

# DESIGN FOR DAUGHTERS

In which a mother recalls her plans for her child and discusses what actually happened.

By MARION WELLS

**W**HEN we look about us at the present day early 20 and teenagers, it is a matter for speculation whether we could successfully separate those of whom so much specialised care and attention was lavished from infancy, and those others for whom depression and wartime hysteria made life a difficult and strenuous affair right from babyhood.

Those of us who were young mothers in the 1920's will recall the plans we made for the young futures, the rules we laid down, the routine we adhered to, with ourselves always the guiding light, always remaining young and modern, mother to be like a sister to daughter, father to be like a brother to son.

Neither grandma nor nana, nor young uncles nor aunts might kiss baby Shirley for fear of germs she might catch.

Now that Shirley is nearly 20, she is not nearly so fussy about avoiding this type of germ; she allows almost complete strangers (of the opposite sex) to kiss her.

She was faithfully taken out in her pram on every fine day for an airing, but now she exhibits a lamentable preference for pictures and dances.

She was kept strictly to a diet approved by the Baby Health Centre; all the necessary vitamins were administered, milk, orange juice, and emulsion to strengthen her bones and teeth. Now she smokes too many cigarettes, drinks an occasional cocktail, and just picks at food.

## Now It's "The Crowd"

She spent a good part of her babyhood in her little playground, playing with her smart toys, and she occasionally played games in a reserved kind of way with her cousins or with mamma's friend's little girl. Now she is always going somewhere with "the crowd" or bringing "the crowd" home to upset the house and dance.

And her schooldays; how carefully they were planned.

First at a kindergarten where she would mix with other nice children, and then at a good school, where she would mix with the daughters of parents who were "something."

Schooldays came and went, leaving baby almost a young woman, equipped with some knowledge more or less useful in the world she was about to face. She could read and write and add up, and she could talk about the French and history and science classes she had attended. She could swim and play tennis, and she had learned to speak and dress and act in a lady-like manner.

Mama's design from this point, of course, is to see her daughter an attractive and popular member of the younger set, with a desirable number of boy-friends hovering about, and eventually an engagement to the favored one, with wedding bells on the horizon.

But baby grown to 17 and 18 and 19 is just one of thousands of equally well-dressed attractive girls. She finds the job of being popular rather strenuous, so she smokes a lot and drinks a cocktail now and then to ease the strain. She has to be one of the crowd all the time, or right out of it; there is no half-measure.

To avoid being considered quiet and dull, she has to talk nonsense in a loud voice, and to get on with the boys at all, she has to let dimwits make imitation love to her.

Mother is smart and well-dressed, too, but looks forthright in spite of it. The other girls' mothers are all much the same; they get through their house-



Mama's design now is to see her daughter a popular member of the younger set.

work quickly and play bridge or go to an afternoon show.

Shirley, at 19, doesn't like it. She often wishes that her mother was comfortably stout with plainly-dressed, slightly-greying hair, and a motherly, comforting look, instead of that appraising or critical glance daughter so often receives. She wishes she had some sisters or brothers with whom she could relax and be natural.

## Mother's Doubts

And the modern mother herself? Life hasn't turned out exactly as she had meant it should. Poor little baby isn't so wonderful or rare as she had expected, and the child isn't even happy. Better, perhaps to have provided her with a genuine sister or brother, and contented herself with being merely mother.

And eventually Shirley becomes engaged to a boy who is also one of the crowd. It seems that he is just as sick of jazzing around as she is.

Their plans for the future include a homely old cottage with good old-fashioned furniture for which they will make a tour of the antique shops, and plenty of ground for their four dream children to play in.

Mother rather likes the idea, too. She can now relax into comfortable middle-age.

## THE ALMOND TREE

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She lay still and watched the delicate white petals, and as she watched, old ghosts came back to her and old beliefs. The belief that somehow the world was orderly and planned, and not a chaotic mess that she had to muddle through as best she could. You had only to look at almond trees and the world swung into alignment. The belief that people were essentially kind, and were only forced by circumstance into doing mean and evil things.

There was goodness in the world, a bewildered, badgered, side-tracked sort of goodness, but goodness nevertheless. And there was some of it in every person. There was even some goodness in Jan Jason when she stopped fighting everybody who had an axe to grind, and stop hiding her sickening disappointment in the world and herself with ridicule and delicate slander. No one to hurt her

here, no one to lie to her and force her into being the efficient, hard-boiled Miss Jason who lived in the cold glittering armor of her own success.

She slipped into her dressing-gown and wandered towards the bookshelf. Funny old books. A Bible, Charles Kingsley's "Westward Ho," "Lorna Doone," "Pilgrim's Progress" — no sophisticates here, no jaded, greedy little people tearing apart their shopworn world. She opened a book of poetry and read, "For I will have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow . . . dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings . . ." Why haven't I been reading that sort of thing thought Jan bewilderedly. Why didn't I find the time?

There was a knock on the door. "Breakfast" announced Grandma Penruth. "I hope you like it. What do you usually have for breakfast?"

Jan said guiltily—"Usually a cup of black coffee and a cigarette."

The old lady shook a disapproving silver head. "No wonder you're nothing but skin and bone."

"But I'm eight stone, Mrs. Penruth," said Jan weakly. "And for my height, that's just right."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Grandma. She led the way to the breakfast table. "The way you're going you'll pine away and die before you're forty. Don't you want to live to a ripe old age?"

"Yesterday I didn't want to . . ." Jan looked at the stout, bustling figure ahead of her affectionately. "But today there seems more sense to it."

"There's a lot of sense to it," said Grandma, over her shoulder. "You can find life just about as rich as a wedding-cake, even when you're getting on in years. It's always seemed to me that time can improve a wedding cake . . . let it mellow, I say, let it mellow . . . don't gulp it down when it's raw. Anyway, I'm getting mixed. I always do when I get abstract. Here's your breakfast, child."

Jan looked at her breakfast, and her heart failed her. Apricots. Cereal. Cream Eggs and Bacon. Toast. Pikelettes. Memories of her svelte, slim-fitting wardrobe assailed her . . .

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