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## Oh Dear!

by Sue Hitchcock

Givenchy “Gentleman”. That’s the name of my son-in-law’s aftershave. I bought him some last Christmas. He uses it too lavishly, but I don’t mind the trace of it I can smell on the arm of their brown leather sofa. It’s so comfortable and the smooth curve of the padding on the arm fits my shoulder so perfectly.

We’ve had a busy morning, the twins and I. My son-in-law is away in Texas on a computer conference, so I’m staying over so Mummy can go to work, while the school is closed. We got up at six to have breakfast with Mummy, the twins and I. Then we had a long day to fill. First of all we went to the swings, Alfie and Winnie and I, and after to the shop. It’s good having twins at the playground, especially on the see-saw. I see lonely singletons uncertain about the potential partner at the other end, with good reason, too. Children are so different in their levels of enthusiasm and vigour. Anyway Alfred and Winifred, as they are properly called, had a good time and an ice cream to follow, before we went to the shop for something for lunch. They’re only three so I had to direct them away from the sweets and we bought fish fingers, potatoes for chips and carrots. Isn’t it funny how kids love carrot sticks? I wouldn’t care if I never had another one.

I hope they are tired –I’ve put them to bed for a nap – I really need a little rest, so I’m putting my feet up for a bit. Mmm, comfy! Ahh, zzz.

What’s that? Oh, the kids are awake. They sound happy enough, giggling. Still, I’d better get up. What time is it? Oh, my goodness, it’s nearly four. I’ve been asleep for hours.

As I climb the stairs, the giggling turns to shrieks.

“What are you up to, my little monsters?”

I look in their room, but apart from a floor strewn with toys like pebble-dash, it is empty. Are they in their parents’ room? No, but the smell of perfume is overwhelming and a bottle on its side on the dressing table reveals the source of that. Standing it up, I see no way of disguising the mischief, but what are they doing now?

Daddy’s office is out of bounds and they know they should not go in, but it has become fascinating. Thankfully the computer and its associated equipment have been unplugged, but children are remarkably inventive. Mummy’s make-up is just like crayons and you can use your fingers to paint with, just like finger-painting at nursery. The computer screen has a spray fan of pinks and reds, but it was too small for two people to paint, so Winnie had moved under the desk and was endeavouring to cover the wall with circles of lipstick and eye shadow in various shades of purple, brown and midnight silver.

“Oh, you little devils, come here.” of course they were engrossed and I had to pull them out bodily. They would have to be cleaned up first before their rainbow fingers could dab anything else. It wasn’t just their hands. There were smudges on elbows and knees, and a change of clothes would be necessary too, if we were to hide the evidence. So I put them in the bath with their favourite toys and went back to examine the damage. Make up remover worked well on the computer screen, but the wall under the desk was more generously covered.

Looking in on what might be going on in the bathroom, I snatched a wad of loo paper and made my first attempt at cleaning off the decoration. The greasy mess came off like pink poo, but was less inclined to submerge when I flushed it. The second wad of paper smeared the remainder and the wall now had a circle of shiny pink. I dared not leave the mischief makers in the bath any longer, with the water puddling on the floor. I threw down a towel and found two more for the children. Once they were dried and dressed again, I had to distract them long enough to ameliorate the mess. They would watch T.V. for a little while, till tea. Could I be sure? I’d have to keep an eye on them.

The kitchen stuff for cleaning grease might work, so I had a go. Colour came off, but still more remained and I realised I couldn’t win. It was time to reassess. Maybe it was more important for the twins to know they had spoilt something of Daddy’s, so telling them this was important, I took them upstairs to look at what they had done.

“Daddy will be home tomorrow. What do you think he will say when he sees his messy wall? I think I’ve got to cover it up as soon as I can, don’t you?”

Alfie ran off and returned with some drawing paper. “Put this on it!” he suggested and I wanted to laugh and cry and fell on my bottom, helpless.