

he'd have left her something, a few hundreds at least. But you'll do it." The voice was earnest now.

Jack lowered at her with heavy humour. "You think a man shouldn't dispose of his money without consulting his wife?"

"Certainly I think so."

"Then I can't give anything to my mother without consulting Gladdie here, and I know what she'll say. Cuts both ways, you see, your women's rights."

Gladys gave a giggle, decorously subdued. Edith turned back to the other two men. "And this is what women have to put up with, and no law to prevent it, and this is only one case?"

"I don't suppose it happens very often. One seldom hears . . ."

"No, not with the higher classes, perhaps; they are protected by family rules and by public opinion, but with people like us it happens, I believe, very often, and with the very women who have done most. You don't hear of it, perhaps, because what can a woman do? Nothing, nothing whatever."

She stopped. The door behind her had opened as she finished. At the same moment her husband jumped to his feet, a look of horror on his face. Jack clutched at the table, his heavy mouth opening; his wife clasped his arm with a hysterical giggle. Involuntarily Edith followed their gaze. "Hannah," she cried, "Hannah, is that you?"

She had reason to ask. It was Hannah, but Hannah completely changed. Instead of the many-flounced crape costume, she wore a salmon-pink silk and chiffon dress with parasol and gloves of a harmonious shade in her hand. The widow's bonnet, with its crape veil, was swept away, and in its place was a fashionable hat, the pink mingling exquisitely with delicate shades of blue. Altogether no more brilliant or festive figure had ever stepped within the private parlour of the Edginton Hotel than was presented by this its hitherto demure and housewifely mistress. Strange to say, the little elderly face did not look grotesque in this gay costume. There was a dignity about the countenance that redeemed even the strange attire.

They noticed this, perhaps vaguely, as after a few amazed exclamations their voices fell into silence.

Hannah waited till there was complete silence. Then she rustled further forward. Her hands, no longer mittened, a filmy fall of lace half hid the worn knuckles, clasped the back of her chair. "You'll excuse me taking the dress," she turned to her sister-in-law; "it's a liberty, I know; not that the silk's as good as good; it's a liberty me taking it as a loan—loan—"

"Keep it," Edith found herself saying; "it's yours; only not now—"

"It's just now I'm wanting it. I'm going to tell you why I'm wearing it. You all know what I've done here. I won't say anything about being a wife and mother. The law don't hold with wives and mothers, so far as I see, but there's something the law does hold with, that's partnership, and I was Josiah's partner. It wasn't only a bit of money I put into the business. I put myself into it. For five-and-twenty years I done that. I've worked 'ard and 'ad no 'oliday, and brought the business through hard times, and what's my reward? The servant that stayed with him six years gets something, and the other as stayed with him ten gets more, according, but the wife that stayed with him five-and-twenty years and been servant, clerk, nurse, and partner, partner . . . she gets nothing."

Her son had recovered himself. "You get a 'ome, mother," he said reprovingly.

"A 'ome, a place by the fireside in the home that isn't mine now, though it's me as made it? Not that I want it for myself. It's the money's worth I want. But I haven't got it. I got nothing, and that's why I am wearing this dress, and that's why I'm going out in it."

But these words, like an electric shock, roused son and brother from their stupor. "Mother." "Hannah, you can't." "Have you forgotten you're a widow?"

"I ain't Josiah's widow. He's said so himself in his will, and who am I to go against him? And why shouldn't I wear a bright dress and lace to it? High time I began if I'm ever going to. I ain't ever had such a dress all those years. I ain't ever had nothing. But I'm going to have 'em now. Why shouldn't I, not being a widow? I'm going out, so as everyone can see. I'm going to the theayter; if there's a

matinay on. . . . I ain't been inside a theayter these twelve years, and I'll ride in one of them new taxi things before all Edginton. If it gets into the papers I don't care. If a 'Daily Mirror' man asks me why I did it, I'll tell him I've got to do it. I've got to show what it means to us women. . . . I've got to."

"Oh, Hannah, don't." It was Edith who spoke. "You've shown how you feel. Now let it rest. It will be so terrible. Poor Josiah didn't understand—"

"Yes, Edith. Josiah knew all along that Gladys and I didn't hit it off together, but there's a mean, nasty spirit in every man, as you'll find out some day, which makes them like women to be at loggerheads, so that they can think how much superior they are—easy enough, seeing they only know the people they want to, but are always shoving their wives against the women they'd be better friends with, as the saying is, apart. No, Edith, Josiah knew very well, only he didn't care. And that's why I'm doing this." She made another move to the door.

But now they grasped the full meaning of her intention, this reversal of the mourning process. "You stop her," Jack almost screamed; "tell her you'll put the law on her, Aunt Edith—the law on her for stealing your clothes."

"I can't; but oh, Hannah!"

Hannah kept her son at bay with her glance. "You may knock your mother down. It's what mothers are for in England; but that's the only way you will keep me. . . ." She tore herself from Edith's clasp, and, with James Reid's indignant outcry, "I'll never forgive you," she went, an incongruous, bright-hued figure, into the sunshine.

"No, I'll never forgive her. He said it again, dazed, stupefied a minute later. Lawyer and servants had slipped away; Jack had gone with Gladys. "Why, it wasn't every young couple as would stand having a mother-in-law in the house always. Mother didn't understand. So he had muttered as the door banged behind him. Edith stood by her husband and tried to soothe him, pointing out the psychology of the incident. "She isn't heartless. Josiah's only a sort of symbol to her now. It's a mission this; she feels she must. Oh,