

For her Sisters Sake.

Karen had never felt witty or amusing before, but with Roger Gale, she suddenly felt both. He had spotted her behind the counter when he came in to her department store to buy perfume for his sister, and had doggedly pursued her until she laughingly agreed to go out for lunch with him.

After an hour, Karen felt as if she had known him all her life. She sipped her coffee, glancing at this smiling, handsome not-quite stranger gazing at her in undisguised admiration. Her stomach somersaulted.

“Tell me, Karen, before I make a complete fool of myself over you,” Roger murmured. “Is there already a special person in your life?”

She returned his gaze steadily.

“Yes there is, Roger. My sister Mandy is very special to me. I brought her up after our parents were killed in a car accident when she was twelve, and I was eighteen. Now she is a talented actress, in fact she is away touring with “Oklahoma” at the moment.”

“Even though she is so grown up now,” Karen went on “I still feel responsible for her happiness and security; But if you are asking if I am seeing anybody at the minute, the answer is no.”

Roger looked searchingly at her.

“I’m sorry about your parents.” He said “Thank you for being so honest with me. Now will you let me take you to the theatre tonight? There is a production of “My Fair Lady” that I was hoping to catch before I have to go back home to the States.”

The next two weeks passed in a haze of fun and romance. There were candlelit dinners. There were strolls along the embankment. There were yellow roses delivered to her door. Karen blossomed.

On his last day, Roger took her out for a long lunch. They tried to keep the conversation light-hearted, but Karen’s throat ached with the effort not to cry. She drove him to the airport, her heart heavy.

Roger held her tightly to his chest.

“You know I would stay if I could, honey.” He murmured into her ear “I’ll phone you every day until we can arrange to meet up next. Hang in there.”

All too soon his flight was called, and Karen could do nothing but watch him walk out of her life.

When she opened the front door to the flat, to her surprise her sister Mandy rushed out of the kitchen to greet her.

“Terry gave me a lift back down to London. What happened to you - you look terrible!”

Karen ignored the references to her swollen eyes and nose.

“Terry? I haven’t heard his name before. Are you seeing each other?”

Mandy sighed theatrically.

“Chill out, sis. He was our stage manager, he is extremely good looking and I think he has got a bit of a crush on me.” She smirked at her reflection in the mirror.

“But it is so good to be home after those foul digs. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have you.”

Karen looked at her sister and thought of Roger, half-way across the Atlantic by now. Her heart felt as if it would shatter in two. But at least Mandy felt looked after, and that was far more important than anything else. Wasn’t it?

As the weeks went by, Karen found herself missing Roger even more, even though he rang daily.

One day, Mandy answered the phone to Roger by accident. They hit it off at once and Karen listened to her sister roaring with laughter and felt irrationally jealous.

“Mandy sounds like a lot of fun,” Roger commented when she finally took over the phone. “I’d love to meet her sometime.”

Suddenly it was all getting out of hand. Now he wanted to meet her family as well as phoning her most days. What chance did she have of getting over Roger as long as he insisted that they stay in such close contact? Karen decided she would have to tell him it was over.

But the following day, Karen was summoned to head office and told she was to go to the States on business for a week.!

She could see Roger when her business was finished! Karen vowed to enjoy the holiday with him and then be brave, and tell him it was over, that it could never work.

But the week with Roger was magical. He proudly introduced Karen to all his friends, who made her feel very welcome.

On the last night they sat on the back porch, watching the sunset.

“Do you like this house?” he enquired.

“How can you even ask that? It’s beautiful, Roger.”

I’ve often asked myself why I bought it, as it is far too big for one. But now with you here – it seems so right. It has been waiting for you for a while- for us to start our lives together!”

Reality hit Karen like a bucket of icy cold water. She had to put a stop to this fantasy now, or it wouldn’t be fair on either of them.

“Roger,” her throat was dry. “You know I love being here with you. But I could never come and live here permanently. I have to think of Mandy- while she still needs me I must be there for her.”

Roger took her hands and looked into her eyes earnestly.

“Karen, honey, you’re wrong. I love you, and I’m asking you to marry me. Don’t ruin our chance of happiness, because of your misplaced sense of loyalty. Mandy is a tough little cookie – I know I haven’t met her yet, but of the two of you, she is the survivor.”

Karen looked at him blankly.

“Misplaced? What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that Mandy doesn’t need you as much as you think she does. I know you feel responsible for her, but surely that doesn’t mean you have to stay with her until you are little old ladies.”

“I made a promise to myself never to let Mandy down,” Karen snapped. “Can you not understand that? Or do you American men expect us to drop everything and come running to you?”

Roger’s eyes flashed angrily, but he took a deep breath.

“I think you are scared, Karen. Scared of making a commitment. ‘Taking care of my sister’ is your shield against the world. It stops you from getting too close to anybody else.”

“What gives you the right to make judgements on my behaviour?” spat Karen. “It has nothing whatsoever to do with you.”

Roger looked as if she had punched him. For a moment she wanted to take it all back, to tell him that she loved him. But the moment passed, and then she was at the airport, saying goodbye to Roger as if they were perfect strangers.

When she let herself into the flat, Mandy came flying out of the kitchen, with a tall bear-like man in tow.

“Karen, we’ve been dying for you to get back, we have some amazing news! Guess what, just guess what!”

“What?” asked Karen faintly. She hadn’t slept throughout the flight, and was aching to be back in Roger’s arms saying sorry.

“Terry has asked me to marry him! He has been asking me ever since the tour finished, but yesterday, I finally said yes. Oh, sis, we are so happy!”

Karen’s head was spinning, but she noticed the adoration on the smiling face of the young man, as he looked at Mandy.

“I am sorry to spring this on you Karen,” he said “but I want you to know that I intend to take very special care of Mandy – she is the best thing that ever happened to me,.”

Her sister was glowing with love and excitement. Roger had been right after all. Of the two of them, it was Mandy who was the survivor, the one looking forward to a future filled with love. Whereas she..

At that moment the phone rang.

“Karen?” Rogers voice was full of concern.

“Roger – we must talk.” She said.

Mandy and Terry thoughtfully went into the kitchen.

“I have been doing a lot of thinking since you caught that flight.” Roger went on

“I know you are only doing what you believe to be right, and it is one of the things I love about you. Am I forgiven?”

“Oh, Roger, yes!” Breathlessly, Karen told him what had happened. Roger let out a whoop of joy.

“That is wonderful news, honey! You see- your little sis is going to be well looked after- she has the two of us, plus a guy of her own to watch over her!”

There was a pregnant pause, both hoping that the other would start.

“I’m probably too late, but does your offer still stand?” blurted Karen. She heard the shout of joy echoing down the line.

“Are you kidding? What’s the soonest you can get here? You’ll be coming home, honey!”

And Karen knew he was right.