

sash for a back width," Judith said in a monologue sort of way, and with tragedy in the very air with which she held the scissors, "and even now, Gert, the skirt is not nearly full enough. I shall have to—"

She broke off as the postman's knock sounded through the house, and Ann, the old servant who had been with the family when both girls were babies, brought in a letter.

It was for Gertrude. She read it, and, as she read, involuntarily made a quick sound of disapproval.

Judith looked up sharply from her litter of silk and tussu paper.

A photograph had fallen from the envelope to the floor. She picked it up. It was the photograph of a bride. Her handsome face grew hard.

Gertrude sprang up and put her arms about her, crying—

"How careless of me! Oh! my poor, dear old Judy! I did not mean you to see. Pollie Wheeler sent it—the monster! She did it to stab you. She knew that—that—"

"He threw me over for a rich girl—yes," completed Judith, calmly. "Do I care? Do I look as if I did? What an idiot you are, Gert. Anyone would think you were in love with the man yourself."

"Care? Of course you do not," sobbed the younger sister. "He was not half good enough. I always hated him. What do we want with marriage? We will live here together always, and be as happy as the days are long."

"Umph!" The beauty disengaged herself and took a long, critical look at the photograph. "I should never have thought that even she could have looked such a guy," she said passionately.

Then she turned her back on her work and knelt on the rug beside her sister.

"We have enough money to rub along with," Gertrude went on with much philosophy, "and men are a nuisance at best."

"Enough money to starve on," the other corrected, scornfully. "I'm sick of turning old gowns and scraping and screwing. Just look at that skirt, for example. A couple of yards more silk—"

"You shall have them, and I'll wear my black lace."

"As brown as a berry. Impossible. As for men—Gert, listen!" Judith spoke very fast. "I've—I've accepted Mr. Robson. He's rich, and not bad. We could never pig on here alone; and I should like to show those Wheelers, and him—why, what's—Good gracious!"

Gertrude had fallen back in a dead faint.

"It was—the cold—the fire, I mean," she said weakly, when they brought her to, and she lay on the couch staring vaguely from Ann's face to Judith's and

back again. "And I had no dinner but a meat pie and a cup of coffee. Oh! Judy, send—" She was off again. Between them they carried her up to bed.

Ten years later—on Christmas Eve, too, as it happened—Gertrude and Judith sat together in the tiny Putney drawing room. In a corner two children were playing—a richly-dressed girl and a fragile-looking boy.

Judith had grown massive; she seemed to fill the room. Gertrude was thin and pale and fair—hardly changed. There the advantage of a plain, insignificant woman comes in. At thirty-three she who had never been pretty or striking looked a good five years younger than big Mrs. Robson, coarsened by prosperity.

"Of course you knew it would come," Judith was saying. "Sooner or later all these stuffy old houses are pulled down. Land is so valuable, even at Putney."

"Stuffy! Oh! Judy, we love it so!"

"You do. I never went in for sentiment. What will you do when they turn you out? Better get rid of that child"—she glanced coldly at the boy—"and live with us. Mr. Robson would not mind, and you would be useful with Gladys." Here she glanced more warmly at the other child—her own. "I never could think," she went on, "what induced you to advertise for the care of a motherless child."

"I'm fond of children," Gertrude told her, a little valorously, "and then there was the money. You forgot, Judith, how poor I am."

Mrs. Robson let her eye rove round the room. How shabby and out of date it all was!

"You've regularly 'botched' your life," she said, with a sister's candor. "You might have married, like other women, if you'd come to us at Lancaster Gate instead of moping here."

"I shall never marry—for private reasons of my own," the spinster said, with gentle dignity.

As she spoke a little spasm of pain twisted her placid face for a second.

"Why, years ago," Judith went on unheeding, "there was Charlie Smith. You might have married him and been a millionaire's wife. He has come home to England. He's made an immense fortune out of South African—something. Mr. Robson did say what, but I'm so stupid at business matters. And now I must be off."

She rose. Gertrude said nervously. "Oh! do stay and see him—the child's father, you know. He sent a telegram to say he'd come this afternoon. I've never met the man in my life. He's never been before, although I've had little Charlie two years."

"
her
"I
able
Not
Ger
dini
Gla
St
bust
pull
drow
G
room
pick
wie
cake
nurs
fath
Th
was
fashi
to Ju
Th
was
Th
knoc
She
Ho
with
The
throa
years
Sinit
Lat
and t
"It
sho h
cared
would
accept
so ver
mo wi
and I
mo to
let you
"My
"An
of you
of that
as she
Then
saying
Queer I
remem
her ma
"Mr.
admitte
after w
It was
someon
pressed
man. I
her very
Anoth
"I we
ory. I
I was f
girl. Si