

GALSWORTHY JOHN

JOY: A PLAY
ON THE
LETTER "I"

John Galsworthy

Joy: A Play on the Letter "I"

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John Galsworthy

Joy: A Play on the Letter «I»

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

COLONEL HOPE, R.A., retired

MRS. HOPE, his wife

MISS BEECH, their old governess

LETTY, their daughter

ERNEST BLUNT, her husband

MRS. GWYN, their niece

JOY, her daughter

DICK MERTON, their young friend

HON. MAURICE LEVER, their guest

ROSE, their parlour-maid

TIME: The present. The action passes throughout midsummer day on the lawn of Colonel Hope's house, near the Thames above Oxford

ACT I

The time is morning, and the scene a level lawn, beyond which the river is running amongst fields. A huge old beech tree overshadows everything, in the darkness of whose hollow many things are hidden. A rustic seat encircles it. A low wall clothed in creepers, with two openings, divides this lawn from the flowery approaches to the house. Close to the wall there is a swing. The sky is clear and sunny. COLONEL HOPE is seated in a garden-chair, reading a newspaper through pince-nez. He is fifty-five and bald, with drooping grey moustaches and a weather-darkened face. He wears a flannel suit and a hat from Panama; a tennis racquet leans against his chair. MRS. HOPE comes quickly through the opening of the wall, with roses in her hands. She is going grey; she wears tan gauntlets, and no hat. Her manner is decided, her voice emphatic, as though aware that there is no nonsense in its owner's composition. Screened from sight, MISS BEECH is seated behind the hollow tree; and JOY is perched on a lower branch hidden by foliage.

MRS. HOPE. I told Molly in my letter that she'd have to walk up, Tom.

COLONEL. Walk up in this heat? My dear, why didn't you order Benson's fly?

MRS. HOPE. Expense for nothing! Bob can bring up her things in the barrow. I've told Joy I won't have her going down to meet the train. She's so excited about her mother's coming there's no doing anything with her.

COLONEL. No wonder, after two months.

MRS. HOPE. Well, she's going home to-morrow; she must just keep herself fresh for the dancing tonight. I'm not going to get people in to dance, and have Joy worn out before they begin.

COLONEL. [Dropping his paper.] I don't like Molly's walking up.

MRS. HOPE. A great strong woman like Molly Gwyn! It isn't half a mile.

COLONEL. I don't like it, Nell; it's not hospitable.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish! If you want to throw away money, you must just find some better investment than those wretched 3 per cents. of yours. The greenflies are in my roses already! Did you ever see anything so disgusting? [They bend over the roses they have grown, and lose all sense of everything.] Where's the syringe? I saw you mooning about with it last night, Tom.

COLONEL. [Uneasily.] Mooning!

[He retires behind his paper. MRS. HOPE enters the hollow of the tree.]

There's an account of that West Australian swindle. Set of ruffians! Listen to this, Nell! "It is understood that amongst the share-holders are large numbers of women, clergymen, and Army officers." How people can be such fools!

[Becoming aware that his absorption is unobserved, he drops his glasses, and reverses his chair towards the tree.]

MRS. HOPE. [Reappearing with a garden syringe.] I simply won't have Dick keep his fishing things in the tree; there's a whole potful of disgusting worms. I can't touch them. You must go and take 'em out, Tom.

[In his turn the COLONEL enters the hollow of the tree.]

MRS. HOPE. [Personally.] What on earth's the pleasure of it? I can't see! He never catches anything worth eating.

[The COLONEL reappears with a paint pot full of worms; he holds them out abstractedly.]

MRS. HOPE. [Jumping.] Don't put them near me!

MISS BEECH. [From behind the tree.] Don't hurt the poor creatures.

COLONEL. [Turning.] Hallo, Peachey? What are you doing round there?

[He puts the worms down on the seat.]

MRS. HOPE. Tom, take the worms off that seat at once!

COLONEL. [Somewhat flurried.] Good gad! I don't know what to do with the beastly worms!

MRS. HOPE. It's not my business to look after Dick's worms. Don't put them on the ground. I won't have them anywhere where they can crawl about. [She flicks some greenflies off her roses.]

COLONEL. [Looking into the pot as though the worms could tell him where to put them.] Dash!

MISS BEECH. Give them to me.

MRS. HOPE. [Relieved.] Yes, give them to Peachey.

[There comes from round the tree Miss BEECH, old-fashioned, barrel-shaped, balloony in the skirts. She takes the paint pot, and sits beside it on the rustic seat.]

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. Well, it's beyond me how you can make pets of worms – wriggling, crawling, horrible things!

[ROSE, who is young and comely, in a pale print frock, comes from the house and places letters before her on a silver salver.] [Taking the letters.]

What about Miss Joy's frock, Rose?

ROSE. Please, 'm, I can't get on with the back without Miss Joy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, then you must just find her. I don't know where she is.

ROSE. [In a slow, sidelong manner.] If you please, Mum, I think Miss Joy's up in the —

[She stops, seeing Miss BEECH signing to her with both hands.]

MRS. HOPE. [Sharply.] What is it, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [Selecting a finger.] Pricked meself!

MRS. HOPE. Let's look!

[She bends to look, but Miss BEECH places the finger in her mouth.]

ROSE. [Glancing askance at the COLONEL.] If you please, Mum, it's below the waist; I think I can manage with the dummy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, you can try. [Opening her letter as ROSE retires.] Here's Molly about her train.

MISS BEECH. Is there a letter for me?

MRS. HOPE. No, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. There never is.

COLONEL. What's that? You got four by the first post.

MISS BEECH. Exceptions!

COLONEL. [Looking over his glasses.] Why! You know, you get 'em every day!

MRS. HOPE. Molly says she'll be down by the eleven thirty. [In an injured voice.] She'll be here in half an hour! [Reading with disapproval from the letter.] "MAURICE LEVER is coming down by the same train to see Mr. Henty about the Tocopala Gold Mine. Could you give him a bed for the night?"

[Silence, slight but ominous.]

COLONEL. [Calling into his aid his sacred hospitality.] Of course we must give him a bed!

MRS. HOPE. Just like a man! What room I should like to know!

COLONEL. Pink.

MRS. HOPE. As if Molly wouldn't have the pink!

COLONEL. [Ruefully.] I thought she'd have the blue!

MRS. HOPE. You know perfectly well it's full of earwigs, Tom. I killed ten there yesterday morning.

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. I don't know that I approve of this Mr. Lever's dancing attendance. Molly's only thirty-six.

COLONEL. [In a high voice.] You can't refuse him a bed; I never heard of such a thing.

MRS. HOPE. [Reading from the letter.] "This gold mine seems to be a splendid chance. [She glances at the COLONEL.] I've put all my spare cash into it. They're issuing some Preference shares now; if Uncle Tom wants an investment" – [She pauses, then in a changed, decided voice] – Well, I suppose I shall have to screw him in somehow.

COLONEL. What's that about gold mines? Gambling nonsense! Molly ought to know my views.

MRS. HOPE. [Folding the letter away out of her consciousness.] Oh! your views! This may be a specially good chance.

MISS BEECH. Ahem! Special case!

MRS. HOPE. [Paying no attention.] I'm sick of these 3 per cent. dividends. When you've only got so little money, to put it all into that India Stock, when it might be earning 6 per cent. at least, quite safely! There are ever so many things I want.

COLONEL. There you go!

MRS. HOPE. As to Molly, I think it's high time her husband came home to look after her, instead of sticking out there in that hot place. In fact —

[Miss BEECH looks up at the tree and exhibits cerebral excitement]

I don't know what Geoff's about; why doesn't he find something in England, where they could live together.

COLONEL. Don't say anything against Molly, Nell!

MRS. HOPE. Well, I don't believe in husband and wife being separated. That's not my idea of married life.

[The COLONEL whistles quizzically.]

Ah, yes, she's your niece, not mime! Molly's very —

MISS BEECH. Ouch! [She sucks her finger.]

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I couldn't sew at your age, Peachey, without pricking my fingers! Tom, if I have Mr. Lever here, you'll just attend to what I say and look into that mine!

COLONEL. Look into your grandmother! I have n't made a study of geology for nothing. For every ounce you take out of a gold mine, you put an ounce and a half in. Any fool knows that, eh, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your horrid mines, with all the poor creatures underground.

MRS. HOPE. Nonsense, Peachey! As if they'd go there if they did n't want to!

COLONEL. Why don't you read your paper, then you'd see what a lot of wild-cat things there are about.

MRS. HOPE. [Abstractedly.] I can't put Ernest and Letty in the blue room, there's only the single bed. Suppose I put Mr. Lever there, and say nothing about the earwigs. I daresay he'll never notice.

COLONEL. Treat a guest like that!

MRS. HOPE. Then where am I to put him for goodness sake?

COLONEL. Put him in my dressing-room, I'll turn out.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom, I won't have you turned out, that's flat. He can have Joy's room, and she can sleep with the earwigs.

JOY. [From her hiding-place upon a lower branch of the hollow tree.] I won't.

[MRS. HOPE and the COLONEL jump.]

COLONEL. God bless my soul!

MRS. HOPE. You wretched girl! I told you never to climb that tree again. Did you know, Peachey? [Miss BEECH smiles.] She's always up there, spoiling all her frocks. Come down now, Joy; there's a good child!

JOY. I don't want to sleep with earwigs, Aunt Nell.

MISS BEECH. I'll sleep with the poor creatures.

MRS. HOPE, [After a pause.] Well, it would be a mercy if you would for once, Peachey.

COLONEL. Nonsense, I won't have Peachey —

MRS. HOPE. Well, who is to sleep there then?

JOY. [Coaxingly.] Let me sleep with Mother, Aunt Nell, do!

MRS. HOPE. Litter her up with a great girl like you, as if we'd only one spare room! Tom, see that she comes down — I can't stay here, I must manage something. [She goes away towards the house.]

COLONEL. [Moving to the tree, and looking up.] You heard what your aunt said?

JOY. [Softly.] Oh, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. I shall have to come up after you.

JOY. Oh, do, and Peachey too!

COLONEL. [Trying to restrain a smile.] Peachey, you talk to her. [Without waiting for MISS BEECH, however, he proceeds.] What'll your aunt say to me if I don't get you down?

MISS BEECH. Poor creature!

JOY. I don't want to be worried about my frock.

COLONEL. [Scratching his bald head.] Well, I shall catch it.

JOY. Oh, Uncle Tom, your head is so beautiful from here! [Leaning over, she fans it with a leafy twig.]

MISS BEECH. Disrespectful little toad!

COLONEL. [Quickly putting on his hat.] You'll fall out, and a pretty mess that'll make on — [he looks uneasily at the ground] — my lawn!

[A voice is heard calling "Colonel! Colonel!"]

JOY. There's Dick calling you, Uncle Tom.

[She disappears.]

DICK. [Appearing in the opening of the wall.] Ernie's waiting to play you that single, Colonel!

[He disappears.]

JOY. Quick, Uncle Tom! Oh! do go, before he finds I'm up here.

MISS. BEECH. Secret little creature!

[The COLONEL picks up his racquet, shakes his fist, and goes away.]

JOY. [Calmly.] I'm coming down now, Peachey.

[Climbing down.]

Look out! I'm dropping on your head.

MISS BEECH. [Unmoved.] Don't hurt yourself!

[Joy drops on the rustic seat and rubs her shin. Told you so!] [She hunts in a little bag for plaster.]

Let's see!

JOY. [Seeing the worms.] Ugh!

MISS BEECH. What's the matter with the poor creatures?

JOY. They're so wriggly!

[She backs away and sits down in the swing. She is just seventeen, light and slim, brown-haired, fresh-coloured, and grey-eyed; her white frock reaches to her ankles, she wears a sunbonnet.] Peachey, how long were you Mother's governess.

MISS BEECH. Five years.

JOY. Was she as bad to teach as me?

MISS BEECH. Worse!

[Joy claps her hands.]

She was the worst girl I ever taught.

JOY. Then you weren't fond of her?

MISS BEECH. Oh! yes, I was.

JOY. Fonder than of me?

MISS BEECH. Don't you ask such a lot of questions.

JOY. Peachey, duckie, what was Mother's worst fault?

MISS BEECH. Doing what she knew she oughtn't.

JOY. Was she ever sorry?

MISS BEECH. Yes, but she always went on doin' it.

JOY. I think being sorry 's stupid!

MISS BEECH. Oh, do you?

JOY. It isn't any good. Was Mother revengeful, like me?

MISS BEECH. Ah! Wasn't she?

JOY. And jealous?

MISS BEECH. The most jealous girl I ever saw.

JOY. [Nodding.] I like to be like her.

MISS BEECH. [Regarding her intently.] Yes! you've got all your troubles before you.

JOY. Mother was married at eighteen, wasn't she, Peachey? Was she – was she much in love with Father then?

MISS BEECH. [With a sniff.] About as much as usual. [She takes the paint pot, and walking round begins to release the worms.]

JOY. [Indifferently.] They don't get on now, you know.

MISS BEECH. What d'you mean by that, disrespectful little creature?

JOY. [In a hard voice.] They haven't ever since I've known them. MISS BEECH. [Looks at her, and turns away again.] Don't talk about such things.

JOY. I suppose you don't know Mr. Lever? [Bitterly.] He's such a cool beast. He never loses his temper.

MISS BEECH. Is that why you don't like him?

JOY. [Frowning.] No – yes – I don't know.

MISS BEECH. Oh! perhaps you do like him?

JOY. I don't; I hate him.

MISS BEECH. [Standing still.] Fie! Naughty Temper!

JOY. Well, so would you! He takes up all Mother's time.

MISS BEECH. [In a peculiar voice.] Oh! does he?

JOY. When he comes I might just as well go to bed. [Passionately.] And now he's chosen to-day to come down here, when I haven't seen her for two months! Why couldn't he come when Mother and I'd gone home. It's simply brutal!

MISS BEECH. But your mother likes him?

JOY. [Sullenly.] I don't want her to like him.

MISS BEECH. [With a long look at Joy.] I see!

JOY. What are you doing, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [Releasing a worm.] Letting the poor creatures go.

JOY. If I tell Dick he'll never forgive you.

MISS BEECH. [Sidling behind the swing and plucking off Joy's sunbonnet. With devilry.] Ah-h-h! You've done your hair up; so that's why you wouldn't come down!

JOY. [Springing up, anal pouting.] I didn't want any one to see before Mother. You are a pig, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I thought there was something!

JOY. [Twisting round.] How does it look?

MISS BEECH. I've seen better.

JOY. You tell any one before Mother comes, and see what I do!

MISS BEECH. Well, don't you tell about my worms, then!

JOY. Give me my hat! [Backing hastily towards the tree, and putting her finger to her lips.] Look out! Dick!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear!

[She sits down on the swing, concealing the paint pot with her feet and skirts.]

JOY. [On the rustic seat, and in a violent whisper.] I hope the worms will crawl up your legs!

[DICK, in flannels and a hard straw hat comes in. He is a quiet and cheerful boy of twenty. His eyes are always fixed on joy.]

DICK. [Grimacing.] The Colonel's getting licked. Hallo! Peachey, in the swing?

JOY. [Chuckling.] Swing her, Dick!

MISS BEECH. [Quivering with emotion.] Little creature!

JOY. Swing her!

[DICK takes the ropes.]

MISS BEECH. [Quietly.] It makes me sick, young man.

DICK. [Patting her gently on the back.] All right, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [Maliciously.] Could you get me my sewing from the seat? Just behind Joy.

JOY. [Leaning her head against the tree.] If you do, I won't dance with you to-night.

[DICK stands paralysed. Miss BEECH gets off the swing, picks up the paint pot, and stands concealing it behind her.]

JOY. Look what she's got behind her, sly old thing!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear!

JOY. Dance with her, Dick!

MISS BEECH. If he dare!

JOY. Dance with her, or I won't dance with you to-night. [She whistles a waltz.]

DICK. [Desperately.] Come on then, Peachey. We must.

JOY. Dance, dance!

[DICK seizes Miss BEECH by the waist. She drops the paint pot. They revolve.] [Convulsed.]

Oh, Peachey, Oh!

[Miss BEECH is dropped upon the rustic seat. DICK seizes joy's hands and drags her up.]

No, no! I won't!

MISS BEECH. [Panting.] Dance, dance with the poor young man! [She moves her hands.] La la-la-la la-la la la!

[DICK and JOY dance.]

DICK. By Jove, Joy! You've done your hair up. I say, how jolly! You do look —

JOY. [Throwing her hands up to her hair.] I did n't mean you to see!

DICK. [In a hurt voice.] Oh! didn't you? I'm awfully sorry!

JOY. [Flashing round.] Oh, you old Peachey!

[She looks at the ground, and then again at DICK.]

MISS BEECH. [Sidling round the tree.] Oh! dear!

JOY. [Whispering.] She's been letting out your worms. [Miss BEECH disappears from view.] Look!

DICK. [Quickly.] Hang the worms! Joy, promise me the second and fourth and sixth and eighth and tenth and supper, to-night. Promise! Do!

[Joy shakes her head.]

It's not much to ask.

JOY. I won't promise anything.

DICK. Why not?

JOY. Because Mother's coming. I won't make any arrangements.

DICK. [Tragically.] It's our last night.

JOY. [Scornfully.] You don't understand! [Dancing and clasping her hands.] Mother's coming, Mother's coming!

DICK. [Violently.] I wish – Promise, Joy!

JOY. [Looking over her shoulder.] Sly old thing! If you'll pay Peachey out, I'll promise you supper!

MISS BEECH. [From behind the tree.] I hear you.

JOY. [Whispering.] Pay her out, pay her out! She's let out all your worms!

DICK. [Looking moodily at the paint pot.] I say, is it true that Maurice Lever's coming with your mother? I've met him playing cricket, he's rather a good sort.

JOY. [Flashing out.] I hate him.

DICK. [Troubled.] Do you? Why? I thought – I didn't know – if I'd known of course, I'd have —

[He is going to say "hated him too!" But the voices of ERNEST BLUNT and the COLONEL are heard approaching, in dispute.]

JOY. Oh! Dick, hide me, I don't want my hair seen till Mother comes.

[She springs into the hollow tree. The COLONEL and ERNEST appear in the opening of the wall.]

ERNEST. The ball was out, Colonel.

COLONEL. Nothing of the sort.

ERNEST. A good foot out.

COLONEL. It was not, sir. I saw the chalk fly.

[ERNEST is twenty-eight, with a little moustache, and the positive cool voice of a young man who knows that he knows everything. He is perfectly calm.]

ERNEST. I was nearer to it than you.

COLONEL. [In a high, hot voice.] I don't care where you were, I hate a fellow who can't keep cool.

MISS BEECH. [From behind the hollow tree.] Fie! Fie!

ERNEST. We're two to one, Letty says the ball was out.

COLONEL. Letty's your wife, she'd say anything.

ERNEST. Well, look here, Colonel, I'll show you the very place it pitched.

COLONEL. Gammon! You've lost your temper, you don't know what you're talking about.

ERNEST. [coolly.] I suppose you'll admit the rule that one umpires one's own court.

COLONEL. [Hotly.] Certainly not, in this case!

MISS BEECH. [From behind the hollow tree.] Special case!

ERNEST. [Moving chin in collar – very coolly.] Well, of course if you won't play the game!

COLONEL. [In a towering passion.] If you lose your temper like this, I'll never play with you again.

[To LETTY, a pretty soul in a linen suit, approaching through the wall.]

Do you mean to say that ball was out, Letty?

LETTY. Of course it was, Father.

COLONEL. You say that because he's your husband. [He sits on the rustic seat.] If your mother'd been there she'd have backed me up!

LETTY. Mother wants Joy, Dick, about her frock.

DICK. I – I don't know where she is.

MISS BEECH. [From behind the hollow tree.] Ahem!

LETTY. What's the matter, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. Swallowed a fly. Poor creature!

ERNEST. [Returning to his point.] Why I know the ball was out, Colonel, was because it pitched in a line with that arbutus tree.

COLONEL. [Rising.] Arbutus tree! [To his daughter.] Where's your mother?

LETTY. In the blue room, Father.

ERNEST. The ball was a good foot out; at the height it was coming when it passed me.

COLONEL. [Staring at him.] You're a – you're aa theorist! From where you were you could n't see the ball at all. [To LETTY.] Where's your mother?

LETTY. [Emphatically.] In the blue room, Father!

[The COLONEL glares confusedly, and goes away towards the blue room.]

ERNEST. [In the swing, and with a smile.] Your old Dad'll never be a sportsman!

LETTY. [Indignantly.] I wish you wouldn't call Father old, Ernie! What time's Molly coming, Peachey?

[ROSE has come from the house, and stands waiting for a chance to speak.]

ERNEST. [Breaking in.] Your old Dad's only got one fault: he can't take an impersonal view of things.

MISS BEECH. Can you find me any one who can?

ERNEST. [With a smile.] Well, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. [Ironically.] Oh! of course, there's you!

ERNEST. I don't know about that! But —

ROSE. [To LETTY,] Please, Miss, the Missis says will you and Mr. Ernest please to move your things into Miss Peachey's room.

ERNEST. [Vexed.] Deuce of a nuisance havin' to turn out for this fellow Lever. What did Molly want to bring him for?

MISS BEECH. Course you've no personal feeling in the matter!

ROSE. [Speaking to Miss BEECH.] The Missis says you're to please move your things into the blue room, please Miss.

LETTY. Aha, Peachey! That settles you! Come on, Ernie!

[She goes towards the house. ERNEST, rising from the swing, turns to Miss BEECH, who follows.]

ERNEST. [Smiling, faintly superior.] Personal, not a bit! I only think while Molly 's out at grass, she oughtn't to —

MISS BEECH. [Sharply.] Oh! do you?

[She hustles ERNEST out through the wall, but his voice is heard faintly from the distance: "I think it's jolly thin."]

ROSE. [To DICK.] The Missis says you're to take all your worms and things, Sir, and put them where they won't be seen.

DICK. [Shortly.] Have n't got any!

ROSE. The Missis says she'll be very angry if you don't put your worms away; and would you come and help kill earwigs in the blue — ?

DICK. Hang! [He goes, and ROSE is left alone.]

ROSE. [Looking straight before her.] Please, Miss Joy, the Missis says will you go to her about your frock.

[There is a little pause, then from the hollow tree joy's voice is heard.]

JOY. No-o!

ROSE. If you did n't come, I was to tell you she was going to put you in the blue.

[Joy looks out of the tree.] [Immovable, but smiling.]

Oh, Miss joy, you've done your hair up! [Joy retires into the tree.] Please, Miss, what shall I tell the Missis?

JOY. [Joy's voice is heard.] Anything you like.

ROSE. [Over her shoulder.] I shall be drove to tell her a story, Miss.

JOY. All right! Tell it.

[ROSE goes away, and JOY comes out. She sits on the rustic seat and waits.

DICK, coming softly from the house, approaches her.]

DICK. [Looking at her intently.] Joy! I wanted to say something

[Joy does not look at him, but twists her fingers.]

I shan't see you again you know after to-morrow till I come up for the 'Varsity match.

JOY. [Smiling.] But that's next week.

DICK. Must you go home to-morrow?

[Joy nods three times.] [Coming closer.]

I shall miss you so awfully. You don't know how I —

[Joy shakes her head.]

Do look at me! [JOY steals a look.] Oh! Joy!

[Again joy shakes her head.]

JOY. [Suddenly.] Don't!

DICK. [Seizing her hand.] Oh, Joy! Can't you —

JOY. [Drawing the hand away.] Oh! don't.

DICK. [Bending his head.] It's — it's — so —

JOY. [Quietly.] Don't, Dick!

DICK. But I can't help it! It's too much for me, Joy, I must tell you —

[MRS. GWYN is seen approaching towards the house.]

JOY. [Spinning round.] It's Mother — oh, Mother! [She rushes at her.]

[MRS. GWYN is a handsome creature of thirty-six, dressed in a muslin frock.

She twists her daughter round, and kisses her.]

MRS. GWYN. How sweet you look with your hair up, Joy! Who 's this? [Glancing with a smile at DICK.]

JOY. Dick Merton — in my letters you know.

[She looks at DICK as though she wished him gone.]

MRS. GWYN. How do you do?

DICK. [Shaking hands.] How d 'you do? I think if you'll excuse me — I'll go in.

[He goes uncertainly.]

MRS. GWYN. What's the matter with him?

JOY. Oh, nothing! [Hugging her.] Mother! You do look such a duck. Why did you come by the towing-path, was n't it cooking?

MRS. GWYN. [Avoiding her eyes.] Mr. Lever wanted to go into Mr. Henty's.

[Her manner is rather artificially composed.]

JOY. [Dully.] Oh! Is he-is he really coming here, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [Whose voice has hardened just a little.] If Aunt Nell's got a room for him — of course — why not?

JOY. [Digging her chin into her mother's shoulder.]

[Why couldn't he choose some day when we'd gone? I wanted you all to myself.]

MRS. GWYN. You are a quaint child — when I was your age —

JOY. [Suddenly looking up.] Oh! Mother, you must have been a chook!

MRS. GWYN. Well, I was about twice as old as you, I know that.

JOY. Had you any — any other offers before you were married, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [Smilingly.] Heaps!

JOY. [Reflectively.] Oh!

MRS. GWYN. Why? Have you been having any?

JOY. [Glancing at MRS. GWYN, and then down.] N-o, of course not!

MRS. GWYN. Where are they all? Where's Peachey?

JOY. Fussing about somewhere; don't let's hurry! Oh! you duckie — duckie! Aren't there any letters from Dad?

MRS. GWYN. [In a harder voice.] Yes, one or two.

JOY. [Hesitating.] Can't I see?

MRS. GWYN. I didn't bring them. [Changing the subject obviously.] Help me to tidy — I'm so hot I don't know what to do.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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