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"Don't you tie him in?" I asked—I remembered that my own nephews, at a similar age, had gone to bed trussed up like fowls.

Muriel looked shocked. "Don't you realise," she said, "that it has an extremely bad psychological effect on the child to deny him freedom of movement?"

I confessed I hadn't thought about it at all. It was obvious that Muriel had.

The trouble with Muriel is that she's too conscientious. It was noticeable at school, but one naturally didn't offer adverse comment on it then. Now the situation was different.

I taxed her with it when we had finished the casserole and were starting on the lemon snow. Muriel herself gave me the opening by telling me about some book on Child Development she was reading.

"I can't help feeling, my dear," I began, "that you're sacrificing too much of your life to your baby. You should go out more, develop other interests, see more of your old school friends. Elma was telling me there's a job going in her office. You'd have such fun together—you always did at school—and I know your mother would love looking after Douglas in the day-time."

"Yes, I know," said Muriel.

"Well?" I countered.

"I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing Mother's a member of the old school. She doesn't really understand about bringing up children.

I was shocked. "Her methods certainly seemed to work out all right with you and Mary and the boys."

"It was easier for us. There were four of us, you see, so we had a normal sort of family life. But I have to be very careful with Douglas because he'll be an only child."

We both avoided looking at the photograph of the young man in uniform on the mantelpiece. The smoke from my cigarette stung my eyes. I pitched it into the fire.

"I know what comes next," I said. "You're going to tell me that you never say 'don't' and you never smack."

"I sometimes say 'don't,' though I try not to. I never smack."

"You wait," I said, and smiled. A hateful, superior, spinsterish smile.

Colour flamed in Muriel's cheeks. Her eyes were bright.

"I don't think there's any excuse for deliberately inflicting physical pain," said Muriel. "There must surely be better ways of ensuring obedience. If there aren't I'd rather do without obedience!"

Something in me must have recognised the essential rightness of Muriel's attitude. I turned the conversation to less controversial topics, ones on which I felt my years of experience did not go for naught. For could any mother be expected to pay attention to the views on child-upbringing of a celebrate female of middle age?

Soothed by warmth, gossip, and sea air we retired early. I lay on my surprisingly comfortable camp bed clutching my hot water bottle and listening to Muriel fussing round in the kitchen. She's an inveterate housekeeper. Then I heard her switch off the light in the bedroom next door.

I was almost asleep. The heavenly warmth, the 'murmur of the sea . . .

I was completely awake.

That wretched child. It sounded more like a shriek of triumph than a yell of pain. It was a shriek of triumph. He seemed to be standing up and bouncing on the wirewove.

I heard Muriel get out of bed and go over to the cot.

"Naughty Douglas," she said. "It's sleep time now."

She always had a beautiful voice, or maybe it was just the maternal solicitude in it.

There were tucking-up sounds, and I heard the bed creak as Muriel got back into it.

Douglas went right on with his song-and-dance act. For half-an-hour. Then it

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