

The Truth Will Out

by Judith Horth

I awoke at six, as usual. I needed no alarm clock. I was already comprehensively alarmed, both by the vivid dreams that had disturbed me all night and by the thought of Mother's reaction to what I knew I must tell her.

She was sitting up in bed, smoking her first cigarette of the day and wearing the pink lacy bedjacket I had bought her a couple of Christmases ago. It had taken months of saving my meagre pocket money for me to be able to afford it, and she had tossed it aside with barely a second glance. "They had some really beautiful ones in Derry and Toms," she had said, before opening her gift from my aunt Elaine. I supposed her other bedjacket was in the wash, or she would never have been wearing this one.

"About time, I'm parched," she said, stubbing out the cigarette in the silver ashtray and taking the cup of tea I handed her. "What have you been playing at, Marguerite? You know I like my tea prompt at seven."

"I'm sorry, Mother." I perched on the edge of the pink velvet bedroom chair. "I felt a bit dizzy and sick and needed to wait until that had passed."

She took a sip of the tea, pulled a face and put the cup and saucer on the bedside table. "The tea's not hot enough. Too much milk." She pulled the bedjacket more tightly round her and folded her arms. "It's not good enough, Marguerite. Since you took up with that Henry you have been out gallivanting far too often. No wonder you look so seedy and you are having trouble with your chores. You should have enough commonsense to realise that you need your beauty sleep. You must not simply give in to the boy every time he wants to take you out. Have some self-respect." She picked up her cup again and gestured for me to top it up. She drank the contents and shook her head.

"Don't frown like that, girl, you'll get wrinkles before your time. Now, run my bath for me, will you?"

I didn't move, and the words came tumbling out before I had time to think. "That's hardly fair, Mother! I didn't really want to go out with Henry in the first place – you pushed me in to it because his father has a title. You just wanted to show off to your friends! You didn't care whether I liked him or not and all you care about now is yourself. I told you I wasn't feeling well but you only noticed the bloody tea!" The blood was pounding in my head – I wanted to hit something. I'd never felt rage like it and before I could stop myself I screamed, "I'm pregnant, Mother! That's why I feel sick. That's why I look "seedy"! I'm going to have a baby!" That's what your precious Henry has done to me!"

By this time I was crying as I'd never cried before. The sobs took hold of me and I could not stop – I suppose I was letting go of all the fear and worry of the last few weeks. Mother knew now.

It was as my tears subsided that I realised she hadn't spoken. There had not been the screaming rage nor the insults I had feared. She hadn't threatened to throw me out on the streets, nor told me I must get rid of it – she had said nothing. I looked up to find her regarding me with narrowed eyes.

"So that's it. You foolish girl – have you no self-respect?" Her voice was cold. "How could you let me down like this?" She thought for a moment. "Does he know?"

I nodded. "He doesn't want to see me again. He told me I should get rid of it." The tears were coming again.

Mother snorted. "Ha! We'll see about that!" she said. "He will marry you, Marguerite, make no mistake about that! I shall see to it. I will not have a boy like that make free with my daughter and get away with it. I shall go and see his parents today."

I could almost swear that there was a note of triumph in her voice.