

The Librarian

from *A Career in Witchcraft* by Kaye Umansky

- ¹ Mr Smike wasn't fond of children. Noisy, ill-mannered little brats with their shrill little voices and grubby little hands. The less he had to do with them, the better. Normally, he would be over in the reference section of the main library, but Miss Jaunty, the children's librarian, had rung in sick and there was nobody else to fill in.
- ⁵ He cast a jaundiced eye over the place. Picture books, hah! Cushions, jigsaw puzzles, mobiles, posters, murals, double hah! This wasn't a proper library. It didn't have QUIET notices all over the place. There wasn't even a box marked FINES. Great hordes of schoolchildren had been in and out all day, putting their unwashed fingers all over the books. The place had been chock-a-block with chattering mums pushing buggies full of snotty-nosed toddlers who waddled around the place getting underfoot. They treated the place like a hotel. It wasn't his kind of library at all.
- ¹² Oh well. Thankfully, it was nearly closing time. With a bit of luck, the Jaunty creature would be back tomorrow dispensing books and smiles and organising poetry competitions and storytelling sessions and whatever else the silly woman did to keep the little monsters happy.
- ¹⁵ Briskly, he gathered up his papers, slipped them into his briefcase and clipped his pen into his breast pocket. He would finish the list of overdue books at home. It would be something to look forward to after supper. Then, if there was time, he would write another of his complaining letters to the local paper. (Mr Smike wrote a lot of complaining letters to newspapers. It was a kind of hobby. He wrote letters about the state of the drains, the surliness of dustmen, the laziness of the unemployed and the trouble with Youth today. If the paper didn't publish them, he wrote and complained about *that*.)