



Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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Sister Love

By John Escott

Marcia met Howard Collins at church. Marcia was thirty-five years old, Howard was forty-one. Howard lived with his mother in a small house on the south side of the town. Marcia lived with her sister and father in an apartment, three streets away.

Marcia did not work. Her father, George Grant, was ill and never left the apartment. He stayed in bed most of the time and always needed somebody with him. So Marcia stayed at home with her father, and only went out when her sister Karin was in the house.

The two sisters were very different. Marcia was short with a small round face and short black hair. Karin was ten years younger. She was tall, had long brown hair, and good legs, and a suntan all through the summer. People often said to Marcia, 'Your sister is very beautiful.' There were always lots of men ready to take Karin out to dinner or to the cinema. But Marcia stayed at home.

Karin worked in a shop in the town. When she was at home, she liked to sit up on the roof garden of their apartment building.

It was one Sunday in May when Marcia came home with Howard the first time. She took him to see her father. George Grant was in bed. He had grey hair and a grey face. Sometimes he read a book, but mostly he just sat in bed and watched television.

'This is Howard, father,' Marcia said. 'He works at the hospital, and we met at church. I told you about him last week. Do you remember?'

'No,' her father said. And he turned his face away, back to his television. He was not interested in new people or his daughters' friends.

Just then, Karin came into the room. She wore a white bikini and white shoes. She smiled at Howard.

'So you're Howard,' she said. 'My big sister has got a boyfriend at last!'

Howard's face went red and he looked down at his feet.

Karin laughed. 'Come on up to the roof garden and have some wine. The sun is wonderful this morning.'

'Oh, I...' Howard began.

Marcia looked angrily at her sister. But then she said, 'Yes, I must get father a drink. See you in a minute, Howard. Go up to the roof and talk to Karin.'

The sun was hot on the roof and Howard took off his coat. He looked around. There were three chairs, a sun umbrella, a sunbed, and a table with three glasses and a bottle of wine on it. There were tiles on the floor, and next to the little wall around the edge of the roof, there were some flowers in boxes. This was the 'garden'.

'Very nice,' said Howard.

Karin smiled at him.

'We don't see many good-looking men up here,' she said. 'Sit down and have a drink.'

Howard's face went red again. He gave a shy little laugh. 'Oh, er... thank you,' he said. He tried not to look at Karin's long suntanned legs, but it was not easy.

'I come up here all the time when it's sunny,' Karin said. She began to put suntan oil on her arms and legs.

Howard watched.

Then Marcia arrived, and the three of them sat in the sun and drank wine. Marcia looked at Howard with love in her eyes. She did not look at Karin.

Karin watched them. Her eyes went from her sister, to Howard, and back again to her sister. She smiled.

It was not a nice smile.

Every Sunday morning after that, Marcia brought Howard home for a glass of wine after church. Howard stopped his car in the street outside the apartment building, and Marcia said, 'Sound the horn, Howard. Tell Karin we're here, then she can get the wine ready.'

So Howard gave three little toots on his car horn. On sunny days, Karin always came to the wall at the edge of the roof, and looked over to wave at them. Then she went to get the wine.

She always wore her bikini or a very short skirt. Marcia never wore short skirts or a bikini.

'My legs are too fat for bikinis,' she told Howard. 'Your legs are... very nice,' he said shyly.

One day in June Karin asked Howard, 'What time do you finish work, Howard?'

'About six o'clock,' he said.

'Could you bring me home after work?' Karin said. 'My shop's very near the hospital - you drive right past it. And you only live three streets away from us.'

'There's a very good bus,' said Marcia quickly. 'It stops outside our building.'

'But the bus is so slow!' Karin said. 'Please, Howard!'

Howard looked from one sister to the other. 'Oh, well... er, yes, all right then,' he said.

'Thank you!' Karin said, and gave him a quick kiss.

So every evening Howard drove Karin home. On the first Friday, they were an hour late. When they arrived, Marcia was at the door of the apartment building.

'What happened?' she asked. 'Why are you so late?'

'There was an accident,' Karin said. 'Three cars, all across the road - on that hill by the cinema, you know. We couldn't get past, we couldn't go back. There were so many cars! Nobody could move!'

Howard said nothing.

It was a long, hot summer that year. Marcia went to church every Sunday morning, and Karin stayed at home with their father. When it was sunny - and it often was - Karin went up to her sunbed on the roof.

When Marcia went up to the roof garden, she always sat under the umbrella. But Karin put on lots of suntan oil and sat in the sun in her bikini.

'The hot sun's not good for your body,' Marcia said. Karin laughed. 'Howard likes my body.'

'No, he doesn't!' Marcia said angrily.

'Oh, he does!' Karin said. 'He's very shy with women, but he always looks at my body very carefully. He does it all the time. Perhaps he wants me to take off-'

'Stop it, Karin!' Marcia said. 'Don't say those things!' Karin laughed. 'What's the matter, big sister? Are you afraid I'm going to take him from you?'

Marcia did not answer.

The next Sunday, Howard phoned Marcia early in the morning.

'I - I don't feel very well,' he said. 'I'm not going to church today.'

'My love, I'm sorry,' Marcia said. 'Can I phone you when I get home?'

'Yes, of course,' he said.

'I can't phone before one o'clock,' Marcia said. 'I'm going to be late back because there's a meeting after church. Something about Africa, I think.'

'Oh yes, I remember,' Howard said.

But Marcia was wrong. There was no meeting after church that morning. It was the next Sunday. So she left church at the usual time and arrived home at a quarter to twelve.

First, she went in to see her father, but he was asleep. Then she phoned Howard, but there was no answer.

'Perhaps he's sleeping,' she thought. 'And his mother doesn't want to answer the phone.'

She went to her room and put on a long summer skirt. Then she went up to the roof garden.

She put her hand on the door to the roof... and stopped. The door was half open and she could hear voices. There was someone with Karin.

A man. Howard. Howard? Marcia listened.

'I feel bad about this,' Howard said. 'We must tell Marcia soon, Karin.'

'No!' Karin said quickly. She gave a little laugh. 'It's our secret, Howard. Only for a little longer. All right?'

'I - I don't like...' he began.

'But you do love me, Howard,' Karin said. 'Not Marcia? Say you love me. Please!'

Marcia suddenly felt cold.

'You... you know I do,' Howard answered. 'But-'

Karin kissed him. 'It's our little secret. Oh, is your car outside, my love? We don't want Marcia to see it.'

'I didn't bring my car,' Howard said. 'I walked here.'

'Good,' Karin said. 'But it's getting late. You must go, before she comes home.'

They kissed again.

'See you tomorrow, usual time, usual place,' said Karin. 'Now, go!'

Marcia moved quickly and quietly away from the roof door, and ran to her bedroom. She did not want Howard or Karin to see her.

She heard their voices. Then the front door of the apartment opened and closed. Howard was gone.

Marcia sat on her bed for an hour. 'Why, why, why?' she thought. 'Why does she do it? I stay at home with an old man all the time. I can't go out to work, I can't make new friends, I can't meet new people. I go shopping once a week and I go to church once a week. That's all. And then I met Howard. When he said "I love you", I was so happy. And now...?'

Karin had everything. Good looks, a job, friends. She was young, she was beautiful, she could have any man. So why Howard? Why, why, why?

'It's not because she wants him,' Marcia thought. 'It's because I love him. It's because she doesn't want me to be happy.'

But you do love me, Howard. Not Marcia?

You know I do.

Was it true? Did Howard love Karin and not her? No! He saw only the beautiful, suntanned body. He didn't know her.

'She's not going to have him...' Marcia thought.

Every evening that week, Howard drove Karin home after work. And every evening they got later and later.

The next Sunday, Marcia didn't go to church.

'I've got a bad head,' she told Karin. 'I just phoned Howard and told him, and he's coming here after church as usual. I'm going back to sleep for an hour or two.' And she went into her bedroom and shut the door.

Later in the morning, when Karin was with their father, Marcia went up to the roof garden. Karin's bottle of suntan oil was on the table, and Marcia smiled.

When Karin came up to the roof, Marcia was in her chair under the umbrella with a book in her hand.

'Oh, is your head better?' Karin asked.

'Yes, thanks,' Marcia said.

Karin wore her bikini, a new yellow one. She opened her bottle of suntan oil. 'Oh, there's not much here,' she said. 'I must get some more.' She began to put some oil on her legs.

Twenty minutes later, Howard stopped his car in the street below. Up on the roof, Karin and Marcia heard the usual three little toots on his car horn.

'He's here,' Karin said excitedly. 'Your man's here, big sister!' And she laughed.

Yes, Marcia thought. My man, not yours, Karin.

Karin jumped up from her sunbed. She ran to the wall at the edge of the roof to look down and wave to Howard. She had no shoes on, and at the wall, her feet suddenly slipped away from under her.

'Aaagh!' she cried.

She fell forward, and put out her hands to grab the wall. But the top of the wall was slippery too. Her hands could not hold it, and slipped away, off the wall, over the edge. And her body went on too, over the edge of the wall, and down...

Down... down... down...

Before she hit the ground, she knew.

Slippery... suntan oil... Marcia...

- THE END-