

Revenge Tragedy

by Judith Horth

“There’s a letter for you, Marguerite. Shall I open it for you?” Greta picked up the letter opener from the hall table and thrust it under the flap of the long white envelope. As the blade sliced through the first inch of paper, Marguerite, wiping her hands on her pinafore, rushed into the dining room.

“No, Mother, I’ll open it please.”

With a snort of displeasure, Greta handed over the envelope, her eyes narrowing as Marguerite tore it open and pulled out the contents.

“Really Marguerite, is there any need to behave in that fashion? It is so much more ladylike to use the letter opener. And must you walk about in that dreadful pinafore? You should take it off before you leave the kitchen. Supposing one of the neighbours were to call, what would they think? Have you no standards?” Going to the mirrored overmantel, she patted her sleek grey French pleat and smiled at her reflection.

Marguerite did not respond and Greta, glancing at her daughter in the mirror, saw that her shoulders had drooped. “What’s the matter, Marguerite? For goodness’ sake! You look like a sack of potatoes. Don’t slouch!”

Marguerite looked up, her shoulders straightening in an automatic response. “Daisy didn’t pass the 11 plus. She won’t be going to Wadsworth Grammar after all,” She spoke in a whisper, avoiding eye contact.

Silence fizzed as Marguerite waited for the response, watching her mother’s face register first shock and then scorn.

“Tsk!” The sound exploded from between Greta’s red-painted lips. “Like mother like daughter then? I don’t know what I did to deserve this. If she has to go to Longfellow Lane she will end up just like you, leaving school with no qualifications and, in all likelihood, getting herself in the family way before you can say Jack Robinson!”

“No, Mother...”

“Don’t you raise your voice at me, my girl! And to think I was telling Anthea Cavendish only the other day that my granddaughter was certain to get a grammar school place. I shan’t be able to look her in the face. Oh, do stop snivelling!”

With that, she stalked across the room, her heels clicking on the parquet, and called up the stairs to Daisy, who, after a few moments, came clattering down to join them, her hair awry and traces of pink lipstick still visible on her lips and cheeks.

“What have you been up to, child?”

“Nothing, Grandma,” Daisy said, her eyes wide.

“Don’t lie to me girl! You’ve been messing around with your mother’s cosmetics again. Look at the state of you! Go and clean that muck off your face immediately and then come in here. I want to have a word with you, young lady.”

Daisy narrowed her eyes and glared at her grandmother, but, noticing a small shake of her mother’s head warning her not to make the situation worse, she went to do as she was told, reappearing a few moments later, her face scrubbed clean and her hair tied neatly in a ponytail. She went to stand by her mother, who passed her the letter. She read it and shrugged her shoulders, letting the piece of paper fall on to the table.

“Well?” Greta snapped. “What have you to say for yourself?”

Daisy frowned. “What do you mean, Grandma?”

“What do I mean? I should have thought that was obvious! You know perfectly well that we ...I...expected you to go to the Grammar school. You are a Templeton after all, even though your father was only a Hobson, and Templetons have always gone to Wadsworth Grammar. Even your mother managed that! What do you have to say for yourself?” Daisy frowned, then folded her arms. “I didn’t want to go to the Grammar school.”

There was an audible intake of breath from Marguerite, who put out a hand to her daughter. Daisy took hold of it, smiled at her mother and turned back to her grandmother.

“You didn’t want to go...I don’t understand...” Greta’s puzzled expression quickly gave way to a look first of horror and then of fury, as the truth dawned.

“I wanted to stay with my friends,” Daisy replied. “I don’t want to go to that stuffy old Grammar. You’re always going on about it but I didn’t want to have to go on the bus every day and wear that silly uniform just so that you can boast about it to your stuck-up friends. So I didn’t answer half the questions.” She smiled. “Is it nearly lunch-time?”