

AN AFTERNOON BY THE SEASIDE - An excerpt between Mrs. Gunner, her son, Percy Gunner and their beach-front neighbors, the Crums. MRS. GUNNER is “a possessive old battleaxe”, and PERCY is “a nice but sad young man.” Page 1/2

MRS. GUNNER. Well, I don't know what the young are coming to! I really don't! Now, Percy, open the house.

(She gives the key to PERCY, who opens the hut and takes out MRS. GUNNER's chair.)

MRS. CRUM. Good afternoon, Mrs Gunner.

MRS. GUNNER. Good afternoon, Mrs. Crum. Good afternoon, Mr. Crum.

(GEORGE raises his hat, still reading. PERCY places the chair down.)

PERCY. Here you are, Mom. Which way would you like it?

MRS. GUNNER. That's very nice, thank you, dear.
(She goes to sit.)

No, I think I'll have it a bit more round.

(She rises. PERCY moves her chair round a bit and they sit.)

And my knitting.

(PERCY rises. He fetches her knitting and a towel from the hut. He places the towel on his chair then puts the knitting down next to MRS. GUNNER.)

(Fondly.) He's such a good son to me. Not that I want to keep him always waiting on me. “You must leave me and go and enjoy yourself,” I say. We old women must expect to sit back and take second place. He wouldn't go to the pictures last night because he thought I had a bit of a headache.

MRS. CRUM. That's nice. That's very nice. That's what I like to hear.

GEORGE. Did you have a headache?

MRS. GUNNER. *(Dignified.)* It passed off.

YOUNG MAN. *(Offstage.)* Percy! Percy! Come on, we've been waiting for you.

(PERCY walks to the edge of the pier and looks off.)

PERCY. Hi!

MRS. GUNNER. Who's that, dear? I can't see.

PERCY. It's Edie and Tom.

MRS. GUNNER. Edie? Is that the red-haired girl who wanted you to go on the charabanc trip?

PERCY. That's right – that's Edie. They've got a boat.
(PERCY starts to exit offstage down the pier.)

MRS. GUNNER. I don't think there's time for that today, Percy. I might want you to get me another skein of wool before the shops shut.

PERCY. Well – I kind of promised...

MRS. GUNNER. *(Martyred.)* Of course go if you want to, dear.

I never want to stand in the way of you enjoying yourself. I know only too well what a trouble we old people are.

PERCY. Oh, look here, Mom ...

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MRS. GUNNER. I dare say I can manage to get to the shops myself – if it's not too hot. It's just I feel my heart a little.

PERCY. No, no. I'll get your wool. I don't know that I want to go out in the boat.

MRS. GUNNER. You don't really like going on the sea, do you dear? Even as a little boy you weren't a good sailor.

PERCY. It's calm enough today. I'd better tell them.
(PERCY exits down the pier, dejected.)

MRS. GUNNER. *(Happily.)* I knew he didn't really want to go. Percy's so good-natured and these girls just badger a man so that he doesn't like to refuse. That Edie now, quite the wrong type for Percy.

MRS. CRUM. It's lucky he's got you to look after him.

MRS. GUNNER. Yes. Now if a really nice girl came along, I'd be only too pleased for Percy to be friendly with her.

GEORGE. Would you?

MRS. GUNNER. *(Laughing.)* Oh, yes. Nothing of the grudging mother about me. Some mothers can't bear their sons to go about with other people. I'm only too pleased. I wish Percy would do it more. But he's so devoted to me that I really can't persuade him to leave me. "You're better company than any girl, Mom," he says. Ridiculous, isn't it?