

Best-Dressed Woman

BY HELEN WELSHIMER

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
 JUDITH IRVING, heroine, America's best-dressed woman.
 PHIL IRVING, Judith's estranged husband.
 MARTA ROGERS, Judith's rival.
 BRUCE KNIGHT, author, Judith's old classmate.
 MILLICENT BAYNE, Bruce's protege.

Yesterday—Judith suffers her first suspicions about Phil and Marta. They are confirmed when Phil telephones, "I'm being detained."

CHAPTER TWO

PROMISING Phil that she would make his apologies, Judith held the receiver of the telephone in a frightened hand. She knew that he had no conference, no client, no business. He was taking Marta Rogers to dinner. She knew it, and yet she wanted to keep that telephone connection which bound her to her husband. When it broke, he would go back to the other woman.

Phil didn't play casually with women. His devotion and fidelity were the talk of their circle. Maybe that very thing left him open to a scheming woman of Marta Rogers' type. She made a hasty decision.

"I'm tired, Phil. I'm skipping the party, too."

His voice was surprised when he answered. Worried, too, but she could not tell if it was for her or because he felt compunction now about carrying out his own plans.

"You're not ill? Judy, I'll skip the whole business and come home as soon as I can. That's what you want, isn't it, dear?"

"DONT come until you're ready," she answered. "I'll be lazy and read."

Phil preferring somebody else—it was preposterous! Of course it would be over in a week, a month. Or would it? For six years he had preferred her...

"Judith Irving, you are acting like a fishwife," she upbraided that still white face in the mirror over the telephone table. Oh, every place she looked today there were mirrors! "No, go walk home. Get so tired that nothing will look as good as a hot bath and a deep chair and a pot of tea. Hurry!"

As she started up the avenue, a pleasant voice spoke at her shoulder. "Maybe we met on a walk somewhere!" She turned to see Bruce Knight. She felt oddly pleased. "I hear tees," he said, smiling disarmingly.

"So do I," she answered. "But I go to hundreds of them."

"Why do we do it?" She answered, explaining it more to herself than to him.

"MY husband likes them... the geniality after the work's over. I like people but not in crowds. I feel that my thoughts are being stepped on."

"Have you seen my play yet?" he asked presently.

She shook her head, dark and shining under the simple blue salwar that matched the hyacinth jacket. "It's a sellout. We have to wait until we can get seats."

"I'll send you tickets."

A boy and a girl from Pittsburgh, walking together again. She thanked him as she turned off at the street which led over to the East River and her apartment. He would send two seats, of course. She had a premonition that she would be seeing the play alone.

But she didn't call off her engagement. Instead she left a note for Phil and went west. He came when the play that followed the dinner was half over.

There were photographers in the lobby during the intermission and Judith smiled and posed while her frock was being photographed. Best-dressed woman—Phil stood near, smiling at her. Suddenly she became aware that the old warmth was missing. He was giving her a courteous gesture. He looked amused, a little critical.

THAT was the reason for the perplexity in her face in the pictures next day. The dress had photographed perfectly. It was white silk crepe with bands of gold and silver embroidery that edged the cape and the panels and made the belt. She had arisen early to have breakfast with Phil and she smiled as she showed him the paper. He looked at the pictured face, and when his eyes searched her own face they were troubled.

"Are you ill, Judy?"

"No, Phil, dear. Why?"

"Would a trip help you? Paris perhaps?"

"I don't think so." Oh, if you only tell me about Marta, if there is anything to tell; if she would put the cards on the table and let me help you face it. Please, Phil. Outwardly her face was quiet. "Honey, let's lunch together. I'll pick you up down on Wall Street."

HE looked at her a little sadly. As though there were something she couldn't understand; as though there were something he wished to tell her and couldn't. He was hunting a path to reach her. Impulsively she spoke:

"What is it, Phil?"

He started. "What? Oh—oh nothing at all. I'm ending up a business deal at lunch today. How about tomorrow?"

Tomorrow didn't matter. Not even if she had not made the date with Bruce Knight. She told him about that now and his interest quickened.

When her telephone rang an hour later and she heard Bruce's voice she was glad. Here was someone who wanted to see her; someone without romantic implications; that was over. "Was it today or tomorrow, or both, we're lunching?" he asked. "I honestly forgot."

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