

PHYLLIS: Can I help, Vi?

VI: Yes, Phyl, you might put the preserved fruits in the sideboard cupboard, the sweets can go in there too, but leave one dish out to take into the front room.

PHYLLIS (*complying*): Sam got quite upset, didn't he?

VI: He's a bit Bolshie, that's all that's the matter with him.

PHYLLIS: I didn't understand half of what he was talking about.

VI: I don't expect he understood much of it himself.

PHYLLIS: Reg thinks he's wonderful.

VI: Reg thinks anybody who can use a few long words is wonderful. He'll soon get over it.

QUEENIE *re-enters, followed by EDIE, with a tray.*

EDIE *is rather an unkempt girl of about twenty-five.*

*During the following scene she and the girls manage to clear the table, change the tablecloths and generally tidy up the room.*

QUEENIE: Has Trotsky gone upstairs?

VI: You were awful, Queenie, if you hadn't of gone on at him the way you did, he wouldn't have got so excited.

QUEENIE (*busying herself*): Silly great fool.

VI: You needn't stay and wash up, Edie, you can slip along home, we can do it later.

EDIE: Thanks very much.

VI: How's your father's neck?

EDIE: Mother was up all night poulticing it, but it was still paining him terrible when I left this morning.

PHYLLIS: They say if you have one you generally have seven.

EDIE: Well, this is 'is third, so we only got four more to go.

Phyllis

VI (*piling things on to the tray*): There's some crackers left in the box in the sideboard—you might care to take them home to your little brother.

EDIE (*finding them*): Thanks ever so.

QUEENIE: Here—you can balance them on the top—that's right.

QUEENIE *balances the box of crackers on the top of the loaded tray and EDIE staggers out of the room with it.*

VI and PHYLLIS *fold up the tablecloth between them while QUEENIE gets the day cloth out of the sideboard drawer.*

PHYLLIS (*to VI*): It has been nice you letting me come and spend my Christmas Day with you. I don't know what I'd have done all by myself in that house in Wandsworth with Auntie ill and everything.

VI: Is she any better?

PHYLLIS: No, she just goes on about the same. Mrs. Watts is looking after her until seven so I don't have to get back till about then.

QUEENIE (*helping VI to put on the day tablecloth*): One of our girls at the shop's mother has been bedridden for five years—can't even get up to wash herself. Just think of that.

PHYLLIS: What some people go through!

*There is the sound of a tap at the window.*

QUEENIE: Good heavens, what's that? (*Going to the window.*) Only Mr. Mitchell come to talk to Dad, I expect.

*She pulls back the curtain and opens the window. It is still more or less daylight, but there is a fog, so the outlook is rather gloomy. BILLY MITCHELL steps into the room. He is a nice-looking boy of about twenty-one. He is in sailor's rig only without his cap.*