

Rachel arrived home for Easter full of bounce, blonde curls, and a small stud in the side of her nose. Martin thought it looked dreadful, but he managed not to tell her so. It took her all of three minutes to deal with the issue of her father's redundancy:

'Now that you've got the shove as well,' she told him, 'that makes four out of seven fathers in my group of close friends. If you're not back in work by September you should be able to get a much bigger grant for me next year.'

Next day she went out and got a job in a local pub. 'There,' she said. 'That's how to deal with cash shortages.'

At least she shows no signs of blaming me, Martin thought, and she's got more sense than to make noises about taking pity on me.

Adrian, by contrast, made no comment at all. He had become more settled since his escapades during his first term, and even got the occasional call from the friend they had taken away for the weekend in February. But neither Marian nor Martin knew whether he was feeling happy or whether he had merely found a way of keeping his discontents to himself. Perhaps I should have taken him to the pub after we'd done the directory round, Martin thought. He was making me an offer, and I pushed him away.

Martin's mother was less easy to deal with. She refused to accept that she needed a hearing aid, so telephone calls with her had become confused shouting matches which they tried to avoid as much as they could.

'You'll have to let her know when you ring to wish her a Happy Easter,' Marian said. 'We don't want another of her bouts of complaining that her family doesn't tell her what's going on.'

So, when Martin had fortified himself with another large whisky, he called her and included the news that he was looking for another job.

'Another dog ? How long is it since your last one got run over?'

'Another JOB, Mother, not another dog.'

'What's the matter with your present one?'

'I haven't got one.'

'Why not ?'

'There's a recession on, you know.'

'A procession, did you say ? What procession?'

'I said a RECESSION, Mother.'

'What about it ?'

'That's why I'm looking for another job.'

Pause. Martin was about to say Happy Easter, must go, when she went on:

'You mean you've got the sack ?'

'Yes.'

'Speak up, I can't hear very well, you know.'

'YES.'

'Why? What did you do wrong ?'

'Nothing.'

'Are you sure, Martin?'

'All right, everything, if that makes you feel better.'

'Pardon?'

'Never mind.'

'I can't understand what's wrong with the world these days. First Susan writes to tell me that her husband's up to his neck in debt because of some disastrous property deal, now you tell me you're out on the street. I've told her I'm not in a position to help her, so the same goes for you.'

As if you ever helped me, Martin thought sourly as he replaced the receiver and headed for the whisky bottle again.

With Marian's parents, who were told the news at a much earlier stage, there was simply a tacit understanding all round that the subject was not to be mentioned in Martin's hearing. And I don't want to be told what they say about it when I'm not there, Martin thought. I've always known they thought I wasn't good enough for her. They may both be ill and wobbly these days, but I'm sure they've got enough energy left for a good gloat. After all, my father-in-law's always right, I distinctly remember him telling me so.