

Benson Edward Frederic

Dodo's Daughter: A Sequel to Dodo



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	17
CHAPTER III	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	39

Benson E. F. Edward Frederic Dodo's Daughter: A Sequel to Dodo

CHAPTER I

Nadine Waldenech's bedroom was a large square apartment on the ground floor at her mother's cottage at Meering in North Wales. It was rather a large cottage, for it was capable of holding about eighteen people, but Dodo was quite firm in the subject of its not being a house. In the days when it was built, forty years ago, this room of Nadine's had been the smoking-room, but since everybody now smoked wherever he or she chose, which was mostly everywhere, just as they breathed or talked wherever they chose, Nadine with her admirable commonsense had argued uselessness of a special smoking-room, for she wanted it very much herself, and her mother had been quite convinced. It opened out of the drawing-room, and so was a convenient place for those who wished to drop in for a little more conversation after bed-time had been officially proclaimed. Bed-time, it may be remarked, was only officially proclaimed in order to get rid of bores, who then secluded themselves in their tiresome chambers.

The room at this period was completely black with regard to the color of carpet and floor and walls and ceiling. That was Nadine's last plan and since it was the last, of necessity, a very recent one. She had observed that when it was all white, people looked rather discolored, like mud on snow, whereas against a black background they seemed to be of gem-like brilliance. But since she always looked brilliant herself, the new scheme was prompted by a wholly altruistic motive. She liked her friends to look brilliant too, and she would have felt thus even if she had not been brilliant herself, for out of a strangely compounded nature, anything akin to jealousy had been certainly omitted. There had been a good many friends in her bedroom lately, and there were a certain number here to-night. She expected more. Collectively they constituted that which was known as the clan.

The bed was an enormous four-poster with mahogany columns at the corners of it. At present it was occupied by only three people. She herself lay on the right of it with her head on the pillow. She had already taken off her dinner-dress when her first visitor arrived, and had on a remarkable dressing-gown of Oriental silk, which looked like a family of intoxicated rainbows and, leaving her arms bare, came down to her feet, so that only the tips of her pink satin shoes peeped out. In the middle of the bed was lying Esther Sturgis, and across it at the foot Bertie Arbuthnot the younger, who was twenty-one years old and about the same number of feet in height. In consequence his head dangled over one side like a tired and sunburnt lily, and his feet over the other. He and his hostess were both smoking cigarettes as if against time, the ash of which they flicked upon the floor, relighting fresh ones from a silver box that lay about the center of the bed. They neither of them had the slightest idea what happened to the smoked-out ends. Esther Sturgis on the other hand was occasionally sipping hot camomile tea. What she did not sip she spilt.

"Heredity is such nonsense," said Nadine crisply, speaking with that precision which the English-born never quite attain. "Look at me, for instance, and how nice I am, then look at Mama and Daddy."

Esther spilt a larger quantity of camomile tea than usual.

"You shan't say a word against Aunt Dodo," she said.

"My dear, I am not proposing to. Mama is the biggest duck that ever happened. But I don't inherit. She had such a lot of hearts – it sounds like bridge – but she had, and here am I without one. First of all she married poor step-papa – is it step-papa? – anyhow the Lord Chesterford whom she married before she married Daddy. That is one heart, but I think that was only a little one, a heartlet."

"Rhyme with tartlet," said Bertie, as if announcing a great truth.

"But we are not making rhymes," said Nadine severely. "Then she married Daddy, which is another heart, and when she married him – of course you know she ran away with him at top-speed – she was engaged to the other Lord Chesterford, who succeeded the first."

"Oh, 'Jack the Ripper,'" said Esther.

Bertie raised his head a little.

"Who?" he asked.

"Jack Chesterford, because he is such a ripper," said Nadine. "And he's coming here to-morrow. Isn't it a thrill? Mama hasn't seen him since – since she didn't see him one day when he called, and found she had run away –"

"Did he rip anybody?" asked Bertie, who was famed for going on asking questions, until he completely understood.

"No, donkey. You are thinking of some criminal. Mama was engaged to him, and she thought she couldn't – so *she* ripped – let her rip, is it not? – and got married to Daddy instead. He was quite mad about darling Mama, but recovered very soon. He made a very bad recovery. Don't interrupt, Berts: I was talking about heredity. Well, there's Mama, and Daddy, well, we all know what Daddy is, and let me tell you he is the best of the family, which is poor. He is a gentleman after all, whatever he has done. And he's done a lot. Indeed he has never had an idle moment, except when he was busy!"

Esther gave a great sigh: she always sighed when she appreciated, and appreciation was the work of her life. She never got over the wonderfulness of Nadine and was in a perpetual state of deep-breathing. She admired Bertie too, and they used often to talk about getting engaged to each other some day, in a mild and sexless fashion. But they were neither of them in any hurry.

"Aren't your other people gentlemen?" he asked. "I thought in Austria you were always all right if you quartered yourself into sixteen parts."

Nadine threw an almost unsmoked cigarette upon the floor with a huge show of impatience.

"Of course one has the ordinary number of great-grandparents, else you wouldn't be here at all," she said, "and you quarter anything you choose. Two quarterings of my great-grandfathers were hung and drawn apart from their quarterings. But really I don't think you understand what I mean by gentlemen. I mean people who have brains, and who have tastes and who have fine perceptions. English people think they know the difference between the *bourgeoisie* and the aristocrats. How wrong they are! As if living in a castle like poor Esther's parents had anything to do with it! Look at some of your marquises – Esther darling, I don't mean Lord Ayr – what cads! Your dukes? What Aunt Sallys! Always making the float-face, don't you call it, the *bêtise*, the stupidity. Is that the aristocracy? Great solemn Aunt Sallys and the rest brewers! Show me an idea: show me a brain, show me somebody with the distinction that thoughts and taste bring about. I do not want a mere busy prating monkey thinking it is a man. But I want people: somebody with a man or woman inside it. Ah! give me a grocer. That will do!"

Bertie put down his head again.

"Let us be calm," he said. "I'll find you a grocer to-morrow."

Nadine laughed. She had a curiously unmelodious but wonderfully infectious laugh. People hearing it laughed too: they caught it. But there was no sound of silvery bells. She gave a sort of hiccup and then gurgled.

"I get too excited over such things," she said. "And when I get excited I forget my English and talk execrably. I will be calm again. I do not mean that a man is not a gentleman because he is stupid, but much more I do not mean that quarterings make him one. The whole idea is so obsolete, so Victorian, like the old mahogany sideboards. Who cares about a grandfather? What does a grandfather matter any more? They used to say 'Move with the Times.' Now we move instead with the 'Daily Mail.' I am half foreign and yet I am much more English than you all. The world goes spinning on. If we do not wish to become obsolete we spin too. I hate the common people, but I do not hate them because they have no grandfathers, but just because they are common. I hate quantities of your de

Veres for the same reason. Their grandfathers make them no less common. But also I hate your sweet people, with blue eyes, of whom there are far too many. Put them in bottles like lollipops, and let them stick together with their own sugar."

There was a short silence. Bertie broke it.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Going on twenty-two. I am as old as there is any need to be. There is only one person in the house younger than me, and that is darling Mama. She is twenty."

Esther gave another huge sigh. She appreciated Nadine very much, but she was not sure that she did not appreciate Aunt Dodo more. It may be remarked that there was no sort of consanguinity between them: the relationship was one of mere affection. She had a mother and Dodo must be the next nearest relative. Frankly, she would have liked to change the relationship between the two. And yet you could say things to an aunt who wasn't an aunt more freely than to a woman who happened to be your mother. Apart from natural love, Esther did not care for her mother. She would not, that is to say, have cared for her if she had been somebody else's mother, and indeed there was very little reason to do so. She had a Roman nose and talked about the Norman Conquest, which in the view of her family was a very upstart affair. She had not a kind heart, but she had an immense coronet in her own right, and had married another. Indeed she had married another coronet twice: there was a positive triple crown on her head like the Pope. In other respects also she was like a Pope, and was infallible with almost indecent frequency. Nadine loved to refer to her as "Holy Mother." She felt herself perfectly capable of managing everybody's affairs, and instead of being as broad as she was long, was as narrow as she was tall, and resembled an elderly guardsman.

Her degenerate daughter finished her sigh.

"Go on about your horrible family," she said to Nadine. "I think it's so illustrious of you to see them as they are."

The door opened without any premonitory knock, and Tommy Freshfield entered with a large black cigar in his mouth. He was rather short, and had the misfortune to look extremely dissipated, whereas he was hopelessly, almost pathetically, incapable of anything approaching dissipation. He put down his bedroom candle and lay down on the bed next Esther Sturgis.

"Have you been comforting Hughie?" she asked.

"Yes, until he went to play billiards with the Bish-dean. He used to be a bishop but subsequently became a dean. I think Aunt Dodo believes he is a bishop still. Lots of bishops do it now, he told me; it is the same as putting a carriage-horse out to grass: there is no work, but less corn. Hughie's coming up here when he's finished his game."

The appreciative Esther sat up.

"It's too wonderful of him," she said. "Nadine, Hugh is coming up here soon. Do be nice to him."

Nadine sat up also.

"Of course," she said. "Hughie has such tact, and I love him for it. Berts has none: he would sulk if I had just refused to marry him and very likely would not speak to me till next day."

"You haven't had the chance to refuse me yet," remarked Berts.

"That is mere scoring for the sake of scoring, Berts darling," said she. "But Hugh –"

"O Nadine, I wish you would marry him," said Esther. "It would make you so gorgeously complete and golden. Did you refuse him absolutely? Or would you rather not talk about it?"

Nadine turned a little sideways on the bed.

"No, we will not talk of it," she said. "What else were we saying? Ah, my family! Yes, it is a wonder that I am not a horror. Daddy is the pick of the bunch, but such a bunch, *mon Dieu*, such wild flowers; and poor Daddy always gets a little drunk in the evening now; and to-night he was so more than a little. But he is such an original! Fancy his coming to stay with Mama here only a year after she divorced him. I think it is too sweet of her to let him come, and too sweet of him to suggest it. She is

so remembering, too: she ordered him his particular brandy, without which he is never comfortable, and it is most expensive, as well as being strong. Well, that's Daddy: then there are my uncles: such histories. Uncle Josef murdered a groom (there is no doubt whatever about it) who tried to blackmail him. I think he was quite right; and I daresay the groom was quite right, but it is a horrible thing to blackmail; it is a cleaner thing to kill. Then there is Uncle Anthony who ought to have been divorced like Daddy, but he was so mean and careful and sly that they could do nothing with him. There was never anything careful about Daddy."

She was ticking off these agreeable relations on her white fingers.

"Then Grandpapa Waldenech committed suicide," she said, "and Grandpapa Vane fell into a cauldron at his own iron-works and was utterly burnt. So ridiculous; they could not even bury him, there was nothing left, except the thick smoke, and they had to open the windows. Then the aunts. There was Aunt Lispeth who kept nothing but white rats in her house in Vienna, hundreds and hundreds there were, the place crawled with them. Daddy could not go near it: he was afraid of their not being real, whereas I was afraid because they were real. Then there is Aunt Eleanor who stole many of Daddy's gold snuff-boxes and said the Emperor had given them her. Of course it was a long time before she was ever suspected, for she was always going to church when she was not stealing; she made quite a collection. Aunt Julia is more modern: she only cares about the music of Strauss and appendicitis."

Berts gave a sympathetic wriggle.

"I had appendicitis twice," he said, "which was enough, and I went to Electra once which was too much. How often did Aunt Julia have appendicitis?"

"She never had it," said Nadine. "That is why she is so devoted to it, an ideal she never attains. It is about the only thing she has never had, and the rest fatigue her. But she always goes to the opera whenever there is Strauss, because she cannot sleep afterwards, and so lies awake and thinks about appendicitis. I go to the opera too, whenever there is not Strauss, in order to think about Hugh."

"And then you refuse him?"

"Yes, but we will not talk of it. There is nothing to explain. He is like that delicious ginger-beer I drank at dinner in stone bottles. You can't explain! It is ginger-beer. So is Hugh."

"I had a bottle of it too," said Bertie. "More than one, I think. I hate wine. Wine is only fit for old women who want bucking up. There's an old man in the village at home who's ninety-five, and he never touched wine all his life."

"That proves nothing," said Nadine. "If he had drunk wine he might have been a hundred by now. But I like wine: perhaps I shall take after Daddy."

A long ash off Tommy Freshfield's cigar here fell into Esther's camomile tea. It fizzed agreeably as it was quenched, and she looked enquiringly into the glass.

"Oh, that's really dear of you, Tommy," she said. "I can't drink any more. John always insists upon my taking a glass of it to go to bed with."

"Your brother John is a prig, perhaps the biggest," said Nadine.

Esther reached out across Tommy, who did not offer his assistance and put down her glass on the small table at the head of the bed.

"I hope there's no doubt of that," she said. "John would be very much upset if he thought he wasn't considered a prig. He is a snob too, which is so frightfully Victorian, and thinks about lineage. Of course he takes after mother. I found him reading Debrett once."

"What is that?" asked Nadine.

"Oh, a red book about peers and baronets," said Esther rather vaguely. "You can look yourself up, and learn all about yourself, and see who you are."

"Poor John!" said Nadine. "He had his camomile tea brought into the drawing-room to-night while he was talking to the bishop about Gothic architecture and the, well – the state of Piccadilly."

He was asking if confirmation was found to have a great hold on the masses. The bishop didn't seem to have the slightest idea."

"John would make that all right," said his sister. "He would tell him. Nadine, why does darling Aunt Dodo so often have a bishop staying with her?"

Nadine sighed.

"Nobody really understands Mama except me," she said. "I thought perhaps you did, Esther, but it is clear you don't. She is religious, that's why. Just as artistic people like artists in their house, so religious people like bishops. I don't say that bishops are better than other people, any more than R.A.'s are finer artists, but they are recognized professionals. It is so: you may think I am laughing or mocking. But I am not. Give me more pillow, and Berts, take your face a little further from my feet. Or I shall kick it, if I get excited again, without intending to, but it will hurt you just the same."

Bertie followed this counsel of commonsense.

"That seems a simple explanation," he said.

Esther frowned; she was not quite so well satisfied.

"But is darling Aunt Dodo quite as religious when a bishop doesn't happen to be here?" she asked. "I mean does she always have family prayers?"

"No, not always, nor do you go to your slums if there is anything very amusing elsewhere."

"But what have they got to do with religion?" asked Bertie.

"Haven't they something to do with it? I thought they had. I know Esther looks good when she has been to the slums; though of course, it's quite delicious of her to go. Still if it makes you feel good, it isn't wholly unselfish. There is nothing so pleasant as feeling good. I felt good the day before yesterday. But after all there are exactly as many ways of being religious as there are people in the world. No one means quite the same. I feel religious if I drive home just at dawn after a ball when all the streets are clean and empty and pearl-colored. Darling Daddy feels religious when he doesn't eat meat on Thursday or Friday, whichever it is, and he has his immediate reward because he has the most delicious things instead – truffles stuffed with mushrooms or mushrooms stuffed with truffles. Also he drinks a good deal of wine that day, because you may drink what you like, and he likes tremendously. He has a particular *chef* for the days of meager, who has to sit and think for six days like the creation, and then work instead."

Nadine gurgled again.

"I suppose I shock you all," she said; "but English people are so unexpected about getting shocked that it is no use being careful. But they don't get shocked at what they do or say themselves. Whatever they do themselves they know must be all right, and they take hands and sing 'Rule Britannia.' They are the *enfant terrible* of Europe. They put their big stupid feet into everything and when they have spoiled it all, so that nobody cares for it any longer, they ask why people are vexed with them! And then they go and play golf. I am getting very English myself. Except when I talk fast you would not know I was not English."

Esther, since her camomile tea was quite spoiled, took a cigarette instead, which she liked better.

"Well, darling, you know every now and then you are a shade foreign," she said. "Especially when you talk about nationalities. As a nation I believe you positively loathe us. But that doesn't matter. It's he and she who matter, not they."

Bertie had sat up at the mention of golf and was talking to Tommy.

"Yes, I won at the seventeenth," he said. "I took it in three. Two smacks and one put."

"Gosh," said Tommy.

"I wish I hadn't mentioned that damned game," said Nadine very distinctly. "You will talk about golf now till morning."

"Yes, but you needn't. Go on about Daddy," said Esther.

"Certainly he is more interesting than golf, and gets into just as many holes. He is a creature of Nature. He falls in love every year, when the hounds of spring – "

A chorus interrupted her.

"Are on winter's traces, the mother of months – "

"Oh, ripping!" said Bertie.

"Yes. How *chic* to have written that and to have lived at Putney," said Nadine. "Mama once took me to see Mr. Swinburne and told me to kiss his hand as soon as ever I got into the room. So when we got in, there was one little old man there, and I kissed his hand; but it was not Mr. Swinburne at all, but somebody quite different."

Again the door opened, and a woman entered, tall, beautiful, vital. There was no mistaking her. The others had not been lacking in vitality before, but she brought in with her a far more abundant measure. She was forty-five, perhaps, but clearly her age was the last thing to be thought about with regard to her. You could as well wonder what was the age of a sunlit wave breaking on the shore, or of a wind that blew from the sea. Everybody sat up at once.

"Mama darling, come here," said Nadine, "and talk to us."

Princess Waldenech looked round her largely and brilliantly.

"I thought I should find you all here," she said. "Nadine dear, of course you know best, but is it usual for a girl to have two young gentlemen lying about with her on one bed? I suppose it must be, since you all do it. Are they all going to bed here? Have they brought their tooth-brushes and nighties? Berts, is that you, Berts? Really one can hardly see for the smoke, but after all this used to be the smoking-room, and I suppose it has formed the habit. Berts, you fiend, you made me laugh at dinner just when Bishop Spenser was telling me about the crisis of faith he went through when he was a young man so that he nearly became a Buddhist instead of a bishop. Or do Buddhists have bishops, too? Wasn't it dreadful? He's a dear, and he gives all his money away to endow other bishops, both black and white – like chess. Of course he isn't a bishop any more, but only a dean, but he keeps his Bible like one. Hugh is playing billiards with him now, and told me in a whisper that he marked three for every cannon he made. Of course Hughie couldn't tell him it only counted two. It would have seemed unkind. Hugh has such tact."

"What I was saying," said Nadine. "Mama, he proposed to me again this evening, and I said 'no' as usual. Is he depressed?"

"No, dear, not in the least except about the cannons. Probably you will say 'yes,' sometime. And I want a cigarette and something to drink, and to be amused for exactly half an hour, when I shall take myself to pieces and go to bed. I hate going to bed and it adds to the depression to know that I shall have to get up again. If only I could be a Christian Scientist I should know that there is no such thing as a bed, and that therefore you can't go there. On the other hand that would be fatiguing I suppose."

Tommy gave her a cigarette, and Nadine fetched her mother her bedroom bottle of water out of which she drank freely, having refused camomile tea with cigar ash in it.

"Too delicious!" she said. "Nadine darling, do marry Hugh before you are twenty-two. Nowadays if girls don't marry before that they take a flat or something and read at the British Museum till they are thirty and have got spectacles, without even getting compromised – "

"Compromised? Of course not," cried Nadine. "You can't get compromised now. There is no such thing as compromise. We die in the ditch sooner, like poor Lord Halsbury. Being compromised was purely a Victorian sort of decoration like – like crinolines. Oh, do tell us about those delicious Victorian days about 1890 when you were a girl and people thought you fast and were shocked."

"My dear, you wouldn't believe it," said Dodo; "you would think I was describing what happened in Noah's Ark. Bertie and Tommy, for instance, would never have been allowed to come and lie on your bed."

"Oh, why not?" asked Esther.

"Because you and Nadine are girls and they are boys. That sounds simple nonsense, doesn't it? Also because to a certain extent boys and girls then did as older people told them to, and older people would have told them to go away. You see we used to listen to older people because they were older; now you don't listen to them, for identically the same reason. We thought they were bores and obeyed them; you are perfectly sweet to them, but they have learned never to tell you to do anything. You would never do what I told you, dear, unless you wanted to."

"No, Mama, I suppose not. But I always do what you tell me, as it is, because you always tell me to do exactly what I want to."

Dodo laughed.

"Yes, that is just what education means now. And how nicely we get along. Nobody is shocked now, in consequence, which is much better for them. You can die of shock, so doctors say, without any other injury at all. So it is clearly wise not to be shocked. I was shocked once, when I was eight years old, because I was taken to the dentist without being told. I was told that I was to go for an ordinary walk with my sister Maud. And then, before I knew where I was, there was my mouth open as far as my uvula, and a dreadful man with a mirror and pincers was looking at my teeth. I lost my trust in human honor, which I have since then regained. I think Maud was more shocked than me. I think it conduced to her death. You didn't remember Auntie Maud, Nadine, did you? You were so little and she was so unrememberable. Yes; a quantity of worsted work. But that's why I always want the bishop to come whenever he can."

"I don't see why, even now," said Nadine.

"Darling, aren't you rather slow? Bishop Spenser, you know, who was Auntie Maud's husband. Surely you've heard me call him Algie. Who ever called a bishop by his Christian name unless he was a relation? Maud knew him when he was a curate. She fluffed herself up in him, just as she used to do in her worsted, and nobody ever saw her any more. But I loved Maud, and I don't think she ever knew it. Some people don't know you love them unless you tell them so, and it is so silly to tell your sister that you love her. I never say I love you, either, and I don't say I love Esther, and that silly Berts, and serious Tommy. But what's the use of you all unless you know it? Nadine, ring the bell, please. It all looks as if we were going to talk, and I had no dinner to speak of, because I was being anxious about Daddy. I thought he was going to talk Hungarian; he looked as if he was, and so I got anxious, because he only talks Hungarian when he is what people call very much on. Certainly he wasn't off to-night; he is off to-morrow. And so I want food. If I am being anxious I want food immediately afterwards, as soon as the anxiety is removed. At least I suppose Daddy has gone to bed. You haven't got him here, have you? Fancy me being as old as any two of you. You are all so delightful, that you mustn't put me on the shelf yet. But just think! I was nice the other day to Berts' sister, and she told her mother she had got a new friend, who was quite old. 'Not so old as Grannie,' she said, 'but quite old!' And all the time I thought we were being girls together. At least I thought I was; I thought she was rather middle-aged. How is your mother, Berts? She doesn't approve of me, but I hope she is quite well."

Bertie also was a nephew by affection.

"Aunt Dodo," he said, "I think mother is too silly for anything."

"I knew something was coming," said Dodo; "what's she done now?"

"Well, it is. She said she thought you were heartless."

"Silly ass," said Esther. "Go on, Berts."

Berts felt goaded.

"Of course mother is a silly ass," he said. "It's no use telling me that. Your mother is a silly ass, too, with her coronets and all that sort of fudge. But altogether there is very little to be said for people over forty, except Aunt Dodo."

"Beloved Berts," remarked Dodo. "Go on about Edith."

"But it is so. They're all antiques except you, battered antiques. Let's talk about mothers generally. Look at Esther's mother. She doesn't want me to marry Esther because my father is only an ordinary Mister. There's a reason! And I don't want to marry Esther because her mother is a marchioness. After all, mine has done more than hers, who never did anything except cut William the Conqueror when he came over, and tell him he was of very poor, new family. But my mother wrote the 'Dods Symphony' for instance. She's something; she was Edith Staines, and when she has her songs sung at the Queen's Hall, she goes and conducts them."

"Bertie, in a short skirt and boots with enormous nails," said Esther.

"And why not? She may be a silly ass in some things, but she's done something."

Bertie uncoiled all his yards of height and stood up.

"You began," he said. "I'm only answering you back. Lady Ayr has never done anything at all except talk about her family. She doesn't think about anything but family: she's the most antiquated and absurd type of snob there is. And your ridiculous brother John is exactly the same. You're the most awful family, and make one long for grocers, like Nadine."

"Darling, what do you want a grocer for?" asked Dodo.

But Berts had not finished yet.

"And as for your brother Seymour, all that can be said about him is that he is a perfect lady," he said, "but he ought to have been drowned when he was a girl, like a kitten."

Esther shouted with laughter.

"Oh, Berts, I wish you would be roused oftener," she said; "I absolutely adore you when you are roused. But you aren't quite right about Seymour. He isn't a lady any more than he's a gentleman. And after all he has got a brain, a real brain."

"Well, it takes all sorts to make a world," said Dodo, "and, Esther dear, I'm often extremely grateful to Seymour. He will always come to dinner at the very last moment –"

"That's because nobody else ever asks him," said Bertie, still fizzing and spouting a little. "That's one of the objections to marrying you, Esther, you will always be letting him come to dinner."

"Be quiet, Berts. As I say, he never minds how late he is asked, and he invariably makes himself charming to the oldest and plainest woman present. Here, for instance, he would be making himself pleasant to me."

"Poor chap!" said Berts, lighting another cigarette, and lying down again.

A tray with some cold ham, a plate of strawberries, and a small jug of iced lemonade which had been ordered by Nadine for her mother was here brought in by a perfectly impassive footman, and placed on the bed between her and Nadine. No servants in Dodo's house ever felt the smallest surprise at anything which was demanded of them, and if Nadine had at this moment asked him to wash her face, he would probably have merely said, "Hot or cold water, miss?"

Nadine had not contributed anything to this discussion on Seymour, because she was almost inconveniently aware that she did not know what she thought about him. Certainly he had brains, and for brains she had an enormous respect.

"Seeing things to eat always makes me feel hungry," said Nadine, absently taking strawberries, "just as the sight of a bed makes me very wide-awake. It is called suggestion. Really the chief use of going to bed is that you are alone and have time to think."

"And that is so exhausting that I instantly go to sleep," remarked Tommy.

"You get – how do you call it – into training, if you practise, Tommy," said Nadine. "People imagine that because they have a brain they can think. It isn't so: you have to learn to think. You have a tongue, but you must learn to talk: you have arms and yet you must learn how to play your foolish golf."

"You don't learn it, darling," said Dodo.

"Mama, you are eating ham and have not been following. Really it is so. Most people can't think. Esther can't: she confesses it."

"It's quite true," said Esther. "I felt full of ideas this morning, and so I went away all alone along the beach to think them out. But I couldn't. There were my ideas all right, and that was all. I couldn't think about them. There they were, ideas: just that, framed and glazed."

Tommy rose.

"I'm worse than that," he said. "I never have any ideas. In some ways it's an advantage, because if we all had ideas, I suppose we should want to express them. As it is I am at leisure to listen."

Dodo took a long draught of lemonade.

"I have one idea," she said, "and that is that it's bed-time. I shall go and exhaust myself with thought. The process of exhaustion does not take long. Besides, if I sit up much later than twelve, my maid always pulls my hair, and whips my head with the brush instead of treating me kindly."

"I should dismiss her," said Nadine.

"I couldn't, dear. She is so imbecile that she would never get another situation. Ah, there's Hugh! Hugh, did poor Algie Balearic-isles beat you?"

A very large young man had just appeared in the doorway. He held in his hand a sandwich out of which he had just taken an enormous semi-circular bite. The rest of it was in his mouth, and he spoke with the mumbling utterance necessary to those who converse when their mouths are quite full.

"Oh, is that where he comes from?" he asked.

"No, my dear, that is where he went to; then of course since he is here he did come from them in a sense. Dear me, if he had been bishop there about fifty years earlier, he might have copied Chopin. How thrilling!"

"Yes, the Isles won," said Hugh, his voice clearing as he swallowed. "Oh, Aunt Dodo" – this again was a relationship founded only on affection – "he said your price was beyond rubies. So I said 'What price rubies?' and as he didn't understand nor did I, we parted. What a lot of people there seems to be here! I came to talk to Nadine. Oh, there she is. Or would it be better taste if I didn't? Perhaps it would. I shall go to bed instead."

"Then what you call taste is what I call peevishness," said Nadine succinctly.

"I don't understand. What is better peevishness, then?"

"You take me at the foot of the letter," said she. "You see what I mean."

"Yes. I see that you mean 'literally.' But in any case there are too many people, chiefly upside down from where I am. That's Esther, isn't it, and Berts? Tommy is the right way up. Nadine upside down also."

Esther got up.

"Why, of course, if you want to talk to Nadine, we'll go," she said.

Bertie gave a long sigh.

"I shall lie here," he said, "like the frog-footman on and off for days and days –"

"So long as you lie off now," said Hugh.

Bertie got up.

"You can all come to my room if you like," he said, "as long as you don't mind my going to bed. Good-night, Nadine; thanks awfully for letting me lie down. It has made me quite sleepy."

Hugh Graves went to the window as soon as they had gone and threw it open.

"The room smells of smoke and stale epigrams," he said in explanation.

"That's not very polite, Hugh," said she, "since I have been talking most, and not smoking least. But I suppose you will answer that you didn't come here to be polite."

In a moment, even as the physical atmosphere of the room altered, so also did the spiritual. It seemed to Nadine that she and Hugh took hands and sailed through the surface foam and brightnesses in which they had been playing into some place which they had made for themselves, which was dim and sub-aqueous. The foam and brightness was all perfectly sincere, for she was never other than sincere, but it had no more than the sincerity of soap-bubbles.

"No. I didn't come here to be polite," said Hugh, "though I didn't come here to be rude. I came to ask you a couple of questions."

Nadine had lain down on the bed again, having put all the pillows behind her, so that she was propped up by them. Her arms were clasped behind her head, and the folds of her rainbow dressing-gown fell back from them leaving them bare nearly to the shoulder. The shaded light above her bed fell upon her hair, burnishing its gold, and her face below it was dim and suggested rather than outlined. The most accomplished of coquettes would, after thought, have chosen exactly that attitude and lighting, if she wanted to appear to the greatest advantage to a man who loved her, but Nadine had done it without motive. It may have been that it was an instinct with her to appear to the utmost advantage, but she would have done the same, without thought, if she was talking to a middle-aged dentist. Hugh had seated himself at some little distance from her, and the same light threw his face into strong line and vivid color. He had still something of the rosininess of youth about him, but none of youth's indeterminateness, and he looked older than his twenty-five years. When he was moving, he moved with a boy's quickness; when he sat still he sat with the steadiness of strong maturity.

"You needn't ask them," she said. "I can answer you without that. The answer to them both is that I don't know."

"How? Do you know the questions yet?" said he.

"I do. You want to know whether my answer to you this evening is final. You want also to know why I don't say 'yes.'"

His eyes admitted the correctness of this: he need not have spoken.

"After all, there was not much divination wanted," he said. "I am as obvious as usual. And you understand me as well as usual."

She shook her head at this, not denying it, but only deprecating it.

"I always understand you too well," she said. "If only I didn't understand you, just as I don't understand Seymour, you have suggested a reason for why I don't say 'yes.' I think it is correct. Ah, don't quote silly proverbs about love's being complete understanding. Most of the proverbs are silly; Solomon was so old when he wrote them."

His mouth uncurled from its gravity.

"That wasn't one of Solomon's," he said.

"Then it might have been. In any case exactly the opposite is true. If love is anything at all beyond the obvious physical sense of the word, it is certainly not understanding. It is the not-understanding – "

"Mis-understanding?"

"No. The not-understanding, the mysterious, the unaccountable – " Nadine gathered her legs up under her and sat clasping them round the knees, and her utterance grew more rapid. Her face, young and undeveloped, and white and exquisite, was full of eager animation.

"That is what I feel anyhow," she said. "Of course I can't say 'this is love' and 'this is not love,' and label other people's emotions. There is one way of love and another way of love, and another and another. There are as many modes of love, I suppose, as there are people who are capable of it. And don't tell me everybody is capable of it. At least, tell me so if you like, but allow me to disagree. All I am certain of is that I look for something which you don't give me. Perhaps I am incapable of love. And if I was sure of that, Hughie, I would marry you. Do you see?"

She, as was always the case with her, made him forget himself. When he was with her, she absorbed his consciousness: his only desire was to follow her, not caring where she led. This desire to apprehend her corrugated his forehead into the soft wrinkles of youth, and narrowed his eyes.

"Tell me why that is not a bad reason," he said.

"Because I should see that the highest would be denied me," she said. "Look what quantities of people marry quite without love. I don't refer to the obvious reason of marrying for position or

wealth, but to the people who marry from admiration or from fear. Mama, for instance: she married Daddy because she was afraid of him. Then she learned he was a bogey with a brandy bottle."

"I am neither," said he.

Nadine gave a little sigh, and he saw his stupidity.

"I am supplying the answer to my own question," he said. "Another answer is that I don't understand you."

Somehow to Nadine this was unexpected, but almost instantly she recognized the truth of it.

"That is true," she said. "I want to be the inferior, mentally, spiritually, of the man I marry. I am just the opposite of those terrible people who want a vote, and say they are the equal of men. That is so *bourgeois* an idea. What woman with any self-respect could stand being her husband's equal if she felt herself capable of loving? It is that. You are too easy, Hugh. I understand you, and you don't understand me. I wish it was the other way round."

"Oh, you do wish that?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, my dear."

"Then you have answered the other question. Your answer to me to-day is not final. I'll puzzle you yet."

"You speak of it all as if it was a conjuring trick," she said. "Don't make conjuring tricks. Don't let me see your approaching engagement to somebody else be announced. That would not puzzle me at all. I shall simply see that it was meant to. Conjuring tricks don't mystify you: you know you have been cheated and don't care."

"No, I shan't make conjuring tricks," he said.

Nadine unclasped her knees, and got up, and began walking to and fro across the big room.

"Hugh, I wish I was altogether different," she said. "I wish I was like one of those simple girls whom you never by any chance meet outside the covers of six-shilling novels. They are quite human, only no human girl was ever like them. They like music and food and sentiment and sea-bathing and playing foolish games, just as we all do. But there is nobody behind them: they are tastes without character. If only one's character was nothing more than the sum total of one's tastes, how extraordinarily simple it would all be. We should spend our lives in making ourselves pleasant and enjoying ourselves. But there is something that sits behind all our tastes, and though those tastes express it, they do not express it all, nor do they express its essence. I am something beyond and back of the things I like, and the people I like. Something inside me says 'I want: I want.' I daresay it wants the moon, and has as much chance of getting it as I have of reaching up into the sky and pulling it down. Oh, Hugh, I want the moon, and what will the moon be like? Will it be hard and cold or soft and warm? I don't care. I shall slip it between my breasts and hold it close."

She paused a moment opposite him.

"Am I talking damned rot?" she asked. "I daresay I am. I am a rotter then, because all I say is me. Another thing, too: morally, I am not in the least worthy of you. I don't know any one who is. I don't really, and I'm not flattering you, because I don't rate the moral qualities very high. They are compatible with such low organizations. Earwigs, I read the other day, are excellent mothers. How that seems to alter one's conception of the beauty of the maternal instinct! It does not alter my conception of earwigs in the least, and I shall continue to kill any excellent mothers that I find in my room."

Hugh laughed suddenly and uproariously and then became perfectly grave again.

"Your moral organization is probably extremely low," he said. "But I settled long ago to overlook that."

"Ah, there we are again," said Nadine. "You deliberately propose to misconceive me, with the kindest intentions I know, but with how wrong a principle. You shut your eyes to me, as if – as if I was a smut! You settle to overlook the fact that I have no real moral perception. Could you settle to overlook the fact if I had no nose and only one tooth? I assure you the lack of a moral nature is a

more serious defect. But, poor devil that I am, how was I to get one? We were talking about heredity before you came in – "

Nadine paused a moment.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I was telling them that there was no truth in heredity. We will now take the other side of the question. How was I, considering my family, to have moral perceptions?"

"Are you being quite consistent?" asked Hugh.

"Why should I be consistent? Who is consistent except those simple people whom you buy so many of for six shillings, and they are consistently tiresome. How, I said, was I to have got moral perception? There is Daddy! If I was a doctor I would certify any one to be insane who said Daddy was a moral organism. There is darling Mama! I would horse-whip any one who said the same of her, for his gross stupidity and insolence. The result is me; I am more pagan than Heliogabalus. I do not think that anything is right or that anything is wrong. I want the moon, but I am afraid you are not the man in it."

"And now you are flippant."

"Flippant, serious, moral, immoral," cried Nadine, "do not label me like luggage. You will tell me my destination next, shall we call it Abraham's bosom? Dear Hugh, you enrage me sometimes. Chiefly you enrage me because you have such an angelic temper yourself. I am not sure that an angelic temper is an advantage: it is always set fair, and there are no surprises. Ah, how it all leads round to that: there are no surprises: I understand you too well. I am very sorry. Do me the justice to believe that. Really I believe that I am as sorry that I can't marry you as you are."

Hugh got up.

"I don't think I do quite believe that," he said. "And now as regards the immediate future. I think I shall go away to-morrow."

This time he succeeded in surprising her.

"Himmel, but why?" she said.

"If you understood me as well as you say, you would know," he said. "I don't find my own heart a satisfactory diet. Of course, if I thought you would miss me – "

Nadine was quite silent for a moment.

"You shall go if you like, of course," she said. "But you do me the most frightful injustice: you understand nothing about me if you think I should not miss you. You cannot be so dull as not to know that I should miss you more than if everybody else went, literally everybody, leaving me alone. But go if you wish."

She walked across to the window, which Hugh had thrown open, and leaned out. A moon rode high in mid-sky, and to the West a quarter of a mile away and far below the sea glimmered like a shield of dim silver. Below the window the ground sloped sharply away down to the gray tumbled sand dunes that fringed the coast, and all lay blurred and melted under the uncertain light. And when she turned round again Hugh saw that her eyes were blurred and melted also.

"Do exactly as you please, Hughie," she said.

He laughed.

"Would you be surprised if I did not go?" he asked.

She came towards him with both hands out.

"Ah, that is dear of you," she said. "Look out of the window with me a moment: how dim and mysterious. There is my moon which I want so much, too. I will build altars and burn incense to any god who will give it me. If only I knew what it was. My moon, I mean! Now perhaps as it is nearly two o'clock, we had better go to bed, Hughie. And I am so sorry that things are as they are."

CHAPTER II

It had been said, by Edith Arbuthnot, perhaps unkindly, but with sufficient humor to neutralize the acidity, that there was always somebody awake day and night in Dodo's house tending the flame of egoistic introspection. Edith did not generally use long words, but chose them carefully when she indulged in polysyllables. She had not been so careful in the choice of her confidant, for she had fired this withering criticism at her son Berts, who in the true spirit of an affectionate nephew instantly repeated it to Dodo, who had roared with laughter and sent Edith an enormous telegram (costing nine shillings and a halfpenny, including sixpence for a paid reply in case Edith wanted to continue the discussion) describing a terrible accident that had just happened to herself.

"A most extraordinary and tragic affair" (this was all written out in full) "has just occurred at Meering at the house of Princess Waldenech. The unfortunate lady has just died of a sudden though not unexpected attack of spontaneous egoism. Loud screams were heard from her room, and Mr. Bertie Arbuthnot, son of the celebrated Edith Arbuthnot, the musical composer, rushed in to find the princess enveloped in sheets of blue flame. The efforts made to quench her were of no avail and in a few moments all that was left of her was a small handful of ashes, which curiously enough, as they cooled, assumed the shape of a capital 'I.' Fear is felt that this outbreak may prove to be contagious, and all those who have been in contact with the combusted princess are busy disinfecting themselves by talking about each other. It is believed that Mrs. Arbuthnot has begun to write a funeral march for her friend, for whom she felt an adoring affection amounting almost to worship, in the unusual key of ten sharps and eleven flats. It is in brisk waltz time and all the performers will blow their own trumpets. She is sending copies to nearly all the crowned heads of Europe."

Edith's reply was equally characteristic.

"Dodo, I love you."

The truth in Edith's criticism was certainly exemplified in the night of which we are speaking, for Hugh did not leave Nadine's room, where she had been engaged on the self-analysis given in the last chapter till two o'clock, and at that precise moment Dodo, who had gone to bed more than an hour before, woke up and began thinking about herself with uncommon intensity. And indeed there was sufficient to think about in the circumstances with which she had at this moment allowed herself to be surrounded. For the last two days, the husband whom she had divorced with such extreme facility had been staying with her, and to-morrow, directly on his departure, Jack Chesterford, to whom she had been engaged when she ran away with the husband she had just divorced, was arriving. All her life Dodo had liked drama, as long as it occurred outside the walls of English theaters, but better than the theaters even of Paris were the dramas which came into real life, especially when you could not possibly tell (even though you were acting yourself) what was going to happen next. Best of all she liked acting herself, having a part to play, without the slightest idea what she or anybody else was going to do or say.

Dodo's zest for life did not decrease with years, nor did her interest in it in the least diminish as the time of her youth began to recede into horizons far behind her. For all the time other horizons were getting closer to her, and she could imagine herself being quite old – "as old as Grannie" in fact – without any of the tragic envy of past years that so often make wormwood of the present. She had indeed settled the mode of her procedure for those years, which were still far enough off, with some exactitude, and was quite determined to have a mob-cap with a blue riband in it, and gold-rimmed spectacles. Also she would read Thomas à Kempis a great deal, – she had read a little already, and was now deliberately keeping the rest until she was seventy – and walk about her garden with a tall cane and pick lavender. She had, moreover, promised herself to make no attempts at sprightliness or to have her hair dyed, since one of the few classes of women whom she really objected to were those whom she called grizzly kittens, who dabbed at you with their rheumatic old paws, and pretended that

they had no need of spectacles, though it was quite clear they could not read the very largest print. But she fully intended to remain exceedingly happy when those years came, for happiness so it seemed to her was a gift that came from within and could not be taken from you by any amount of external calamities or accumulation of decades. Certainly in the years that had passed she had had her share of annoyances, and in support of her theory with regard to happiness it must be confessed that they had not deprived her of one atom of it. Her late husband's conduct, for instance, had for years been of the most disagreeable kind, and she had borne with it not in the least like a tearful lamb but more like a cheerful lion. It had not in the least discouraged her with life in general, but only disgusted her with him. For the last two years before she got her divorce, he had been, as she expressed it, "too Bacchic for anything," and she had sent Nadine away from their homes in Austria to live with a variety of old friends in England. Eventually Dodo had decided that she would waste no more time with her husband and got her freedom coupled with an extremely handsome allowance. She continued to call herself "Princess Waldenech," because it was still rather pleasant being a Princess, and Waldenech told her that, as far as he was concerned, she might call herself "Dowager-Empress Waldenech," or anything else she chose.

So for a year now she had been in England, and had stepped back, or rather jumped back, into the old relations with almost all that numerous body of people who twenty years ago had helped to make life so enchanting. And with the same swiftness and sureness she had established herself in the hearts of the younger generation that had grown up since, so that the sons and daughters of her old friends became her nephews and nieces. Nadine, with the beauty, the high spirits and power of enjoyment that was hers by birthright, had so it seemed to her mother succeeded to a place that was very like what her own had been rather more than twenty years ago. Of course there was a tremendous difference in their modes, for the manners and outlook of one generation are as divergent from those of the last, as are the clothes they wear, but the same passionate love of life, the same curiosity and vividness inspired her daughter's friends, even as they had inspired her own. And since she herself had lost not one atom of her own vitality, it was not strange that the years between them and her were easily bridged over.

There were one or two voices that were silent in the chorus of welcome with which Dodo's reappearance had been hailed. One of these was Edith Arbuthnot, who, though she did not desire to put any restrictions on Berts' intimacy (which was lucky, since Berts was a young gentleman hideously gifted with the power of getting his way) loudly proclaimed that she could never be friends with Dodo again. But the answer she had sent to Dodo's remarkable telegram about combusted egoism a few days before seemed to indicate that she had surrendered and, though she had subsequently announced that Dodo was heartless, might be regarded as a convert, especially since Jack had at last yielded too, and had invited himself down here. Another fortress hitherto impregnable was Mrs. Vivian, for whom Dodo in days gone by had felt as solid an affection as she was capable of. Consequently she regretted that Mrs. Vivian was invariably unable to come and dine, and never manifested the slightest desire that Dodo should come to see her. Her regret was slightly tempered by the fact that Mrs. Vivian had an ear-trumpet in these days, which she presented to people whose conversation she desired to hear rather in the manner that elephants at the Zoo hold out their trunks for refreshments. Somehow that seemed to make her matter less, and Dodo had not at present made any determined effort to beleague her. But she intended when she went back to town in July to capture what was now practically the only remaining stronghold of the disaffected.

When Dodo drowsily awoke that night just at the time that Hugh and Nadine had finished their talk it was the thought of Jack that first stirred in her mind. Instantly she was perfectly wide-awake. During this last year, though he was great friends with Nadine, he had absolutely avoided coming into contact with herself. He never went to a house where Dodo was expected, and once finding she was staying for a Saturday-till-Monday with the Granthams, had left within ten minutes of his arrival. Miss Grantham had conceived this misbegotten plan of bringing them unexpectedly face to face, with

the only result that the party numbered thirteen, and her father was very uncomfortable for weeks afterwards. Once again they had been caught in a block in taxi-cabs exactly opposite each other. Dodo, taking the bull by the horns, had leaned impulsively toward him with both hands outstretched and cried, "Ah, Jack, are we never to meet again?" On which the bull, so to speak, paid his fare, and continued his journey on foot. Dodo had been considerably disappointed by this rebuff: it had seemed to her that no man should have resisted her direct appeal. On the other hand, Jack on seeing her had nailed to his face so curiously icy a mask that his appearance became quite ludicrous. Also he knocked his hat against the roof of the closed half of his cab, and it fell into the road, in the middle of an unusually deep puddle. She noticed that he was not bald yet, which was a great relief, since she detested the sight of craniums.

And now Jack had yielded, had walked out of his citadel without any further assault being delivered, and was to arrive to-day. At the thought, when she woke in the stillness of earliest morning, Dodo's brain started into fullest activity, and, as always, as much interested in the motives that inspired actions as in the actions themselves, she set herself to ponder the nature of the impulse which had caused so complete a *volte-face*. But the action itself interested and charmed her also: all this year she had wanted to see Jack again. He had understood her better than any one, and in spite of the vile way in which she had used him, she had more nearly loved him than either of the men she had married. Her first husband had never been more to her than "an old darling," and often something not nearly that. Of Waldenech she had simply been afraid: under the fascination of fear she had done what he told her. But Jack —

Dodo felt for the switch of her electric light: the darkness was too close to her eyes, and she wanted to focus them on something. Clearly there were several possibilities any of which would account for this change in him. He might perhaps merely wish to resume ordinary and friendly relations with her. But that did not seem a likely explanation, since, if that was all, he would more naturally have waited till she returned to town again after this sojourn in the country. There must have been in his mind a cause more potent than that. Naturally the more potent cause occurred to her, and she sat up in bed. "It is too ludicrous," she said to herself, "it cannot possibly be that." And yet he had remained unmarried all these years, with how many charming girls about who would have been perfectly willing to share his wealth and title, not to speak of himself.

Dodo got out of bed altogether; and went across the room to where a big looking-glass set in the door of her wardrobe reflected her entire figure. She wished to be quite honest in her inspection of herself, to see there not what she wanted to see but what there was to be seen. The room was brightly lit, and through her thin silk nightdress she could see the lines of her figure, molded in the soft swelling curves of her matured womanhood. Yet something of the slimness and firm elasticity of youth still dwelt there, even as youth still shone in the smooth unwrinkled oval of her face and sparkled in the depths of her dark eyes. Right down to her waist hung the thick coils of her black hair, still untroubled by gray, and slim and shapely were her ankles, soft and rosy from the warmth of her bed her exquisite feet. And at the sight of herself her mouth uncurled itself into a smile: the honesty of her scrutiny had produced no discouraging revelations. Then frankly laughing at herself she turned away again, and wholly unconsciously and instinctively took half a dozen dance-steps across the Persian rugs that were laid down over the polished floor. She could no more help that impulse of her bubbling vitality than she could help the fact that she was five feet eight in height.

The coolness and refreshment of the two hours before dawn streamed in through her open window, and she put on the dressing-gown with its cascades of lace and blue ribands that lay on the chair by her dressing-table. Supposing it was the case that Jack was coming for her, that he wanted her now as in the old days when she had thrown his devotion back at him like a pail of dirty water, what answer would she make him? Really she hardly knew. Neither of her marriages had been a conspicuous success, but for neither of her husbands had she felt anything of that quality of emotion

which she had felt for the man she had treated so infamously. She gave a great sigh and began ticking off certain events on her fingers.

"First of all I refused him before I married poor darling Chesterford the first," she said to herself. "Secondly, having married Chesterford the first, I asked Jack to run away with me. But that was in a moment of great exasperation: it might have happened to anybody. Thirdly, as soon as Chesterford I. was taken, I got engaged to Jack which I ought to have done originally; and fourthly, I jilted him and married Waldenech."

Dodo had arrived at her little finger and held her other hand poised over it.

"What the devil is fifthly to be?" she said aloud.

She got out of her chair again.

"It is very odd but I simply can't make up my mind," she thought, "and I usually can make it up without the slightest trouble; indeed it is usually already made up, just as one used to find eggs already boiled in that absurd machine that always stood by Chesterford at breakfast. I hate boiled eggs! But I wonder if I owe it to Jack to marry him if he wants me to? Supposing he says I have spoiled his life, and he wants me to unspoil it now? Is it my duty apart from whatever my inclination may be, and I wish I knew what it was?"

Dodo felt herself quite unable to make up her mind on this somewhat important point. She felt herself already embarked on an argument with Jack, as she had been so often embarked in the old days, and on how pleasant and summery a sea. She would certainly tell him that nobody ought to let his life be spoiled by anybody else, and she would point to herself as a triumphant instance of how she had refused to let her joy of life get ever so slightly tarnished by the really trying experiences in her partnership with Waldenech. Here was she positively as good as new. And then unfortunately it occurred to her that Jack might say "But then you didn't love him." And the ingenious Dodo felt herself unable to frame any reply to this very bald suggestion. It really seemed unanswerable.

There was a further reason which might account for Jack's coming: Nadine. Dodo knew that the two were great friends. She had even heard it suggested that Jack had serious thoughts with regard to her. Very likely that was only invented by some friend who was curious to know how she herself would take the suggestion, but clearly this was not an improbable, far less an impossible, contingency. But that Nadine had serious thoughts with regard to Jack was less likely. Dodo felt that her daughter took after herself in emotional matters and was probably not at that age seriously thinking about anybody. Yet after all she herself had married at that age (though without serious thought) and the experiment which seemed so sensible and promising had been a distinct disappointment. Ought she to warn Nadine against marrying without love? Or would that look as if, for other reasons, she did not wish her to marry Jack? That would be an odious interpretation to put on it, and the worst of it was that she was not perfectly certain whether there was not some sort of foundation for it. Something within her ever so faintly resented the idea of Jack's marrying Nadine.

Dodo's thought paused and was poised over this for a little, and she made an eager and a conscious effort to root out from her mind this feeling of which she was genuinely ashamed. Then suddenly all her meditations were banished, for from outside there came the first faint chirrupings of an awakening bird. Deep down in her, below the trivialities and surface-complications of life, below all her warm-heartedness and her egoism there lay a strain of natural untainted simplicity, and these first flutings of birds in the bushes roused it. She went to the window and drew up the blind.

The dusk still hovered over the sea and low-lying land, and in the sky already turning dove-colored a late star lingered, remotely burning. The bird that had called her to look at the dawn had ceased again, and a pause holy and sweet and magical brooded over this virginal meeting of night and day. But far off to the right the hill-tops had got the earliest news of what was coming and were flecked with pale orient reflections and hints of gold and scarlet and faint crimson. But here below the dusk lay thick still, like clear dark water.

Just below her window lay the lawn, garlanded round with sleeping and dew-drenched flower-beds and the incense of their fragrant buds and folded petals still slept in the censer, till in the East should rise the gold-haired priest and swing it, tossing high to heaven the fragrance of its burning. And then from out of the bushes beyond there scudded a thrush, perhaps the same as had called Dodo to the window. He scurried over the shimmering lawn with innumerable footfalls, and came so close underneath her window that she could see his eyes shining. Then he swelled his throat, and sang one soft phrase of morning, paused as if listening and then repeated it. All the magic of youth and joy of life was there: there was also in Dodo's heart the indefinable yearning for days that were dead, the sense of the fathomless well of time into which forever dropped beauty and youth and the soft sweet days. But that lasted but a moment, for as long as the thrush paused. Another voice and yet another sounded from the bushes; there were other thrushes there, and in the ivy of the house arose the cheerful jangling of sparrows. Fresh-feathered forms ran out upon the lawn, and the air was shrill with their pipings. Every moment the sky grew brighter with the imminent day, the last star faded in the glow of pink translucent alabaster, and in the green-crowned elms the breeze of morning awoke, and stirred the tree-tops. Then it came lower, and began to move in the flower-beds, and the wine of the dew was spilled from the chalices of new-blown roses, and the tall lilies quivered. There was wafted up to her the indescribable odor of moist earth and opening flowers, and on the moment the first yellow ray of sunlight shot over the garden.

Dodo stood there dim-eyed, unspeakably and mysteriously moved. She thought of other dawns she had seen, when coming back perhaps from a ball where she had been the central and most brilliant figure all night long; she thought of other troubled dawns when she had wakened from some unquiet dream and yet dreaded the day. But here was a perfect dawn and it seemed to symbolize to her the beginning of the life that lay in front of her. She looked forward to it with eager anticipation, she gave it a rapturous welcome. She was in love with life still, she longed to see what delicious things it held in store for her. She felt sure that God was going to be tremendously kind to her. And in turn (for she had a certain sense of fairness) she felt most whole-heartedly grateful and determined to deserve these favors. There were things in her life she was very sorry for: such omissions and commissions should not occur again. She felt that the sight of this delicious dawn had been a sort of revelation to her. And with a great sigh of content, she went back to bed, and without delay fell fast asleep and did not awake till her maid came in at eight o'clock with a little tray of tea that smelt too good for anything, and a whole sheaf of attractive-looking letters, large, stiff square ones, which certainly contained cards that bade her to delightful entertainments.

She always breakfasted in her room, and when she came downstairs about half-past ten, and looked into the dining-room, she found to her surprise that Waldenech was there eating sausages one after the other. This was a very strange proceeding for him, since in general he adopted slightly shark-like hours and did not breakfast till at least lunch-time. Time, or at any rate, his habits and method of spending it, had not been so kind to him as to Dodo and though it had not robbed him of that look of distinction which was always his it had conferred upon him the look of being considerably the worse for wear. He seemed as much older than his years as Dodo appeared younger than hers, and she was no longer in the least afraid of him. Indeed it struck her that morning as she came in, with a sense of wonder, that she had ever found him formidable.

"Good-morning, my dear," she said, "but how very surprising. Has everybody else finished and gone out? Waldenech, I am so glad you suggested coming here, and I hope you haven't regretted it."

"I have not enjoyed any days so much since you left me," he said.

"How dear of you to say that! Every one thought it so extraordinary that you should want to come here or that I should let you, but I am delighted you did."

He left his place, and came to sit in a chair next her. The remains of Nadine's breakfast were on a plate opposite: half a poached egg, some melon rind, marmalade and a cigarette end. He pushed these rather discouraging relics away.

"It is not extraordinary that I should want to come here," he said, "for the simple reason that you are the one woman I ever really cared about. I always cared for you – "

"There are others who think you occasionally cared for them," remarked Dodo.

"That may be so. Now I should like to stop on. May I do so?"

"No, my dear, I am afraid that you certainly may not," she said. "Jack comes to-day and the situation would not be quite comfortable, not to say decent."

"Do you think that matters?" he asked.

"It certainly is going to matter. You haven't really got a European mind, Waldenech. Your mind is probably Thibetan. Is it Thibet where you do exactly as you feel inclined? The place where there are Llamas."

"I do as I feel inclined wherever I am," said he.

Dodo remembered, again with wonder, the awful mastery that that sort of sentence as delivered by him used to have for her. Now it had none of any kind: his personality had simply ceased to be dominant with regard to her.

"But then you won't be here," said she. "You will go by that very excellent train that never stops at all; I have reserved a carriage for you."

He lit a cigarette.

"I must have been insane to behave to you as I did," he said. "It was most intensely foolish from a purely selfish point of view."

She patted his hand which lay on the table-cloth.

"Certainly it was," she said, "if you wanted to keep me. I told you so more than once. I told you that there were limits, but you appeared to believe there were not. That was quite like you, my dear. You always thought yourself a Czar. I do not think we need to go into past histories."

He got up.

"Dodo, would you ever under any circumstances come back to me?" he said. "There is Nadine, you know. It gives her a better chance – "

Dodo interrupted him.

"You are not sincere when you say that. It isn't of Nadine that you think. As for your question, I have never heard of any circumstances which would induce me to do as you suggest. Of course we cannot say that they don't exist, but I have never come across them. Don't let us think of it, Waldenech: it is quite impossible. If you were dying, I would come, but under the distinct understanding that I should go away again, in case you got better, as I am sure I hope you would. I don't bear you the slightest ill-will. You didn't spoil my life at all, though it is true you often made me both angry and miserable. As regards Nadine, she has an excellent chance, as you call it, under the present arrangements. All my friends have come back to me, except Mrs. Vivian."

"Mrs. Vivian?" said he. "Oh, yes, an English type, earnest widow."

"With an ear-trumpet now," continued Dodo; "and I shall get her some day. And Jack comes this afternoon. *Voilà*, the round table again! I take up the old life anew, with the younger generation as well, not a penny the worse."

"You are a good many pennies the better," said he in self-justification. "As regards Lord Chesterford: why is he coming here?"

"I suppose because, like you, he wants to see me and Nadine or both of us."

"Do you suppose he wants to marry you?" he asked. "Will you marry him?"

Dodo got up, reveling in her sense of liberty.

"Waldenech, you don't seem to realize that certain questions from you to me are impertinent," she said. "My dear, what I do now is none of your business. You have as much right to ask Mrs. Vivian whether she is thinking of marrying again. You have been so discreet and pleasant all these days: don't break down now. I have not the slightest idea if Jack wants to marry me now, as a matter of fact; and I have really no idea if I would marry him in case he did. It is more than twenty years

since I spoke to him – oh, I spoke to him out of a taxi-cab the other day, but he did not answer – and I have no idea what he is like. In twenty years one may become an entirely different person. However, that is all my business, and no one else's. Now, if you have finished, let us take a stroll in the garden before your carriage comes round."

"I ask then a favor of you," he said.

"And what is that?"

"That you be yourself just for this stroll: that you be as you used to be when we met that summer at Zermatt."

Dodo was rather touched: she was also relieved that the favor was one so easy to grant. She took his arm as they left the dining-room and came out into the brilliant sunshine.

"That is dear of you to remember Zermatt," she said. "Oh, Waldenech, think of those great mountains still standing there in their silly rows with their noses in the air. How frightfully fatiguing! And they all used to look as if they were cuts with each other, and there they'll be a thousand years hence, not having changed in the least. But I'm not sure we don't have the better time scampering about for a few years, and running in and out like mice, though we get uglier and older every day. Look, there is poor John Sturgis coming towards us: let us quickly go in the opposite direction. Ah, he has seen us! – Dear John, Nadine was looking for you, I believe. I think she expected you to read something to her after breakfast about Goths or Gothic architecture. Or was it Bishop Algie you were talking to last night about cathedrals? One or the other, I am sure. He said he so much enjoyed his talk with you."

Waldenech felt that Dodo was behaving exactly as she used to behave at Zermatt. Somehow in his sluggish and alcoholic soul there rose vibrations like those he had felt then.

"Talk to him or me, it does not matter," he said in German to her, "but talk like that. That is what I want."

Dodo gave him one glance of extraordinary meaning. This little muttered speech strangely reminded her of the pæan in the thrush's song at dawn. It recalled a poignancy of emotion that belonged to days long past, but the same poignancy of feeling was hers still. She could easily feel and habitually felt, in spite of her forty and more years, the mere out-bubbling of life that expressed itself in out-bubbling speech. She also rather welcomed the presence of a third party: it was easier for her to bubble to anybody rather than to Waldenech. She buttonholed the perfectly willing John.

"Bishop Algie is such a dear, isn't he?" she said. "He is accustomed not to talk at all, and so talking is a treat to him, and he loved you. He is taking a cinematograph show, all about the Acts of the Apostles, round the country next autumn to collect funds for Maud's orphanage. The orphanage is already built, but there are no orphans. I think the money he collects is to get orphans to go there, scholarships I suppose. He made all his friends group themselves for scenes in the acts, and he is usually St. Paul. There is a delicious shipwreck where they are tying up the boat with rug-straps and ropes. He had it taken in the bay here, and it was extremely rough, which made it all the more realistic because dear Algie is a very bad sailor and while he was being exceedingly unwell over the side, his halo fell off and sank."

"We did not talk about the Acts of the Apostles last night," said John firmly, "we talked about Gothic architecture, and Piccadilly, and Wagner."

"But how entrancing," said Dodo. "I particularly love Siegfried because it is like a pantomime. Do you remember when the dragon comes out of his cave looking exactly like Paddington station, with a red light on one side and a green one on the other, and a quantity of steam, and whistlings, and some rails? Then afterwards a curious frosty female appears suddenly in the hole of a tree and tells Wotan that his spear ought to be looked to before he fights. Waldenech, we went together to Baireuth, and you snored, but luckily on the right note, and everybody thought it was Fafner. John, I was sitting in my window at dawn this morning, and all the birds in the world began to sing. It made

me feel so common. Nobody ought to see the dawn except the birds, and I suppose the worms for the sake of the birds."

Waldenech turned to her, and again spoke in German. "You are still yourself," he said. "After all these years you are still yourself."

Dodo's German was far more expressive than his, it was also ludicrously ungrammatical, and intensely rapid.

"There are no years," she said. "Years are only an expression used by people who think about what is young and what is old. Every one has his essential age, and remains that age always. This man is about sixty, the age of his mother."

John Sturgis smiled in a kind and superior manner.

"Perhaps I had better tell you that I know German perfectly," he said. "Also French and Italian, in case you want to say things that I shan't understand."

Dodo stared for a moment, then pealed with laughter.

"Darling John," she said, "I think that is too nice of you. If you were nasty you would have let me go on talking. Isn't my German execrable? How clever of you to understand it! But you are old, aren't you? Of course it is not your fault, nor is it your misfortune, since all ages are equally agreeable. We grow up into our ages if we are born old, and we grow out of them, like missing a train, if our essential age is young. When you are eighty, you will still be sixty, which will be delightful for you. I make plans for what I shall be when I am old, but I wonder if I shall be able to carry them out. When I am old, I shall be what I shall be, I suppose. The inevitable doesn't take much notice of our plans, it sits there like the princess on the top of the glass-hill while we all try, without the slightest success, to get at it. Ah, my dear Waldenech, there is the motor come round for you. You will have to start, because I have at last trained my chauffeur to give one no time to wait at the station, and you must not jilt the compartment I have engaged you to. It will get to London all alone: so bad for a young compartment."

He made no further attempt to induce her to let him stop, and Dodo, with a certain relief of mind, saw him drive off and blew a large quantity of kisses after him.

"He was such a dear about the year you were born, John," she said, "but you are too old to remember that. Now I must be Martha, and see the cook and all the people who make life possible. Then I shall become Mary again and have a delicious bathe before lunch. Certainly the good part is much the pleasantest, as is the case always at private theatricals. I think we must act this evening: we have not had charades or anything for nearly two days."

John, like most prigs, was of a gregarious disposition, and liked that his own superiority of intellect, of which he was so perfectly conscious, should be made manifest to others and, literally, he could not imagine that Dodo should not seem to prefer burying herself in household affairs when he was clearly at leisure to converse with her. He did not feel himself quite in tune with the younger members of the party, and sometimes wondered why he had come here. That wonder was shared by others. His tediousness in ordinary intercourse was the tediousness of his genus, for he always wanted to improve the minds of his circle. Unfortunately he mistook quantity of information for quality of mind, and thought that large numbers of facts, even such low facts as dates, held in themselves the germ of culture. But since, at the present moment, Dodo showed not the smallest desire to profit by his leisure, he wandered off to the tennis-courts, where he had reason to believe he should find companions. His faith was justified, for there was a rather typical party assembled. Berts and Hugh were playing a single, while Esther was fielding tennis-balls for them. They were both admirable performers, equally matched and immeasurably active. At the moment Esther standing, as before Ahasuerus, with balls ready to give to Berts, had got in his way, and he had claimed a let.

"Thanks awfully, Esther," he said, as he took a couple of balls from her, "but would you get a little further back? You are continually getting rather in my way."

"Oh, Berts, I'm so sorry," she said. "You are playing so well!"

"I know. Esther was in the light, Hugh."

"Oh rather, lot, of course," said Hugh.

Nadine took no active share. She was lying on the grass at the side of the court with Tommy, and was reading "Pride and Prejudice" aloud. When Esther had a few moments to spare she came to listen. John joined the reading party, and wore an appreciative smile.

Nadine came to the end of a chapter.

"Yes, Art, oh, great Art," she said, shutting the book, "but I am not enchained. It corresponds to Madame Bovary, or the Dutch pictures. It is beautifully done; none but an artist could have done it. But I find a great deal of it dull."

John's smile became indulgent.

"Ah, yes," he said, "but what you call dull, I expect I should call subtle. Surely, Nadine, you see how marvelous."

Esther groaned.

"John, you make me feel sick," she began.

"Balls, please," said Hugh.

Esther sprang up.

"Yes, Hugh, I'll get them," she said. "Aren't those two marvelous?" she added to Nadine.

"John is more marvelous," said Nadine. "John, I wish you would get drunk or cheat at cards. It would do you a world of good to lose a little of your self-respect. You respect yourself far too much. Nobody is so respectable as you think yourself. We were talking of you last night: I wish you had been there to hear; but you had gone to bed with your camomile tea. Perhaps you think camomile tea subtle also, whereas I should only find it dull."

"I think you are quibbling with words," he said. "But I, too, wish I had heard you talking last night. I always welcome criticism so long as it is sincere."

"It was quite sincere," said Nadine, "you may rest assured. It was unanimous, too; we were all agreed."

John found this not in the least disconcerting.

"I am not so sure that it matters then," he said. "When several people are talking about one thing – you tell me you were talking about me – they ought to differ. If they all agree, it shows they only see one side of what they are discussing."

Nadine sat up, while Tommy buried his dissipated face in his hands.

"We only saw one side of you," she said, "and that was the obvious one. You will say that it was because we were dull. But since you like criticism you shall know. We all thought you were a prig. Esther said you would be distressed if we thought differently. She said you like being a prig. Do tell me: is it pleasant? Or I expect what I call prig, you call cultured. Are you cultured?"

Tommy sat up.

"Come and listen, Esther," he shouted. "Those glorious athletes can pick up the balls themselves for a minute."

Esther emerged from a laurel bush triumphant with a strayed reveler.

"Oh, is Nadine telling John what she thinks?" she asked.

"Nadine is!" said Tommy.

Nadine meantime collected her thoughts. When she talked she ascertained for herself beforehand what she was going to say. In that respect she was unlike her mother, who ascertained what she thought when she found herself saying it. But the result in both cases had the spontaneous ring.

"John, somehow or other you are a dear," she said, "though we find you detestable. You think, anyhow. That gives you the badge. Anybody who thinks – "

Hugh, like Mr. Longfellow with his arrow, flung his racquet into the air, without looking where it went. He had a moment previously sent a fast drive into the corner of the court, which raised whitewash in a cloud, and won him the set.

"Nadine, are you administering the oath of the clan?" he said. "You haven't consulted either Berts or me."

Nadine looked pained.

"Did you really think I was admitting poor John without consulting you?" she said. "Though he complies with the regulations."

Hugh, streaming with the response that a healthy skin gives to heat, threw himself down on the grass.

"I vote against John!" he said. "I would sooner vote for Seymour. And I won't vote for him. Also, it is surely time to go and bathe."

"I don't know what you are all talking about," said John. "I daresay it doesn't matter. But what is the clan?"

Hugh sat up.

"The clan is nearly prigs," he said, "but not quite. But you are, quite. We are saved because we do laugh at ourselves –"

"And you are not saved because you don't," added Nadine.

"And is the whole object of the clan to think?" asked John.

"No, that is the subject. Also you speak as if we all had said, 'Let there be a clan, and it was so,'" said Nadine. "You mustn't think that. There was a clan, and we discovered it, like Newton and the orange."

"Apple, surely," said John.

Nadine looked brilliantly round.

"I knew he would say that," she said. "You see you correct what I say, whereas a clansman would be content to understand what I mean."

"Bishop Algie is clan, by the way," said Hugh. "I went down to bathe before breakfast, and found him kneeling down on the beach saying his prayers. That is tremendously clannish."

"I don't see why," said John.

Esther sighed.

"No, of course you wouldn't see," she said.

"Try him with another," said Nadine.

Esther considered.

"Attend, John," she said. "When the last Stevenson letters came out, Berts bought them and looked at one page. Then he took a taxi to Paddington and took a return ticket to Bristol."

"Swindon," said Berts.

"The station is immaterial, so long as it was far away. I daresay Swindon is quite as far as Bristol."

John smiled.

"There you are quite wrong," he said. "Swindon comes before Bath, and Bristol after Bath. No doubt it does not matter, though it is as well to be accurate."

Esther looked at him with painful anxiety.

"But don't you see why Berts went to Swindon or Bristol?" she said. "Poor dear, you do see now. That is hopeless. You ought to have felt. To reason out what should have been a flash, is worse than not to have understood at all."

John, again like all other prigs, was patient with those not so gifted as himself.

"I daresay you will explain to me what it all amounts to," he said. "All I am certain of is that Berts wanted to read Stevenson's letters and so got into a train, where he would be undisturbed. Wouldn't it have answered the same purpose if he had taken a room at the Paddington hotel?"

Nadine turned to Berts.

"Oh, Berts, that would have been rather lovely," she said.

"Not at all," said he. "I wanted the sense of travel."

John got up.

"Then I should have recommended the Underground," he said. "You could have gone round and round until you had finished. It would have been much cheaper."

Nadine waved impotent arms of despair.

"Now you have spoiled it," she said. "There was a possibility in the Paddington hotel, which sounds so remote. But the Underground! You might as well say, why do I bathe, I who cannot swim? I can get clean in a bath, though I only get dirty in the sea, and if I want the salt I can put Tiddle-de-wink salt or whatever the name is in my bath –"

"Tidman," said John.

"I am sure you are right, though who cares? I am knocked down by cold waves, I am cut by stones on my soles. I am pinched by crabs and *homards*, at least I think I am; the wind gnaws at my bones, and my hair is as salt as almonds. Between my toes is sand, and bits of seaweed make me a plaster, and my stockings fall into rock-pools, but do I go with rapture to have a bath in the bathroom? I hate washing. There is nothing so sordid as to wash my face, except to brush my teeth. But to bathe in the sea makes me think: it gives me romance. Poor John, you never get romance. You amass information, and make a Blue Book. But we all, we make blue mountains, which we never reach. If we reached them they would probably turn out to be green. As it is, they are always blue, because they are beyond. It is suggestion that we seek, not attainment. To attain is dull, to aspire is the sugar and salt of life. Don't you see? To realize an ideal is to lose the ideal. It is like a man growing rich: he never sees his sovereigns: when he has gained them he flings them forth again into something further. If he left them in a box, the real sovereigns, under his bed, what chance would there be for him to grow rich? But out they go, he never uses them, except that he makes them breed. It is the same with the riches of the mind. An idea, an ideal is yours. Do you keep it? Personally you do. But we, no. We invest it again. It is to our credit, at this bank of the mind. We do not hoard it, and spend it piecemeal. We put it into something else. What I have perceived in music, I put into plays: what I have perceived in plays I put into pictures. I never let it remain at home. But when I shall be a millionaire of the mind, what, what then? Yes, that makes me pause. Perhaps it will all be converted, as they convert bonds, is it not, and I shall put it all into love. Who knows, La-la."

Nadine paused a moment, but nobody spoke. Hugh was watching her with the absorption that was always his when she was there. But after a moment she spoke again.

"We talk what you call rot," she said. "But it is not rot. The people who always talk sense arrive at less. There are sparks that fly, as when you strike one flint with another. Your English philosophers – who are they? – Mr. Chesterton I suppose, is he not a philosopher? – or some Machiavelli or other, they sit down soberly to think, and when they have thought they wrap up their thought in paradox, as you wrap up a pill for your dog, so that he swallows it, and his inside becomes bitter. That is not the way. You must start with pure enjoyment, and when a thought comes, you must fling it into the air. They hit a bird, or turn into a rainbow, or fall on your head – but what matter? You others sit and think, and when you have thought of something you put it in a beastly book, and have finished with it. You prigs turn the world topsy-turvy that way. You do not start with joy, and you go forth in a slough of despondent information. Ah, yes: the child who picks up a match and rubs it against something and finds it catches fire removes the romance of the match, more than Mr. Bryant and May and Boots is it? who made the match. Matches are made on earth, but the child who knows nothing about them and strikes one is the person who is in heaven. You are not content with the wonder and romance of the world, you prefer to explain the rainbow away instead of looking at it. It is a sort of murder to explain things away: you kill their souls, and demonstrate that it is only hydrogen."

She looked up at Hugh.

"We talked about it last night," she said. "We settled that it was a great misfortune to understand too well –"

A footman arrived at this moment with a telegram which he handed to Berts, who opened it. He gave a shout of laughter and passed it to Nadine.

"What shall I say?" he asked.

"But of course 'yes,'" she said. "It is quite unnecessary to ask Mama."

Berts scribbled a couple of words on the reply-paid form.

"It's only my mother," he said in general explanation. "She wants to come over for a day or two, and see Aunt Dodo again, but she doesn't feel sure if Aunt Dodo wants to see her. Are you sure there's a room, Nadine?"

"There always is some kind of room," said Nadine. "She can sleep in three-quarters of my bed, if not."

"I'm so glad she is tired of being a silly ass, as we settled she was last night," said Berts. "Perhaps I ought to ask Aunt Dodo, Nadine."

"Pish-posh," said Nadine.

John got up, and prig-like had the last word.

"I see all about the clan," he said. "You have a quantity of vague enthusiasm, and a lack of information. You swim like jelly-fish without any sense of direction, and admire each other."

Nadine considered this.

"I do see what he means," she said.

"And don't live what you mean," added John.

CHAPTER III

This sojourn at Meering in the month of June, when London and its diversions were at their midmost, was Nadine's plan. Whatever Nadine was or was not, she was not a *poseuse*, and her contention that it was a waste of time to spend all day in talking to a hundred people who did not really matter, and in dancing all night with fifty of them, was absolutely genuine.

"As long as anything amuses you," she had said, "it is not waste of time; but when you begin to wonder if it really amuses you, it shows that it does not. Darling Mama, may I go down to Meering for a week or ten days? I do not want any one to come, but if anybody likes to come, we might have a little cheerful party. Besides it is Coronation next week, and great *corvée*! I think it is likely that Esther would wish to escape and perhaps one or two others, and it would be enchanting at Meering now. It would be a rest cure; a very curious sort of rest, since we shall probably never cease bathing and talking and reading. But anyhow we shall not be tired over things that bore us. That is the true fatigue. You are never tired as long as you are interested, but I am not interested in the Coronation."

Nadine's solitary week had proved in quality to be populous, and in quantity to exceed the ten days, and it was already beginning to be doubtful if July would see any of them settled in London again. Dodo's house in Portman Square had been maintained in a state of habitableness with a kitchen-maid to cook, and a housemaid to sweep, and a footman to wait, and a chauffeur to drive, and an odd man to do whatever the other servants didn't, and occasionally one or two of the party made a brief excursion there for a couple of nights, if any peculiar attraction beckoned. The whole party had gone up for a Shakespeare ball at the Albert Hall, but had returned next day, and Dodo had hurried to St. Paul's Cathedral to attend a thanksgiving service, especially since she, on leaving London, had taken a season ticket, being convinced she would be continuously employed in rushing up and down. Subsequently she had defrauded the railway-company by lending it, though strictly non-transferable, to any member of the party who wished to make the journey, with the result that Bertie had been asked by a truculent inspector whether he was really Princess Waldenech. His passionate denial of any such identity had led to a lesser frequency of these excursions.

Nadine with the same sincerity had mapped out for herself a course of study at Meering, and she read Plato every afternoon in the original Greek, with an admirable translation at hand, from three o'clock till five. During these hours she was inaccessible, and when she emerged rather flushed sometimes from the difficulty of comprehending what some of the dialogues were about, she was slightly Socratic at tea, and tried to prove, as Dodo said, that the muse of Mr. Harry Lauder was the same as the muse of Sir George Alexander, and that she ought to be rude to Hugh if she loved him. She was extremely clear-headed in her reason, and referred them to the Symposium and the dialogue on Lysis, to prove her point. But as nobody thought of contradicting her, since the Socratic mood soon wore off, they did not attempt to find out the Hellenic equivalents for those amazing doctrines.

She was markedly Socratic this afternoon, when the whole party were having tea on the lawn. Esther and Bertie had been down to bathe after lunch, and since everybody was going to bathe again after tea, they had left their clothes behind different rocky screens above the probable high-water level on the beach, and were clad in bathing-dress, moderately dried in the sun, with dressing-gowns above. Berts had nothing in the shape of what is called foot-gear on his feet, since it was simpler to walk up barefoot, and he was wriggling his toes, one after the other, in order to divest them of an excess of sand.

"But pain and pleasure are so closely conjoined," said Nadine, in answer to an exclamation of his concerning stepping in a gorse-bush. "It hurts you to have a prickle in your foot, but the pleasure of taking it out compensates for the pain!"

"That's Socratic," said Hugh, "when they took off his chains just before they hemlocked him. You didn't think of that, Nadine."

"I didn't claim to, but it is quite true. There is actual pleasure in the cessation of pain. If you are unhappy and the cause of your unhappiness is removed, your happiness is largely derived from the fact that you were unhappy. For instance, did you ever have a fish-bone stick in your throat, Hugh?"

"As a matter of fact, never," said Hugh. "But as I am meant to say 'yes,' I will."

"And did you cough?"

"Violently," said Hugh.

"Upon which the fish-bone returned to your mouth?"

"No," said Hugh. "I swallowed it. It never returned at all."

"It does not matter which way it went," said Nadine; "but your feeling of pleasure at its going was dependent on the pain which its sticking gave you."

"Is that all?" said Hugh.

"Does it not seem to you to be proved?"

"Oh, yes. It was proved long ago. But it's a pedantic point. The sort of point John would have made."

He absently whistled the first two lines of "Am Stillen Herd," and Nadine was diverted from her Platonisms.

"Ah, that is so much finer than the finished 'Preislied,'" she said; "he has curled and oiled his verse like an Assyrian bull. He and Sachs had cobbled at it too much: they had brushed and combed it. It had lost something of springtime and sea-breeze. A finished work of art has necessarily less quality of suggestiveness. Look at the Leonardo drawings. Is the 'Gioconda' ever quite as suggestive? I am rather glad it was stolen. I think Leonardo is greater without it."

John drew in his breath in a pained manner.

"'Mona Lisa' was the whole wonder of the world," he said. "I had sooner the thief had taken away the moon. Do you remember – perhaps you didn't notice it – the painting of the circle of rock in which she sat?"

"You are going to quote Pater," said Nadine. "Pray do not: it is a deplorable passage, and though it has lost nothing by repetition – for there was nothing to lose – it shows an awful ignorance of the spirit of the Renaissance. The eyelids are not a little weary: they are a little out of drawing only."

Esther looked across at Berts.

"Berts is either out of drawing," she said, "or else his dressing-gown is. I think both are: he is a little too long, and also the dressing-gown is too short. They ought to proceed as far as the ankles, but Berts' got a little weary at his knees."

"I barked my knees on those foul rocks," said Berts, examining those injured joints.

"Barking them is worse than biting them," said Nadine.

"I never bite my knees," said he. "It is a greedy habit. Worse than doing it to your nails."

"If you are not careful you will talk nonsense," said Nadine.

"I don't agree. If you are not careful you can't talk nonsense. If you want to talk nonsense, you've not got to be not careful."

"There are too many 'nots,'" remarked Nadine.

"Not at all. If you are careless some sort of idea creeps into what you say, and it ceases to be nonsense. There are lots of creeping ideas about like microbes, any of which spoil it. Hardly anybody can be really meaningless for five minutes. That is why the Mad Tea Party is a supreme work of art: you can't attach the slightest sense to anything that is said in it."

"The question is what you mean by nonsense," said Nadine. "Is it what Mr. Bernard Shaw writes in his plays, or what Mrs. Humphry Ward writes in her books? They neither mean anything but they are not at all alike. In fact they are as completely opposed to each other as sense is to nonsense."

Berts threw himself back on the turf.

"True," he said. "But they are neither of them nonsense. The lame and the halt and the blind ideas creep into both. They both talk sense mortally wounded."

Esther gave her appreciative sigh.

"Oh, Berts, how true!" she said. "I went to a play by Mrs. Humphry Ward the other day, or else I read a book by Bernard Shaw, I forget which, and all the time I kept trying to see what the sense of it had been before it had its throat cut. But no one ever tried to see what Alice in Wonderland meant, or what Aunt Dodo means."

"Mama is wonderful," said Nadine. "She lives up to what she says, too. Her whole life has been complete nonsense. I do hope Jack will persuade her to do the most ridiculous thing of all, and marry him."

"Is that why he is coming?" asked Esther.

"Oh, I hope so. It would be *the* greatest and most absurd romance of the century."

Hugh was eating sugar meditatively out of the sugar basin.

"I don't see that you have any right to lay down the law about nonsense, Nadine," he said. "You are constantly reading Plato, and making arguments, which are meant to be consecutive."

"I do that to relax my mind," said Nadine. "Berts is quite right. Nonsense is not the absence of sense, but the negative of sense, just as sugar is the negative of salt. To get non-salt with your egg, you must eat sugar with it, not only abstain from salt."

"You will get a remarkably nasty taste," remarked John.

"Dear John, nobody ever wronged you so much as to suggest that you would like nonsense. When was Leonardo born? And how old was he when he died? And how many golden crowns did Francis of France give him for the 'Gioconda'? Your mind is full of interesting facts. That is why you are so tedious. You are like the sand they used to put on letters, which instantly made it dry."

Berts got up.

"We will go and bathe again," he said, "and John shall remain on the beach and look older than the rocks he sits among. The rocks by the way are old red sandstone. They will blossom as the rose when Granite John sits among them. His is the head on which all the beginnings of the world have come, and he is never weary. Dear me, if I was not a teetotaler I should imagine I was drunk. I think it is the sea. What a heavenly time the man who stole the 'Gioconda' must have had. He just took it away. I can imagine him going to the Abbey at the Coronation, and taking away the King's crown. There is genius, and it is also nonsense. It is pure nonsense to imagine going to the Louvre and taking 'la Gioconda' away."

"I wonder what he has done with it," said Nadine. "I think he must be a jig-saw puzzle maniac, and have felt compelled to cut it up. Probably the Louvre will receive bits of it by registered post. The nose will come, and then some rocks, and then a rather weary eyelid. I think John stole it: he was absorbed in jig-saw puzzles all morning. Now that seems to me nonsense."

"Wrong again," said Berts. "When it is put together it is sense. If people cut up the pictures and then threw the bits away, it might be nonsense. But they keep the pieces and these become the picture again."

"The process of cutting it up is nonsense," said Nadine.

"Yes, and the process of putting it together is nonsense," said Esther.

"And the two make sense," said Berts. "Let's go and bathe. Nadine, take down some proper book, and read to us in the intervals."

"'Pride and Prej?'" said Nadine.

"Oh, do you think so? Not good for the sea-shore. Why not 'Poems and Ballads'?"

"John will be shocked," said Nadine.

"Not at all. He will be old red sandstone. I know Aunt Dodo has a copy. I think Mr. Swinburne gave it her," said Esther.

"She may value it," said Nadine. "And it may fall into the sea."

"Not if you are careful. Besides, that would be rather suitable. Swinburne loved the sea, and also understood it. I think his spirit would like it, if a copy was drowned."

"But Mama's spirit wouldn't," said Nadine.

On the moment of her mentioned name Dodo appeared at the long window of the drawing-room that opened upon the lawn. Simultaneously there was heard the buzz of a motor-car stopping at the front door just round the corner.

"Oh, all you darlings," said Dodo, in the style of the 'Omnia opera,' "are you going to bathe, or have you bathed? Berts, dear, we know that above the knee comes the thigh, without your showing us. Surely there are bigger dressing-gowns somewhere? Of course it does not matter: don't bother, and you've got beautiful legs, Berts."

"Aren't they lovely?" said Esther. "They ought to be put in plaster of Paris."

"But if you have bathed, why not dress?" said Dodo; "and if you haven't, why undress at present?"

"Oh, but it's both," said Berts, "and so is Esther. We have bathed, and are going to do it again, as soon as we've eaten enough tea."

Dodo looked appreciatively round.

"You refreshing children!" she said. "If I bathed directly after tea I should turn blue and green like a bruise. I have wasted all afternoon in looking at a box of novels from Melland's. I don't know what has happened to the novelists: their only object seems to tell you about utterly dull and sordid people. There is no longer any vitality in them: they are like leaders in the papers, full of reliable information. One instance shocked me: the heroine in 'No. 11 Lambeth Walk' went to Birmingham by a train that left Euston at 2:30 p. m. and her ticket cost nine shillings and twopence halfpenny. An awful misgiving seized me that it was all true and I rang for an A.B.C. and looked out Birmingham. It was so: there was a train at that hour and the tickets cost exactly that."

"How wretched!" said Nadine in a pained voice.

"Darling, don't take it too much to heart. And one of those novels was about Home Rule and another about Soap, and another about Tariff Reform, and a fourth about Christianity, which was absolutely convincing. But one doesn't go to a novel in order to learn Christianity, or soap-making. One reads novels in order to be entertained and escape from real life into the society of imaginary and fiery people. Another one – "

Dodo stopped suddenly, as a man came out of the drawing-room window. Then she held both her hands out.

"Ah, Jack," she said. "Welcome, welcome!"

A very kind face, grizzled as to the hair and mustache, looked down on her from its great height, a face that was wonderfully patient and reasonable and trustworthy. Jack Chesterford wore his years well, but he wore them all; he did not look to be on the summer side of forty-five. He was spare still: life had not made him the unwilling recipient of the most voluminous and ironic of its burdens, obesity, but his movements were rather slow and deliberate, as if he was tired of the senseless repetition of the days. But there seemed to be no irritation mingled with his fatigue: he but yawned and smiled, and turned over fresh pages.

But at the moment, as he stood there with both Dodo's hands in his, there was no appearance of weariness, and indeed it would have been a man of dough who remained uninspired by the extraordinary perfection and cordiality of her greeting. It was almost as if she welcomed a lover: it was quite as if she welcomed the best of friends long absent. That she had thought out the manner of her salutation, said nothing against its genuineness, but she could have welcomed him quite as genuinely in other modes. She had thought indeed of putting pathos, penitence, and shamefacedness into her greeting: she could with real emotion to endorse it have just raised her eyes to his and let them fall again, as if conscious of the need of forgiveness. Or (with perhaps a little less genuineness) she could have adopted the matronly and 'too late' attitude; but this would have been less genuine because she did not feel at all matronly, or think that it was in the least 'too late.' But warm and

unmixed cordiality, with no consciousness of things behind, was perhaps the most genuine and least complicated of all welcomes, and she gave it.

She did not hold his hands more than a second or two, for Nadine and others claimed them. But after a few minutes he and Dodo were alone again together, for Jack declined the invitation to join the bathers, on the plea of senility and feeling cold like David. Then when the noise of their laughter and talk had faded seawards, he dropped the trivialities that till now had engaged them, and turned to her.

"I have been a long time coming, Dodo," he said. "Indeed, I meant never to come at all. But I could not help it. I do not think I need explain either why I stopped away or why I have come now."

Apart from the perfectly authentic pleasure that Dodo felt in seeing her old friend again, there went through her a thrill of delight at Jack's implication of what she was to him. She loved to have that power over a man; she loved to know how potent over him still was the spell she wielded. In days gone by she had not behaved well to him; it would be truer to acknowledge that she had behaved just as outrageously as was possible for anybody not a pure-bred fiend. But he had come back. It was unnecessary to explain why.

And then suddenly with the rush of old memories revived, memories of his unfailing loyalty to her, his generosity, his unwearied loving-kindness, her eyes grew dim, and her hands caught his again.

"Jack dear," she said, "I want to say one thing. I am sorry for all I did, for my – my treachery, my – my damnedness. I was frightened: I have no other excuse. And, my dear, I have been punished. But I tell you, that what hurts most is your coming here – your forgiveness."

She had not meant to say any of this; it all belonged to one of the welcomes of him which she had rejected. But the impulse was not to be resisted.

"It is so," she said with mouth that quivered.

"Wipe it all out, Dodo," he said. "We start again to-day."

Dodo's power of rallying from perfectly sincere attacks of emotion was absolutely amazing and quite unimpaired. Only for five seconds more did her gravity linger.

"Dear old Jack," she said. "It is good to see you. Oh, Jack, the gray hairs. What a lot, but they become you, and you look just as kind and big as ever. I used to think it would be so dreadful when we were all over forty, but I like it quite immensely, and the young generation are such ducks, and I am not the least envious of them. But aren't some of them weird? I wonder if we were as weird; I was always weirdish, I suppose, and I'm too old to change now. But I've still got one defect, though you would hardly believe it: I can't get enough into the day, and I haven't learned how to be in two places at once. But I have just had three telephone lines put into my house in town. Even that isn't absolutely satisfactory, because the idea was to talk to three people at once, and I quite forgot that I hadn't three ears. I really ought to have been one of the people in the Central Exchange, who give you the wrong number. You must feel really in the swim, if you are the go-between of everybody who wants to talk to everybody else; but I should want to talk to them all. Have you had tea? Yes? Then let us go down to the sea, because I must have a bathe before dinner. – Oh, by the way, Edith is coming to-night. I have not seen her yet. You and she were the remnant of the old guard who wouldn't surrender, Jack, but went on sullenly firing your muskets at me. I forgot Mrs. Vivian, but her ear-trumpet seems to make her matter less."

They went together across the lawn, which that morning had been so sweetly bird-haunted, and down the steep hillside that led across the sand-dunes to the sea. Here a mile of sands was framed between two bold headlands that plunged steeply into the sea, and Jack and Dodo walked along the firm, shining beach towards the huge boulders which had in some remote cataclysm been toppled down from the cliff, and formed the rocks than which John was so much older. Like brown amphibious sheep with fleeces of seaweed they lay grazing on the sands, and dotted about in the water, and from the end of them a long reef of cruel-forked rocks jutted out a couple of hundred yards into the sea. Higher up on the beach were more monstrous fragments, as big as cottages, behind

which the processes of dressing and undressing of bathers could discreetly and invisibly proceed. Dodo had forgotten about this and talking rapidly was just about to advance round one of them when an agonized trio of male voices warned her what sight would meet her outraged eyes. The tide was nearly at its lowest and but a little way out, at the side of the reef, these rocks ended altogether, giving place to the wrinkled sand, and in among them were delectable rock-pools with torpid strawberry-looking anemones, and sideways-scuttling crabs with a perfect passion for self-effacement, which, if effacement was impossible, turned themselves into wide-pincered grotesques, and tried to make themselves look tall. Bertie and Esther who were already prepared for the bathe were pursuing marine excavations in one of these, and Dodo ecstatically pulled off her shoes and stockings, one of which fell into the rock-pool in question.

"Oh, Jack, if you won't bathe you might at least paddle," she said. "Berts, *do* you see that very red-faced anemone? Isn't it like Nadine's maid? Esther, do take care. There's an enormous crab crept under the seaweed by your foot. Don't let it pinch you, darling: isn't cancer the Latin for crab? It might give you cancer if it pinched you. Here are the rest of them: I must go and put on my bathing-dress. It's in the tent. I put up a tent for these children, Jack, at great expense, and they none of them ever use it. Nadine, are you going to read to us all in the water? Do wait till I come. What book is it? 'Poems and Ballads?' And so suspiciously like the copy Mr. Swinburne gave me. Don't drop it into the water more often than is necessary. You shall read us 'Dolores, our Lady of Pain,' as we step on sharp rocks and are pinched by crabs. How Mr. Swinburne would have liked to know that we read his poems as we bathed. And there's that other delicious one 'Swallow, my Sister, oh, Sister Swallow.' It sounds at first as if his sister was a pill, and he had to swallow her. Jack, dear, you make me talk nonsense, somehow. Come up with me as far as the tent, and while I get ready you shall converse politely from outside. It is so dull undressing without anybody to talk to."

Jack, though cordially invited to take part in the usual Symposium in Nadine's room that night at bed-time, preferred to go to his own, though he had no intention of going to bed. He wanted to think, to ascertain how he felt. He imagined that this would be a complicated process; instead he found it extraordinarily simple. That there were plenty of things to think about was perfectly true, but they all faced one way, so to speak, one dominant emotion inspired them all. He was as much in love with Dodo as ever. He did not, because he could not, consider how cruelly she had wronged him: all that she had done was but a rush-light in the mid-day sun of what she was. He was amazed at his stupidity in letting a day, not to speak of a year, elapse without seeing her since she was free again; it had been a wanton waste of twelve golden months to do so. Often during these last two years, he had almost fancied himself in love with Nadine; now he saw so clearly why. It was because in face and corporal presence no less than in mind she reminded him so often of what Dodo had been like. She reproduced something of Dodo's inimitable charm: But now that he saw the two together how utterly had the image of Nadine faded from his heart. In his affection, in his appreciation of her beauty and vitality she was still exactly where she was, but out of the book of love her name had been quite blotted out. Blotted out, too, were the years of his anger and the scars of a bleeding heart, and years of indignant suffering. But he had never let them take entire possession of him: in his immense soul there had ever been alight the still, secret flame that no winds or tempests could make to flicker. And to-day, at the sight of her, that flame had shot up again, a beacon that reached to heaven.

Hard work had helped him all these years to keep his nature unsoured. His great estates were managed with a care and consideration for those who lived on his land, unequaled in England, and politically he had made for himself a name universally respected for the absolute integrity of which it was the guarantee. But all that, so it seemed to him now, had been his employment, not his life. His life, all these years, had lain like some enchanted and sleeping entity, waiting for the spell that would awaken it again. Now the spell had been spoken.

For a moment his thought paused, wondering at itself. It seemed incredible that he should be so weak, so wax-like. Yet that seemed to matter not at all. He might be weak or wax-like, or anything else that a man should not be, but the point was that he was alive again.

For a little he let himself drift back upon the surface of things. He had passed a perfectly amazing evening. Edith Arbuthnot had arrived, bringing with her a violinist, a viola-player and a 'cellist, but neither maid nor luggage. Her luggage, except her golf-clubs and a chest containing music (as she was only coming for a few days) was certainly lost, but she was not sure whether her maid had ever meant to come, for she could not remember seeing her at the station. So the violinist had her maid's room and the viola-player and 'cellist, young and guttural Germans, had quarters found for them in the village, since Dodo's cottage was completely crammed. But they had given positively the first performance of Edith's new quartette, and at the end the violinist had ceremoniously crowned her with a wreath of laurels which he had picked from the shrubbery before dinner. Then they went into wild ecstasies of homage; and drank more beer than would have been thought possible, while Edith talked German even more remarkably than Dodo, and much louder. With her laurel wreath tilted rakishly over one ear, a mug of beer in her hand, and wearing an exceedingly smart dinner-gown belonging to Dodo, and rather large walking-boots of her own, since nobody else's shoes would fit her, she presented so astounding a spectacle, that Jack had unexpectedly been seized with a fury of inextinguishable laughter, and had to go outside followed by Dodo who patted him on the back. When they returned, Edith was lecturing about the music they had just heard. Apparently it was impossible to grasp it all at one hearing, while it was obviously essential that they must all grasp it without delay. In consequence it was performed all over again, while she conducted with her wreath on. There was more homage and more beer. Then they had had charades by Dodo and Edith, and Edith sang a long song of her own composition with an immense trill on the last note but one, which was 'Shake'; and her band played a quantity of Siegfried, while Dodo with a long white beard made of cotton-wool was Wotan, and Edith truculently broke her walking-stick, and that was 'Spear,' and they did whatever they could remember out of Macbeth, which wasn't much, but which was 'Shakespeare.'

It was all intensely silly, but Jack knew that he had not laughed so much during all those years which to-night had rolled away.

Then he left the surface and dived down into his heart again... There was no question of forgiving Dodo for the way in which she had treated him: the idea of forgiveness was as foreign to the whole question as it would have been to forgive the barometer for going down and presaging rain. It couldn't help it: it was like that. But in stormy weather and fine, in tempest and in the clear shining after rain, he loved Dodo. What his chances were he could not at present consider, for his whole soul was absorbed in the one emotion.

Jack, for all his grizzled hair and his serious political years, had a great deal about him that was still boyish, and with the inconsistency of youth having settled that it was impossible to think about his chance, proceeded very earnestly to do so. The chance seemed a conspicuously outside one. She had had more than one opportunity of marrying him before, and had felt herself unable to take advantage of it: it was very little likely that she would find him desirable now. Twice already she had embarked on the unaccountable sea; both times her boat had foundered. Once the sea was made, in her estimate, of cotton-wool; the second time, in anybody's estimate, of amorous brandy. It was not to be expected that she would experiment again with so unexpected a Proteus.

Meantime a parliament of the younger generation in Nadine's room were talking with the frankness that characterized them about exactly the same subject as Jack was revolving alone, for Dodo had gone away with Edith in order to epitomize the last twenty years, and begin again with a fresh twenty to-morrow.

"It is quite certain that it is Mama he wants to marry and not me," said Nadine. "I thought it was going to be me. I feel a little hurt, like when one isn't asked to a party to which one doesn't want to go.

"You don't want to go to any parties," said Hugh rather acidly, "but I believe you love being asked to them."

Nadine turned quickly round to him.

"That is awfully unfair, Hughie," she said in a low voice, "if you mean what I suppose you do. Do you mean that?"

"What I mean is quite obvious," he said.

Nadine got up from the window-seat where she was sitting with him.

"I think we had all better go to bed," she said. "Hugh is being odious."

"If you meant what you said," he remarked, "the odiousness is with you. It is bad taste to tell one that you feel hurt that the Ripper doesn't want you to marry him."

Nadine was silent a moment. Then she held out her hand to him.

"Yes, you are quite right, Hugh," she said. "It was bad taste. I am sorry. Is that enough?"

He nodded, and dropped her hand again.

"The fact is we are all rather cross," said Esther. "We haven't had a look in to-night."

"Mother is quite overwhelming," said Berts. "She and Aunt Dodo between them make one feel exactly a hundred and two years old, as old as John. Here we all sit, we old people, Nadine and Esther and Hugh and I, and we are really much more serious than they."

"Your mother is serious enough about her music," said Nadine. "And Jack is serious about Mama. The fact is that they are serious about serious things."

"Do you really think of Mother as a serious person with her large boots and her laurel-crown?" asked Berts.

"Certainly: all that is nothing to her. She doesn't heed it, while we who think we are musical can see nothing else. I couldn't bear her quartette either, and I know how good it was. I really believe that we are rotten before we are ripe. I except Hugh."

Nadine got up, and began walking up and down the room as she did when her alert analytical brain was in grips with a problem.

"Look at Jack the Ripper," she said. "Why, he's living in high romance, he's like a very nice gray-headed boy of twenty. Fancy keeping fresh all that time! Hugh and he are fresh. Berts is a stale old man, who can't make up his mind whether he wants to marry Esther or not. I am even worse. I am interested in Plato, and in all the novels about social reform and dull people who live in sordid respectability, which Mama finds so utterly tedious."

Nadine threw her arms wide.

"I can't surrender myself to anybody or anything," she said. "I can be cool and judge, but I can't get away from my mind. It sits up in a corner like a great governess. Whereas Mama takes up her mind like one of those flat pebbles on the shore and plays ducks and drakes with it, throws it into the sea, and then really enjoys herself, lets herself feel. If for a moment I attempt to feel, my mind gives me a poke and says 'attend to your lessons, Miss Nadine!' The great Judy! If only I could treat her like one, and take her out and throw brickbats at her. But I can't: I am terrified of her; also I find her quite immensely interesting. She looks at me over the top of her gold-rimmed spectacles, and though she is very hard and angular yet somehow I adore her. I loathe her you know, and want to escape, but I do like earning her approbation. Silly old Judy!"

Berts gave a heavy sigh.

"What an extraordinary lot of words to tell us that you are an intellectual egoist," he said. "And you needn't have told us at all. We all knew it."

Nadine gave her hiccup-laugh.

"I am like the starling," she said. "I can't get out. I want to get out and go walking with Hugh. And he can't get in. For what a pack of miseries was *le bon Dieu* responsible when he thought of the world."

"I should have been exceedingly annoyed if He had not thought of me," said Berts.

Nadine paused opposite the window-seat, where Hugh was sitting silent.

"Oh, Hugh," she said, speaking very low, "there is a real me somewhere, I believe. But I cannot find it. I am like the poor thing in the fairy-tale, that lost its shadow. Indeed I am in the more desperate plight, I have got my shadow, but I have lost my substance, though not in riotous living."

"For God's sake find it," he said, "and then give it me to keep safe."

She looked at him, with her dim smile that always seemed to him to mean the whole world.

"When I find it, you shall have it," she said.

"And last night it was the moon you wanted," said he, "not yourself."

Nadine shrugged her shoulders.

"What would you have?" she said. "That was but another point of view. Do not ask me to see things always from the same standpoint. And now, since my mama and Berts have made us all feel old, let us put on our night-caps and put some cold cream on our venerable faces and go to bed. Perhaps to-morrow we shall feel younger."

Seymour Sturgis (who, Berts thought, ought to have been drowned when he was a girl) was employed one morning in July in dusting his jade. He lived in a small flat just off Langham Place, with a large, capable, middle-aged Frenchwoman, who worshiped the ground on which he so delicately trod with the cloth-topped boots which she made so resplendent. She cooked for him in the inimitable manner of her race, she kept his flat speckless and shining, she valeted him, she did everything in fact except dust the jade. Highly as Seymour thought of Antoinette he could not let her do that. He always alluded to her as "my maid," and used to take her with him, as valet, to country-houses. It must, however, be added that he did this largely to annoy, and he largely succeeded.

The room which was adorned by his collection of jade, seemed somehow strangely unlike a man's room. A French writing-table stood in the window with a writing-case and blotting-book stamped with his initials in gilt; by the pen-tray was a smelling-bottle with a gold screw-top to it. Thin lace blinds hung across the windows, and the carpet was of thick fawn-colored fabric with remarkably good Persian rugs laid down over it. On the chimney-piece was a Louis Seize garniture of clock and candlesticks, and a quantity of invitation cards were stuck into the mirror behind. There were half-a-dozen French chairs, a sofa, a baby-grand, a small table or two, and a book-case of volumes all in morocco dress-clothes. On the walls there were a few prints, and in glazed cabinets against the wall was the jade. Nothing, except perhaps the smelling-bottle, suggested a mistress rather than a master, but the whole effect was feminine. Seymour rather liked that: he had very little liking for his own sex. They seemed to him both clumsy and stupid, and his worst enemies (of whom he had plenty) could not accuse him of being either the one or the other. On their side they disliked him because he was not like a man: he disliked them because they were.

But while he detested his own sex, he did not regard the other with the ordinary feeling of a man. He liked their dresses, their perfumes, their hair, their femininity, more than he liked them. He was quite as charming to plain old ladies, even as Dodo had said, as he was to girls, and he was perfectly happy, when staying in the country, to go a motor drive with aunts and grandmothers. He had a perfectly marvelous digestion; ate a huge lunch, sat still in the motor all afternoon, and had quantities of buttered buns for tea. He dressed rather too carefully to be really well-dressed and always wore a tie and socks of the same color, which repeated in a more vivid shade the tone of his clothes. He had a large ruby ring, a sapphire ring and an emerald ring: they were worn singly and matched his clothes. He spoke French quite perfectly.

All these depressing traits naturally enraged such men as came in contact with him, but though they abhorred him they could not openly laugh at him, for he had a tongue, when he chose, of quite unparalleled acidity, and was markedly capable of using it when required and taking care of himself afterwards. In matters of art, he had a taste that was faultless, and his taste was founded on real knowledge and technique, so that really great singers delighted to perform to his accompaniment, and in matters of jewelry he designed for Cartier. In fact, from the point of view of his own sex,

he was detestable rather than ridiculous, while considerable numbers of the other sex did their very best to spoil him, for none could want a more amusing companion, and his good looks were quite undeniable. But somewhere in his nature there was a certain grit which quite refused to be ground into the pulp of a spoiled young man. In his slender frame, too, there were nerves of steel, and, most amazing of all, when not better employed in designing for Cartier, or engaged in bloodless flirtations, he was a first-class golfer. But he preferred to go for a drive in the afternoon, and smoke a succession of rose-scented cigarettes, which could scarcely be considered tobacco at all. He was fond of food, and drank a good many glasses of port rather petulantly, after dinner, as if they were medicine.

This morning he was particularly anxious that his jade should show to advantage, for Nadine was coming to lunch with him, to ask his advice about something which she thought was old Venetian-point lace. He had taken particular pains also about the lunch: everything was to be *en casserole*; there were eggs in spinach, and quails, and a marvelous casseroled cherry tart. He could not bear that anything about him, whether designed for the inside or the outside, should be other than exquisite, and he would have been just as sedulous a Martha, if that strange barbarian called Berts was coming, only he would have given Berts an immense beefsteak as well.

The bell of his flat tinkled announcing Nadine. He did not like the shrill treble bells, and had got one that made a low bubbling note like the laugh of Sir Charles Wyndham; and Nadine came in.

"Enchanted!" he said. "How is Philistia?"

"Not being the least glad of you," she said. "I wish I could make people detest me, as Berts detests you. It shows force of character. Oh, Seymour, what jade! It is almost shameless! Isn't it shameless jade I mean? Is any one else coming to lunch?"

"Of course not. I don't dilute you with other people; I prefer Nadine neat. Now let's have the crisis at once. Bring out the lace."

Nadine produced a small parcel and unfolded it.

"Pretty," said he.

Then he looked at it more closely, and tossed it aside. "I hoped it was more like Venetian point than that," he said. "It's all quite wrong: the thread's wrong; the stitch is wrong; it smells wrong. Don't tell me you've bought it."

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