then.

TOM We can't go wrong. Mum buys the land and we help to bung up the houses. With everybody screaming out for property, we're rolling in it. (*Turning to look at her.*) You're marrying into wealth, love.

SHIRLEY (*with a shy giggle as she crosses to the sofa*) Am I really?

TOM Come off it, I've told you often enough.

SHIRLEY (*sitting*) Yer, but I never believed you before.

TOM (*quietly*) But you believe I love you?

SHIRLEY (*simply*) I hope you do, Tom, 'cos I love you.

(TOM *joins her on the sofa and they tenderly kiss.* TOM *then gently brings up his hand to caress her ear, but* SHIRLEY *stops him.*)

No, don't.

TOM But they're lovely.

SHIRLEY Please, Tom.

(TOM *finds her mouth again.* HENRY *enters, carrying a magazine and a large bunch of flowers and wearing sports cap and overalls. He is an inconspicuous man in his late thirties, preferring the shadows to the limelight. He has a neat moustache, a round face and a round body. He is shy, kind, quietly-spoken and resembles a cuddly bear. He halts in his tracks and stares at the couple in surprise before turning to go out.*)

HENRY (*with a smile as he tosses the magazine on to armchair*) Oh, I beg your pardon.

TOM (*as he and* SHIRLEY *break*) It's all right, Henry. No need to creep off. Henry—Shirley. This is Henry.

SHIRLEY (*crossing to shake his hand*) Hello, Henry.

HENRY (*shyly*) Good evening to you.

TOM (*standing behind* SHIRLEY) What do you think, then?

HENRY Think about what?

TOM Shirley

(SHIRLEY *shyly crosses to the sofa where she sits.*)

HENRY Oh, very nice. Very nice. (*Quietly in* TOM*'s ear.*) You know Mum will be here shortly. (*He places the flowers on the table above the sofa.*)

TOM So what?

HENRY Well, you know, if you want to say cheerio to Shirley; well, that's all right, ain't it?

TOM (*sitting next to* SHIRLEY) But Shirley's staying, Henry.

HENRY Staying?

TOM For the weekend. In the guest-room.

HENRY Oh. (*Crossing to the door and then turning.*) Mum didn't say.

TOM (*grinning*) Mum doesn't know.

(HENRY *crosses to the glass cabinet* D.R. *and adjusts the china jug.*)

SHIRLEY (*frowning*) Doesn't know?

TOM I'm giving her a surprise.

SHIRLEY (*staring at* TOM) But I thought she'd invited me.

TOM I never told you that.

SHIRLEY But this means she's being imposed upon.

TOM I don't see why?

SHIRLEY What, having someone stay and not knowing about it?

HENRY (*moving in a few paces*) Shirley's right. You should have told Mum.

SHIRLEY (*anxiously to* HENRY *as she rises*) Do you think I ought to go?

HENRY (*kindly*) Yes, I do really.

TOM (*making her sit*) She's not leaving. You're not leaving, Shirley.

HENRY (*appealing to* TOM) But there's no need for her to stay, Tom. You'll have what you're after, anyway. I mean, the sparks are going to fly when Terry ups and tells her about himself.

SHIRLEY Tells her what?

HENRY It's a family matter, Shirley.

TOM But Shirley's one of the family, Henry. (*Slipping an arm round her waist.*) We're engaged, aren't we, darling?

SHIRLEY We're picking up the ring tomorrow.

HENRY (*after a little cough*) Yer, well, I think I'll go and get changed. (*A shade too casually as he crosses to the door and opens it.*) Do you think perhaps I could see you for a moment on your own, Tom?

TOM (*rising and crossing to* HENRY) No, Henry.

HENRY (*as* TOM *wanders to above the sofa*) But there's something I want to say to you, Tom.

TOM Then say it, Henry.

HENRY In private.

(SHIRLEY *takes a mirror from her handbag and looks at herself.*)

TOM Spit it out, mate.

(HENRY *hesitates before closing the door and taking a few paces into the room.*)

HENRY I just want to know if—well, if you, if you're fond of her.

TOM (*sincerely*) I'm in love with her.

(SHIRLEY *registers pleasure as she puts away her mirror.*)

HENRY It's not a trick?

TOM (*indignantly as he crosses* D.L.) Why should it be a trick?

HENRY Then for her sake, you ought to wait before telling Mum.

TOM She's going to be told tonight. (*He spreadeagles himself in the chair* D.R.)

HENRY But you're asking too much from Shirley.

SHIRLEY (*glancing at* TOM) You can't ask too much from someone who loves you.

TOM (*to* HENRY) D'you hear that? Now isn't that nice? Don't you think that's nice?

(*Three children are heard screaming their way upstairs and calling for 'Uncle Henry'.*)

SHIRLEY (*surprised*) Who's arrived?

TOM At a rough guess I'd say about three of Terry's kids.

SHIRLEY How many's he got then?

TOM Five, and one on the way.

HENRY (*beaming*) Hear the little blighters? They're calling for me.

TOM Yer, they love their Uncle Henry, don't they, Henry?

TERRY (*off*) Shut up! I said be quiet! And if you go into Nannie's room, I'll thump you! (*As he runs upstairs.*) I said not into Nannie's room!

HENRY (*as the children's voices fade*) Better go to them before they get a walloping.

TOM (*quickly crossing upstage to join* HENRY) Bring 'em in here, Henry. Introduce them to Shirley.

HENRY (*his smile disappearing*) You know they're not allowed.

SHIRLEY Not allowed?

HENRY (*a shade uncomfortable*) Mum put it out of bounds after they'd done a pile of damage.

TOM (*wandering down to above sofa*) One of them broke an egg-cup, Shirley.

HENRY It had a great sentimental value to Mum.

(HENRY *opens the door and* TERRY *enters carrying a bunch of flowers. He is a thin, fairly tall man of thirty-four, with a long, rather woebegone face.* SHIRLEY *rises and eases* L.)

TERRY Where's that loud-mouthed, skinny, no good ignorant lazy lout— (*Seeing* SHIRLEY.) Who are you?

SHIRLEY (*rather taken aback*) Shirley.

(TERRY *gazes at her before turning his attention on* TOM, *who is grinning away.* SHIRLEY *sits in armchair* D.L.)

TERRY (*as* TOM *joins him*) You left a live cable dangling from the loft of plot seven. I could have been electrocuted.

TOM Wasn't my fault. I couldn't find no conduit. Anyway, I think it's a dead liberty calling us in for repairs. After all, they only moved into the house last week. Everything would have righted itself.

TERRY If everyone did their work properly, there'd be no repairs to do.

TOM Hark at you! Just hark at you. Who built a broom cupboard right behind the door so that you had to walk into the kitchen sideways?

(*He walks sideways to armchair* R. *where he sits.*)

TERRY (*mumbling*) Everyone can make a mistake now and again. I'm no exception.

TOM You are, mate, because you never stop making them.

(TERRY *turns and points the flowers at* SHIRLEY.)

HENRY (*quickly*) Did you find time to look at the staircase of plot twelve, Terry?

TERRY (*sitting on right arm of sofa*) I had to, didn't I? They was moving in this afternoon.

HENRY Was it much away from the wall?

TERRY About an inch.

TOM It was only half an inch when I noticed it last night. (*Grinning.*) They ought to be delighted. They're getting a moving staircase for nothing.

TERRY (*grumbling*) I had to work right through the lunch-hour on it. No wonder I got an ulcer.

HENRY How did you get rid of the gap?

TERRY Wood filler! Got through tubes of the stuff.

CHILDREN'S VOICES–(*in unison*) Uncle Henry!

HENRY (*smiling and calling out*) Coming!

TERRY (*rising and going to above sofa*) Hold on. (*Gazing at* SHIRLEY) So what's this one doing here, then?

HENRY They're engaged. Terry. (*Soothingly.*) But they are in love. They are in love, Terry.

(HENRY *goes out and a cheer goes up from the children.*)

TERRY (*to* TOM, *as he carefully places the flowers on the table*) You git!

TOM (*agreeably*) I hope you've noticed, Shirley; we're a very polite family.

(TERRY *looks at* SHIRLEY *and suddenly smiles as he walks* D.S. *and sits on the edge of the coffee table.*)

TERRY You're not engaged.

TOM We are, you know.

TERRY (*sympathetically*) He's put you up to this, hasn't he?

SHIRLEY (*puzzled*) I beg your pardon?

TERRY How much is he paying you?

SHIRLEY What?

TERRY To do this act.

SHIRLEY (*bewildered*) What act?

TERRY Kidding everyone you're engaged to him.

SHIRLEY It's no act. We're going to get married.

TERRY I tell you it's an act.

SHIRLEY It's not.

TERRY It is.

SHIRLEY (*becoming angry*) Look, I should know, shouldn't I?

TOM (*grinning*) It's no good, Shirley. His brain's radioactive. That's why it's surrounded by lead, so's nothing will get in or out.

TERRY (*taking out a wad of notes*) Look, I'm not wasting any more time. I'll give you fifty quid to clear off.

SHIRLEY (*rising and going to* TOM *for protection*) I'm not going nowhere. I'm staying. Tom's invited me to stay.

TOM (*rising and crossing to* TERRY) For the weekend, Terry.

TERRY (*turning round*) You conniving two-faced little runt. Well, you're not springing it on Mum tonight.

TOM (*grinning*) I've got news for you.

TERRY Not tonight!

TOM Tonight.

TERRY (*seething*) God, I've got a good mind to fling you straight through that door!

TOM (*unabashed*) Wouldn't hurt, mate, it's one of your doors: (*Crossing to door.*) papier maché, a pot of glue and matches.

(KAREN *enters carrying flowers, handbag and basket containing toys and a pair of shoes. She is in her early thirties, plumpish, and has a bright personality and an assured manner. Leaving the door open, she places flowers and handbag on the table above the sofa and the basket on the floor.* TERRY *wanders upstage, while* TOM *joins* SHIRLEY.)

KAREN (*pleasantly*) The last time in this house. It's like paying off a mortgage. (*Noticing* SHIRLEY *and glancing at* TERRY.)

TERRY He says he's engaged to her.

SHIRLEY (*hotly*) I've got a handle, just like you, you know.

TERRY (*as* KAREN *slips off her coat and leaves it on* R. *arm of sofa*) Henry thinks they're in love.

SHIRLEY We are in love!

(KAREN *grins and crosses to* TOM *whom she kisses.*)

KAREN Congratulations, Tom. (*She returns to table.*)

TOM It's on the level, Karen.

KAREN (*surprised*) Is it?

TOM Definitely.

(KAREN *gazes at him for a moment and then chuckles.*)

KAREN Even better. (*She takes her shoes from the basket.*)

TOM (*grinning*) Yes, I thought it would please your sense of humour.

TERRY Well, I don't believe it.

KAREN I do. It had to happen some time; why not now?

TOM And you're all for it, aren't you?

KAREN Not arf. I'll be needing reinforcements this evening. (*Kindly to* SHIRLEY.) What's your name, love?

SHIRLEY Shirley.

KAREN (*with a quick kiss on her cheek*) Congratulations, Shirley.

(*Crossing to sofa.*) Yer, well, this is going to be another one in the eye for the old bag, ain't it? (*Sitting.*) I presume she don't know yet.

SHIRLEY Tom's telling her tonight.

(KAREN *chortles, as* SHIRLEY *smiles at* TOM *before crossing* D.R. *where she sits.* KAREN *quickly removes her boots and slips on the shoes.*)

TERRY (*to* TOM) Well, I'm having my say first, I'm telling her about me first. Then you can detonate your floozie in her face. But wait till Karen and me are out of the way.

KAREN No, I want to be here when it happens. You tell her as soon as I get back from dumping the kids.

(*A car pulls up outside, and* TOM *wanders over to the window.*)

TOM I'll pick my moment.

KAREN (*grinning*) I bet you will.

SHIRLEY Aren't the children staying for the party?

KAREN What? She can't stand the sight of 'em. No, she'll give them their anniversary present each, and then I'll quickly whisk 'em back home. Come to think of it, they're a bit quiet, aren't they?

TERRY They're with Henry.

KAREN (*frowning*) Oh, are they? (*Rising and placing her boots in the basket.*) Nip up and see that they're all right, Terry.

TERRY Why shouldn't they be all right?

KAREN You know how I feel about Henry.

TERRY He's harmless.

KAREN Is he?

(*The slam of the front door is heard.*)

TOM (*rubbing his hands as he comes away from the window*) Here she is, the fairy godmother. She's arrived.

(KAREN *immediately sits on arm of chair* R. *and picks up the magazine.* SHIRLEY *nervously rises.*)

KAREN (*gesturing*) Sit down.

SHIRLEY Just thought I'd tidy up a bit, put on a face.

KAREN Whatever face you put on would be wrong, so sit down.

(MUM *enters. She is in her late fifties and average in height and weight. She has a slight stoop, a great deal of nervous energy and there is a menacing quality about her that*

spells danger to anyone contemplating crossing her. She also has an inherent charm, and this charm prevents her more obnoxious remarks from leaving a taste.
She is wearing a spy glass at the end of a length of ribbon and a mink coat which is open revealing an attractive dress).

MUM (*pleasantly*) Every time your kids come and visit me, Karen, they bring half the garden with them. (*Removing her gloves as she crosses to the table above the sofa.*) There's mud all up the stairs.

KAREN (*unperturbed*) Strange, I made them take their shoes and socks off before they came in.

MUM Then all I can say is, it's high time you washed their feet. (*Gazing down at the flowers.*) So when am I being buried? (KAREN *rises.*)

TERRY, TOM, KAREN (*together—tonelessly*) Happy anniversary, Mum.

MUM (*beaming*) Ah, you've remembered. I wondered if you would.

KAREN Didn't you get the card we sent you, then?

TOM Of course she did.

MUM (*sweetly to* SHIRLEY) Hello, dear.

SHIRLEY (*nervously*) Hello.

MUM (*surveying her from right of sofa*) You're not one of Karen's, are you?

KAREN (*pleasantly*) How can she be one of mine, Mum? She don't look like Terry, and all the rest do, don't they?

MUM Ah, but you could have had her before you met Terry. (MUM *chuckles and* KAREN *chuckles in reply before pulling a face behind* MUM's *back.*) Friend of yours, my little Tommy Tucker?

TOM (*taking* SHIRLEY's *hand and making her rise*) Shirley, this is my mum.
(SHIRLEY *holds out her hand, which* MUM *ignores.*)

MUM And would you like her to stay, Tommy?

TOM She is staying, Mum.

MUM That's what I said, dear. Would you like her to stay?

TOM Yes.

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 armchair* 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*

wanders above the sofa towards TOM, *who is playfully wagging a finger at her.*)

Really, I don't honestly know what you're complaining about, Karen. After all, you get a nice lot of pin money every month out of child allowance.

KAREN (*pleasantly*) I didn't know I was complaining, Mum.

MUM You can't understand why I just don't give you the money to put into the post-office, so called.

KAREN Can't I, Mum?

MUM I'm just looking after their interest, Karen, that's all. Is that so very wrong?

KAREN It's very laudable, Mum.

MUM So what are you so raving jealous about?

KAREN Your complexion, Mum. I always wanted a complexion like you've got.

(MUM *gazes at* KAREN *and then gives a little laugh.*)

MUM Soap and water, dear. Soap and water. (*Patting her face.*) And lots of patting all over. (*Rising and going upstage.*) Are the children staying?

(SHIRLEY *and* TERRY *rise while* KAREN *eases* R.)

TERRY No, Mum.

MUM (*surprised*) Why ever not?

KAREN Would you like them to stay, Mum?

MUM (*crestfallen*) But who's going to look after them?

KAREN My mother.

MUM (*pursing her lips*) Oh, I see. You've already arranged it between yourselves, have you? Five minutes with me, five hours with her. If you can pinch back your trousers, Terry, I'd like to see my grandchildren occasionally.

TERRY They're upstairs waiting for you.

MUM (*grinning*) Waiting to see what I've brought them, you mean. (*Opening the door.*) Don't forget, I've had three chicks of my own. (*Turning.*) Only three, I grant you, Karen. But then natural good manners told me when to put the plug in.

(MUM *closes the door as she goes out.* KAREN *and* TERRY *sit on the sofa and relax while* SHIRLEY *sits* D.R. KAREN *takes a cigarette, which* TERRY *lights for her.*)

TOM Well, do you think she's realised?

KAREN What?

TOM That I'm quite serious about Shirley.

KAREN She's no doubt wondering what Shirley's doing up your sleeve.

TOM So why didn't she ask me?

TERRY Why should she, when she can find it all out from Henry?

TOM (*worried as he rises and wanders upstage*) Damn, I'd forgotten about him. (*Halting.*) But he won't tell her. He's not one for stirring it. (*Wandering* D.R.) No, he won't tell her.

KAREN If you wanted to keep the engagement secret till after Mum had proposed the toast, you should have hidden Shirley up the chimney. That's the only way you'd have stopped Mum's brain from racing to a hundred thousand conclusions.

SHIRLEY That crack about skinny gold-diggers was meant for me, you know.

KAREN How did you find your future in-law?

SHIRLEY (*crossing to* KAREN) It's quite nerve-racking really, ain't it?

KAREN I always leave here with a screaming headache, and my whole body shaking with murder and hate. But not for long now. (*Slipping an arm through* TERRY'S.) We'll soon be out of it, won't we, Terry?

TERRY (*nodding and smiling*) Yer.

SHIRLEY Where you going, then?

KAREN Canada. Way up north.

TOM (*as* SHIRLEY *returns to chair* D.R.) Mum can't stand the cold.

TERRY Do you think she knows about us, too?

KAREN She must know something's up, because you've been going round for the past couple of months like a driver who's just knocked down a policeman on a zebra crossing. Don't worry, she's been burrowing about, sniffing around, I bet.

TERRY Make it a lot easier if she does know.

TOM Why?

TERRY My trouble is I don't like hurting her.

TOM (*crossing to sofa*) Your trouble is you've always let her play the tune on your guts.

KAREN (*defending* TERRY) Leave off now. Terry's got feelings. He's the sensitive one among us.

TOM (*lifting his eyes to the ceiling with amused sarcasm as he swings upstage*) Gawd save us!

SHIRLEY (*not to be outdone*) Tom's very sensitive too, I've found.

(TOM, KAREN *and* TERRY *turn to look at her.*)

KAREN I'm not talking about being ticklish in the long grass, Shirley.

TOM (*frowning*) I am sensitive.

TERRY You're not, otherwise you wouldn't have brought your floozie here tonight. This is Mum's night.

TOM So when are you going to tell Mum you're emigrating?

TERRY I've got to give her a week's notice, haven't I?

TOM You could have told her yesterday or last week.

TERRY I didn't want to upset her.

TOM But you're going to upset her tonight.

TERRY Because I've got to give her a week's notice.

TOM So how does that make you more sensitive than me?

KAREN That proves you're not sensitive, otherwise you'd know.

SHIRLEY (*rising*) Excuse me, but I don't see how your husband is all that sensitive if he can turn round twice inside half an hour and call me a floozie. Because even if I am, I don't like to be told it.

TOM Good for you, Shirley. Don't you be sat on by these two. With their weight you'd go straight through the floorboards.

TERRY Who started this stupid argument anyway?

TOM You must have done if it's stupid.

KAREN It wasn't Terry, it was me. And it wasn't an argument, it was a fact. Terry's the sensitive one of the family, otherwise why wouldn't he have cleared out years ago?

TERRY Drop it, Karen.

KAREN I'm sorry, but I'm not sitting here listening to you being ridiculed.

TOM Who's ridiculing him?

KAREN Don't be rude, Tom!

SHIRLEY You were ridiculing Tom!

TERRY (*rising and crossing to french windows*) Shut up, the lot of you! Like a pack of wolves tearing into nothing. It's this house. Five minutes inside it and everyone gets the screaming abdabs.

KAREN (*quietly*) He's right, you know.

TOM (*wandering to below piano*) Yes, he is. Makes you want to itch, draw blood. Ought to be pulled down. (*Grinning.*) That's a thought, isn't it? Pour petrol over it, start a fire.

KAREN (*grinning expectantly*) Where's Mum, Tom? Where's Mum?

TOM I gave her some sleeping tablets. She's in bed snoring away, her teeth grinning in a glass of water. And the flames are licking her legs, (*Touching* TERRY*'s knees before crossing to* SHIRLEY.) and she thinks old Dad's returned.

(TOM *and* KAREN *find this very amusing, but not* SHIRLEY. *She turns and sits* D.R.)

SHIRLEY I've never heard you talking like that before.

TOM You've never seen me with my Mum before. The times she's been perfectly murdered.

TERRY Belt up, you ungrateful nit.

SHIRLEY You murder your Mum?

TOM At least once a week.

SHIRLEY But that's horrible. I mean she's your Mum.

(HENRY *enters. He is now wearing a lounge suit.*)

HENRY She wants to know who's taking the kids home.

TOM (*impatiently*) Did you tell her about the engagement?

HENRY (*surprised*) But you told her, didn't you?

TOM (*furiously*) You fat ponce! I didn't want her to find out.

HENRY But she knew. She come up and said, 'So when's the wedding?' Just like that.

TOM (*ramming fist into palm as he slowly crosses to the window*) Spoilt! My big dramatic moment. Spoilt! Something I've really been looking forward to so much—spoilt!

TERRY (*crossing to* L. *of sofa*) How did she take it?

HENRY (*picking up the magazine from armchair and crossing below the sofa*) Seemed all excited, especially when I said that he really loved her. (*Sitting on chair* D.L.)

KAREN (*happily*) Good. Reaction should be setting in about now.

HENRY The children are ready to leave when you are.

TERRY I suppose you want to stay, Karen?

KAREN Yes, please!

(TERRY *goes out.*)

It's not often I get a ringside seat. I'm usually inside the ring, on the ropes. I can't miss this.

TOM (*aggrieved*) And I had it all sorted out; I was going to frizzle her with it. And now it's her who's got the hand on the switch. (*Sitting in armchair* R.) How the hell does she manage it?

(TERRY *re-enters.*)

TERRY You've got to take 'em home, love.

KAREN Why not you?

TERRY (*sitting*) She's got something to tell me.

KAREN (*suspiciously*) What is it?

TERRY She says it's a surprise.

KAREN She can tell you later.

TERRY She says it can't wait. (*He wanders to above sofa.*)

SHIRLEY (*to* KAREN *in some agitation*) Please! Don't go.

TOM (*surprised*) Why? What's the matter with you then?

SHIRLEY (*to* TOM) I don't want to be left alone with your Mum.

TOM Get out of it, I'm here, aren't I?

KAREN I know how she feels. When you're preparing for battle, you want your own sex around you. Don't worry, love. I'm not leaving. She's up to something and she wants me out of the way.

(MUM *enters, without her mink coat.*)

MUM Hurry, Karen, before they wreck Terry's car. (*Crossing to the sofa.*) I find them all very lovely but quite exhausting. (*She looks at* KAREN *who rises in order that* MUM *may sit.* KAREN *then decides to sit at the other end of the sofa. This does not please* MUM.)

Do you want them to drive off without you, dear, because that's what they'll do if you don't move yourself.

KAREN (*with a rueful smile*) I can't, Mum, I'm afraid. The little perisher's making me feel quite faint.

MUM Nonsense. It's not big enough yet. Unless of course you've got an ugly great bear in there.

KAREN (*smiling*) Well, at least there'll be someone coming along who'll look like me; eh, Mum?

MUM (*returning the smile*) You never cease to amaze me, Karen. Why do you want every child to look like you? Let them have some chance in life, for God's sake.

TERRY Look, what about the kids? Who's taking them home?

MUM (*concerned*) Like poor little orphans—nobody wanting to own them. But if they was rabbits or cats, you'd all be jumping out of the window in your eagerness to comfort them.

TERRY I was all ready to take 'em home, Mum.

MUM (*pursing her lips*) It's not convenient, Terry.

HENRY (*rising*) Shall I take them home, then?

(MUM *stretches out her arms towards* HENRY *and gazes at him in adoration.*)

MUM Why is it you always have to fall back on my Henry to help you out of your difficulties? You're a real crusader, Henry, and the world's better for having you around. (*To* SHIRLEY.) There are times, Shirley, when I'm sorry we aren't Roman Catholics. Henry would have made a lovely Pope. Henry the Humble.

(HENRY *crosses below the sofa and turns upstage.*)

(*To* HENRY.) But no mucking about. Come straight home. It'll soon be time to leave for the restaurant.

(HENRY *goes into the hall for his coat.*)

(*To* SHIRLEY.) We're having prawn cocktails to start off with, Shirley. But it's not a drink, dear; so use the spoon provided.

HENRY (*from the doorway as he slips on his coat*) Can I buy them some ice-cream, Karen?

MUM He's generous to a fault, is my eldest.

KAREN No, thank you, Henry. They're being rationed to one a day, and they've had their quota.

MUM (*staring at* KAREN) What are you preparing them for: the next war? Do they have to sleep down the tube twice a week, and wear gas-masks round the house? Rationing! Really Karen, I know you won't mind me saying this, but you're a very hard mother.

KAREN That's how I want their teeth to be, Mum. Good and hard.

MUM Now don't put words into my mouth. I never said good. I don't think you are a good mother, though it's certainly not my place to say it.

KAREN (*with resigned patience*) Then why say it, Mum?

MUM Because there are some things that have to be said if we're

going to get on with each other. Live and let live, Karen.

KAREN (*rising and going to the french windows*) Yes, Mum. I agree.

MUM So, tell the kids the ice-cream's from their Nannie, Henry.

(KAREN *swings round angrily and* MUM *smiles brightly at her.* KAREN *then sits* D.L.)

TERRY (*following* HENRY *into the hall*) Here, you'd better take the car keys. And I don't want no trouble from the police about lights, so keep them on if you park outside the house.

SHIRLEY (*as* TERRY *re-enters*) Ice-cream is very bad for teeth.

(*There is silence while* MUM *slowly turns to gaze at* SHIRLEY).

MUM Oh, she's awake, is she? (*With a brittle smile and an underlying edge as she pats the side of the sofa.*) Come over here, dear. Sit beside me. Let me get a good look at you.

(SHIRLEY *glances at* TOM *before rising, and crosses to the sofa where she sits.* MUM *gazes at her.*)

His tastes seem to be changing. He used to like to feel a lot of flesh. I'm afraid you wouldn't fetch much in Sainsbury's. Is she sleeping in the guest-room, Tommy?

TOM Yer. That's right, Mum.

MUM (*to* SHIRLEY) I keep meaning to get a new bed; one that don't creak. I never get a good night's sleep, Shirley, when Tom has his guests to stay. All that creaking. But of course I never mention it. After all, he's been gifted with all this wonderful energy. It's got to be used up somehow. And I don't like embarrassing the girls.

TOM (*crossing to* MUM) It won't work, Mum. Shirley's not going to take a scrap of notice of your ravings; so, go on, you enjoy yourself, have fun.

SHIRLEY (*taking the plunge*) We're going to get married.

MUM (*kindly and without a pause*) Will it be a white wedding, dear?

SHIRLEY (*astonished at* MUM*'s reaction*) Er, yes. Yes, it will.

MUM You'll look radiant in white. And how many bridesmaids: two?

(SHIRLEY *nods.*)

I bet they'll be in yellow. And they'll each carry a bouquet

and you'll carry a prayer book. And the bells will ring, ting-a-ling-a-ling, and you'll be so happy, dear; and we'll all be happy for you. And I promise we'll be very sympathetic when Tom fails to turn up.

(TOM *is about to make a retort but* TERRY *comes down and tugs at his sleeve. Without another word* TOM *crosses to* R.)

TERRY (*with bored impatience*) Isn't it about time we changed the subject?

MUM (*gaily*) Just listen to Terry! Honestly, you're still the same little boy hating it when the spotlight isn't on you. (*Cooing to him.*) So haven't we noticed you for two minutes? Did you think you'd been forgotten?

(KAREN *rises and crosses to above the sofa where she takes a cigarette from her handbag.*)

(*Seriously, as she leans slightly back to get a better view.*) I don't think I've ever seen such a strong disciplined face in my life; and I'm not just saying that, Shirley love, because he happens to be my son. It seems to be hewn out of granite. It's the face of a man who's suffered and has come through it all. Am I right, Karen?

(*An embarrassed* TERRY *shuffles over to* R.)

KAREN I should say he's still suffering, wouldn't you, Mum?

MUM (*kindly*) You think you've failed him, do you, dear? Well, at least you're honest about it.

(*The phone rings and* MUM *stretches out an arm to take it.*) Pilgrim 8822. Yes? (*Pause.*) Speaking. (*Amazed.*) No! Oh, that's very bad, isn't it? (*Pause.*) Well, it's almost criminal negligence, isn't it? But don't you worry, I'll send one of my sons over to blow them up first thing in the morning. Goodbye. (*As she replaces the receiver.*) Remind Henry to go to the house on Fenton Street. We forgot to put in the damp course. (*Not at all concerned.*) I don't know, we seem to be having lots of complaints lately.

TERRY I've told you why. It's that clause you got inserted in all contracts. (*Wandering above the sofa.*) I mean, it's ridiculous. Fifty quid off the price for every day we're behind schedule!

MUM That's what's known as a good selling point. Besides, the customer has a right to know when he can move in.

TERRY Working like slaves just to make sure we're not fined. (*Moving further* L.) And you won't bring in extra staff to help out, will you?

MUM We've got enough layabouts living off us. Bring in any more, and our standards would suffer.

TOM That would be quite impossible.

TERRY (*moving to* L. *of sofa*) We just can't keep up the pace, Mum. It's crippling us.

KAREN Yes.

MUM (*turning and smiling politely at* SHIRLEY) Shirley dear, would you mind going and sitting elsewhere. I find B.O. offensive.

SHIRLEY (*furiously, as she rises*) I haven't got B.O!

TOM (*quickly*) Shirley!

(SHIRLEY *crosses to* TOM *who gives her a comforting squeeze as he leads her to the chair* D.R. *and gently sits her down.* MUM *pats the sofa and* TERRY *sits.*)

MUM Anyway, Terry, you won't be feeling like this when you move.

(TERRY *and* KAREN *exchange glances as he half rises in alarm.*)

(*Smiling.*) I thought that would surprise you. Yes, I've bought you a new house.

KAREN (*suspiciously*) Why?

MUM I'm sure some people would be overcome with gratitude, Karen, at such news. But not you, dear. You ask why, as if I'm doing it out of spite. You've had it too easy, Karen. (*To* SHIRLEY.) You won't be getting no backhanders from me, Shirley.

SHIRLEY (*still seething*) I don't want no backhanders from you.

MUM (*to* TERRY *with a sad smile*) See?

TERRY (*a shade worried*) You haven't paid for it, have you, Mum?

MUM Next week. Twelve thousand quid.

TOM (*crossing to* R. *of sofa*) Twelve thousand quid? Where's the contract then, Mum?

MUM With the solicitors. (*Casually, as she shrugs her shoulders.*) Of course if you don't want it, for one reason or another, you'd better tell me now.

TOM Watch her, Terry. She's fishing.

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