Dodo's Daughter

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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 rosiness 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 beleaguer 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 veryuncomfortable 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 teetotaller 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 unwearying 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."

CHAPTER IV

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."

"No, I shan't tell you," she said.

He took it up again and pondered.

"You got it at Ducane's," he said. "I remember seeing it. Well, take it back to Ducane, and tell him if he sold it as Venetian, that he must give you back your money. My dear, it is no wonder that these dealers get rich, if they can palm off things like that. *C'est fini.*—Ah, but that is an exquisite aquamarine you are wearing. Those little diamond points round it throw the light into it. How odd people usually are about jewelry. They think great buns of diamonds are sufficient to make an adornment. You might as well send up an ox's hind-leg on the table. What makes the difference is the manner of its presentation. Who is that lady who employs herself in writing passionate love-novels? She says on page one that he was madly in love with her, on page two that she was madly in love with him, on page three that they were madly in love with each other, and then come some asterisks. (How much more artistic, by the way, if they printed the asterisks and left out the rest! Then we should know what it

really was like.) You can appreciate nothing until it is framed or cooked: then you can see the details. The poor lady presents us with chunks of meat and informs us that they are amorous men and women. I will write a novel some day, from the detached standpoint, observing and noting. Then I shall go away, abroad. It is only bachelors who can write about love. Do you like my tie?"

Seymour had a trick of putting expression into what he said by means of his hands. He waved and dabbed with them: they fondled each other, and then started apart as if they had quarreled. Sometimes one finger pointed, sometimes another, and they were all beautifully manicured. Antoinette did that, and as she scraped and filed and polished, he talked his admirable French to her, and asked after the old home in Normandy, where she learned to make wonderful soup out of carrots and turnips and shin-bones of beef. At the moment she came in to announce the readiness of lunch.

"Oh, is it lunch already?" said Nadine. "Can't we have it after half an hour? I should like to see the jade."

"Oh, quite impossible," said he. "She has taken such pains. It would distress her. For me, I should prefer not to lunch yet, but she is the artist now. They are fragile things, Nadine, eggs in spinach. You must come at once."

"How greedy you are," she said.

"For you that is a foolish thing to say. I am simply thinking of Antoinette's pride. It is as if I blew a soap-bubble, all iridescent, and you said you would come to look at it in ten minutes. You shall tell me news: if you talk you can always eat. What has happened in Philistia?"

Nadine frowned.

"You think of us all as Philistines," she said, "because we like simple pleasures, and because we are enthusiastic."

"Ah, you mistake!" he said. "You couple two reasons which have nothing to do with each other. To be enthusiastic is the best possible condition, but you must be enthusiastic over what is worth enthusiasm. Is it so lovely really, that Aunt Dodo has settled to marry the Ripper? Surely that is a *rechauffée*. You wrote me the silliest letter about it. Of course it does not matter at all. Much more important is that you look perfectly exquisite. Antoinette, the spinach is *sans pareil*: give me some more spinach. But it is slightly *bourgeois* in Jack the R. to have been faithful for so many years. It shows want of imagination, also I think a want of vitality, only to care for one woman."

"That is one more than you ever cared for," remarked Nadine.

"I know. I said it was *bourgeois* to care for one. There is a difference. It is also

like a troubadour. I am not in the least like a troubadour. But I think I shall get married soon. It gives one more liberty: people don't feel curious about one any more. English people are so odd: they think you must lead a double life, and if you don't lead the ordinary double life with a wife, they think you lead it with somebody else and they get curious. I am not in the least curious about other people: they can lead as many lives as a piano has strings for all I care, and thump all the strings together, or play delicate arpeggios on them. Nadine, that hat-pin of yours is simply too divine. I will eat it pin and all if it is not Fabergé."

Nadine laughed.

"I can't imagine you married," she said. "You would make a very odd husband."

"I would make a very odd anything," said he. "I don't find any recognized niche that really fits me, whereas almost everybody has some sort of niche. Indeed in the course of hundreds of years the niches, that is the manners of life, have been evolved to suit the sorts of types which nature produces. They live in rows and respect each other. But why it should be considered respectable to marry and have hosts of horrible children I cannot imagine. But it is, and I bow to the united strength of middle-class opinion. But neither you nor I are really made to live in rows. We are Bedouins by nature, and like to see a different sunrise every day. There shall be another tent for Antoinette."

That admirable lady was just bringing them their coffee, and he spoke to her in French.

"Antoinette, we start for the desert of Sahara to-morrow," he said. "We shall live in tents."

Antoinette's plump face wrinkled itself up into enchanted smiles.

"*Bien, m'sieur*," she said. "*A quelle heure?*"

Nadine crunched up her coffee-sugar between her white teeth.

"You are as little fitted to cross the desert of Sahara as any one I ever met," she said.

"I should not cross it: I should—"

"You would be miserable without your jade or your brocade and the sand would get into your hair, and you would have no bath," she said. "But every one who thinks has a Bedouin mind: it always wants me to go on and find new horizons and get nearer to blue mountains."

"The matter with you is that you want and you don't know what you want,"

said he.

Nadine nodded at him. Sometimes when she was with him she felt as if she was talking to a shrewd middle-aged man, sometimes to a rather affected girl. Then occasionally, and this had been in evidence to-day, she felt as if she was talking to some curious mixture of the two, who had a girl's intuition and a man's judgment. Fond as she was of the friends whom she had so easily gathered round her, gleeful as was the nonsense they talked, serious as was her study of Plato, she felt sometimes that all those sunny hours concerned but the surface of her, that, as she had said before, the individual, the character that sat behind was not really concerned in them. And Seymour, when he made mixture of his two types, had the effect of making her very conscious of the character that sat behind. He had described it just now in a sentence: it wanted it knew not what.

"And I want it so frightfully," she said. "It is a pity I don't know what it is. Because then I should probably get it. One gets what one wants if one wants enough."

"A convenient theory," he said, "and if you don't get it, you account for it by saying you didn't want it enough. I don't think it's true. In any case the converse isn't; one gets a quantity of things which one doesn't want in the least. Whereas you ought not to get, on the same theory, the things you passionately desire not to have."

Nadine finished her sugar and lit a cigarette.

"Oh, don't upset every theory," she said. "I am really rather serious about it."

He regarded her with his head on one side for a moment. "What has happened is that somebody has asked you to do something, and you have refused. You are salving your conscience by saying that he doesn't want it enough, or you would not have refused."

She laughed.

"You are really rather uncanny sometimes," she said.

"Only a guess," he said.

"Guess again then: define," she said.

"The obvious suggestion is that Hugh has proposed to you again."

"You would have been burned as a witch two hundred years ago," said she. "I should have contributed fagots. Oh, Seymour, that was really why I came to see you. I didn't care two straws about the foolish lace. They all tell me I had better marry Hugh, and I wanted to find somebody to agree with me. I hoped

perhaps you might. He is such a dear, you know, and I should always have my own way: I could always convince him I was right."

"Most girls would consider that an advantage."

"In that case I am not like most girls; I often wish I was. I wrote an article a month or two ago about Tolstoi, and read it him, and he thought it quite wonderful. Well, it wasn't. It was silly rot: I wrote it, and so of course I know. It came out in a magazine."

"I read it," remarked Seymour in a strictly neutral voice.

"Well, wasn't it very poor stuff?" asked Nadine.

"To be quite accurate," said Seymour, "I only read some of it. I thought it very poor indeed. If was ignorant and affected."

Nadine gave him an approving smile.

"There you are then! And with Hugh it would be the same in everything else. He would always think what I did was quite wonderful. They say love is blind, don't they? So much the worse for love. It seems to me a very poor sort of thing if in order to love anybody you must lose, with regard to her, any power of mind and judgment that you may happen to possess. I don't want to be loved like that. I want people to sing my praises with understanding, and sit on my defects also with discretion. If I was perfectly blind too, I suppose it would be quite ideal to marry him. But I'm not, and I'm not even sure that I wish I was. Again if Hugh was perfectly critical about me, it would be quite ideal. It seems to me you must have the same quality of love on both sides, or at any rate the same quality of affection. People make charming marriages without any love at all, if they have affection and esteem and respect for each other."

They had gone back to the drawing-room and Seymour was handing pieces of his most precious jade to Nadine, who looked at them absently and then gave them back to him, with the same incuriousness as people give tickets to be punched by the collector. This Seymour bore with equanimity, for Nadine was interesting on her own account, and he did not care whether she looked at his jade or not. But at this moment he screamed loudly, for she put a little round medallion of exquisitely carved yellow jade up to her mouth, as if to bite it.

"Oh, Seymour, I'm so sorry," she said. "I wasn't attending to your jade, which is quite lovely, and subconsciously this piece appeared like a biscuit. Tell me, do you like jade better than anything else? It is part of a larger question, which is: 'Do you like things better than people?' Personally I like people so far more than anything else in the world, but I don't like any particular person nearly as much. I like them in groups I suppose. If I married at all, I should probably be a polyandrist. Certainly if I could marry four or five people at once, I should

marry them all. But I don't want to marry any one of them."

Seymour put the priceless biscuit back into its cabinet.

"Who," he asked, "are this quartette of fortunate swains?"

"Well, Hugh of course would be one," said she, "and I think Berts would be another. And if it won't be a shock to you, you would be the third, and Jack the R. would be the fourth. I should then have a variety of interests: this would be the world and the flesh and the devil, and a saint."

"St. Seymour," said he, as if trying how it sounded, like a Liberal peer selecting his title.

"I am afraid you are cast for the devil," said Nadine candidly. "Berts is the world because he thinks he is cynical. And Jack is the flesh—"

"Because he is so thin?"

"Partly. But also because he is so rich."

Seymour turned the key on his jade. This interested him much more. But he had to make further inquiries.

"If every girl wanted four husbands," he said, "there wouldn't be enough men to go round."

"Round what?" asked Nadine, still entirely absorbed in what she was thinking.

"Round the marriageable females. Or does your plan include poly-womany, whatever the word is, for men?"

"But of course. There are such lots of bachelors who would marry if they could have two or three wives, just as there are such lots of girls who would marry if they could have two or three husbands. All those laws about 'one man, one wife' were made by ordinary people for ordinary people. And ordinary people are in the majority. There ought to be a small county set apart for ridiculous people, with a rabbit fence all round it, and any one who could be certified to be ridiculous in his tastes should be allowed to go and live there unmolested. That would be much better than your plan of going to the Sahara with Antoinette. You would have to get five householders to certify you as ridiculous, in order to obtain admission. Then you would do what you chose within the rabbit fence, but when you wanted to be what they call sensible again you would come out, and be bound to behave like anybody else, as long as you were out, under penalty of not being admitted again."

Seymour considered this.

"There's a lot in it," he said, "and there would be a lot of people in the rabbit

fence. I should go there to-morrow and never come out at all. But a smaller county would be no use. I should start with Kent, not Rutlandshire, and be prepared to migrate to Yorkshire. I accept the position of one of your husbands."

"That is sweet of you. I think—"

He interrupted.

"I shall have some more wives," he said. "I should like a lunch wife and a dinner wife. I want to see a certain kind of person from about mid-day till tea-time."

"Is that a hint that it is time for me to go?" asked Nadine.

"Nearly. Don't interrupt. But then, if one is not in love with anybody at all, as you are not, and as I am not, you want a perfectly different kind of person in the evening. To be allowed only one wife, has evolved a very tiresome type of woman; a woman who is like a general servant, and can, so to speak, wait at table, cook a little, and make beds. You look for somebody who, on the whole, suits you. It is like buying a reach-me-down suit, which I have never done. It probably fits pretty well. But if it is to be worn every day until you die, it must fit absolutely. If it doesn't, there are fifty other suits that would do as well."

"Translate," said Nadine.

"Surely there is no need. What I mean is that occasionally two people are ideally fitted. But the fit only occurs intermittently: it is not common. Short of that, as long as people don't blow their noses wrong, or walk badly, or admire Carlo Dolci, or fail to admire Bach, so long, in fact, as they do not have impossible tastes, any phalanx of a thousand men can marry a similar phalanx of a thousand women, and be as happy, the one with the other, as with any other permutation or combination of the thousand. There is a high, big, tremulous, romantic attachment possible, and it occasionally occurs. Short of that, with the limitation about Carlo Dolci and Bach, anybody would be as happy with anybody else, as anybody would be with anybody. We are all on a level, except the highest of all, and the lowest of all. Life, not death, is the leveler!"

"Still life is as bad as still death," said she.

Seymour groaned and waved his hands.

"You deserve a good scolding, Nadine, for saying a foolish thing like that," he said. "You are not with your Philistines now. There is not Esther here to tell you how marvelous you are, nor Berts to wave his great legs and say you are like the moon coming out of the clouds over the sea. I am not in the least

impressed by a little juggling with words such as they think clever. It isn't clever: it is a sort of parrot-talk. You open your mouth and say something that sounds paradoxical and they all hunt about to find some sense in it, and think they do."

Seymour got up and began walking up and down the room with his little short-stepped, waggling walk. "It is the most amazing thing to me," he said, "that you, who have got brains, should be content to score absurd little successes with your dreadful clan, who have the most ordinary intelligences. I love your Philistines, but I cannot bear that they should think they are clever. They are stupid, and though stupid people are excellent in their way, they become trying when they think they are wise. You are not made wise by bathing all day in the silly salt sea, and reading a book—"

"How did you know?" asked Nadine.

"I didn't: it is merely the sort of thing I imagine you do at Meering. Aunt Dodo is different: there is no rot about Aunt Dodo, nor is there about Hugh. But Esther, my poor sister, and the beautiful Berts!"

Nadine took up the cudgels for the clan.

"Ah, you are quite wrong," she said. "You do us no justice at all. We are eager, we are, really: we want to learn, we think it waste of time to spend all day and night at parties and balls. We are critical, and want to know how and why. Seymour, I wish we saw more of you. Whenever I am with you, I feel like a pencil being sharpened. I can make fine marks afterwards."

"Keep them for the clan," he said. "No, I can't stand the clan, nor could they possibly stand me. When Esther squirms and says, 'O Nadine, how wonderful you are,' I want to be sick, and when I wave my hands and talk in a high voice as I frequently do, I can see Berts turning pale with the desire to kill me. Poor Berts! Once I took his arm and he shuddered at my baleful touch. I must remember to do it again. Really, I don't think I can be one of your husbands if Berts is to be another."

"Very well: I'll leave out Berts," said she.

"This is almost equivalent to a proposal," said Seymour in some alarm.

She laughed.

"I won't press it," she said. "And now I must go. Thanks for sharpening me, my dear, though you have done it rather roughly. I am going down to Meering again to-morrow: London is a mere rabble of colonels and colonials. Come down if you feel inclined."

"God forbid!" said Seymour piously.

Nadine had spent some time with him, but long after she had gone something of her seemed to linger in his room. Some subtle aroma of her, too fine to be purely physical, still haunted the room, and the sound of her detached crisp speech echoed in the chambers of his brain. He had never known a girl so variable in her moods: on one day she would talk nothing but the most arrant nonsense; on another, as to-day, there mingled with it something extraordinarily tender and wistful; on a third day she would be an impetuous scholar; on the fourth she threw herself heart and soul (if she had a heart) into the gay froth of this London life. Indeed "moods" seemed to be too superficial a word to describe her aspects: it was as if three or four different personalities were lodged in that slim body or directed affairs from the cool brain in that small poised head. It would be scarcely necessary to marry other wives, according to their scheme, if Nadine was one of them, for it was impossible to tell even from minute to minute with which of her you were about to converse, or which of her was coming down to dinner. But all these personalities had the same vivid quality, the same exuberance of vitality, and in whatever character she appeared she was like some swiftly acting tonic, that braced you up and, unlike mere alcoholic stimulant, was not followed by a reaction. She often irritated him, but she never resented the expression of his impatience, and above all things she was never dull. And for once Seymour left incomplete the dusting of the precious jade, and tried to imagine what it would be like to have Nadine always here. He did not succeed in imagining it with any great vividness, but it must be remembered that this was the first time he had ever tried to imagine anything of the kind.

Edith had left Meering with Dodo two days before and was going to spend a week with her in town since she was rather tired of her own house. But she had seen out of the railway-carriage window on the north coast of Wales, so attractive-looking a golf-links, that she had got out with Berts at the next station, to have a day or two golfing. The obdurate guard had refused to take their labeled luggage out, and it was whirled on to London to be sent back by Dodo on arrival. But Edith declared that it gave her a sense of freedom to have no luggage, and she spent two charming days there, and had arrived in London only this afternoon. She had gone straight to Dodo's house, and had found Jack with her and then learned the news of their engagement which had taken place only the day before. Upon which she sprang up and remorselessly kissed both Dodo and Jack.

"I can't help it if you don't like it," she said; "but that's what I feel like. Of course it ought to have happened more than twenty years ago, and it would have saved you both a great deal of bother. Dodo, I haven't been so pleased since my mass was performed at the Queen's Hall. You must get married at once, and must have some children. It will be like living your life all over

again without any of those fatal mistakes, Dodo. Jack—I shall call you Jack now—Jack, you have been more wonderfully faithful than anybody I ever heard of. You have seen all along what Dodo was, without being put off by what she did—"

Dodo screamed with laughter.

"Are these meant to be congratulations?" she said. "It is the very oddest way to congratulate a man on his engagement, by telling him that he is so wise to overlook his future wife's past. It is also so pleasant for me."

Edith was still shaking hands with them both, as if to see whether their hands were fixtures or would come off if violently agitated.

"You know what I mean," she said. "It is useless my pretending to approve of most things you have done: it is useless for Jack also. But he marries the essential you, not a parcel of actions."

Jack kept saying "Thanks awfully" at intervals, like a minute gun, and trying to get his hand away. Eventually Edith released it.

"I am delighted with you both," she said. "And to think that only a fortnight ago I was still not on speaking terms with you, Dodo. And Jack wasn't either. I love having rows with people if I know things are going to come straight afterwards, because then you love them more than ever. And I knew that some time I should have to make it up with you, Dodo, though if I was Jack I don't think I could have forgiven—well, you don't wish me to go on about that. Anyhow, you are ducks, and I shall leave the young couple alone, and have a wash and brush-up. I have been playing golf quite superbly."

Edith banged the door behind her, and they heard her shrilly whistling as she went off down the passages.

Then Dodo turned to Jack.

"Jack, dear, I thought I should burst when Edith kissed you," she said. "You half shut your eyes and screwed up your face like a dog that is just going to be whipped. But I love Edith. Now come and sit here and talk. I have hardly seen you, since—well, since we settled that we should see a good deal more of each other in the future. I want you to tell me, oh, such lots of things. How often a month on the average have you thought about me during all these years? Jack, dear, I want to be wanted, so much."

"You have always been wanted by me," he said. "It is more a question of how many minutes in the month I haven't thought about you. They are easily counted."

He sat down on the sofa by her, as her hand indicated.

"Dodo," he said, "I don't make demands of you, except that you should be yourself. But I do want that. We are all made differently: if we were not the world would be a very stupidly simple affair. And you must know that in one respect anyhow I am appallingly simple. I have never cared for any woman except you. That is the fact. Let us have it out between us just once. I have never worn my heart on my sleeve, for any woman to pluck at, and carry away a mouthful of. There are no bits missing, I assure you. It is all there, and it is all yours. It is in no way the worse for wear, because it has had no wear. I feel as if—"

Jack paused a moment: he knew the meaning of his thought, but found it not so easy to make expression of it.

"I feel as if I had been sitting all my life at a window in my heart," he said, "looking out, and waiting for you to come by. But you had to come by alone. You came by once with my cousin. You came by a second time with Waldenech. You were bored the first time, you were frightened the second time. But you were not alone. I believe you are alone now: I believe you look up to my window. Ah, how stupid all language is! As if you looked up to it!"

Dodo was really moved, and when she spoke her voice was unsteady.

"I do look up to it, Jack," she said. "Oh, my dear, how the world would laugh at the idea of a woman already twice married, having romance still in front of her. But there is romance, Jack. You see—you see you have run through my life just as a string runs through a necklace of pearls or beads: beads perhaps is better—yet I don't know. Chesterford gave me pearls, all the pearls. A necklace of pearls before swine shall we say? I was swine, if you understand. But you always ran through it all, which sounds as if I meant you were a spendthrift, but you know what I do mean. Really I wonder if anybody ever made a worse mess of her life than I have done, and found it so beautifully cleaned up in the middle. But there you were—I ought to have married you originally: I ought to have married you unoriginally. But I never trusted my heart. You might easily tell me that I hadn't got one, but I had. I daresay it was a very little one, so little that I thought it didn't matter. I suppose I was like the man who swore something or other on the crucifix, and when he broke his oath, he said the crucifix was such a small one."

She paused again.

"Jack, are you sure?" she asked. "I want you to have the best life that you can have. Are you sure you give yourself the best chance with me? My dear, there will be no syllable of reproach, on my lips or in my mind, if you reconsider. You ought to marry a younger woman than me. You will be still a man at sixty, I shall be just a thing at fifty-eight."

Dodo took a long breath and stood up.

"Marry Nadine," she said. "She is so like what I was: you said it yourself. And she hasn't been battered like me. I think she would marry you. I know how fond she is of you, anyhow, and the rest will follow. I can't bear to think of you pushing my Bath chair. God knows, I have spoiled many of your years. But, God knows, I don't want to spoil more of them. She will give you all that I could have given you twenty years ago. Ah, my dear, the years. How cruel they are! How they take away from us all that we want most! You love children, for instance, Jack. Perhaps I shall not be able to give you children. Nadine is twenty-one. That is a long time ago. You should consider. I said 'yes' to you yesterday, but perhaps I had not thought about it sufficiently. I have thought since. Before you came down to Meering I was awake so long one night, wondering why you came. I was quite prepared that it should be Nadine you wanted. And, oh, how gladly I would give Nadine to you, instead of giving myself: I should see: I should understand. At first I thought that I should not like it, that I should be jealous, to put it quite frankly, of Nadine. But somehow now that I know that your first desire was for me, I am jealous no longer. Take Nadine, Jack! I want you to take Nadine. It will be better. We know each other well enough to trust each other, and now that I tell you that there will be nothing but rejoicing left in my heart, if you want Nadine, you must believe that I tell you the entire truth. I know very well about Nadine. She will not marry Hugh. She wants somebody who has a bigger mind. She wants also to put Hugh out of the question. She does not mean to marry him, and she would like it to be made impossible. Woo Nadine, dear Jack, and win her. She will give you all I could once have given you, all that I ought to have given you."

At that moment Dodo was making the great renunciation of her life. She had been completely stirred out of herself and she pleaded against her own cause. She was quite sincere and she wanted Jack's happiness more than her own. She believed even while she renounced all claim on him, that her best chance of happiness was with him, for it had taken her no time at all to make up her mind when he proposed to her yesterday. And she had not exaggerated when just now she told him that he ran through her life like a string that keeps the beads of time in place. She had never felt for another man what she had felt for him, and her declaration of his freedom was a real renunciation, made impulsively but most generously and completely. She really meant it, and she did not pause to consider that the offer was one of which no man could conceivably take advantage. And Jack felt and knew her sincerity.

"You are absolutely free, my dear," she said. "Absolutely! And I will come to your wedding, and dance at it if you like, for joy that you are happy."

He got up too.

"There will be no wedding unless you come to it," he said. "Dance at it, Dodo, but marry me. Nobody else will do."

Dodo looked him full in the face.

"Edith was quite right to remind you of—of what I have done," she said.

"And I am quite right to forget it," said he.

She shook her head, smiling a little tremulously.

"Oh, Jack," she said in a sigh.

He took her close to him.

"My beloved," he said, and kissed her.

CHAPTER V

Dodo's wedding, which took place at the end of July in Westminster Abbey, was a very remarkable and characteristic affair. In the first place she arrived so late that people began to wonder whether she was going to throw Jack over again, this time at the very last moment. Jack himself did not share these misgivings and stood at the west door rather hot and shy but quite serene, waiting till his bride should come. Eventually Nadine who was to have come with her mother appeared in a taxi going miles above the legal limit, with the information that Dodo was in floods of tears because she had been so horrible to Jack before, and wanted to be so nice now. She said she would stop crying as soon as she possibly could, but would Nadine ask Jack to be a dear and put off the wedding till to-morrow, since her tears had made her a perfect fright. On which the bridegroom took a card and wrote on it: "I won't put off the wedding, and if you don't come at once, I shall go away. Do be quick: there are millions and millions of people all staring."

"Oh, Jack, what a brute you are," said Nadine, as she read it, "I don't think I can take it."

"You can and will," said he. "You will also take Dodo by the hand and bring her here. Bring her, do you understand? Tell her that in twenty minutes from now I shall go."

Somehow Dodo's marriage had seized the popular imagination, and the Abbey was crammed, so also for half a mile were the pavements. The traffic by the Abbey had been diverted, and all round the windows were clustered with

sight-seers. The choir was reserved for the more intimate friends, and Bishop Algie who was to perform the ceremony was endorsed by a flock of eminent clergy. The news that Dodo was in tears, but that Nadine had been sent by the bridegroom to fetch her, traveled swiftly up the Abbey, and a perfect babel of conversation broke out, almost drowning the rather Debussy-like wedding march which Edith had composed for the occasion. She had also written an anthem, "Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine," a highly original hymn-tune, and two chants for the psalms written for full orchestra with percussion and an eight-part choir. She had wanted to conduct the whole herself, and expressed her perfect willingness to wear a surplice and her music-doctor's hood, and keep on her cap or not, exactly as the dean preferred. But the dean preferred that she should take no part whatever, beyond contributing the whole of the music, which annoyed her very much, and several incisive letters passed between them in which the topics of conventionalism, Pharisees and cant were freely introduced. Edith had to give way, but consoled herself by arranging that the whole of the "Marriage Suite" should be shortly after performed at the Queen's Hall, where no dean or other unenlightened person could prevent her conducting in any costume she chose. But temporarily she had been extremely upset by this ridiculous bigotry.

Dodo arrived before the twenty minutes were over, and she came up the choir on Jack's arm, looking quite superb and singing Edith's hymn tune very loud and occasionally incorrectly. She had just come opposite Edith, who had, in default of conducting, secured a singularly prominent position, when she sang a long bell-like B flat, and Edith had said "B natural, Dodo," in a curdling, sibilant whisper. There were of course no bridesmaids, but Dodo's train was carried by pages, both of whom she kissed when they arrived at the end of their long march up the choir. Mrs. Vivian, who on Dodo's engagement had finally capitulated, was next to Edith, and Dodo said "Vivy, dear!" into her ear-trumpet, as she passed up the aisle. Miss Grantham alone among the older friends was absent: she had said from the beginning that it was dreadfully common of Dodo to marry Jack, as it was a "lived-happily-ever-afterwards" kind of ending to Dodo's unique experiences. She knew that they would both become stout and serene and commonplace, instead of being wild and unhappy and interesting, and to mark her disapproval, made an appointment with her dentist at the hour at which the voice would be breathing over Eden in the exceedingly up-to-date music which Edith had composed. But so far from her dentist finding change and decay, he dismissed her five minutes after she had sat down, and seized by a sudden ungovernable fit of curiosity she drove straight off to the Abbey to find that Dodo had not arrived, and it seemed possible that there was a thrill coming, and everything might not end happily. But when it became known that Dodo was only late for sentimental reasons, she left again in disgust, and ran into Dodo at the west door, and said,

"I am disappointed, Dodo."

Dodo sang Edith's psalm with equal fervor, but thought it would be egoistic to join in the anthem, since it was about herself. But she whispered to Jack, "Jack, dear, it's much the most delicious marriage I ever had. Hush, you must be grave because dear Algie is going to address us. I hope he will give us a nice long sermon."

The register was signed by almost everybody in the world, and there were so many royalties that it looked at first as if everybody was going to leave out their surnames. But the time of ambassadors and peers came at last, and then it looked as if the fashion was to discard Christian names. "In fact," said Dodo, "I suppose if you were much more royal than anybody else, you would lose your Christian name as well, your Royal Highness, and simply answer to Hie! or to any loud cry—Oh, are we all ready again? We've got to go first, Jack. Darling, I hope you won't shy at the cinematographs. I hear the porch is full of them, like Gatling guns, and to-night you and I will be in all the music-halls of London. Where are my ducks of pages? That's right: one on each side. Now give me your arm, Jack. Here we go! Listen at Edith's wedding march! I wonder if it's safe to play as loud as that in anything so old as the Abbey. I should really be rather afraid of its falling down if Algie hadn't told me not to be afraid with any amazement."

It took the procession a considerable time to get down the choir, since Dodo had to kiss her bouquet (not having a hand to spare) to such an extraordinary number of people. But in course of time they got out, faced the battery of cameras and cinematograph machines, and got into their car. Jack effaced himself in a corner, but Dodo bowed and smiled with wonderful assiduity to the crowds.

"They have come to see us," she explained. "So it is essential that we should look pleased to see them. I should so like to be the Queen, say on Saturdays only, like the train you always want to go by on other days in the week. Darling, can't you smile at them? Or put out your tongue, and make a face. They would enjoy it hugely."

Eventually, as they got further away from the Abbey, it became clear to Dodo that the people in the street were concerned with their own businesses, and not hers, and she leaned back in the carriage.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "it is you and I at last. But I can't help talking nonsense, dear. I only do it because I'm so happy. I am indeed. And you?"

"It is morning with me," he said.

They left town that afternoon, though Dodo rather regretted that they would

not see themselves in the cinematograph to make sure that she had smiled and that Jack's hair was tidy, and went down to Winston, Jack's country place, where so many years ago Dodo had arrived before as the bride of his cousin. He had wondered whether, for her sake, another place would not be more suitable as a honeymoon resort, but she thought the plan quite ideal.

"It will be like the renewal of one's youth," she said, "and I am going to be so happy there now. Jack, we were neither of us happy when you used to come to stay there before, and to go back like this will wipe out all that is painful in those old memories, and keep all that isn't. Is it much changed? I should so like my old sitting-room again if you haven't made it something else."

"It is exactly as you left it," said he. "I couldn't alter anything."

Dodo slipped her hand into his.

"Did you try to, Jack?" she asked.

"Yes. I meant to alter it entirely: I meant to put away all that could remind me of you. In fact, I went down there on purpose to do it. But when I saw it, I couldn't. I sat down there, and—"

"Cried?" said Dodo softly, sympathetically.

"No, I didn't cry. I smoked a cigarette and looked round in a stupid manner. Then I took out of its frame a big photograph of myself that I had given you, in order to tear it up. But I put it back in its frame again, and put the frame exactly where it was before."

Dodo gave a little moan.

"Oh, Jack, how you must have hated me!" she said.

"I hated what you had done: I hated that you could do it. But the other, never. And, Dodo, let us never talk about all those things again, don't let us even think of them. It is finished, and what is real is just beginning."

"It was real all along," she said, "and I knew it was real all along—you and me, that is to say—but I chose to tell myself that it wasn't. I have been like the people who when they hear the scream of somebody being murdered say it is only the cat. I have been a little brute all my life, and in all probability it is past half-time for me already; in fact it certainly is unless I am going to live to be ninety. I'm not sure that I want to, and yet I don't want to die one bit."

"I should be very much annoyed if you ventured to do anything of the sort," remarked Jack.

"Yes, and that is so wonderful of you. You ought to have wished me dead a hundred times. What's the phrase? 'Yes, she would be better dead.' Just now I

want to be better without being dead. I often think we all have a sort of half-time in our lives, like people in foot-ball matches, when they stop playing and eat lemons. The lemons, you understand, are rather sour reflections that we are no better than we might be, but a great deal worse. And somehow that gives one a sort of a fresh start, and we begin playing again."

They arrived at Winston late in the afternoon; the village had turned out to greet them, flags and arches made rainbow of the gray street with its thatched houses and air of protected stability, and from the church-tower the bells pealed welcome. Dodo, always impressionable and impulsive, was tremendously moved, and with eyes brimming over, leaned out of one side of the carriage and then the other to acknowledge these salutations.

"Oh, Jack, isn't it dear of them?" she said. "Of course I know it's all for you really, but you've endowed me with everything, and so this is mine too. Look at that little duck whom that nice-faced woman is holding up, waving a flag! Hark to the bells! Do you remember the poem by Browning, 'The air broke into a mist with bells'? This is a positive London fog of bells; can't you taste it? Is it the foghorns, in that case, that make the fogs? And here we are at the lodge and there's the lake, and the house! Ah, what a gracious thing a summer evening is. But how fragile, Jack, and how soon over."

That wistful, underlying tenderness in her nature, almost melancholy but wholly womanly, rose for the moment to the surface. It was not the less sincere because it was seldom in evidence. It was as truly part of her (and a growing part of her) as her brilliant enjoyment and *insouciance*. And the expression of it gleamed darkly in her soft brown eyes, as she leaned back in the carriage and took his hand.

"I will try to make you happy," she said.

He bent over her.

"Don't try to do anything, Dodo," he said. "Just—just be."

For a moment a queer little qualm came over her. Had she followed her immediate impulse, she would have said, "I don't know how to love like that. I have to try: I want to learn." But that would have done no good, and in her most introspective moments Dodo was always practical. The qualm lasted but a moment, as the door was opened, when they drew up. But it lasted long enough to cause her to wonder whether it would be the past that would be entered again instead of the future, entered, too, not by another door, but by the same.

On the doorstep she paused.

"Lift me over the threshold, Jack," she said; "it is such bad luck for a bride to

stumble when she enters her home."

"My dear, what nonsense."

"Very likely, but let's be nonsensical. Let us propitiate all the gods and demons. Lift me, Jack."

He yielded to her whim.

"That is dear of you," she said. "That was a perfect entry. Aren't I silly? But no Austrian would ever dream of letting his wife walk over the threshold for the first time. And—and that's all about Austria," she added rather hastily.

Dodo looked swiftly round the old, remembered hall. Opposite was the big open fireplace round which they so often had sat, preferring its wide-flaring homely comfort to the more formal drawing-rooms. To-day, no fire burned there, for it was midsummer weather; but as in old times a big yellow collie sprawled in front of it, grandson perhaps, so short are the generations of dogs, to the yellow collies of the time when she was here last. He, too, gave good omen, for he rose and stretched and waved a banner of a tail, and came stately towards them with a thrusting nose of welcome. The same pictures hung on the walls; high up there ran round the palisade of stags' heads and Dodo (with a conscious sense of most creditable memory) recognized the butler as having been her first husband's valet. She also remembered his name.

"Why, Vincent," she said, holding out her hand, "It is nice to see another old face. And you don't look one day older, any more than his lordship does. Tea? Yes, let us have tea at once, Jack. I am so hungry: happiness is frightfully exhausting, and I don't mind how exhausted I am."

Suddenly Dodo caught sight of the portrait of herself which had been painted when this house was for the first time her home.

"Oh, Jack, look at that little brute smiling there!" she said. "I was rather pretty, though, but I don't think I like myself at all. Dear me, I hope I'm not just the same now, with all the prettiness and youth removed. I don't think I am quite, and oh, Jack, there's poor dear old Chesterford. Ah, that hurts me; it gives me a bitter little heart-ache. Would you mind, Jack, if—"

Jack felt horribly annoyed with himself in not having seen to this.

"My dear," he said, "it was awfully thoughtless of me. Of course, it shall go. It was stupid, but, Dodo, I was so happy all this last month, that I have thought of nothing except myself."

Dodo turned away from the picture to him.

"And all the time I thought you were thinking about me!" she said. "Jack, what

a deceiver!"

He shook his head.

"No: it is that you don't understand. You *are* me.

"Am I? I should be a much nicer fellow if I was. Jack, don't have that picture moved. It only hurt for a moment: it was a ghost that startled me merely because I did not expect it. It is a dear ghost: it is not jealous, it will not spoil things or come between us. It—it wants us to be happy, for he told me, you know, it was the last thing he said—that I was to marry you. It is a long time ago, oh, how long ago, though I say it to my shame. Besides, if you are to pull down or put away all that reminds me of that dreadful young woman"—Dodo put out her tongue and made a face at her own picture—"you will have to pull down the house and drink up the lake and cut down the trees. Ah, how lovely the garden looks! I was never here in the summer before: we only came for the shooting and hunting and the garden invariably consisted of rows of blackened salvias and decaying dahlias. But it is summer now, Jack."

There was no mistaking the figurative sense in which she meant him to understand the word "summer." It had been winter, winter of discontent—so the glance she gave him inevitably implied—when she was here before, and she rejoiced in and admired this excellent glory of summer-time. And yet but a moment before the picture in the hall had "hurt" her, until she remembered that even on his death-bed her first husband had bidden her marry the man who had brought her back here to-day. She had neglected to do as she was told for about a quarter of a century, and had married somebody else instead, and yet this amazing variety of topics that concerned her heart, any one of which, you would have expected, was of sufficient import to fill her mind to the exclusion of all else, but bowled across it, as the shadows of clouds bowl across the fields on a day of spring winds, leaving the untarnished sunshine after their passage. It was not because she was heartless that she touched on this series of somewhat tremendous topics: it was rather that her vitality instantly reasserted itself: it was undeterred, impervious to discouraging or disturbing reflections.

Dodo ate what may be termed a good tea, and smoked several cigarettes. Then noticing that a small golf links had been laid out in the fields below the garden, she rushed indoors to change her dress, and play a game with her husband.

"It won't be much fun for you, darling," she said, "because my golf is a species of landscape gardening, and I dig immense hollows with my club and alter the lie of the country generally. Also I sometimes cheat, if nobody is looking, so admire the beauties of nature if you hear me say that I have a bad lie, because if you looked you would see me pushing the ball into a pleasanter place, and

that would give you a low opinion of me. But a little exercise would be so good for us both after being married: the Abbey was terribly stuffy."

The fifth hole brought them near the memorial chapel in the Park, where her first husband was buried.

"Darling, that puts you five up," she said, "and would you mind waiting here a minute, while I go in alone? I don't want even you with me: I want to go alone and kneel for a minute by his grave, and say my prayers, and tell him I have come back again with you. Will you wait for a minute, Jack? I shan't be long."

Dodo wasn't long: she said her prayers with remarkable celerity, and came out again wiping her eyes.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "what a beautiful monument: it wasn't finished, you know, when I went away and I hadn't seen it. And it's so touching to have just those three words, 'Lead, kindly Light': the dear old boy was so fond of that hymn. It's all so lovely and peaceful, and if ever there was a saint in the nineteenth century, it was he. Somehow I felt as if he knew about us and approved, and I remember we had 'Lead, kindly Light' on the very last Sunday evening of all. I am so glad I went in."

Dodo gave a little sigh.

"Where are we?" she said. "Am I one hole up or two? Two, isn't it? Do let it be two. And what a lovely piece of marble. It looks like the most wonderful cold cream turned to stone. It must be Carrara. Oh, Jack, what a beautiful drive! It went much faster than the legal limit."

The flames of the summer-sunset were beginning to fade in the sky when they got back to the house, and it was near dinner-time. Dodo's spirits and appetite were both of the most excellent order, and all the memories that this house brought back to her, so far from causing any aching resuscitation of past years, were, owing to the incomparable alchemy of her mind, but transformed into a soft and suitable background for the present. Afterwards, they sat on the terrace in the warm dusk.

"I must telegraph to Nadine to-morrow," she said, "and tell her how happy I am. Jack, sometimes Nadine seems to me exactly what I should expect a very attractive aunt to be. Do you know what I mean? I feel she could have warned me of all the mistakes I have made in my life, before they happened, if she had been born. And she approves of you and me; isn't it lucky? I wonder why I feel so young on the very day on which I should most naturally be thinking what a lot of life has passed. Jack, I don't want any more events. Some people reckon life by events, and that is so unreasonable. Events are thrust upon you; what counts is what you feel."

He moved his chair a little nearer to hers.

"I am satisfied with what I feel," he said. "And though I have felt it for very many years, it has never lost its freshness. I have always wanted, and now I have got."

Suddenly Dodo's mood changed.

"Oh, you take a great risk," she said. "Who is to assure you that I shan't disappoint you, disappoint you horribly? I can't assure you of that, Jack. It is easy to understand other people, but the silly proverb that tells you to know yourself, makes a far more difficult demand. If I disappoint you, what are we to do?"

"You can't disappoint me if you are yourself," he said.

"You say that! To me, too, who have outraged every sort of decency with regard to you?"

He was silent a moment.

"Yes, I say that to you," he said.

Dodo gave a little bubbling laugh.

"You are not very polite," she said. "I say that I have outraged every sort of decency and you don't even contradict me."

"No. What you say is—is perfectly true. But the comment of you and me sitting here on our bridal night is sufficient, is it not? Dodo, there is no use in your calling yourself names. Leave it all alone: we are here, you and I. And it is getting late, my darling."

The same night Lady Ayr was giving one of her awful dinner-parties. Her family, John, Esther and Seymour were always bidden to them, and went in to dinner in exactly their proper places as sons and daughters of a marquis. Before now it had happened that Seymour had to take Esther in to dinner, and it was so to-night. But in the general way they saw so little of each other, that they did not very much object. They usually quarreled before long, but made their differences up again by their unanimity of opinion about their mother. That had already happened this evening.

"Mother is bursting with curiosity about Aunt Dodo's wedding," said Esther. "She wasn't asked. I told her it was a very pretty wedding."

"I went," said Seymour, "and I am going to write an account of it for *The Lady*. If you will tell me how you were dressed, I will put it in, that is supposing you were decently dressed. Mother asked me about it, too, and I think I said the bridesmaids looked lovely."

"But there weren't any," said Esther.

"Of course there weren't, but it enraged her. By the way, there is some awful stained glass put up in the staircase since I was here last. A ruby crown has apparently had twins, one of which is a sapphire crown and the other a diamond crown. I shouldn't mind that sort of thing happening, if it wasn't so badly done. I shall try to break it by accident after dinner. Did you design it? My dear, I forgot: we had finished quarreling. Let us talk about something else. Nadine came to see me the other day, and if you will not tell anybody, I think it quite likely that I shall marry her. She likes jade. And she looks quite pretty to-night, doesn't she?"

Esther had already alluded to Nadine, who was sitting opposite, as the dream of dreams, and further appreciation was unnecessary.

"You don't happen to have asked her yet?" she said, with marked neutrality.

"No, one doesn't ask that sort of thing until one knows the answer," said he. "That is, unless you are one of the ridiculous people who ask for information. I hate the information I get by asking, unless I know it already."

"And then you don't get it."

"No. Esther, that is a charming emerald you are wearing but it is atrociously set. If you will send it round to-morrow, I will draw a decent setting for it. Do look at Mother. She has got the family lace on, which is made of string. I think it is Saxon. Oh, of course the coronets are about her. How foolish of me not to have guessed."

"It is more foolish of you to think that Nadine would look at you," said Esther.

"I didn't ask her to look at me, and I shan't ask her to look at me. I shall recommend her not to look at me. But I shall marry her or Antoinette. I don't see why you are so stuffy about it. Or perhaps you would prefer Antoinette for a sister-in-law."

"If she is to be your wife, dear, I think I should," said Esther.

Seymour laid his hand on hers. His smelt vaguely of wall-flowers.

"How disagreeable you are," he said. "I don't think I shall say anything about your dress in *The Lady*. I shall simply say that Lady Esther Sturgis was there looking very plain and tired. I shall describe my own dress instead. I had an emerald pin, properly set, instead of its being set like that sort of cheese cake you are wearing. No, it's not exactly a cheese cake: it is as if you had spilt some *crème-de-menthe* and put a little palisade of broken glass round it to prevent it spreading. What a disgusting dinner we are having, aren't we? I never know what to do before I dine with Mama, whether to eat so much lunch

that I don't want any dinner, or to eat none at all so that I can manage to swallow this sort of garbage. To-night I am rather hungry: won't you come away early with me and have some supper at home? Perhaps Nadine will come too."

"If Nadine will come, I will," said Esther. "I suppose we can chaperone each other."

"Certainly, if it amuses you. Shall we ask anybody else? I see hardly anybody here whom I know by sight. I think they must all be earls and countesses. It's funny how few of one's own class are worth speaking to. Look at Mama! I know I keep telling you to look at Mama, but she is so remarkable. She said 'sir' just now to the man next her. He must be a Saxon king. I wish she was responsible for the wine instead of father: teetotalers usually give one excellent wine, because they don't imagine they know anything about it, and tell the wine merchants just to send round some champagne and hock. So of course they send the most expensive."

"I think we ought to talk to our neighbors," said Esther. "Mama is making faces."

"That is because she has eaten some of this *entrée*, I expect. I make no face because I haven't. But I can't talk to my neighbor. I tried, but she is unspeakable-to. I wish my nose would bleed, because then I should go away."

One of the frequent pauses that occurred at Lady Ayr's dinners was taking place at the moment, and Seymour's rather shrill voice was widely audible. A buzz of vacant conversation succeeded, and he continued.

"That was heard," he said, "and really I didn't mean it to be heard. I am sorry. I shall make myself agreeable. But tell Nadine we shall go away soon after dinner. If you will be ready, I shall not go up into the drawing-room at all."

Seymour turned brightly to the woman seated on his right.

"Have you been to 'The Follies'?" he asked. "I hope you haven't, because then we can't talk about them, since I haven't either. There are enough follies going about, without going to them."

"How amusin' you are," said his neighbor.

Seymour felt exasperated.

"I know I am," he said. "Do be amusing too; then we shall be delighted with each other."

"But I don't know who you are," said his neighbor.

"Well, that is the case with me," said he. "But my mother—"

His neighbor's face instantly changed from a chilly neutrality to a welcoming warmth.

"Oh, are you Lord Seymour?" she asked.

"I should find it very uncomfortable to be anybody else," said he. "I should not know what to do."

"Then *do* tell me, because of course you know all about these things: Are we all going to wear slabs of jade next year? And did you see me at Princess Waldenech's wedding this morning? And who manicures you? I hear you have got a marvelous person." Seymour really wished to atone for the unfortunate remark that had broken the silence and exerted himself.

"But of course," he said. "It is Antoinette. She cooks for me and calls me: she dusts my rooms, and brushes my boots. She stirs the soup with one hand and manicures me with the other. Fancy not knowing Antoinette! She is fifty-two: by the time you are fifty-two you ought to be known anywhere. If she marries I shall die: if I marry, she will still live I hope. Now do tell me: do you recommend me to marry?"

"Doesn't it depend upon whom you marry?"

"Not much, do you think? But perhaps you are married, and so know. Are you married? And would you mind telling me who you are, as I have told you?"

"You never told me: I guessed. Guess who I am."

Seymour looked at her attentively. She was a woman of about fifty, with a shrewd face, like a handsome monkey, and his millinerish eyes saw that she was dressed without the slightest regard to expense.

"I haven't the slightest idea," he said. "But please don't tell me, if you have any private reason for not wishing it to be known. I can readily understand you would not like people to be able to say that you were seen dining with Mama. Of course you are not English."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because you talk it so well. English people always talk it abominably. But—"

He looked at her again, and a vague resemblance both in speech and in the shape of her head struck him.

"I will guess," he said, "you are a relation of Nadine's."

"Quite right: go on."

Seymour was suddenly agitated and upset a glass of champagne that had just been filled. He took not the slightest notice of this.

"Is it too much to hope that you are the aunt who—who had so many snuff-boxes?" he asked. "I mean the one to whom the Emperor gave all those lovely snuff-boxes? Or is it too good to be true?"

"Just good enough," she said.

"How wildly exciting! Will you come back to my flat as soon as we can escape from this purgatory and Antoinette shall manicure you. Do tell me about the snuff-boxes; I am sure they were beauties, or you would not—I mean the Emperor would not have given you them."

"Of course not. But I am afraid I can't come to your flat to-night, as I am going to a dance. Ask me another day. I hear you have got some lovely jade and are going to make it the fashion. Then I suppose you will sell it."

Seymour determined to insure his jade before Countess Eleanor entered his rooms, for fear of its subsequently appearing that the Austrian Emperor had followed up his present of snuff-boxes with a present of jade. But he let no suspicion mar the cordiality of his tone.

"Yes, that's the idea," he said. "You see no younger son can possibly live in the way he has been brought up unless he has done something honest and commercial like that, or cheats at bridge. But that is so difficult I am told. You have to learn bridge first, and then go to a conjurer, during which time you probably forget bridge again. But otherwise you can't live at all unless you marry and the only thing left to do is to take to drink and die."

"My brother took to it and lives," said she.

"I know, but you are a very remarkable family."

A footman had wiped up the greater part of the champagne Seymour had spilt and now stood waiting till he could speak to him.

"Her ladyship told me to tell you that you seemed to have had enough champagne, my lord," he said.

Seymour paused for a moment, and his face turned white with indignation.

"Tell her ladyship she is quite right," he said, "and that the first sip I took of it was more than enough."

"Very good, my lord."

"And tell her that the fish was stale," said Seymour shrilly.

"Yes, my lord."

"And tell her—" began Seymour again.

Countess Eleanor interrupted him.

"You have sent enough pleasant messages for one time," she said. "You can talk to your mother afterwards: at present talk to me. Did you go to the wedding this morning?"

"Yes."

Seymour rather frequently allowed himself to be ruffled, but he always calmed down again quickly. "It is so like Mama to send a servant in the middle of dinner to say I am drunk," he said, "but she will be sorry now. Look, she is receiving my message, and is turning purple. That is satisfactory. She looks unusually plain when she is purple. Yes: I am describing the wedding for a lady's paper. I shall get four guineas for it."

"You do not look as if that would do you much good."

"If you take four guineas often enough they—they purify the blood," said he, "though certainly the dose is homeopathic. It is called the gold cure. About the wedding. I thought it was very vulgar. And it was frightfully *bourgeois* in spirit. It is very early Victorian to marry a man who has waited for you since about 1820."

"But they will be very happy."

"So are the *bourgeoisie* who change hats. At least I should have to be frightfully happy to think of putting on anybody else's hat. I recommend you not to eat that savory unless you have a bad cold that prevents your tasting anything. Shall I send another message to Mama about it?"

"Ah, my dear young man," said Countess Eleanor, "we are all common when we fall in love. You will find yourself being common too, some day. And the people who are least *bourgeois* become the most common of all. Nadine, for instance: there is no one less *bourgeoise* than Nadine, but if she ever falls in love she will be so common that she will be perfectly sublime. She will be the embodiment of humanity. But she is not in love with that great boy next her, who is so clearly in love with her. Dear me, what beautiful Sèvres dessert plates. I once collected Sèvres as well as snuff-boxes."

"Did you—did you get together a fine collection?" asked Seymour.

"Pretty well. It is easier to get snuff-boxes. My brother has some that used to be mine.—Ah, they are all getting up. Let me come to see your jade some other day."

Nadine and Esther escaped very soon after dinner from this dreadful party, and went to Seymour's flat where he had preceded them and was busy cooking with Antoinette in the kitchen when they arrived. He opened the door for them

himself with his shirt sleeves rolled up above his elbows, showing an extremely white and delicate skin. Round one wrist he wore a gold bangle.

"I've left the kitchen door open," he said, "so that the whole flat shall smell as strong as possible of cooking. There is nothing so delicious when you are hungry. We will open the windows afterwards. You and Esther must amuse yourselves for ten minutes, and then supper will be ready."

"Oh, may I come and cook too, Seymour?" asked Nadine.

"Certainly not. Antoinette is the only woman in the world who knows how to cook. You would make everything messy. Go and rock the cradle or rule the world, or whatever you consider to be a woman's sphere, until we are ready."

Seymour disappeared again into the kitchen from which came rich cracklings and odors of frying, and Nadine turned to Esther with a sigh.

"My dear, I have got remorse and world yearnings to-night," she said. "I attribute it to your mother's awful party. But I daresay we shall all be better soon. You know, if I had asked Hugh to let me come and cook, he would have given me a golden spoon to stir with, and eaten till he burst because I cooked it. And I don't care! He was so dear and so utterly impossible this evening. I told him I wasn't going to the dance at the Embassy, and he said he should go in case I changed my mind. And if it had been Hugh cooking in there, I should have gone and cooked too, even if he hadn't wanted me to. It's no use, Esther: I can't marry Hugh. There's the end of it. Up till to-night I have always wondered if I could. Now I know I can't. I think I shan't see so much of him. I shall miss him, don't think I shan't miss him, but I want to be fair to him. As it is now, whenever I am nice to him, which I always am, he thinks it means that I am beginning to love him. Whereas it doesn't mean anything whatever. I wish people hadn't got into the habit of marrying each other, but bought their babies at a shop instead. And kissing is so disgusting. The only person I ever like kissing is Mama, because her skin is so delicious and smells very faintly of raspberries. Hugh smells of cigarettes and soap—"

"Darling Nadine, you haven't been kissing Hugh, have you?" asked Esther.

"Yes, I kissed him this evening, when he was putting my cloak on, but there were ninety-five footmen there so it wasn't compromising: we were heavily chaperoned. And I would just as soon have kissed any of the other ninety-five. But he wanted me to, and so I did, and then suddenly I saw how unfair it was for me. It didn't mean anything: I kissed him just as I kiss my dog, because he is such a duck. Also because he wanted me to, which Tobias never does: he always cleans his face on the rug after I have kissed him, and sneezes."

"Did he ask you to?" said Esther,—"not Toby, Hugh!"

"No, but I can see by a man's face when he wants. I saw one of the footmen wanted, too, and perhaps I ought to have kissed him as well, to show Hugh it did not mean anything."

Nadine sat down and spread her hands wide with a surprisingly dramatic gesture of innocence and despair.

"It isn't my fault," she said; "it's me. *C'est moi: son' io!* I would translate it into all the languages of the world, like the Bible, if that would make Hugh understand. People can't be different from what they are. It's a grand mistake to suppose otherwise. They can act and talk in accordance with what they are, or they can act and talk otherwise, but they, the personalities, are unchangeable except by miracles. I could act contrary to my own self and marry Hugh, but it would be no particle of good. I want him to understand that I can't love him, and I am too fond of him to marry him without. I wish to heaven he would marry somebody else."

"He won't do that," said Esther.

"I am afraid not. I think it is rather selfish. It is putting it all on me. I shall have to marry somebody else, I suppose, and that will be very unselfish of me, because I don't want to marry. Of course one has to: I don't want to grow old, but I shall have to grow old. They are both laws of nature, and perhaps neither the one nor the other is so disagreeable really."

Esther gave her long, appreciative sigh.

"It would be too wonderful of you to marry somebody else, in order to make it clear to Hugh that you couldn't marry him," she said. "It would be the most illustrious thing to do and it shows that really you are devoted to Hugh. But you really think that people don't change, Nadine?"

"Not unless a moral earthquake happens and earthquakes are not to be expected. Only an upheaval of that kind makes any difference in the essential things. Their tastes change, as their noses and hair change, but the thing that sits behind like some beastly idol in a temple never moves and looks on at all that changes round it with the same wooden eyes. Oh, dear, I am so tired of myself, and I can't get out of sight of myself."

Nadine looked at herself in a Louis Seize mirror that hung above the fireplace and pointed a contemplative finger at the reflection of her pale loveliness.

"I wish I was anything in the world except that thing," she said. "I am genuine when I say that, but having said that there is nothing else about me but what is intolerable. But I am aware that I don't really care about anybody in the world. The only thing that can be said for me is that I detest myself. I wish I was like you, Esther, because you care for me: I wish I was like Aunt Eleanor because

she cares for stealing. I wish I was like Daddy because he cares for old brandy. You are all better off than I. I envy anybody and everybody who cares for anybody with her heart. No doubt having a heart is often a very great nuisance, and often leads you to make a dreadful fool of yourself, but it gets tedious to be wise and cool all the time like me."

Seymour entered at this moment carrying a little silver censer with incense in it.

"The smell of food is sufficiently strong," he said. "And supper is ready. Also the smell of incense reminds one of stepping out of the blazing sunlight into St. Mark's at Venice. Nadine, you look too exquisite, but depressed. Has not the effect of Mama worn off yet?"

"Oh, it's not your mother, it's me," said she.

"You think about yourself too much," observed Seymour. "I know the temptation so well, and generally yield to it. It is a great mistake: one occasionally has doubts whether one is the nicest person in the world and whether it is worth while doing anything, even collecting jade. But such doubts never last long with me."

"Don't you ever wish you had a heart, Seymour?" she asked. "You and I have neither of us got hearts."

"I know, and I am so exceedingly comfortable without one, that I should be sorry to get one. If you have a heart, sooner or later you get into a state of drivel about somebody, who probably doesn't drivel about you. That must be so mortifying. Even if two people drivel mutually they are deplorable objects, but a solitary driveler is like a lonely cat on the tiles, and is a positive nuisance. Poor Hugh! Nadine, you suit my wall-paper quite exquisitely. Also it suits you. Don't let any of us go to bed to-night, but see the morning come. The early morning is the color of a wood-pigeon's breast, and looks frightfully tired, as if it had sat up all night too. Most people look perfectly hideous at that moment, but I really don't believe you would. Do sit up and let me see.

"I look the color of an oyster at dawn," said Esther, "it is just as if I had gone bad."

Her brother looked at her thoughtfully.

"Yes, my dear, I can imagine your looking quite ghastly," he said. "You had better go away before dawn. It might make me seriously unwell."

"I shall. I shall go to the dance at the Embassy, I think. Madame Tavita is so hideous that she makes me feel good-looking for a week."

"You always behave as if you were pretty, which matters far more than being

pretty," said Seymour. "It matters very little what people look like, if they only behave as if they were Venuses, just as it does not matter how tall you are if you consistently look at a point rather above the head of the person you are talking to."

Nadine was recovering a little under the influence of food.

"That is quite true," she said. "And if you want to look really rich, you must be shabby, or not wash your face. Seymour, let us try and write a little book together, 'Fifty ways of appearing enviable.' You should eat a great deal in order to make it appear you have a good digestion, although you may be quite sick afterwards, and refuse a great many invitations to show what a wild social success you are, even though you dine all by yourself at home. My dear, what delicious food; did you cook it, or Antoinette?"

"Both. We each threw in what we thought would be good, and stirred it together. I am sorry for people who are not greedy. I am told that when you are old, food and saving money are the only pursuits that don't pall. At present food and spending money are particularly attractive, and a piquancy is added if you haven't got any money. And now we all feel better."

Seymour had a piece of needlework which he often produced when he was staying with friends, in order to irritate them. He seldom worked at it when at home, but to-night he got it out, in order to irritate his sister into going to the ball without delay, for Esther was always exasperated to a point almost beyond her control by the sight of her brother with his thimble and needle. So before long she took her departure, leaving Nadine to follow (which was Seymour's design), and he put the needlework back into its embroidered bag again.

"I am afraid my methods are a little obvious," he said, "but poor Esther sees nothing but the most obvious hints. You have to say things very loud and clear to her, like the man in 'Alice in Wonderland.'"

"Who was that?" asked Nadine absently. "And what did you want Esther to do?"

"To go away, of course. I wanted to talk to you, Nadine. I have never known you look so beautiful as to-night. You look troubled too. Troubles make people feel plain but look beautiful."

Nadine shifted her position, so that she faced him.

"Yes, do talk to me," she said. "See if you can distract me a little from myself. My mind hurts me, Seymour. I wish I had a hard bright mind as some people have. Their minds are like ... I don't know what they are like: I can't trouble to think to-night. How stupid are all the jinkings and monkey-tricks we go through! I have worn an inane smile all day, and when I tried to read my Plato,

it merely bored me. Nothing seems worth while. And don't be commonplace, and say that it is liver. It is nothing of the sort. Would you be surprised if I burst into tears?"

"You have been thinking of the old 'un," remarked Seymour.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Hugh, of course. Do you know you are rather like a boy watching the struggle of a butterfly he has impaled? You are sorry for it, but you don't let it go.

"He impaled himself," said Nadine.

"Well, you gave him the pin. But as you don't mean to marry him, make that quite clear to him."

"But how?"

"Marry me," said Seymour.

CHAPTER VI

Edith Arbuthnot had conceived the idea, an unhappy one as regards her family and neighbors, that every one who aspired to the name of Musician (it is not too much to assert that she did) should be able to play every instrument in the band. Just now she was learning the French horn and double-bass simultaneously. She kept her mind undistracted by the hideous noises she produced, and expected others to do so. Thus unless she was practising some instrument that required the exclusive use of the mouth, she would talk (and did so) while she learned.

Just now she was seated on the terrace wall at Winston, which was of a convenient height for playing the double-bass, which rested on the terrace below, and conversing at the top of her voice to Dodo who sat a yard or two away. These stentorian tones of course were necessary in order that she should be heard above the vibrating roar of the ill-played strings. She could not at present get much tone out of them; but for volume, it was as if all the bumblebees in the world were swarming in all the threshing-machines in the world, which were threshing everything else in the world.

"I used to think you were heartless, Dodo," she shouted; "but compared to Nadine you are a sickly sentimentalist."

When Dodo did not feel equal to shouting back, she spoke in dumb show.

Now she concisely indicated "Rot" on her fingers.

"It isn't Rot," shouted Edith; "ah, what a wonderful thing a double-bass is: I shall write a Suite for the double-bass unaccompanied—I really mean it. If you seemed to me without a heart, Nadine would seem to have an organ which is all that a heart is not, very highly developed. Probably she inherited a tendency from you, and has developed and cultivated it. What do you say?"

"I said, do stop that appalling noise, darling," screamed Dodo. "I shall burst a blood-vessel if I try to talk against it."

"Very well: I must just play two or three scales," said Edith.

The hoarse clamor grew more and more vibrant and Dodo stopped her ears. Eventually the bow, as Edith brought it down upon the first note of a new scale, flew from her hands, and describing a parabola in the air fell into a clump of sweet-peas in the flower-bed below the terrace.

"I must learn not to do that," she said. "It happened yesterday and I shan't consider myself proficient until I am safe not to hit the conductor in the face. About Nadine: She is going to perpetrate the most horrible cruelty, marrying that dreadful young man, while Hugh is just dying for her. Hugh reminds me of what Jack was like, Dodo."

"Oh, do you think so?" said Dodo. "Except that Jack was once twenty-five, which is what Hugh is now, I don't see the smallest resemblance. Jack was so good-looking, and Hugh only looks good, and though Hugh is a darling, he is just a little slow and heavy, which Jack never was. You will be able to compare them, by the way, because Hugh is coming here this afternoon. I asked him not to, but he is coming just the same. I told him Nadine and Seymour were both here."

"Perhaps he means to kill Seymour," said Edith thoughtfully. "It certainly would be the obvious thing to do—"

"Hughie would always do the obvious thing," said Dodo.

"I will finish my sentence," said Edith. "It certainly would be the obvious thing to do, provided that the public executioner would not hang him, and that Nadine would marry him. But things would probably go the other way about, which would not be so satisfactory for Hugh. Really the young generation is very bloodless: it talks more than we did, but it does absolutely nothing."

"We used to talk a good deal," remarked Dodo, "and we are not silent yet. At least you and I are not. Edith, has it ever struck you that you and I are middle-aged? Or is middle-age, do you think, not a matter of years, but of inclination? I think it must be, for it is simply foolish to say that I am forty-five, though it

would be simply untrue to say that I was anything else. That is by the way; we will talk of ourselves soon. Where had I got to? Oh, yes, Hugh is coming down this afternoon though I implored him not to. Nadine says I was wrong. She wants me to be very nice to him, as she has been so horrid. They have not seen each other for a whole week, ever since her engagement was announced. I am sure Nadine misses him; she will be miserable if Hugh deserts her."

Edith plucked impatiently at the strings of the double-bass, and aroused the bumblebees again.

"That's what I mean by bloodless," she said. "They are all suffering from anemia together. Their blood has turned to a not very high quality of gray matter in the brain. Nadine wants you to be kind to Hugh, because she has been so horrid! Dodo, don't you see how fishlike that is? And he, since he can't marry her, takes the post of *valet-de-chambre,* and looks on while Seymour gives her little butterfly kisses and small fragments of jade. I saw him kiss her yesterday, Dodo. It made me feel quite faint and weak, and I had to hurry into the dining-room and take half a glass of port. It was the most debilitated thing I ever saw. Berts is nearly as bad, and though he is nine feet high and plays cricket for his county, he is somehow ladylike. I can't think where he got it from: certainly not from me. And as for Hugh, I suppose he calls it faithfulness to hang about after Nadine, but I call it anemia. I am surprised at Hugh; I should have thought he was sufficiently stupid to have more blood in him. He ought to box Nadine's ears, kick Seymour and instantly marry somebody else, and have dozens of great red-faced, white-toothed children. Bah!"

Dodo had subsided into hopeless giggles over this remarkable tirade against the anemic generation and Edith plucked at her double-bass again as she concluded with this exclamation of scorn.

"And I can't think how you allow Nadine to marry that—that jade," said Edith.

Dodo became momentarily serious.

"If you were Nadine's mother," she said, "you would be delighted at her marrying anybody. She is the sort of girl who doesn't want to marry, and afterwards wishes she had. I am not like that: I was continually marrying somebody and then wishing I hadn't. But Nadine doesn't make mistakes. She may do things that appear very odd, but they are not mistakes, she has thought it out very carefully first. You see, quite a quantity of eligible youths and several remarkably ineligible ones have wanted to marry her, and she has never felt any—dear me, what is it a man with a small income always feels when a post with a large income is offered him—oh, yes, a call: Nadine has never felt any call to marry any of them. There are many girls like that in

whom the physical makes very little appeal. But what does appeal to Nadine very strongly is the mental, and Seymour however many times you call him a jade, is as clever as he can be. In him, also, I should say, the physical side is extremely undeveloped, and so I think that he and Nadine may be very happy. Now Hugh is not clever at all; he has practically no intellect and that to Nadine is an insuperable defect. Now don't call her prig or blue stocking. She is neither the one nor the other. But she has a mind. So have you. So for that matter have I, and it has led me to do weird things."

Edith thrummed her double-bass again.

"Dodo, I can't tell you how I disapprove of you," she said, "and how I love you. You are almost entirely selfish, and yet you have charm. Most utterly selfish people lose their charm when they are about thirty. I made sure you would. But I was quite wrong. Now I am utterly unselfish: I live entirely for my husband and my art. I live for him by seldom going near him, since he is much happier alone. But then I never had any charm at all. Now you have always lived, and do still, completely for your own pleasure—"

Dodo clapped her hands violently in Edith's face for it required drastic measures to succeed in interrupting her.

"Ah, that is an astonishingly foolish thing for you to say," she said. "If I lived for my pleasure, do you know what I should do? I should have a hot bath, go to bed and have dinner there. I should then go to sleep and when I woke up I should go for a ride, have another hot bath and another dinner and go to sleep again. There is nothing so pleasant as riding and hot baths and food and sleep. But I never have sought my pleasure. What I always have sought is my happiness. And that on the whole is our highest duty. Don't swear. There is nothing selfish about it, if you are made like I am. Because the thing that above all others makes me happy is to contrive that other people should have their own way. That is why I never dream of interfering in what other people want. If they really want it, I do all I can to get it for them. I was not ever thus, as the hymn says, but I am so now. The longer I live the more clearly I see that it is impossible to understand why other people want what they want, but it seems to me that all that concerns me is that they do want. I can see how they want, but never why. I can't think, darling, for instance, why you want to make those excruciating noises, but I see how. Here's Jack. Jack, come and tell us about Utopia."

Edith had laid her double-bass down on the ground of the terrace.

"Yes, but I want to sit down," he said. "May I sit on it, Edith?"

Edith screamed. He took this as a sign that he might not, and sat on the terrace wall.

"Utopia?" he asked. "You've got to be a man to begin with and then you have to marry Dodo. It does the rest."

"What is It?"

"That which does it, your consciousness. Dodo, it would send up rents in Utopia if Seymour went to a nice girls' school. He is rather silly, and wants the nonsense knocked out of him."

"But there you make a mistake," said she. "Almost every one who is nice is nice because the nonsense has not been knocked out of him. People without heaps of nonsense are merely prigs. Indeed that is the best definition of a prig, one who has lost his capability for nonsense. Look at Edith! She doesn't know she's nonsensical, but she is. And she thinks she is serious all the time with her great boots and her great double-bass and her French horns. Oh me, oh me! The reasonable people in the world are the ruin of it; they spoil the sunshine. Look at the abominable Liberal party with terrible, reasonable schemes for scullery-maids. They are all quite excellent, and it is for that reason they are so hopeless.

"It is moreover a great liberty to take with people to go about ameliorating them. I should be furious if anybody wanted to ameliorate me. Darling, Bishop Algie the other day said he always prayed for my highest good. I begged him not to, because if his prayers were answered, Providence might think I should be better for a touch of typhoid. You can't tell what strange roundabout ways Providence may have. So he promised to stop praying for me, because he is so understanding and knew what I meant. But when Lloyd George wants to give scullery-maids a happy old age with a canary in the window it is even worse. It is so sensible: I can see them sitting dismally in the room listening to their canary, when they would be much more comfortable in a nice work-house, with Edith and me bringing them packets of tea and flannel. Don't let us talk politics: there is nothing that saps the intellect so much."

"Edith and I have not talked much yet," observed Jack.

"No, you are listening to Utopia, which as I said, consists largely of nonsense. If you are to be happy, you must play, you must be ridiculous, you must want everybody else to be ridiculous. But everybody must take his own absurdities quite seriously."

Dodo sat up, pulled Jack's cigarette case from his pocket and helped herself.

"The Greeks and Romans were so right," she said, "they had a slave class, though with them it was an involuntary slave class. We ought to have a voluntary slave class, consisting of all the people who like working for a cause. There are heaps of politicians who naturally belong to it, and clergymen

and lawyers and nationalists, all the people in fact who die when they retire, and are disappointed when they have not got offices and churches to go to. You can recognize a slave the moment you see him. He always, socially, wants to open the door or shut the window, or pick up your gloves. The moment you see that look in a man's eye, that sort of itch to be useful, you should be able to give secret information and make him a slave at £200 a year, instead of making him a cabinet minister or a bishop or a director of a company. He wants work: let him have it. Edith, darling, you would be a slave instantly, and the State would provide you with double-basses and cornets. I haven't thought it all completely out, since it only occurred to me this minute, but it seems to me an almost painfully sound scheme now that I mention it. Think of the financiers you would get! There would be poor Mr. Carnegie and Rockefeller and—and the whole of the Rothschild house, and Barings and Speyers all quite happy, because they are happy when they work. And all the millions they make—how they make it, I don't know, unless they buy gold cheap and sell it dear, which I believe is really what they do—all the money they make would be at the disposal of those who know how to spend it. I suppose I am a Socialist."

Edith put her forehead in her hands.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said.

"I have my doubts myself," said Dodo ingenuously. "It began about Nadine's marriage and then drifted. You get to all sorts of strange places if you drift, both morally and physically. It really seems very unfair, that if you don't ever resist anything, you go to the bad. It looks as if evil was stronger than good, but Algie shall explain it to me. He can explain almost anything, including wasps. Jack, dear, do make me stop talking; you and the sunshine and Edith have gone to my head, and given me the babbles."

"I insist on your going on talking," said Edith. "I want to know how you can let Nadine marry without love."

"Because a great many of our unfortunate sex, dear, never fall in love, as I mean it, at all. But I would not have them not marry. They often make excellent wives and mothers. And I think Nadine is one of those. She is as nearly in love with Hugh as she has ever been with anybody, but she quite certainly will not marry him. Here she is; I daresay she will explain it all herself. My darling, come and talk matrimony shop to Edith, Jack and I are going for a short ride before lunch. Will you be in when Hugh comes?"

Nadine sat down in the chair from which Dodo had risen. She was dressed in a very simple linen dress of cornflower blue, that made the whites and pinks of her face look absolutely dazzling.

"Yes, I will wait for him," she said. "Seymour thought it would be kinder if he went to meet him at the station, so that Hughie could get rid of some of the hate on the way up. He has perception—*des aperçus très-fins*. And I will explain anything to anybody in the interval. I want to be married, and so does Seymour, and we think it will answer admirably if we marry each other. There is very little else to say. We are not foolish about each other—"

"I find you are extremely modern," interrupted Edith.

"You speak as if you did not like that," said Nadine; "but surely somebody has got to be modern if we are going to get on at all. Otherwise the world remains stock-still, or goes back. I do not think it would be amusing to be Victorian again; indeed there would be no use in us trying. We should be such obvious forgeries, Seymour particularly. I consider it lucky that he was not born earlier; if he had grown up as he is in Victorian days, they would certainly have done away with him somehow. Or his mother would have exposed him in Battersea Park like Œdipus."

Edith leaned over the terrace wall, and took the double-bass bow out of the tall clump of sweet peas.

"There are exactly two things in the world worth doing," she said, "to love and to work. Certainly you don't work, Nadine, and I don't believe you love."

Nadine looked at her a moment in silent hostility.

"That is a very comfortable reflection," she observed, "for you who like working better than anything else in the world except perhaps golf. I wonder you did not say there were three things in the world worth doing, making that damned game the third."

Edith had spoken with her usual cock-sure breezy enthusiasm, and looked up surprised at a certain venom and bitterness that underlay the girl's reply.

"My dear Nadine!" she said. "What is the matter?"

Nadine glared at her a moment, and then broke into rapid speech.

"Do you think I would not give the world to be able to love?" she said. "Do you think I send Hugh marching through hell for fun? You say I am heartless, as if it was my fault! Would you go to a blind man in the street and say, 'You beast, you brute, why don't you see?' Is he blind for fun? Am I like this for fun?"

She got up from her seat and came and stood in front of Edith, flushed with an unusual color, and continued more rapidly yet, emphasizing her points by admirable gesticulations of her hands. Indeed they seemed to have speech on their own account: they were extraordinarily eloquent.

"Do you know you make me lose my temper?" she said. "That is a rare thing with me; I seldom lose it; but when I do it is quite gone, and I don't care what I say, so long as it is what I mean. For the minute my temper is absolutely vanished, and I shall make the most of its absence. Who are you to judge and condemn me? and give me rules for conduct, how work and love are the only things worth doing? What do you know about me? Either you are absolutely ignorant about me, or so stupid that the very cabbages seem clever by you. And you go telling me what to do! And what do you know about love? To look at you, as little as you know about me. Yes; no wonder you sit there with your mouth open staring at me, you and your foolish, great fat-bellied bloated violin. You are not accustomed to be spoken to like this. It never occurred to you that I would give the world to be able to love as Jill and Polly and Mary and Minnie love. I do not go about saying that any more than a cripple calls attention to his defect: he tries to be brave and conceal it. But that is me, a dwarf, a hunchback, a *crétin* of the soul. That is the matter with me, and you are so foolish that it never occurred to you that I wanted to be like other people. You thought it was a pose of which I was proud, I think. There! Now do not do that again."

Nadine paused, and then sighed.

"I feel better," she said, "but quite red in the face. However, I have got my temper back again. If you like I will apologize for losing it."

Edith jumped up and kissed Nadine. When she intended to kiss anybody she did it, whether the victim liked it or not.

"My dear, you are quite delightful," she said. "I thoroughly deserve every word. I was utterly ignorant of you. But I am not stupid: if you will go on, you will find I shall understand."

Suddenly Nadine felt utterly lonely. All she had said of herself in her sudden exasperation was perfectly genuine, and now when her equanimity returned, she felt as if she must tell somebody about this isolation, which for the moment, in any case, was sincerely and deeply hers. That she was a girl of a hundred moods was quite true, but it was equally true that each mood was authentically inspired from within. Many of them, no doubt, were far from edifying, but none could be found guilty of the threadbare tawdriness of pose. She nodded at Edith.

"It is as I say," she said. "I hate myself, but here I am, and here soon will Hugh be. It is a disease, this heartlessness: I suffer from it. It is rather common too, but commoner among girls than boys."

Then queerly and unexpectedly, but still honestly, her intellectual interest in herself, that cold egoism that was characteristic of another side of her, awoke.

"Yet it is interesting," she said, "because it is out of this sort of derangement that types and species come. For a million years the fish we call the sole had a headache because one of its eyes was slowly traveling through its head. For a million years man was uncomfortable where the tail once came, because it was drying up. For a million years there will be girls like me, poor wretches, and at the end there will be another type of woman, a third sex, perhaps, who from not caring about these things which Nature evidently meant them to care about have become different. And all the boys like Seymour will be approximating to the same type from the other side, so that eventually we shall be like the angels—"

"My dear, why angels?" asked Edith.

"Neither marrying nor giving in marriage. La, la! And I was saying only the other day to him that I wished to marry half-a-dozen men! What a good thing that one does not feel the same every day. It would be atrociously dull. But in the interval, it is lonely now and then for those of us who are not exactly and precisely of the normal type of girl. But if you have no heart, you have to follow your intelligence, to go where your intelligence leads you, and then wave a flag. Perhaps nobody sees it, or only the wrong sort of person, who says, 'What is that idiot-girl waving that rag for?' But she only waves it because she is lost, and hopes that somebody will see it."

Nadine laughed with her habitual gurgle.

"We are all lost," she said. "But we want to be found. It is only the stupidest who do not know they are lost. Well, I have—what is Hugh's word? ah, yes,—I have gassed enough for one morning. Ah, and there is the motor coming back from the station. I am glad that Hugh has not thrown Seymour out, and driven forwards and backwards over him."

The motor at this moment was passing not more than a couple of hundred yards off through the park which lay at the foot of the steep garden terraces below them. From there the road wound round in a long loop towards the house.

"I shall go to meet Hugh at once, and get it over," said Nadine; and thereupon she whistled so shrilly and surprisingly on her fingers, that Hugh, who was driving, looked up and saw her over the terrace. She made staccato wavings to him, and he got out.

"You whistled the octave of B. in alt," remarked Edith appreciatively.

"And my courage is somewhere about the octave of B. in profundis," said Nadine. "I dread what Hugh may say to me."

"I will go and talk to him," said Edith. "I understand you now, Nadine. I will

tell him."

Nadine smiled very faintly.

"That is sweet of you," she said, "but I am afraid it wouldn't be quite the same thing."

Nadine walked down the steep flight of steps in the middle of the terrace, and out through the Venetian gate into the park. Hugh had just arrived at it from the other side, and they met there. No word of greeting passed between them; they but stood looking at each other. He saw the girl he loved, neither more nor less than that, and did not know if she looked well or ill, or if her gown was blue or pink or rainbowed. To him it was Nadine who stood there. But she saw details, not being blinded: he was big and square, he looked a picture of health, brown-eyed, clear of skin, large-mouthed, with a habit of smiling written strongly there. He had taken off his hat, as was usual with him, and as usual his hair looked a little disordered, as if he had been out on a windy morning. There was that slight thrusting outwards of his chin which suggested that he would meet argument with obstinacy, but that kind and level look from his eyes that suggested an honesty and kindliness hardly met with outside the charming group of living beings known as dogs. He was like a big, kind dog, polite to strangers, kind to friends, hopelessly devoted to the owner of his soul. But to-day his mouth did not indulge its habit: he was quite grave.

"Why did you kiss me the other night?" he said.

Nadine had already repented of that rash act. Being conscious of her own repentance, it seemed to her rather nagging of him to allude to it.

"I meant nothing," she said. "Hughie, are we going to stand like posts here? Shan't we stroll—"

"I don't see why: let us stand like posts. You did kiss me. Or do you kiss everybody?"

Nadine considered this for a moment.

"No, I don't kiss everybody," she said. "I never kissed a man before. It was stupid of me. The moment after I had done it I wanted to kiss *anybody* to show you it didn't mean anything. You are like the Inquisition. My next answer is that I have kissed Seymour since. I—I don't particularly like kissing him. But it is usual."

"And you are going to marry him?"

Nadine's courage which she had confessed was a B. in profundis, sank into profundissima.

"Yes, I am going to marry him," she said.

"Why? You don't love him. And he doesn't love you."

"I don't love anybody," said Nadine quickly. "I have said that so often that I am tired of saying it. Girls often marry without being in love. It just happens. What do you want? Would you like me to go on spinstering just because I won't marry you? That I will not do. You know why. You love me. I can't marry you unless I love you. Ah,*mon Dieu,* it sounds like Ollendorf. But I should be cheating you if I married you, and I will not cheat you. You would expect from me what you bring to me, and it would be right that I should bring it you, and I cannot. If you didn't love me like that, I would marry you to-morrow, and the trousseau might go and hang itself. Mama would give me some blouses and stockings, and you would buy me a tooth-brush. Yes, this is very flippant, but when serious people are goaded they become flippant. Oh, Hughie, I wish I was different. But I am not different. And what is it you came down here about? Is it to ask me again to marry you, and to ask me not to marry my dear little Seymour?"

"Little?" he asked.

"It was a term of endearment. Besides, it is not his fault that he does not weigh fourteen stones—"

"Stone," said he with the tremor of a smile.

"No, stones," said Nadine. "I choose that it should be stones: fourteen great square lumps. Hughie, don't catch my words up and correct me. I am serious and all you can answer is 'stone' instead of 'stones.'"

"I did it without thinking," he said. "I only fell back into the sort of speech there used to be between us. It was like that, serious one moment and silly the next. I spoke without thinking, as we used to speak. I won't do it again."

"And why not?" demanded Nadine.

"Because now that you tell me you really are going to marry Seymour, everything is changed between us. This is what I came to tell you. I am not going to hang about, a mixture between a valet and an *ami de la maison*. You have chosen now. When you refused me before, there was always in my mind the hope that some day you would give me a different answer. I waited long and patiently and willingly for that chance. Now the chance no longer exists. You have scratched me—"

Nadine drew her eyebrows together.

"Scratched you?" she said. "Oh, I see, a race: not nails."

"And I am definitely and finally out of it."

"You mean you are no longer among my friends?" asked Nadine.

"I shall not be with you so much or so intimately. We must talk over it just this once. We will stroll if you like. It is too hot for you standing in the sun without a hat."

"No, we will settle it here and now," said she quickly. "You don't understand. My marriage with Seymour will make no difference in the quality of affection I have always had for you. Why should I give up my best friend? Why should you?"

"Because you are much more than my best friend, and I am obliged to give up, at last, that idea of you. You have forced me to see that it is not to be realized. And I won't sit about your house, to have people pointing at me, and saying to each other, 'That's the one who is so frightfully in love with her.' It may sound priggish, but I don't choose to be quite so unmanly as that. Nor would you much respect me if I did so choose."

"But I never did respect you," said Nadine quickly. "I never thought of you as respectable or otherwise. It doesn't come in. You may steal and cheat at cards, and I shall not care. I like whom I like: I like you tremendously. What do you mean you are going to do? Go to Burmah or Bengal? I don't want to lose you, Hughie. It is unkind of you. Besides, we shall not marry for a long time yet, and even then— Ah, it is the old tale, the old horror called Me all over again— I don't love anybody. Many are delightful and I am so fond of them. But the other, the absorption, the gorgeous foolishness of it all, it is away outside of me, a fairy-tale and I am grown up now and say, 'For me it is not true.'"

Hugh came a step nearer her.

"You poor devil," he said gently.

Tears, as yet unshed, gathered in Nadine's eyes. They were fairly creditable tears: they were not at any rate like the weepings of the great prig-prince and compounded merely of "languor and self-pity," but sorrow for Hugh was one ingredient in them. Yet in the main they were for herself, since the only solvent for egoism is love.

"Yes, I am that," she said. "I'm a poor devil. I'm lost, as I said to that foolish Arbuthnot woman with her feet and great violin. Hark, she is playing it again: she is a big 'C major'! She has been scolding me, though if it comes to that I gave it her back with far more *gamin* in my tongue. And now you say you will not be friends any longer, and Mama does not like my marrying Seymour, though she does not argue, and there is no one left but myself, and I hate myself. Oh, I am lost, and I wave my flags and there is no one who sees or

understands. I shall go back to Daddy, I think, and he and I will drink ourselves drunk, and I shall have the red nose. But you are the worst of them all, Hugh! It is a very strange sort of love you have for me, if all it can do is to desert me. And yet the other day I felt as you feel; I felt it would only be fair to you to see you less. I am a damned weathercock. I go this way and that, but the wind is always cold. I am sorry for you, I want you to be happy, I would make you happy myself, if I could."

Nadine's eyes had quite overflowed, and as she poured out this remarkable series of lamentations, she dabbed at her moistened cheeks. Yet Hugh, though he was so largely to blame, as it seemed, for this emotion, and though all the most natural instincts in him longed to yield, knew that deep in him his determination was absolutely unsoftened. It, and his love for Nadine were of the quality of nether mill-stones. But all the rest of him longed to comfort her.

"Oh, Nadine, don't cry," he said. "I'm not worth crying about, to begin with."

"It is not you alone I cry about," said Nadine with justice. "I cry a little for you, every third drop is for you. The rest is quite for myself."

"It is never worth while to cry for oneself," he said.

"Who wants it to be worth while? I feel like crying, therefore I cry. Hardly anything I do is worth while, yet I go on doing, and I get tired of it before it is done. Already I am tired of crying, and besides it gives me the red nose without going to Daddy. Not you and I together are worth making myself ugly for. But you are so disagreeable, Hughie: first I wanted to stroll, and you said 'no,' and then when I didn't want to stroll you said 'yes,' and you aren't going to be friends with me, and I feel exactly as I used to feel when I was six years old, and it rained. Come, let us sit down a little, and you shall tell me what you mean to do, and how it will be between us. I will be very good: I will bless any plan you make, like a bishop. It shall all be as you will. I owe you so much and there is no way by which I can ever repay you. I don't want to be a curse to you, Hughie; I don't indeed."

She sat down, leaning against a great beech trunk, and he lay on the coarse meadow-grass beside her.

"I know you don't," he said.

He looked at her steadily, as she finished mopping her cheeks. Her little burst of tears had not made her nose at all red; it had but given a softness to her eyes. Never before had he so strongly felt her wayward, irresistible charm, which it was so impossible to analyse or explain. Indeed, if it came to analysis there were strange ingredients there; there was egoism as complete, and yet as disarming, as that of a Persian kitten; there was the unreasonableness of a

spoilt child; there was the inconsiderateness and unreliability of an April day, which alternates its gleams of the saffron sun of spring with cold rain and plumping showers.

Yet he felt that there was something utterly adorable, wholly womanly that lay sheathed in these more superficial imperfections, something that stirred within them conscious of the coming summer, just as the life embalmed within the chrysalis stirs, giving token of the time when the husk shall burst, and that which was but a gray crawling thing shall be wafted on wings of silver emblazoned with scarlet and gold. Then there was her beauty too, which drew his eyes after the wonder of its perfection, and was worthy of the soul that he divined in her. And finally (and this perhaps to him was the supreme magnet) there was the amazing and superb quality of her vitality, that sparkled and effervesced in all she did and said, so that for him her speech was like song or light, and to be with her was to be bathed in the effulgence of her spirit. And Hugh, looking at her now, felt, as always, that his self slipped from him, so that he was conscious of her only; she possessed him, and he lay like the sea with the dazzle of sunlight on it that both reflects the radiance and absorbs it.

Then he sat up: and half turned from her, for there were things to be said yet that he could scarcely say while he looked at her.

"I know you don't mean to be a curse to me," he said, "and you couldn't be if you tried. Whatever you did, and you are going to do a pretty bad thing now in marrying that chap, must be almost insignificant compared to the love which you have made exist in me."

He paused a moment.

"I have thought it all out," he said, "but it is difficult, and you must give me time. I'm not quick like you as you know very well, but sometimes I get there. It is like this."

She was watching him and listening to him, with a curious intentness and nervousness, as a prisoner about to receive sentence may watch the judge. Her hands clasped and unclasped themselves, her breath came short and irregular. It seemed as if she, for once, had failed to understand him whom she had said she knew too fatally well. Just now, at any rate, and on this topic, it was clear she did not know what he was going to propose. Yet it was scarcely a proposal she waited for; she waited for his word, his ultimatum. Till now she had dominated him completely with her quick wit, her far more subtle intelligence, her beauty, her vitality. But for once now, he was her master: she felt she had to bow to his simplicity and his uncomplicated strength, his brute virility. It was but faintly that she recognized it; the recognition came to her consciousness but as an echo. But the voice that made the echo came from

within.

"I have received my dismissal from you," he said, "as head of your house, as your possible husband. As I said, I won't take the place of the tame cat instead. God knows I don't want to cut adrift from you, and I can't cut adrift from you. But my aspiration is rendered impossible, and therefore both my mental attitude to you and my conduct must be altered. I daresay Berts and Tommy and Esther and all the rest of them will go lying about on your bed, and smoking in your bedroom just as before. Well, I can't be intimate in that sort of way any longer. You said you never reckoned whether you respected me or not, and that may be so. But without wanting to be heavy about it, I have got to respect myself. I can't help being your lover, but I can help tickling my love, so to speak, making it squirm and wriggle. Whether I am respectable or not, it is, and I shan't—as I said—I shan't tickle it. Also though I would be hurt in any other way for your sake, I won't be hurt like that. Don't misunderstand me. It is because my love for you is not one atom abated, that I won't play tricks with it. But when it says to me, 'I can't bear it,' I shall not ask to bear it. You always found me too easy to understand: I think this is another instance of it."

He paused a moment and Nadine gave a little sobbing sigh.

"Oh, Hughie," she began.

"No, don't interrupt," he said. "I want to go through with it, without discussion. There is no discussion possible. I wouldn't argue with God about it. I should say: 'You made me an ordinary human man, and you've got to take the consequences. In the same way, you have chosen Seymour, and I am telling you what is the effect. Now—you are tired of hearing it—I love you. And therefore I want your happiness without reservation. You have decided it will conduce to your happiness to marry Seymour. Therefore, Nadine—this is quite simple and true—I want you to do so. I may rage and storm on the surface, but essentially I don't. Somewhere behind all I may say and do, there is, as you once said to me, the essential me. Well, that says to you, 'God bless you.' That's all."

He unclasped his hands from round his knees, and stood up.

"I'm going away now," he said. "I thought when I came down it might take a long time to tell you this. But it has taken ten minutes only. I thought perhaps you would have a lot to say about it, and I daresay you have, but I find that it doesn't concern me. Don't think me brutal, any more than I think you brutal. I am made like this, and you are made otherwise. By all means, let us see each other, often I hope, but not just yet. I've got to adjust myself, you see, and you haven't. You never loved me, and so what you have done makes no difference in your feelings towards me. But I've got to get used to it."

She looked up at him, as he stood there in front of her with the green lights through the beech-leaves playing on him.

"You make me utterly miserable, Hugh," she said.

"No, I don't. There is no such thing as misery without love. You don't care for me in the way that you could—could give you the privilege of being miserable."

For one half-second she did not follow him. But immediately the quickness of her mind grasped what came so easily and simply to him.

"Ah, I see," she said, her intelligence leading her away from him by the lure of the pleasure of perception. "When you are like that, it is even a joy to be miserable. Is that so?"

"Yes, I suppose that is it. Your misery is a—a wireless message from your love. Bad news, perhaps, but still a communication."

She got up.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "that must be so. I never thought of it. But I can infer that you are right. Somehow you are quickened, Hughie. You are giving me a series of little shocks. You were never quite like that before."

"I was always exactly like that," he said. "I have told you nothing that I have not always known."

Again her brilliant egoism asserted itself.

"Then it is I who am quickened," she said. "There is nothing that quickens me so much as being hurt. It makes all your nerves awake and active. Yes; you have hurt me, and you are not sorry. I do not mind being hurt, if it makes me more alive. Ah, the only point of life is to be alive. If life was a crown of thorns, how closely I would press it round my head, so that the points wounded and wounded me. It is so shallow just to desire to be happy. I do not care whether I am happy or not, so long as I feel. Give me all the cancers and consumptions and decayed teeth, and gout and indigestion and necrosis of the spine and liver if there is such a thing, so that I may feel. I *don't* feel: it is that which ails me. I have a sane body and a sane mind, and I am tired of sanity. Kick me, Hughie, strike me, spit at me, make me angry and disgusted, anything, oh, anything! I want to feel, and I want to feel about you most particularly, and I can't, and there is Edith playing on her damned double-bass again. I hear it, I am conscious of it, and it is only the things that don't matter which I am conscious of. I am conscious of your brown eyes, my dear, and your big mouth and your trousers and boots, and the cow that is wagging its tail and looking at us as if it was going to be sick. Its dinner, I remember, goes

into its stomach, and then comes up again, and then it becomes milk or a calf or something. It has nine stomachs, or is it a cat that has nine lives, or nine tails? I am sure about nine. Oh, Hughie, I see the outside aspect of things, and I can't get below. I am a flat stone that you send to make—chickens is it?—no, ducks and drakes over a pond: flop, flop, the foolish thing. And somehow you with your stupidity and your simplicity, you go down below, and drown, and stick in the mud, and are so uncomfortable and miserable. And I am sorry for you: I hate you to be uncomfortable and miserable, and oh, I envy you. You suffer and are kind, and don't envy, and are not puffed up, and I envy your misery, and am puffed up because I am so desirable, and I don't really suffer—you are quite right—and I am not kind. Hugh, I can't bear that cow, drive it away, it will eat me and make milk of me. And there, look, are Mama and Papa Jack, coming back from their ride. Papa Jack loves her; his face is like a face in a spoon when he looks at her, and I know she is learning to love him. She no longer thinks when she is talking to him, as to whether he will be pleased. That is a sure sign. She is beginning to be herself, at her age too! She doesn't think about thinking about him any more: it comes naturally. And I am not myself: I am something else: rather, I am nothing else: I am nothing at all, just some intelligence, and some flesh and blood and bones. I am not a real person. It is that which is the matter. I long to be a real person, and I can't. I crawl sideways over other things like a crab: I wave my pincers and pinch. I am lost: I am nothing! And yet I know—how horribly I know it—there is something behind, more than the beastly idol with the wooden eye, which is all I know of my real self. If only I could find it! If only I could crack myself up like a nut and get to a kernel. For God's sake, Hughie, take the nut-crackers, and crack me. It is idle to ask you to do it. You have tried often enough. You will have to get a stronger nut-cracker. Meantime I am a nut, just a nut, with its hard bright shell. Seymour is another nut. There we shall be."

Hugh caught her by the wrists.

"I can't stand it, Nadine," he said. "You feel nothing for him. He is nothing to you. How can you marry him? It's profane: it's blasphemous. You say you can give nothing to anybody. Well, make the best of yourself. I can give all I am to you. Isn't that better than absolute *nil*? You can't give, but let me give. It's worship, it's all there is—"

She stood there with her wrists in his hands, his strong fingers bruising and crushing them. She could have screamed for the pain of it.

"No, and a thousand times no," she said. "I won't cheat."

"I ask you to cheat."

"And I won't. Hughie dear, press harder, hurt me more, so that you may see I

am serious. You may bite the flesh off me, you may strangle me, and I will stand quite still and let you do it. But I won't marry you. I won't cheat you. My will is stronger than your body, and I would die sooner."

"Then your marriage is a pure farce," said he.

"Come and laugh at it," she said.

CHAPTER VII

Hugh's intention had been to stay several days, at the least, with the Chesterfords, and he had brought down luggage that would last any reasonable person a fortnight. Unluckily he had not foreseen the very natural effect that the sight of Seymour would have on him, and as soon as lunch was over he took his hostess into a corner and presented the situation with his usual simplicity.

"It is like this, Aunt Dodo," he said. "I didn't realize exactly what it meant to me till I saw Seymour again. He drove me up from the station, and it got worse all the time. I thought perhaps since Nadine had chosen him, I might see him differently. I think perhaps I do, but it is worse. It is quite hopeless: the best thing I can do is to go away again at once."

Dodo had lit two cigarettes by mistake, and since, during their ride Jack had (wantonly, so she thought) accused her of wastefulness, she was smoking them both, holding one in each hand, in alternate whiffs. But she threw one of them away at this, and laid her hand on Hugh's knee.

"I know, my dear, and I am so dreadfully sorry," she said. "I was sure it would be so, and that's why I didn't want you to come here. I knew it was no good. I can see you feel really unwell whenever you catch sight of Seymour or hear anything he says. And about Nadine? Did you have a nice talk with her?"

Hugh considered.

"I don't think I should quite call it nice," he said. "I think I should call it necessary. Anyhow, we have had it and—and I quite understand her now. As that is so, I shall go away again this afternoon. It was a mistake to come at all."

"Yes, but probably it was a necessary mistake. In certain situations mistakes are necessary: I mean whatever one does seems to be wrong. If you had stopped away, you would have felt it wrong too."

"And will you answer two questions, Aunt Dodo?" he asked.

"Yes, I will certainly answer them. If they are very awkward ones I may not answer them quite truthfully."

"Well, I'll try. Do you approve of Nadine's marriage? Has it your blessing?"

"Yes, my dear: truthfully, it has. But it is right to tell you that I give my blessings rather easily, and when it is clearly no use attempting to interfere in a matter, it is better to bless it than curse it. But if you ask me whether I would have chosen Seymour as Nadine's husband, out of all the possible ones, why, I would not. I thought at one time that perhaps it was going to be Jack. But then Jack chose me, and, as we all know, a girl may not marry her stepfather, particularly if her mother is alive and well. But I should not have chosen you either, Hughie, if your question implies that. I used to think I would, but when Nadine explained to me the other day, I rather agreed with her. Of course she has explained to you."

Hugh looked at her with his honest, trustworthy, brown eyes.

"Several times," he said. "But if I agreed, I shouldn't be worrying. Now another question: Do you think she will be happy?"

"Yes, up to her present capacity. If I did not think she would be happy, I would not bless it. Dear Edith, for example, thinks it is a shocking and terrible marriage. For her I daresay it would be, but then it isn't she whom Seymour proposed to marry. They would be a most remarkable couple, would they not? I think Edith would kill him, with the intention of committing suicide after, and then determine that there had been enough killing for one day. And the next day suicide would appear quite out of the question. So she would write a funeral march."

Dodo held the admirable sensible view that if discussion on a particular topic is hopeless, it is much better to abandon it, and talk as cheerfully as may be about something different. But this entertaining diversion altogether failed to divert Hugh.

"You said she would be happy up to her present capacity?" he reminded her.

"Yes: that is simple, is it not? We develop our capacity for happiness; and misery, also, develops as well. Whether Nadine's capacity will develop much, I cannot tell. If it does, she may not be happy up to it. But who knows? We cannot spend our lives in arranging for contingencies that may never take place, and changes in ourselves that may never occur."

Dodo looked in silence for a moment at his grave reliable face, and felt a sudden wonder at Nadine for having chosen as she had done. And yet her reason for rejecting this extremely satisfactory youth was sound enough, their intellectual levels were such miles apart. But Dodo, though she did not express

her further thought, had it very distinct in her mind. "If she does develop emotionally like a woman," she said to herself, "there will not be a superfluity of happiness about. And she will look at you and wonder how she could have refused you."

But necessarily she did not say this, and Hugh got up.

"Well, then, at the risk of appearing a worse prig than John Sturgis," he said, "I may tell you that as long as Nadine is happy, the main object is accomplished. My own happiness consists so largely in the fact of hers. Dear me, I wonder you are not sick at my sententiousness. I am quite too noble to live, but I don't really want to die. Would it make Nadine happier if I told Seymour I should be a brother to him?"

Dodo laughed.

"No, Hughie; it would make her afraid that your brain had gone, or that you were going to be ill. It would only make her anxious. Is the motor around? I am sorry you are going, but I think you are quite right to do so. Always propose yourself, whenever you feel like it."

"I don't feel like it at present," said he. "But thanks awfully, Aunt Dodo."

Dodo felt extremely warmly towards this young man, who was behaving so very well and simply.

"God bless you, dear Hugh," she said, "and give you your heart's desire."

"At present my heart's desire appears to be making other plans for itself," said Hugh.

Esther had said once in a more than usually enlightened moment, that Nadine's friends did her feeling for her, and she observed them, and put what they felt into vivacious and convincing language and applied it to herself. Certainly Hugh, when he drove away again this afternoon, was keenly conscious of what Nadine had talked about to Edith: he felt lost, and the flag he had industriously waved so long for her seemed to be entirely disregarded. He hardly knew what he had hoped would have come of this ill-conceived visit, which had just ended so abruptly, but a vague sense of Nadine's engagement being too nightmare-like to be true had prompted him to go in person and find out. Also, it had seemed to him that when he was face to face with Nadine, asking her at point-blank range, whether she was going to marry Seymour, it was impossible that she should say "Yes." Something different must assuredly happen: either she would say it was a mistake, or something inside him must snap. But there was no mistake about it, and nothing had snapped. The world proposed to proceed just as usual. And he could not decline to proceed with it; unless you died you were obliged to proceed, however intolerable the journey,

however unthinkable the succession of days through which you were compelled to pass. Life was like a journey in an express train with no communication-cord. You were locked in, and could not stop the train by any means. Some people, of course, threw themselves out of the window, so to speak, and made violent ends to themselves; but suicide is only possible to people of a certain temperament, and Hugh was incapable of even contemplating such a step. He felt irretrievably lost, profoundly wretched, and yet quite apart from the fact that he was temperamentally incapable of even wishing to commit suicide, the fact that Nadine was in the world (whatever Nadine was going to do) made it impossible to think of quitting it. That was the manner and characteristic of his love: his own unhappiness meant less to him than the fact of her.

Until she had suggested it, the thought of traveling had not occurred to him; now, as he waited for his train at the station, he felt that at all costs he wanted to be on the move, to be employed in getting away from "the intolerable anywhere" that he might happen to be in. Wherever he was, it seemed that any other place would be preferable, and this he supposed was the essence of the distraction that travel is supposed to give. His own rooms in town he felt would be soaked with associations of Nadine, so too would be the houses where he would naturally spend those coming months of August and September. Not till October, when his duties as a clerk in the Foreign Office called him back to town, had he anything with which he felt he could occupy himself. An exceptional capacity for finding days too short and few, even though they had no duties to make the hours pass, had hitherto been his only brilliance; now all gift of the kind seemed to have been snatched from him: he could not conceive what to do with to-morrow or the next day or any of the days that should follow. An allowance of seven days to the week seemed an inordinate superfluity; he was filled with irritation at the thought of the leisurely march of interminable time.

He spent the evening alone, feeling that he was a shade less intolerable to himself than anybody else would have been; also, he felt incapable of the attention which social intercourse demands. His mind seemed utterly out of his control, as unable to remain in one place as his body. Even if he thought of Nadine, it wandered, and he would notice that a picture hung crooked, and jump up to straighten it. One such was a charming water-color sketch by Esther of the beach at Meering, with a splash of sunlight low in the West that, shining through a chimney in the clouds, struck the sea very far out, and made there a little island of reflected gold. Esther had put in this golden islet with some reluctance: she had said that even in Nature it looked unreal, and would look even more unreal in Art, especially when the artist happened to be herself. But Nadine had voted with Hugh on behalf of the golden island, just

because it would appear unreal and incredible. "It is only the unreal things that are vivid to us," she had said, "and the incredible things are just those which we believe in. Isn't that so, Hughie?"

How well he remembered her saying that; her voice rang in his ears like a haunting tune! And while Esther made this artistic sacrifice to the god of things as they are not, he and Nadine strolled along the firm sandy beach, shining with the moisture of the receding tide. She had taken his arm, and just as her voice now sounded in his ears, so he could feel the pressure of her hand on his coat.

"You live among unrealities," she said, "although you are so simple and practical. You are thinking now that some day you and I will go to live on that golden island. But there is no island really, it is just like the rest of the sea, only the sun shines on it."

The bitter truth of that struck him now as applied to her and himself. Though she had refused him before, the sun shone on those days, and not until she had engaged herself to Seymour did the gold fade. Not until to-day when he had definite confirmation of that from her own lips, had he really believed in her rejection of him. He well knew her affection for him; he believed, and rightly, that if she had been asked to name her best friend, she would have named none other than himself. It had been impossible for him not to be sanguine over the eventual outcome, and he had never really doubted that some day her affection would be kindled into flame. He had often told himself that it was through him that she would discover her heart. As she had suggested, he would some day crack the nut for her, and show her her own kernel, and she would find it was his.

And now all those optimisms were snuffed out. He had completely to alter and adjust his focus, but that could not be done at once. To-night he peered out, as it were upon familiar scenes, and found that his sight of them was misty and blurred. The whole world had vanished in cold gray mists. He was lost, quite lost, and ... and there was a letter for him on the table which he had not noticed. The envelope was obviously of cheap quality, and was of those proportions which suggest a bill. A bill it was from a bookseller, of four shillings and sixpence, incurred over a book Nadine had said she wanted to read. He had passed the bookseller's on his way home immediately afterwards and of course he had ordered it for her. She had not cared for it; she had found it unreal. "The man is meant to arouse my sympathy," she had said, "and only arouses my intense indifference. I am acutely uninterested in what happens to him." Hugh felt as if she had been speaking of himself, but the moment after knew that he did her an injustice. Even now he could not doubt the sincerity of her affection for him. But there was something frozen about it. It was like

sleet, and he, like a parched land, longed for the pity of the soft rain.

Hugh had a wholesome contempt for people who pity themselves, and it struck him at this point that he was in considerable danger of becoming despicable in his own eyes. He had been capable of sufficient manliness to remove himself from Nadine that afternoon, but his solitary evening was not up to that standard; he might as well have remained at Winston, if he was to endorse his refusal to dangle after her with nothing more virile than those drawling sentimentalities. She was not for him: he had made this expedition to-day in order to convince himself on that point, and already his determination was showing itself unstable, if it suffered him to dangle in mind though not in body. And yet how was it possible not to? Nadine, physically and tangibly, was certainly going to pass out of his life, but to eradicate her from his soul would be an act of spiritual suicide. Physically there was no doubt that he would continue to exist without her, spiritually he did not see how existence was possible on the same terms. But he need not drivel about her. There were always two ways of behaving after receiving a blow which knocked you down, and the one that commended itself most to Hugh was to get up again.

Lady Ayr at the end of the London season had for years been accustomed to carry out some innocent plan for the improvement and discomfort of her family. One year she dragged them along the castles by the Loire, another she forced them, as if by pumping, through the picture galleries of Holland, and this summer she proposed to show them a quantity of the English cathedrals. These abominable pilgrimages were made pompously and economically: they stayed at odious inns, where she haggled and bargained with the proprietors, but on the other hand she informed the petrified vergers and custodians whom she conducted (rather than was conducted by) round the cathedrals or castles in their charge, that she was the Marchioness of Ayr, was directly descended from the occupants of the finest and most antique tombs, that the castle in question had once belonged to her family, or that the gem of the Holbeins represented some aunt of hers in bygone generations. Here pomp held sway, but economy came into its own again over the small silver coin with which she rewarded her conductor. On English lines she had a third class carriage reserved for her and beguiled the tedium of journeys by reading aloud out of guide-books an account of what they had seen or what they were going to visit. Generally they put up at "temperance" hotels, and she made a point of afternoon tea being included in the exiguous terms at which she insisted on being entertained. John aided and abetted her in those tours, exhibiting an ogreish appetite for all things Gothic and mental improvement; and her husband followed her with a white umbrella and sat down as much as possible. Esther's part in them was that of a resigned and inattentive martyr, and she

fired off picture postcards of the places they visited to Nadine and others with "This is a foul hole," or "The beastliest inn we have struck yet" written on them, while Seymour revenged himself on the discomforts inflicted on him, by examining his mother as to where they had seen a particular rose-window or portrait by Rembrandt, and then by the aid of a guide-book proving she was wrong. Why none of them revolted and refused to go on these annual journeys, now that they had arrived at adult years, they none of them exactly knew, any more than they knew why they went, when summoned, to their mother's dreadful dinner-parties, and it must be supposed that there was a touch of the inevitable about such diversions: you might grumble and complain, but you went.

This year the tour was to start with the interesting city of Lincoln and the party assembled on the platform at King's Cross at an early hour. The plan was to lunch in the train, so as to start sight-seeing immediately on arrival, and continue (with a short excursion to the hotel in order to have the tea which had been included in the terms) until the fading light made it impossible to distinguish ancestral tombs or Norman arches. Lady Ayr had not seen Seymour since his engagement, and, as she ate rather grisly beef sandwiches, she gave him her views on the step. Though they were all together in one compartment the conversation might be considered a private one, for Lord Ayr was sleeping gently in one corner, John was absorbed in the account of the Roman remains at Lincoln (Lindum Colonia, as he had already announced), and Esther with a slightly leaky stylograph was writing a description of their depressing journey to Nadine.

"What you are marrying on, Seymour, I don't know," she said. "Neither your father nor I will be able to increase your allowance, and Nadine Waldenech has the appearance of being an expensive young woman. I hope she realizes she is marrying the son of a poor man, and that we go third class."

"She is aware of all that," said Seymour, wiping his long white finger-tips on an exceedingly fine cambric handkerchief, after swallowing a sandwich or two, "and we are marrying really on her money."

"I am not sure that I approve of that," said his mother.

"The remedy is obvious," remarked Seymour. "You can increase my allowance. I have no objection. Mother, would you kindly let me throw the rest of that sandwich out of the window? It makes me ill to look at it."

"We are not talking about sandwiches. Why do you not earn some money like other younger sons?"

"I do. I earned four pounds last week, with describing your party and other things, and there is my embroidery as well, which I shall work at more

industriously. I shall do embroidery in the evening after dinner while Nadine smokes."

Lady Ayr looked out of the window and pointed magisterially to the towers of some great church in the town through which the train was passing.

"Peterborough," she said. "We shall see Peterborough on our way back. Peterborough, John. Ayr and Esther, we are passing through Peterborough."

Esther looked out upon the mean backs of houses.

"The sooner we pass through Peterborough the better," she observed.

John turned rapidly over the leaves of his guide-book.

"Peterborough is seventy-eight miles from London, and contains many buildings of interest," he informed them.

Lady Ayr returned to Seymour.

"I hope you will insist on her leaving off smoking when you are married to her," she said. "I cannot say she is the wife I should have chosen for you."

"I chose her myself," observed Seymour.

"Tell me more about her. Certainly the Waldenechs are a very old family, there is that to be said. Is she serious? Does she feel her responsibilities? Or is she like her mother?"

Seymour brushed a few remaining sandwich-crumbs off his trousers.

"I think Aunt Dodo is one of the most serious people I know," he said. "She is serious about everything. She does everything with all her might. Nadine is not quite so serious as that. She is rather flippant about things like food and dress. However, no doubt my influence will make her more serious. But as a matter of fact I can't tell you about Nadine. A fortnight ago, when I proposed to her, I could have. I could have given you a very complete account of her. But I can't any longer: I am getting blind about her. I only know that it is she. Not so long ago I told her a quantity of her faults with ruthless accuracy, but I couldn't now. I can't see them any more: there's a glamor."

Esther looked up.

"Oh, Seymour," she said, "are you talking about Nadine? Are you falling in love with her? How very awkward! Does she know?"

Seymour pointed a withering finger at his sister.

"Little girls should mind their own business," he said.

"Oh, but it is my business. Nadine matters far more than any one else. She

might easily think it not right to marry you if you were in love with her."

Lady Ayr turned a petrifying gaze from one to the other.

"She seems a very extraordinary young person," she said. "And in any case Esther has no business to know anything about it."

"Whether she thinks it right or not, she is going to marry me," said Seymour.

Esther shook her head.

"You are indeed blind about Nadine," she said, "if you think she would ever do anything she thought wrong."

"You might be describing John," said Seymour rather hotly.

"Anyhow, Nadine is not like John."

"I see no resemblance," said Lady Ayr. "But it is something to know she would not do anything she thought wrong."

"When you say it in that voice, Mother," said Esther, "you make nonsense of it."

"The same words in any voice mean the same thing," said Lady Ayr.

Seymour sighed.

"I am on Esther's side for once," he said.

Esther turned to her brother.

"Seymour, you ought to tell Nadine you are falling in love with her," she said. "I really don't think she would approve. Why, you might become as bad as Hugh. Of course you are not so stupid as Hugh—ah, stupid is the wrong word—you haven't got such a plain kind of intellect as Hugh—which was Nadine's main objection—"

Seymour patted Esther's hand with odious superiority. "You are rather above yourself, my little girl," he said, "because just now I agreed with you. It has gone to your head, and makes you think yourself clever. Shut your eyes till we get to Lincoln. You will feel less giddy by degrees. And when you open them again, you can mind your own business, and mother will tell you about the Goths and Vandals who built the cathedral. You are a Vandal yourself: you will have a fellow-feeling. Mother, dear, put down that window. I am going to see cathedrals to please you, but I will not be stifled to please anybody. The carriage reeks of your beef sandwiches. But I think I have some scent in my bag."

"I am quite sure you have," said Esther scornfully. "I am writing to Nadine, by

the way. I shall tell her you are falling in love with her."

"You can tell her exactly what you please," said Seymour suavely. "Ah, here is some wall-flower scent. It is like a May morning. Yes, tell Nadine what you please, but don't bother me. What is the odious town we are coming to? I think it must be Lincoln. John, here is Lincoln, and all the people are ancient Romans."

Seymour obligingly sprayed the expensive scent about the carriage, even though they were so shortly to disembark.

"The river Witham," said John, pointing to a small and fetid ditch. "Remains of Roman villas—"

"The inhabitants of which died of typhoid," said Seymour. "Tell Nadine we are enjoying Lincoln, Esther. Had father better be allowed to sleep on, or shall I wake him? There is a porter: call him, Mother—I won't carry my bag even to save you sixpence. But don't tell him we are marchionesses and lords and ladies, because then he will expect a shilling. I perceive a seedy-looking 'bus outside. That is probably ours. It looks as if it came from some low kind of inn. I wish I had brought Antoinette. And yet I don't know. She would probably have given notice after seeing the degradation of our summer holiday."

"Seymour, you are making yourself exceedingly disagreeable," said his mother.

"It is intentional. You made yourself disagreeable to me: you began. As for you, Esther, you must expect to see a good deal less of Nadine after she and I are married. I will not have you mooning about the house, reminding her of all the damned—yes, I said damned—nonsense you and she and Berts and Hugh talked about the inequality of marriages where one person is clever and the other stupid, or where one loves and the other doesn't. You have roused me, you and mother between you, and I am here to tell you that I will manage my own affairs, which are Nadine's also, without the smallest assistance from you. Put that in—in your ginger-beer, or whatever we have for dinner, and drink it. You thought I was only a sort of thing that waved its hands and collected jade, and talked in rather a squeaky voice, and walked on its toes. Well, you have found out your mistake, and don't let me have to teach it you again. You can tell Nadine in your letter exactly what I have said. And don't rouse me again: it makes me hot. But mind your own business instead, and remember that when I want either your advice or mother's I will ask for it. Till then you can keep it completely to yourselves. You needn't answer me: I don't want to hear anything you have got to say. Let us go to the cathedral. I suppose it is that great cockshy on the top of the hill. I know it will prove to have been built by

our forefathers. The verger will like to know about it. But bear in mind I don't want to be told anything about Nadine."

Seymour had become quite red in the face with the violence of the feelings that prompted these straightforward remarks, and before putting the spray of wall-flower scent back into his bag, he shut his eyes and squirted himself in the face in order to cool himself, while Esther stared at him open-mouthed. She hardly knew him, for he had become exactly like a man, a transformation more unexpected than anything that ever happened at a pantomime, and she instantly and correctly connected this change in him with what he had been saying. For the reason of the change was perfectly simple and sufficient: during those last days at Winston, after the departure of Hugh, he had fallen in love with Nadine, and his nature, which had really been neither that of man or woman, had suddenly sexed itself. He had not in the least cast off his tastes and habits; to spray himself and a stuffy railway-carriage with wall-flower scent was still perfectly natural to him, and no doubt, unless Nadine objected very much, he would continue to take Antoinette about with him as his maid, but he had declared himself a man, and found, even as his sister found, that the change in him was as immense as it was unexpected. He thought with more than usual scorn of Nadine's friends, such as Esther and Berts, who all played about together like healthy, but mentally anemic, children, for he, the most anemic of them all, had suddenly had live blood, as it were, squirted into him. Indeed the only member of the clan whom he thought of with toleration was Hugh, with whom he felt a bond of brotherhood, for Hugh, like himself, loved Nadine like a man. Already also he felt sorry for him, recognizing in him a member of his own sex. Hitherto he had disliked his own sex, because they were men, now he found himself detesting people like Berts, because they were not. For men, so he had begun to perceive, are essentially those who are aware of the fact of women; the rest of them, to which he had himself till so lately belonged, he now classified as more or less intellectual amœbæ. And the corresponding members of the other sex were just as bad: Esther had no sense of sex, nor perhaps, and here he paused, had Nadine.

That, it is true, gave him long pause. He knew quite well that Nadine had been no more in love with him, when they had got engaged, than he had been with her. They had both been, and she so he must suppose was still, quite undeveloped as regards those instincts. Hugh with all his devotion and developed manliness awoke no corresponding flame in her, and Seymour was quite clear-sighted enough to see that there was no sign of his having succeeded where Hugh had failed. She belonged, as Dodo had remarked, to that essentially modern type of girl, which, unless she marries while quite young, will probably be spinster still at thirty. They had brains, they had a hundred intellectual and artistic interests, and studied mummies, or logic, or

Greek gems, or themselves, and lived in flats, eagerly and happily, and smoked and substituted tea for dinner. They knew of nothing in their natures that gave them any imperious call; on the other hand they called imperiously though unintentionally to others. Nadine had called like that to Hugh, and was dismayed at the tumult she had roused, regretting it, but not comprehending it. And now she had called like that to Seymour. She was like the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, calling in her sleep. Hugh had answered her first and had fought his way through thicket and briar, but his coming had not awakened her. Then she had called again, and this time Seymour stood by her. She had given him her hand, but her sleep had been undisturbed. She smiled at him, but she smiled in her sleep.

The seedy 'bus, of the type not yet quite extinct, with straw on the bottom of it, proved to be sent for them and they proceeded over cobbled streets, half deafened by the clatter of ill-fitting windows. After a minute or two of this Seymour firmly declined to continue, for he said the straw got up his trousers and tickled his legs, and the drums of his ears were bursting. So he got delicately out, in order to take a proper conveyance, and promised to meet the rest of them at the west door of the cathedral. Here he sat very comfortably for ten minutes till they arrived, and entering in the manner of a storming party, they literally stumbled over an astonished archdeacon who was superintending some measurement of paving stone immediately inside, and proved to be a cousin of Lady Ayr's. This fact was not elicited without pomp, for the cathedral was not open to visitors at this hour, as he informed them, on which Lady Ayr said, "I suppose there will be no difficulty in the way of the Marquis of Ayr—Ayr, this is an archdeacon—and his wife and family seeing it." Upon which "an" archdeacon said, "Oh, are you Susie Ayr?" Explanations of cousinship—luckily satisfactory—followed, and they were conducted round the cathedral by him free of all expense, and dined with him in the evening, at a quarter to eight, returning home at ten in order to get a grip of all they were going to see next day, by a diligent perusal of the guide-books.

They were staying at an ancient hostelry called the "Goat and Compasses," a designation the origin of which John very obligingly explained to them, but Seymour, still perhaps suffering from the straw at the bottom of the 'bus, thought that the "Flea and Compasses" would be a more descriptive title. No room was on the level with any other room or with the passage outside it, and short obscure flights of steps designed to upset the unwary communicated between them. A further trap was laid down for unsuspicious guests in the matter of doors and windows, for the doors were not quite high enough to enable the person of average height to pass through them without hitting his forehead against the jamb, and the windows, when induced to open, descended violently again in the manner of a guillotine. The floors were as wavy as the

pavement of St. Mark's at Venice, the looking-glasses seemed like dusky wells, at the bottom of which the gazer darkly beheld his face, and the beds had feather mattresses on them. Altogether, it was quite in the right style, except that it was not a "temperance hotel," for the accommodation of Lady Ayr on a tour of family culture, and she and John, after a short and decisive economical interview with the proprietor, took possession of the largest table in the public drawing-room, ejecting therefrom two nervous spinsters who had been looking forward to playing *Patience* on it, and spreading their maps of the town over it, read to each other out of guide-books, while Lord Ayr propped himself up dejectedly in a corner, where he hoped to drop asleep unperceived. The troublesome interview with the proprietor had been on the subject of making a deduction from the agreed terms, since they had all dined out. He was finally routed by a short plain statement of the case by Lady Ayr.

"If you can afford to take us in for so much, dinner included," she said, "you can afford to take us in for less without dinner. I think there is no more to be said on the subject. Breakfast, please, at a quarter past eight punctually and I shall require a second candle in my bedroom. I think your terms, which I do not say are excessive, included lights? *Thank* you!"

Seymour had declined to take part in this guide-book conference, saying with truth that he felt sure it would all be very completely explained to him next day, and let himself out into the streets of the town which were already growing empty of passengers. Above the sky was lucent with many stars, and the moon which had risen an hour before, cleared the house-roofs and shone down into the street with a very white light, making the gas-lamps look red. Last night it had been full, and from the terrace at Winston they had all watched it rise, full-flaring, over the woods below the house. Then he and Nadine had strolled away together, and in that luminous solitude with her, he had felt himself constrained and tongue-tied. He had no longer at command the talk that usually rose so glibly to his lips, that gay, witty, inconsequent gabble that had truthfully represented what went on in his quick discerning brain. His brain now was taken up with one topic only, and it was as hard for him to speak to her of that, as it was for him to speak of anything else. He knew that she had entered into her engagement with him, in the same spirit in which he had proposed to her. They liked each other; each found the other a stimulating companion; by each no doubt the attraction of the other's good looks was felt. She, he was certain, regarded him now as she had regarded him then, while for him the whole situation had undergone so complete a change, that he felt that the very fortress of his identity had been stormed and garrisoned by the besieging host. And what was the host? That tall girl with the white slim hands, who, without intention, had picked up a key and, cursorily, so it seemed, had unlocked his heart, so that it stood open to her.

Honestly, he did not know that it was made to unlock: he had thought of it always as some toy Swiss *châlet*, not meant to be opened. But she had opened it, and gone inside.

The streets grew emptier: lights appeared behind blinds in upper windows, and only an occasional step sounded on the pavements. He had come to an open market place, and from where he paused and stood the western towers of the cathedral rose above the intervening roofs, and aspired whitely into the dark velvet of the night. Hitherto, Seymour would have found nothing particular to say about moonlight, in which he took but the very faintest interest, except that it tended to provoke an untimely loquaciousness in cats. But to-night he found his mind flooded with the most hackneyed and commonplace reflections. It reminded him of Nadine; it was white and chaste and aloof like her ... he wanted her, and he was going to get her, and yet would she really be his in the sense that he was hers? Then for a moment habit asserted itself, and he told himself he was being common, that he was dropping to the level of plain and barbarous Hugh. It was very mortifying, yet he could not keep off that level. He kept on dropping there, as he stared at the moonlit towers of the cathedral, unsatisfied and longing. But it may be doubted whether he would have felt better satisfied, if he had known how earnestly Nadine had tried to drop, or rise, to the moonlit plane, or how sincerely, even with tears, she had deplored her inability to do so. For it was not he whom she had sought to join there.

CHAPTER VIII

Dodo was seated in her room in Jack's house in town, intermittently arguing with him and Miss Grantham and Edith and Berts, and in intervals looking up as many of her friends as she could remember the names of and asking them to her dance. The month was November, and the dance was for to-day week, which was the first of December, and as far as she had got at present, it appeared that all her friends were in town and that they would all come. Nadine was similarly employed next door, and as they both asked anybody who occurred to them, the same people frequently got asked twice over.

"Which," said Dodo, "is an advantage, as it looks as if we really wanted them very much. Oh, is that Esther? Esther, we are having a dance on December the first, and will you all come? Yes: wasn't it a good idea? That is nice. Of course, delighted if your mother cares to come, too—"

"Then I shan't," said Berts.

"Berts, shut up," said Dodo in a penetrating whisper. "Yes, darling Esther, Berts said something, but I don't know what it was as they are all talking together. Yes, a cotillion. Good-by. Look out Hendrick's Stores, Grantie. But I really won't lead the cotillion with Berts. It is too ridiculous: a man may not lead the cotillion with his grandmother: it comes in the prayer-book."

"Three thousand and seven," said Miss Grantham. "P'd'n't'n."

"Three double-o seven, Padd," said Dodo briskly, "please, miss. I always say, 'please, miss,' and then they are much pleasanter. I used to say 'I'm Princess Waldenech, please, miss,' but they never believed it, and said 'Garn!' But I was: darling Jack, I was! No, my days of leading the cotillion came to an end under William the Fourth. There is nothing so ridiculous as seeing an old thing — No, I'm not the Warwick Hotel? Do I sound like the Warwick Hotel?"

Dodo's face suddenly assumed an expression of seraphic interest.

"It's too entrancing," she whispered. "I'm sure it's a nice man, because he wants to marry me. He says I didn't meet him in the Warwick Hotel this morning. That was forgetful. Yes? Oh, he's rung off: he has jilted me. I wish I had said I was the Warwick Hotel: it was stupid of me. I wonder if you can be married by telephone with a clergyman taking the place of 'please, miss.' Where had we got to? Oh, yes, Hendrick's: three double-o seven, you idiot. I mean, please, miss. What? Thank you, miss. No, Nadine and Berts shall lead it."

"I would sooner lead with Lady Ayr," said Berts. "Nadine always forgets everything—"

"Oh, Hendrick's, is it?" said Dodo. "Yes, Lady Chesterford. I am really, and I want a band for the evening of December the first. No, not a waistband. Music. Yes, send somebody round." Dodo put down the ear-piece.

"Let us strive not to do several things together," she said. "For the moment we will concentrate on the cotillion. Jack dear, why did you suggest I should lead? It has led to so much talking, of which I have had to do the largest part."

"I want you to," he said. "I'll take you to Egypt in the spring, if you will. I won't otherwise."

"Darling, you are too unfair for words. You want to make an ass of me. You want everybody to say 'Look at that silly old grandmama.' I probably shall be a grandmama quite soon, if Nadine is going to marry Seymour in January —'Silly old grandmama,' they will say, 'capering about like a two-year-old.' Because I shall caper: if I lead, I shan't be able to resist kicking up."

Jack came across the room and sat on the table by her.

"Don't you want to, Dodo?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, darling, I should love to. I only wanted pressing. Oh, my beloved Berts, what larks! We'll have hoops, and snowballs, and looking-glass, and wooly-bear—don't you know wooly-bear?—and paper-bags and obstacles, and balance. And then the very next day I shall settle down, and behave as befits my years and riches and honor. I am old and Jack is rich, and has endowed me with all his worldly goods, and we are both strictly honorable. But I feel it's a hazardous experiment. If I hear somebody saying, as no doubt I shall, 'Surely, Lady Chesterford is a little old?' I shall collapse in the middle of the floor, and burst into several tears. And then I shall wipe my eyes, both of them if both have cried, and if not, one, and say, 'Beloved Berts, come on!' And on we shall go."

"You haven't asked Hugh yet," said Miss Grantham, looking at the list.

"Nadine did," said Dodo. "He said he wasn't certain. They argued."

"They do," said Berts. "Aunt Dodo, may I come to dine this evening, and have a practice afterwards?"

"Yes, my dear. Are you going? Till this evening then."

Dodo turned to Jack, and spoke low.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "Waldenech's in town. Nadine saw him yesterday."

"Glad I didn't," said Jack.

"I'm sure you are, darling. But here we all are, you know. You can't put him out like a candle. About the dance, I mean. I think I had better ask him. He won't come, if I ask him."

"He won't come anyhow, my dear," said Jack.

"You can't tell. I know him better than you. He's nasty, you know, poor dear. If I didn't ask him, he might come. He might think he ought to have been asked, and so come instead. Whereas if he was asked, he would probably think it merely insulting of me, and so stop at home."

"Don't whisper to each other," said Edith loudly. "I can't bear a husband and wife whispering to each other. It looks as if they hadn't got over the honeymoon. Dodo, I haven't had a single word with you yet—"

"Darling Edith, you haven't. If you only would go to the other end of the telephone, I would talk to you for hours, simply to thwart the 'please, miss' who asks if we haven't done yet. The only comfortable conversation is conducted on the telephone. Then you say 'hush' to everybody else in the room. Indeed, it isn't usually necessary to say 'hush.' Anybody with a proper

interest in the affairs of other people always listens to what you say, trying to reconstruct what the inaudible voice says. Jack was babbling down the telephone the other day, when I particularly wanted to talk, but when he said 'Never let him shave her again,' how could I interrupt?"

"Did he shave her again?" asked Miss Grantham. "Who was she?"

"You shouldn't have said that," said Dodo, "because now I have to explain. It was the poodle, who had been shaved wrong, and she had puppies next day, and they probably all had hair in the unfashionable places. Please talk to each other, and not about poodles. Jack and I have a little serious conversation to get through."

"I will speak," said Edith, "because it matters to me. We've let our house, Dodo, at least Bertie let it, and has gone to Bath, because he is rheumatic; Berts can stay at the Bath Club, because he isn't, but I want to stay with you."

"The house is becoming like Basle railway-station," remarked Jack.

"Yes, dear. Every proper house in town is," said Dodo. "A house in London isn't a house, it is a junction. People dine and lunch and sleep if they have time. I haven't. Yes, Edith, do come. Jack wants you, too, only he doesn't say so, because he is naturally reticent."

Edith instantly got up.

"Then may I have some lunch at once?" she said. "Cold beef will do. But I have a rehearsal at half-past one."

The telephone bell rang, and Dodo took up the ear-piece.

"No, Lady Chesterford is out," she said. "But who is it? It's Waldenech, Jack," she said in a low voice. "No, she hasn't come in yet. What? No: she isn't expected at all. She is quite unexpected."

She replaced the instrument.

"I recognized his voice," she said, "and I oughtn't to have said I was unexpected, because perhaps he will guess. But he sounded a bit thick, don't they say? Yes, dear Edith, have some cold beef, because it is much nicer than anything else. I shall come and have lunch in one minute, too, as I didn't have any breakfast. Take Grantie away with you, and I will join you."

"I won't have cold beef, whatever happens," said Grantie.

Dodo turned round, facing Jack, as soon as the others had left the room, and laid her hand on his knee.

"Jack, I feel sure I am right," she said. "I don't want Waldenech here any more than you do. But after all, he is Nadine's father. I wish Madge or Belle or somebody who writes about society would lay down for us the proper behavior for re-married wives towards their divorced husbands."

"I can tell you the proper behavior of divorced husbands towards re-married wives," said Jack.

"Yes, darling, but you must remember that Waldenech has nothing to do with proper behavior. He always behaved most improperly. If he hadn't, I shouldn't be your wife now. I think that must be an instance of all things working together for good, as St. Peter says."

"Paul," remarked Jack.

"Very likely, though Peter might be supposed to know most about wives. Jack, dear, let us settle this at once, because I am infernally hungry, and the thought of Edith's eating cold beef makes me feel homesick. I think I had much better ask Waldenech to our dance. There he is: I've known him pretty well, and it's just because he is nothing more than an acquaintance now, that I wish to ask him. To ask him will show the—the gulf between us."

Jack shook his head.

"I prefer to show the gulf by not asking him," he said.

Dodo frowned, and tapped the skirt of her riding-habit with her whip. She was rather tired and very hungry, for she had been playing bridge till two o'clock the night before, and had got up at eight to go out riding, and, meaning to have breakfast afterwards, had found herself plunged in the arrangements for her ball, which had lasted without intermission till this moment. But she felt unwilling to give this point up, unless Jack absolutely put his foot down with regard to it.

"I think I am right," she said. "He is rather a devil."

"All the more reason for not asking him."

"Do you mean that you forbid me?" she asked.

He thought for a moment.

"Yes, I forbid you," he said.

Dodo got up at once, flicked him in the face with the end of her riding-whip, and before he had really time to blink, kissed him on exactly the same spot, which happened to be the end of his nose.

"That is finished, then," she said in the most good-humored voice. "And now I

have both the whip and the whip-hand. If anything goes wrong, darling, I shall say 'I told you so,' till you wish you had never been born."

He caught her whip and her hands in his.

"You couldn't make me wish that," he said.

Her whole face melted into a sunlight of adorable smiles.

"Oh, Jack, do you really mean that?" she asked. "And because of me?"

He pulled her close to him.

"I suppose I should mean in spite of you," he said. "Go and eat with that ogre Edith. And then, darling, will you rest a little? You look rather tired."

She raised her eyes to his.

"But I am tired," she said. "It would be a disgrace not to be tired every day. It would show you hadn't made the most of it."

"I don't like you to be tired," he said, "especially since it isn't lunch-time yet. You haven't got much more to do, to-day, I hope."

"But lots, and all so jolly. Oh, my dear, the world is as full as the sea at high-tide. It would be wretched not to fling oneself into it. But it is only high-tide till after my dance. Then we go down to Meering, and snore, and sleep like pigs and eat like kittens, and sprout like mushrooms."

"You've asked a houseful there," objected Jack.

"Yes, darling, but it's only people like you and Esther and Hugh. I shan't bother about you."

"Is Hugh coming there?" he asked.

"Yes. He goes abroad directly afterwards, as he has exchanged from the Foreign Office into the Embassy at Rome for six months. He is wise, I think. He doesn't want to be here when Nadine is married, nor for some time afterwards. But he wants to see her again first."

"The rest is wise," said Jack, "but that is abominably foolish."

"Perhaps it is, but how one hates a young man to be altogether wise. A wise young man is quite intolerable. In fact wisdom generally is intolerable. It would be intolerable of me to lie down after lunch, and not eat and drink what I chose. You would be intolerable if you didn't make yourself so utterly foolish about me. Oh, Jack, let us die if necessary, but don't let us be wise before that."

Jack had nothing to say to this remarkable aspiration, and Dodo went out to join Edith. But he sat still on the edge of the table after she had gone, not

altogether at ease. During the last month or so, he had several times experienced impulses not to be accounted for rationally, which had made him ask her if she felt quite well, and now that he collected these occasions in his mind, he could not recollect any very reassuring response on her part. She had told him not to fuss, she had stood before him, radiant, brilliant and said, "Do I look particularly unwell? Why do you want to spoil the loveliest time of all my life?" But she did not seem to have given him any direct answer at all, and the cumulative effect of those possible evasions troubled him a little. But he soon told himself that such a cloud was born of his imagination only, for it was impossible to conceive, when he let himself contemplate the memory of those days since last July, that there could be anything wrong behind them, in so serene a beneficence of happiness were they wrapped. He had never dreamed that the world held such store, and he had not ever so faintly realized how jejune and barren his life had been before. He, for all his fifty years, had not yet lived one-half of them, for less than half himself had passed through the months that made them up. It was as if all his life he had dreamed, dreamed with God knew what shocks and catastrophes that Dodo was his, and last July only he awoke to find that his arms were indeed about her, and that she herself was pressed close to him. And she, too, had told him that she was happy, not pleased merely, or excited or thrilled, but happy. Incredible as it seemed to his modest soul, her happiness was one with his. It seemed there was nothing left to ask God for; the only possible attitude was to stand up and praise and thank Him. Jack did that every day and night that passed.

Dodo, when she left her husband, had not gone straight to the dining-room to join Edith and the cold beef. For half an hour before, she had been conscious of a queer and rather sickening pain, that had made it an effort to continue enthusiastically telephoning and arguing. She had had no real doubt in her own mind that it was the result of a rather strenuous morning without any food except the slice of bread and butter that had accompanied her early bedroom tea, but she thought that she would go upstairs and have her hot bath, which was sure to make her quite comfortable, before she ate. Her bathroom which opened out of her bedroom was prepared for her, the water steaming and smelling of the delicious verbena-salts which her maid had put into it, and convinced that she would feel perfectly fit again after it, she quickly undressed, and went in with bare feet to enjoy herself. But even as she took off her dressing-gown, she had a start of pain that for the moment frightened her, and caused her to stand naked by her bath, holding on to the edge of it. Then the pain gradually drew away, as if pulled out of her by a string, and in a minute more she was quite herself again. But there was the memory of it left, like a black patch, so it seemed, even when it had quite ceased. However, it had gone now, and instinctively obeying the habit of years, she swiftly turned her mind to contemplate the thoroughly delightful things that lay in front of

her, rather than the disturbing moment that had passed now, leaving only a black patch in memory. But before she slipped into the hot aromatic water, she wiped the sweat from her forehead. She splashed the steaming water over her back, wriggling a little at the touch of it.

"O Lord, how nice!" she said to herself. "And it's hardly possible to bear it. And that reminds me that I utterly forgot to say my prayers this morning, because I was in such a hurry. Any one would have been on such a lovely morning, with such a lovely horse waiting at the door. But I am having the nicest time that anybody ever had, and I'll try not to be quite such a disgrace as I used to be."

Dodo gave a loud sigh of reverent content and splashed again. It must be understood that she was saying her forgotten prayers.

"And Jack's a perfect darling," she went on, "and I am so pleased to love somebody. I never loved anybody before really, if you know what I mean by love, except perhaps Nadine. It makes the most tremendous difference, and one doesn't think about oneself absolutely all the time, though I daresay very nearly. Of course I was always fond of people, but I think that was chiefly because they were mostly so nice to me. I must go to church next Sunday, which is to-morrow, and do all this properly, but it would have been much more convenient if it had been the day after to-morrow, as I think I promised Jack to play golf with him to-morrow. But I'll see what can be done. Now I've dropped the soap, and isn't everything extraordinarily mixed up! Oh, please don't let me have any more pain like what I had just now, if it's all the same; but of course if I must have it, well, there it is. But I hope it doesn't mean anything nasty—"

Dodo dropped the soap which she had just rescued from the bottom of the cloudy water, and looked up with bright eyes.

"Oh, my dear, can it be that?" she said aloud. "Is it possible?"

She recollected that she had said "my dear" when she was by way of saying her forgotten prayers, and so added "Amen" very loudly and piously. Then, quite revivified, she got out, dried herself with great speed and went downstairs half-dressed, with an immense fur-coat to cover deficiencies, since it was impossible to wait any longer for food. She felt no fatigue any more, but a sudden intense eagerness at the thought of what possibly that pain might mean. It seemed almost incredible, but she found herself almost longing for a return of that which had frightened her before.

It was impossible for her to cram any more engagements into that day, since they already fitted into each other like the petals of a rose not yet fully blown, but she made an appointment with her doctor for next morning. The interview

was not a long one, but Dodo came out from it, wreathed in smiles, immensely excited, and hurried home, where she went straight up to Jack's room. She seized him with both hands, and kissed him indiscriminately.

"Oh, my dear, you can't possibly guess," she said, "because it is quite too ridiculous, and only a person like me could possibly have done anything of the kind, and you're Zacharias, but you needn't be dumb. Oh, Jack, don't you see? Yes: it's that. I'm going to have a baby, instead of cancer. I was prepared—at least not quite—for its being cancer, which I shouldn't have enjoyed at all, but Dr. Ingram says it's the other thing. Did you ever hear anything so nice, and I am a very wonderful woman, aren't I, and pray God it will be a boy! Oh, Jack, think how bored I was with the bearing of my first child. I didn't deserve it, and you used to come and cheer me up. And then, poor little innocent, it was taken from me. Poor little chap: he would have been Lord Chesterford now instead of you if he had lived. Won't it seem funny giving birth to the same baby, so to speak, twice? Ah, my dear, but it's not the same! It's your child this time, Jack, and I shan't be bored this time. You see I didn't really become a woman at all till lately. I was merely a sprightly little devil, and so I suppose God is giving me another chance. Jack, it simply must be a boy: I shall love to hear Lord Harchester cry this time."

Jack, though informed that he needn't be like Zacharias, had been dumb because there was no vacant moment to speak in. The news had amazed and astounded him.

"Oh, Dodo!" he said. "Next to yourself, that is the best gift of all. But I'm not sure I forgive you, for suspecting you were ill, and not telling me."

"Then I shall get along quite nicely without your forgiveness," said she. "Forgiveness, indeed! Or will it be twins? Wouldn't that be exciting? But a boy anyhow: I've ordered him, and he shall have one blue eye because he's yours and one brown eye because he's mine, and so he'll be like a Welsh collie, and every one will say: 'What a pretty little dog; does he bite?' Jack, I hope he'll be rather a rip when he grows up and make his love to other people's wives. I suppose I oughtn't to wish that, but I can't help it. I like a boy with a little dash in him. He shall be about as tall as you, but much better looking, and oh, to think that I once had a boy before, and didn't care! My conscience! I care now, and only yesterday I said I should probably soon be a grandmother, and now I've got to leave out the grand, and be just a humble mother first. I'm not humble: I'm just as proud as I can stick together."

Suddenly this amazing flood of speech stopped, and Dodo grew dim-eyed, and laid her head on her husband's shoulder.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord!" she whispered.

The night of Dodo's ball had arrived, and she was going to lead the cotillion, but not dance more than she felt to be absolutely necessary. She had told everybody what was going to happen to her, in strict privacy, which was clearly the best way of keeping it secret for the present. Since she was not going to dance more than a step or two she had put on all the jewels she could manage to attach to herself, including the girdle of great emeralds that Waldenech had given her. This was a magnificent adornment, far too nice to give back to him when she divorced him, and she meant to let Nadine have it, as soon as she could bear to part with it herself, which did not seem likely to happen in the immediate future. It consisted of large square stones set in brilliants, and long pear-shaped emeralds depended from it. Jack had once asked her how she could bear to wear it, and she had said: "Darling, when emeralds are as big as that, they help you to bear a good deal. They make a perfect Spartan of me." In other respects she wore what she called the "nursery fender," which was a diamond crown so high that children would have been safe from falling over it into the fire, the famous Chesterford pearls, and a sort of breast-plate of rubies, like the High-priest.

"I suppose it's dreadfully vulgar to wear so many jewels," she said to Jack, as they took their stand at the top of the stairs, where Dodo intended to remain and receive her guests, as long as she could bear not being in the ball-room, "but most people who have got very nice stones like me I notice are vulgar. The truly refined people are those who have got three garnets and one zircon. They also say that big pearls, great eggs like these, are vulgar and seed-pearls tasteful. What a word, 'tasteful'! And they talk of people's being very simply and exquisitely dressed. Thank God, no one can say I'm simply dressed to-night. I'm not: I'm the most elaborate object for miles round. Jack, when my baby— Dear Lady Ayr, how nice to see you, and Esther and John. Seymour dined here, and he has been taking notes of our clothes for the new paper called *Gowns*!"

As in the old days, when Dodo piped, the world danced, and she was as vital, as charged with that magnetism that spreads enjoyment round itself more infectiously than influenza, to-night as ever. Her beauty, too, was like a rose, full-blown, but without one petal yet fallen: and she stood there, in the glory of her incomparable form, jeweled and superb, a Juno decked for a feast among the high gods. All the world of her friends streamed up the stairs to be welcomed by that wonderful smiling face, and many instead of going in to the ball-room waited round the balustrade at the stair-head watching her. By degrees the tide of arriving guests slackened, and she turned to Jack.

"Jack dear, the band is turning all my blood into champagne," she said. "Come and have one turn with me round the ball-room. Why are they all standing about, instead of going to dance? Do they want to be shown how? Just once

round, or perhaps twice, and then I will stop quiet until the cotillion."

Dodo suddenly knit her eyebrows, and looked sharply down into the hall below.

"I was right, and you were wrong," she said. "There's Waldenech just come in. He is not going to come upstairs. Wait here for me."

Jack stepped forward.

"No, that's for me to do," he said

Dodo laid her hand on his arm.

"Do as I tell you, my dear," she said. "Wait here: it won't take me a minute."

She went straight down into the hall: all smiles and gaiety had left her face, but its vitality was quite unimpaired. The color that was in her cheeks had left them, but it was not fear that had driven it away, but anger. He was just receiving a ticket for his hat and coat, and she went straight up to him.

"Waldenech, take your hat and coat, and go away," she said. "You must have come to the wrong house, you were not asked here."

He turned at the sound of her voice, and looked up at her.

"You incomparable creature," he said rather thickly. "You pearl!"

"Give the Prince his hat and coat," said Dodo. "Now go, Waldenech, before I disgrace you. I mean it: if you do not go quietly and at once, you shall be turned out."

His eyes wandered unsteadily from her face to her bosom, and down to her waist where the great girdle gleamed and shone.

"You still wear the jewels I gave you," he said.

Dodo instantly undid the clasp, and the girdle fell on to the carpet.

"I do not wear them any more," she said. "Take them, and go."

He stood there for a moment without moving. Then he bent down and picked them up.

"I ask your pardon most humbly," he said. "I am a gentleman, really. Please let me see you put the girdle on again, before I go; and say you forgive me. If your husband knows I am here, ask his pardon for me also."

Some great wave of pity came over Dodo, utterly quenching her anger.

"Oh, Waldenech, you have all my forgiveness, my dear," she said. "But take the jewels."

"I ask you to give me that sign of your forgiveness," he said.

Dodo smiled at him.

"Fasten it yourself, then," she said.

His fingers halted over this, but in a moment he had found and secured the clasp.

"Good-night," he said.

The whole scene had lasted not more than a minute, and scarcely half-a-dozen people had seen her speaking to him, or knew who it was. Berts, who had just arrived, was one of these. Dodo turned to him.

"Ah, there you are, Berts," she said. "We are going to begin the cotillion exactly at twelve. Yes, poor dear Waldenech looked in, but he couldn't stop. You might remember not to tell Nadine. And why wasn't Edith here for dinner? Or isn't she staying here now? Now I come to think of it I haven't seen her all day."

"She left you yesterday," said Berts, "and I've just left her at home eating a chop and correcting proofs of a part-song. She was also singing. She's coming though, and says she will lead the cotillion with me, and she's sure you oughtn't to. She didn't say why."

Dodo went up to Jack.

"He went like a lamb, poor dear," she said, "though I thought for a moment he was going to stop like a lion. It gave me a little heart-ache, Jack, for, after all, you know— Now we are going twice round the ball-room. It isn't much of a heart-ache, it's only a little one, and I expect it will soon stop."

This, it may be expected, was the case, for certainly Dodo did not behave as if she had any kind of ache, however little, anywhere, and, whether she danced or sat still, was the sun and center of the brilliant scene. Wall-flowers raised their heads on her approach, and were galvanized into vitality. She ordained that there should be a waltz in which nobody should take part who was not over forty, led off herself with Lord Ayr, who had not had a wink of sleep all evening, and was far too much surprised to be capable of resistance, and convinced him that his dancing days were not nearly over yet. All manner of women who had hoped that nobody dreamed that they were more than thirty-five at the most followed her, reckless of the antiquity which they had publicly and irrevocably acknowledged, while Edith Arbuthnot, arriving in the middle of this and being quite unable to find a disengaged gentleman of suitable years, pirouetted up and down the room all by herself, until she clawed hold of Jack, who was taking the breathless Lady Ayr to get some strictly unalcoholic

refreshment.

"I don't know how I came to do it," said this lady to Esther, as she drank her lemonade. "I haven't danced for years. Somehow I feel as if it was Lady Chesterford's fault. She has got into everybody's head, it seems to me. We're all behaving like boys and girls. Fancy Ayr dancing, too! Ayr, I saw you dancing."

Lord Ayr had come in with Dodo, at the end of this, unutterably briskened up.

"And I saw you dancing, my dear," he said. "And I hope you feel all the better for it, because I do."

"We all do," said Dodo, "and we'll all do it again. I want everything at once, a cigarette and an ice and a glass of champagne and Berts. Esther, be angelic and fetch me Berts. Don't tell him only I want him, but fetch him. Oh, Jack, isn't it fun: yes, darling, we're going to begin the cotillion immediately, and I'm going to be ever so quiet. Edith, it was dear of you to offer to take my place, but I wouldn't give it up to Terpsichore herself or even Salome. Jack dear, go and make every one go and sit down in two rows round the ball-room, and if anybody finds a rather large diamond about, it's probably mine, though I never wrote my name on it.... Wasn't it careless? It resembles the *Koh-i-noor*. Oh, Berts, there you are. Now don't lose your head, but give all the plainest women the most favors. Then the pretty ones will easily see the plan, and the plain ones won't. It's the greatest happiness for the plainest number."

Certainly it was the most successful cotillion. As Dodo had arranged, all the more unattractive people got selected first, and all the more attractive, as Dodo had foreseen, saw exactly what was happening. The style was distinctly anti-Leap-year and in the mirror-figure men, instead of women, rejected the faces in the glass, and Lord Ayr had nothing whatever to say to his wife, who was instantly accepted by Jack. And at the end, the band preceding, they danced through the entire house, from cellar to garret. They waltzed through drawing-rooms and dining-room, and up the stairs, and through Dodo's bedroom, and through Jack's dressing-room, where his pajamas were lying on his bed (Berts put them on *en passant*), and into *cul-de-sacs*, and impenetrable servants' rooms. And somehow it was Dodo all the time who inspired these childish orgies: those near her saw her, those behind danced wildly after her. There was no accounting for it, except in the fact that while she was enjoying herself so enormously, it was impossible not to enjoy too. Sometimes it was she shrieking, "Yes, straight on," sometimes it was her laugh-choked voice, saying "No, don't go in there," but the fact that she was leading them, with her nursery fender, and her vitality, and her ropes of pearls, and her complete *abandon* to the spirit of dancing, with Berts for partner in Jack's pajamas, made a magnet that it was impossible not to follow. They passed

through bedroom and attic, they went twice round the huge kitchen, where the *chef*, at Dodo's imperious command, laid down his culinary implements (which at the moment meant an ice-pail) and joined the dance with the first kitchen-maid. Then Dodo saw a footman standing idle, and called to him, "Take my maid, William," and William with a broad grin embraced a perfectly willing Frenchwoman of great attractions, and joined in the dance. Like the fairies in a Midsummer-night's Dream, they danced the whole hour through, Dodo with Berts, the chef with the kitchen-maid, William with Dodo's maid, Lord Ayr with Nadine, Lady Ayr with somebody whom nobody knew by sight, who had probably come there by mistake, and the first twenty couples or so finished up in the cellar. This, though it seemed improvised, had been provided for, and there were cane-chairs to rest in, and bottles instantly opened. The rest, following the band, danced their way back to the supper-room, where they were almost immediately joined by the cellar party, who were hungry as well as thirsty, and had nothing to eat down below.

It was between three and four o'clock that the last guests took their ways. As the dance had been announced to take place from ten till two, the cordial spirit of the invitation had been made good. And at length Dodo found herself alone with Jack.

"Lovely, just lovely," she said, as he unclasped her diamond collar. "Oh, Jack, what a darling world it is!"

"Not tired?"

Dodo faced round, and her brilliance and freshness was a thing to marvel at

"Look at me!" she said. "Tell me if I look tired!"

He laid the collar down on her table: her neck seemed to him so infinitely more beautiful than the gorgeous bauble with which it had been covered, a Beauty released from beauteous bonds.

"Not very. Ah, Dodo, and this is the best of all, when they have all gone, and you are left."

She put her face up to his.

"Why, of course," she said. "Do you suppose I wasn't looking forward to this one minute alone with you all the evening? I was, my dear, though if I said I thought of it all the time, I should be telling a silly lie. But it was anchored firmly in my mind all the time. Oh, what pretty speeches for a middle-aged old couple to make to each other! But the fact is that we get on very nicely together. Good-night, old boy. It's all too lovely. Oh, Daddy! Fancy becoming Daddy! Oh, by the way, did Hugh come? I didn't see him."

"Yes, he sat out a couple of dances with Nadine, and then went away."

"Poor old chap!" said Dodo.

As has been mentioned, Dodo proposed to take her family and a great many other people as well to spend Christmas down at Meering, which at this inclement time of the year often had spells of warm and genial weather. Scattered through the same weeks there were to be several shooting-parties at Winston, but motor-cars, driven at a sufficiently high speed, made light of the difficulty of being in two places at the same time, and on the day after the dance she talked these arrangements over with Nadine.

"In any case," she said, "you can be hostess in one house and I, in the other, so that we can be in two places at once quite easily, so Jack is wrong as usual. Jack dear, I said 'as usual.'"

Jack got up: it was he who had made the ill-considered remark that you can't be in two places at once.

"I heard," he said, "and you may hear, too, that I will not have you going up to North Wales every other day, and flying down again the next. Otherwise you may settle what you like. Personally, I shall be at Winston almost all the time, as there's a heap of business to be done, and as Nadine hates shooting-parties —"

"Oh, a story!" said Nadine.

"Well, my dear, you always do your best to spoil them by making a large quantity of young gentlemen, who have been asked to shoot, sit round you and talk to you instead."

"Papa Jack, if you want to call me a flirt, pray do so. I will forgive you instantly. And to save you trouble, I will tell you what you are driving to—"

"At," said Jack.

"Driving to," repeated Nadine with considerable asperity, for she was aware she was wrong. "You want me to be at Meering, and Mama to be at Winston. So why not say so without calling me a flirt?"

"This daughter of Eve—" began Jack.

"My name is Dorothea," interrupted Dodo, "but they call me Dodo for short. I was never called Eve either before, during, or after baptism."

"All I mean," said Jack, "is that Dorothea is not going to divide the week into week-ends, and be twenty-four hours at Meering and then twenty-four at Winston. The master of the house has spoken."

"What a bully!" said Nadine.

"Then I shan't give you a wedding-present," said Jack.

"Darling Papa Jack, you are not a bully. Let's all go down to Meering in a few days, and stop there over Christmas. Then you and Dorothea shall go to Winston, and I shall be left all alone at Meering, and you shall have your horrid shooting-parties and she shall do the flirting instead of me."

"Strictly speaking, will you be all alone at Meering?"

"Not absolutely. I have asked a few friends."

"Who is going to chaperone you all, darling?" said Dodo.

"We shall chaperone each other, as usual."

"That you and Dodo can settle," said Jack. "Good-by: don't quarrel."

"Indeed, that will be all right, Mama," said Nadine, "or I daresay Edith would come. Anyhow, we were often all together before like that in the summer."

"Yes, my dear, but it's a little different now," said Dodo. "You are engaged to Seymour, and Hugh is going to be there, too."

"Yes, but that makes it all the simpler."

Dodo got up.

"I wonder if you realize that Seymour is in love with you," she said. "In love with you like Hugh is, I mean."

"Perfectly, and he is charming about it," said Nadine. "And I practise every morning being in love with him like that. I think I am getting on very well. I dreamed about him last night. I thought he gave me a great box of jade and when I opened it, there was a rabbit inside—"

"That shows great progress," said Dodo.

"Mama, I think you are laughing at me. But what would you have? I am very fond of him, he is handsome and clever and charming. I expected to find it tiresome when he told me he was in love like that, but it is not the least so."

Memories of the man she had married when she was even younger than Nadine, came unbidden into Dodo's mind: she remembered her first husband's blind, dog-like devotion and her own *ennui* when he strove to express it, to communicate it to her.

"Nadine," she said, "treat it reverently, my dear. There is nothing in the world that a man can give a woman that is to be compared to that. It is better than a rabbit in a jade-box. When I was even younger than you, Papa Jack's cousin

gave it me, and—and I didn't reverence it. Don't repeat my irreparable error."

"Weren't you nice to him?" asked Nadine.

"I was a brute beast to him, my darling."

"Oh, I shan't be a brute beast to Seymour," said Nadine. "Besides, I don't suppose you were. You didn't know: wasn't that all?"

Dodo wiped the mist from her eyes.

"No, that wasn't nearly all. But be tender with it, and pray, oh, my dear, pray, that you may catch that—that 'noble fever.' Who calls it that? It is so true. And Hughie? I never saw him last night."

Nadine made a little gesture of despair.

"Ah, dear Hughie," she said. "That is not very happy. That is so largely why I wanted to marry Seymour quickly, in January instead of later, so that it may be done, and Hughie will not fret any more. I hate seeing him suffer, and I can't marry him. It would not be fair: it would be cheating him, as I told him before."

"But you are not cheating Seymour?" asked Dodo.

"Not in the same way. He is not simple, like Hugh. Hugh has only one thought: Seymour has plenty of others. He has such a mind: it is subtle and swift like a woman's. Hughie has the mind of a great retriever dog, and the eyes of one. There is all the difference in the world between them. Seymour knows what he is in for, and still wants it. Hugh thinks he knows, but he doesn't. I understand Hugh so well: I know I am right. And I would have given anything to be able to be in love with him. It was a pity!"

There was something here that Dodo had not known and there was a dangerous sound about it.

"Do you mean you wish you were in love with him?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, Mama, but I'm not. I used to practice trying to be for months and months, just as I am practising for Seymour now. La, la, what a world!"

Nadine paused a moment.

"Of course I've quite stopped practising being in love with Hugh since I was engaged to Seymour," she said with an air of the most candid virtue. "That *would* be cheating."

Nadine got up looking like a tall white lily.

"Seymour is so good for me," she said. "He doesn't think much of my brain,

you know, and I used to think a good deal of it. He doesn't say I'm stupid, but he hasn't got the smallest respect for my mind. I am not sure whether he is right, but I expect seeing so much of Hugh made me think I was clever. I wonder if being in love makes people stupid. He himself seems to me to be not quite so subtle as he was, and perhaps it's my fault. What do you think, Mama?"

CHAPTER IX

It was the morning after Christmas Day, and Dodo and Jack had just driven off from Meering on their way to Winston, where a shooting-party was to assemble that day, leaving behind them a party that regretted their departure, but did not mean to repine. Edith Arbuthnot had promised to arrive two days before, to take over from Dodo the duty of chaperone, but she had not yet come, nor had anything whatever been heard of her.

"Which shows," said Berts lucidly, "that nothing unpleasant can have happened to mother, or we should have heard."

Until she came Nadine had very kindly consented to act as regent, and in that capacity she appeared in the hall a little while after Dodo had gone, with a large red contadina umbrella, a book or two, and an expressed determination to sit out on the hillside till lunch-time.

"It is boxing-day, I know," she said, "but it is too warm to box, even if I knew how. The English climate has gone quite mad, and I have told my maid to put my fur coat in a box with those little white balls until May. Now I suppose you are all going to play the foolish game with those other little white balls till lunch."

Seymour was seated in the window-sill, stitching busily at a piece of embroidery which Antoinette had started for him.

"I am going to do nothing of the sort," he said. "It is much too fine a day to do anything so limited as to play golf. Besides there is no one here fit to play with. Nadine, will you be very kind and ring for my maid? I am getting in a muddle."

Berts, who was sitting near him, got up, looking rather ill. Also he resented being told he was not fit to play with.

"May I have my perambulator, please, Nadine?" he asked.

Seymour grinned.

"Berts, you are easier to get a rise out of than any one I ever saw," he remarked. "It is hardly worth while fishing for you, for you are always on the feed. And if you attempt to rag, I shall prick you with my needle."

Nadine lingered a little after the others had gone, and as soon as they were alone Seymour put down his embroidery.

"May I come and sit on the hillside with you?" he asked. "Or is the—the box-seat already engaged?"

"Hugh suggested it," she said. "I was going out with him."

Seymour picked up his work again.

"It seems to me I am behaving rather nicely," he said. "At the same time I'm not sure that I am not behaving rather anemically. I haven't seen you much since I came down here. And after all I didn't come down here to see Esther."

Nadine frowned, and laid her hand on his arm. But she did not do it quite instinctively. It was clear she thought it would be appropriate. Certainly that was quite clear to Seymour.

"Take that hand away," he said. "You only put it there because it was suitable. You didn't want to touch me."

Nadine removed her hand, as if his coat-sleeve was red-hot.

"You are rather a brute," she said.

"No, I am not, unless it is brutal to tell you what you know already. I repeat that I am behaving rather nicely."

It was owing to him to do him justice.

"I know you are," she said, "you are behaving very nicely indeed. But it is only for a short time, Seymour. I don't mean that you won't always behave nicely, but that there are only a limited number of days on which this particular mode of niceness will be required of you, or be even possible. Hugh is going away next week; after that you and I will be Darby and Joan before he sees me again. You are all behaving nicely: he is too. He just wanted one week more of the old days, when we didn't think, but only babbled and chattered. I can't say that he is reviving them with very conspicuous success: he doesn't babble much, and I am sure he thinks furiously all the time. But he wanted the opportunity: it wasn't much to give him."

"Especially since I pay," said Seymour quickly.

He saw the blood leap to Nadine's face.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I oughtn't to have said that, though it is quite true. But I

pay gladly: you must believe that also. And I'm glad Hugh is behaving nicely, that he doesn't indulge in—in embarrassing reflections. Also, when does he go away?"

"Tuesday, I think."

"Morning?" asked Seymour hopefully.

Nadine laughed: he had done that cleverly, making a parody and a farce out of that which a moment before had been quite serious.

"You deserve it should be," she said.

"Then it is sure to be in the afternoon. Now I've finished being spit-fire—I want to ask you something. You haven't been up to your usual form of futile and clannish conversation. You have been rather plaintive and windy—"

"Windy?" asked Nadine.

"Yes, full of sighs, and I should say it was Shakespeare. Are you worrying about anything?"

She looked up at him with complete candor.

"Why, of course, about Hughie," she said. "How should I not?"

"I don't care two straws about that," said Seymour, "as long as your worrying is not connected with me. I mean I am sorry you worry, but I don't care. Of course you worry about Hugh. I understand that, because I understand what Hugh feels, and one doesn't like one's friends feeling like that. But it's not about—about you and me?"

Nadine shook her head and Seymour got up.

"Well, let us all be less plaintive," he said. "I have been rather plaintive too. I think I shall go and take on that great foolish Berts at golf. He will be plaintive afterwards, but nobody minds what Berts is."

Whatever plaintiveness there was about, was certainly not shared by the weather, which, if it was mad, as Nadine had suggested, was possessed by a very genial kind of mania. An octave of spring-like days, with serene suns, and calm seas, and light breezes from the southwest had decreed an oasis in midwinter, warm halcyon days made even in December the snowdrops and aconites to blossom humbly and bravely, and set the birds to busy themselves with sticks and straws as if nesting-time was already here. New grass already sprouted green among the grayness of the older growths, and it seemed almost cynical to doubt that spring was not verily here. Indeed where Hugh and Nadine sat this morning, it was May not March that seemed to have invaded and conquered December; there lay upon the hillside a vernal fragrance that

set a stray bee or two buzzing round the honied sweetness of the gorse with which the time of blossoming is never quite over, and to-day all the winds were still, and no breeze stirred in the bare slender birches, or set the spring-like stalks of the heather quivering. Only, very high up in the unplumbed blue of the zenith thin fleecy clouds lay stretched in streamers and combed feathers of white, showing that far above them rivers of air swept headlong and swift.

Nadine had a favorite nook on this steep hillside below the house, reached by a path that stretched out to the south of the bay. It was a little hollow, russet-colored now with the bracken, of the autumn, and carpeted elsewhere by the short-napped velvet of the turf. Just in front, the cliff plunged sheer down to the beach, where they had so often bathed in the summer, and where the reef of tumbled sandstone rocks stretched out into the waveless sea, like brown amphibious monsters that were fish at high tide and grazing beasts at the ebb. Down there below, a school of gulls hovered and fished with wheelings of white wings, but not a ripple lapped the edges of the rocks. Only the sea breathed softly as in sleep, stirring the fringes of brown weed that had gathered there, but no thinnest line of white showed breaking water. Along the sandy foreshore of the bay there was the same stillness: heaven and earth and ocean lay as if under an enchantment. The sand dunes opposite, and the hills beyond, lay reflected in the sea, as if in the tranquillity of some land-locked lake. There was a spell, a hush over the world, to be broken by God-knew-what gentle awakening of activity, or catastrophic disturbance.

The two had walked to this withdrawn hollow of the hill almost in silence. He had offered to carry her books for her, but she had said that they were of no weight, and after pause he had announced a fragment of current news to which she had no comment to add, but had noticed the windless, unnatural calm of the day. Something in this unusual stillness of weather had set her nerves a-quiver, and perhaps the position she was in, bound as she was to Seymour, not struggling against it, but quite accepting it, made ordinary intercourse difficult. For she had it all her own way, Hugh was behaving with exemplary discretion, Seymour was behaving with admirable tolerance, and just because they both made her own part so easy for her, she, womanlike, found the smoothed-out performance of it to be difficult. Had she instructed each of them how to behave, her instructions were carried out to the letter's foot: they were impeccable as lover and rejected lover, and therefore she wanted something different. The situation was completely of her own making: her actors played their parts exactly as she would have them play, and yet there was something wanting. They were too well-drilled, too word-perfect, too certain to say all she had designed for them from the right spot, and in the right voice. True, for a moment just now Seymour had shown signs of individualism when he called attention to the fact that he was behaving very nicely, and that he would be

glad when the scene was over, but Hugh had shown none whatever, except for the fact that he had been asked to be allowed a few days like the old days agone before he left England. He had assured her in the summer that he would never seek to get back into the atmosphere of unthinking intimacy again, but, poor fellow, when there were to be so few days left him, before the situation was sealed and made irrevocable, his heart had cried out against the edict of his will and, foolish though it might be, he had asked for this week of Meering days. But from his point of view, no less than from hers, they had been but a parody of what he had hoped for, they had been frozen and congealed by the reserve and restraint that he dared not break. Below that surface-ice, he knew how swiftly ran the torrent in his soul, but the ice quite stretched from shore to shore. It was this which disappointed Nadine: for she equally with Hugh had expected that he could realize the impossible, and that he, loving her as he did and knowing that she was so soon to give herself to another man, could cast off the knowledge of that, and resume for a space the unshackled intimacy of old. The Ethiopian and the leopard would have found their appropriate feats far easier, for it was Hugh's bones and blood he had to change, not mere skin and hair, and the very strength of the bond that bound him to her made the insuperableness of the barrier. He felt every moment the utter failure of his attempt, while she, who thought she understood him so well, had no notion how radical the failure was. Not loving, she could not understand. He knew that now, and thought bitterly of the little fireworks of words she had once lit for him on that same text, believing that by the light of those quick little squibs, she could read his heart.

So, when they were settled in their nook, once again she tried to recapture the old ease. She pointed downwards over the edge of the cliff.

"Oh, Hughie, what a morning," she said. "Quiet sea and gulls, and bees and gorse. What a summer in December, a truce with winter, isn't it? I've brought a handful of nice books. Shall I read?"

"Oh, soon," said he. "But your summer in December isn't going to last long. There is a wind coming, and a big one. Look at the mare's-tails of clouds up above. Can't you smell the wind coming? I always can. And the barometer has dropped nearly an inch since last night."

He put back his head and sniffed, moving his nostrils rather like a horse.

"Oh, how fascinating," said Nadine. "If I do that shall I smell the wind?"

It made her sneeze instead.

"I don't think much of that," she said. "I expect you looked at the barometer before you smelt the wind. Besides, how is it possible to smell the wind before there is any wind to smell? And when it comes you feel it instead."

"It will be a big storm," said Hugh.

Even as he spoke some current of air stirred the surface of the sea below them, shattering the reflections. It was as if some great angel of the air had breathed on the polished mirror of the water, dimming it. Next moment the breath cleared away again, and the surface was as bright and unwavering as before. But some half-dozen of the gulls that had been hovering and chiding there, rose into the higher air, leaving their feeding-ground, and after circling round once or twice, glided away over the sand dunes inland. Almost immediately afterwards, another relay followed, and another, till the bay that had been so populous with birds was quite deserted. They did not pause in their flight, but went straight inland, in decreasing specks of white till they vanished altogether.

"The gulls seem to think so, too," said Hugh.

"Then they are perfectly wrong," said Nadine. "The instincts Nature implants in animals are almost invariably incorrect. For instance, the Siberian tigers at the Zoo. For several years they never grew winter coats, and all the naturalists went down on their knees and said: 'O wonderful Mother Nature! their instincts tell them this is a milder climate than Siberia.' But this winter, the mildest ever known, the poor things have grown the thickest winter coats ever seen. So all the naturalists had to get up again, and dust their trousers where they had knelt down."

"Put your money on the gulls and me," said Hugh. "Look there again, far away along the sands."

To Nadine, the most attractive feature about Hugh was his eyes. They had a far-away look in them that had nothing whatever spiritual or sentimental in it, but was simply due to the fact that he had extraordinarily long sight. She obediently screwed up her eyes and followed his direction, but saw nothing whatever of import.

"It's getting nearer: you'll see it soon," said Hugh.

Soon she saw. A whirlwind of sand was advancing towards them along the beach below, revolving giddily. As it came nearer they could see the loose pieces of seaweed and jetsam being caught up into it. It came forward in a straight line, perhaps as fast as a man might run, getting taller as it approached and gyrating more violently. Then in its advance it came into collision with the wall of cliff on which they sat, and was shattered. They could hear, like the sound of rain, the sand and rubbish of which it was composed falling upon the rocks.

"Oh, but did you invent that, Hughie?" she said. "It was quite a pretty trick.

Was it a sign to this faithless generation, which is me, that you could smell the wind? Or did the gulls do it? Prophesy to me again!"

He lay back on the dry grass.

"Trouble coming, trouble coming," he said.

"Just the storm?" she asked. "Or is this more prophecy?"

"Oh, just the storm," he said. "I always feel depressed and irritated before a storm."

"Are you depressed and irritated?" she asked. "Sorry. I thought it was such a nice, calm morning."

Hugh took up a book at random, which proved to be Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads." At random he opened it, and saw the words:

"And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love."

"Oh, do read," said Nadine. "Anything: just where you opened it."

Hugh sat up, a bitterness welling in his throat. He read:

"And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love."

Nadine flushed slightly, and was annoyed with herself for flushing. She could not help knowing what must be in his mind, and tried to make a diversion.

"I don't think she was to be blamed," she said. "A quantity of flowers stuck all over the sky would look very odd, and I don't think would kindle anybody's emotions. That sounds rather a foolish poem. Read something else."

Hugh shut the book.

"'Though all we fell on sleep, she would not weep,' is the end of another stanza," he said.

Nadine looked at him for a long moment, her lips parted as if to speak, but they only quivered; no words came. There was no doubt whatever as to what Hugh meant, but still, with love unawakened, and with her tremendous egotism rampant, she saw no further than he was behaving very badly to her. He had come down here to renew the freedom and intimacy of old days: till to-day he had been silent, stupid, but when he spoke like this, silence and stupidity were better. She was sorry for him, very sorry, but the quiver of her lips half at least consisted of self-pity that he made her suffer too.

"You mean me," she said, speaking at length, and speaking very rapidly. "It is

odious of you. You know quite well I am sorry: I have told you so. I cried: I remember I cried when you made that visit to Winston, and the cow looked at me. I daresay you are suffering damned torments, but you are being unfair. Though I don't love you—like that, I wish I did. Do you think I make you suffer for my own amusement? Is it fun to see my best friend like that? Is it my fault? You have chosen to love this heartless person, me. If I had no liver, or no lungs, instead of no heart, you would be sorry for me. Instead you reproach me. Oh, not in words, but you meant me, when you said that. Where is the book out of which you read? There, I do that to it: I send it into the sea, and when the gulls come back they will peck it, or the sea will drown it first, and the wind which you smell will blow it to America. You don't understand: you are more stupid than the gulls."

She made one swift motion with her arm, and "Poems and Ballads" flopped in the sea as the book dived clear of the cliff into the high-water sea below.

More imminent than the storm which Hugh had prophesied was the storm in their souls. He, with his love baffled, raged at the indifference with which she had given herself to another, she, distrusting for the first time, the sense and wisdom of her gift, raged at him for his rebellion against her choice.

"Don't speak," she said, "for I will tell you more things first. You are jealous of Seymour—"

Hugh threw back his head and laughed.

"Jealous of Seymour?" he cried. "Do you really think I would marry you if you consented in the spirit in which you are taking him? Once, it is true, I wanted to. You refused to cheat me—those were your words—and I begged you to cheat me, I implored you to cheat me, so long as you gave me yourself.

"I didn't care how you took me, so long as you took me. But now I wouldn't take you like that. Now, for this last week, I have seen you and him together, and I know what it is like."

"You haven't seen us together much," said Nadine.

"I have seen you enough: I told you before that your marriage was a farce. I was wrong. It's much worse than a farce. You needn't laugh at a farce. But you can't help laughing, at least I can't, at a tragedy so ludicrous."

Nadine got up. The situation was as violent and sudden as some electric storm. What had been pent-up in him all this week, had exploded: something in her exploded also.

"I think I hate you," she said.

"I am sure I despise you," said he.

He got up also, facing her. It was like the bursting of a reservoir: the great sheet of quiet water was suddenly turned into torrents and foam.

"I despise you," he said again. "You intended me to love you; you encouraged me to let myself go. All the time you held yourself in, though there was nothing to hold in; you observed, you dissected. You cut down with your damned scalpels and lancets to my heart, and said, 'How interesting to see it beating!' Then you looked coolly over your shoulder and saw Seymour, and said, 'He will do: he doesn't love me and I don't love him!' But now he does love you, and you probably guess that. So, very soon, your lancet will come out again, and you will see his heart beating. And again you will say, 'How interesting!' But there will be blood on your lancet. You are safe, of course, from reprisals. No one can cut into you, and see your blood flow, because you haven't any blood. You are something cold and hellish. You often said you understood me too well. Now you understand me even better. Toast my heart, fry it, eat it up! I am utterly at your mercy, and you haven't got any mercy. But I can manage to despise you: I can't do much else."

Nadine stood quite still, breathing rather quickly, and that movement of the nostrils, which she had tried to copy from him, did not make her sneeze now.

"It is well we should know each other," she said with an awful cold bitterness, "even though we shall know each other for so little time more. It is always interesting to see the real person—"

"If you mean me," he said hotly, "I always showed you the real person. I have never acted to you, nor pretended. And I have not changed. I am not responsible if you cannot see!"

Nadine passed her tongue over her lips. They seemed hard and dry, not flexible enough for speech.

"It was my blindness then," she said. "But we know where we are now. I hate you, and you despise me. We know now."

Then suddenly an impulse, wholy uncontrollable, and coming from she knew not where, seized and compelled her. She held out both her hands to him.

"Hughie, shake hands with me," she said. "This has been nightmare talk, a bad thing that one dreams. Shake hands with me, and that will wake us both up. What we have been saying to each other is impossible: it isn't real or true. It is utter nonsense we have been talking."

How he longed to take her hands and clasp them and kiss them! How he longed to wipe off all he had said, all she had said. But somehow it was beyond him to do it. It was by honest impulse that the words of hate and contempt had risen to their lips; the words might be canceled, but what could

not be quenched, until some mistake was shown in the workings of their souls, was the thought-fire that had made them boil up. She stood there, lovely and welcoming, the girl whom his whole soul loved, whose conduct his whole soul despised, eager for reconciliation, yearning for a mutual forgiveness. But her request was impossible. God could not cancel the bitterness that had made him speak. He threw his hands wide.

"It's no good," he said. "I am sorry I said certain things, for there was no use in saying them. But I can't help feeling that which made me say them. Cancel the speeches by all means. Let the words be unsaid with all my heart."

"But let us be prepared to say them again?" said Nadine quietly. "It comes to that."

"Yes, it comes to that. I am not jealous of Seymour. I laughed when you suggested it; and I am not jealous, because you don't love him. If you loved him, I should be jealous, and I should say, 'God bless you!' As it is—"

"As it is, you say 'Damn you,'" said Nadine.

Hugh shook his head.

"You don't understand anything about love," he said. "How can you until you know a little bit what it means? I could no more think or say 'Damn you,' than I could say 'God bless you.'"

Nadine had withdrawn from her welcome and desire for reconciliation.

"Neither would make any difference to me," she said.

"I don't suppose they would, since I make no difference to you," said he. "But there is no sense in adding hypocrisy to our quarrel."

Nadine sat down again on the sweet turf.

"I cancel my words, then, even if you do not," she said. "I don't hate you. I can't hate you, any more than you can despise me. We must have been talking in nightmare."

"I am used to nightmare," said Hugh. "I have had six months of nightmare. I thought that I could wake; I thought I could—could pinch myself awake by seeing you and Seymour together. But it's still nightmare."

Nadine looked up at him.

"Oh, Hughie, if I loved you!" she said.

Hugh looked at her a moment, and then turned away from her. Outside of his control certain muscles worked in his throat; he felt strangled.

"I can say 'God bless you' for that, Nadine," he said huskily. "I do say it. God bless you, my darling."

Nadine had leaned her face on her hands when he turned away. She divined why he turned from her, she heard the huskiness of his voice, and the thought of Hughie wanting to cry gave her a pang that she had never yet known the like of. There was a long silence, she sitting with hand-buried face, he seeing the sunlight swim and dance through his tears. Then he touched her on the shoulder.

"So we are friends again in spite of ourselves," he said. "Just one thing more then, since we can talk without—without hatred and contempt. Why did you refuse to marry me, because you did not love me, and yet consent to marry Seymour like that?"

She looked up at him.

"Oh, Hughie, you fool," she said. "Because you matter so much more."

He smiled back at her.

"I don't want to wish I mattered less," he said.

"You couldn't matter less."

He had no reply to this, and sat down again beside her. After a little Nadine turned to him.

"And I said I thought it was such a calm morning," she said.

"And I said that storm was coming," said he.

She laid her hand on his knee.

"And will there be some pleasant weather now?" she said. "Oh, Hughie, what wouldn't I give to get two or three of the old days back again, when we babbled and chattered and were so content?"

"Speak for yourself, miss," said Hugh. "And for God's sake don't let us begin again. I shall quarrel with you again, and—and it gives me a pain. Look here, it's a bad job for me all this, but I came here to get an oasis: also to pinch myself awake: metaphors are confusing things. Bring on your palms and springs. They haven't put in an appearance yet. Let's try anyhow."

Nadine sat up.

"Talking of the weather—" she began.

"I wasn't."

"Yes, you were, before we began to exchange compliments."

She broke off suddenly.

"Oh, Hughie, what has happened to the sun?" she said.

"I know it is the moon," said Hugh.

"You needn't quote that. The shrew is tamed for a time. It's a shrew-mouse, a lady mouse with a foul temper; do you think? About the sun—look."

It was worth looking at. Right round it, two or three diameters away, ran a complete halo, a pale white line in the abyss of the blue sky. The little feathers of wind-blown clouds had altogether vanished, and the heavens were untarnished from horizon to zenith. But the heat of the rays had sensibly diminished, and though the sunshine appeared as whole-hearted as ever, it was warm no longer.

"This is my second conjuring-trick," said Hugh. "I make you a whirlwind, and now I make you a ring round the sun, and cut off the heating apparatus. Things are going to happen. Look at the sea, too. My orders."

The sea was also worth looking at. An hour ago it had been turquoise blue, reflecting the sky. Now it seemed to reflect a moonstone. It was gray-white, a corpse of itself, as it had been. Then even as they looked, it seemed to vanish altogether. The horizon line was blotted out, for the sky was turning gray also, and both above and below, over the cliff-edge, there was nothing but an invisible gray of emptiness. The sun halo spread both inwards and outwards, so that the sun itself peered like a white plate through some layer of vapor that had suddenly formed across the whole field of the heavens. And still not a whistle or sigh of wind sounded.

Hugh got up.

"As I have forgotten what my third conjuring trick is," he said, "I think we had better go home. It looks as if it was going to be a violent one."

He paused a moment, peering out into the invisible sea. Then there came a shrill faint scream from somewhere out in the dim immensity.

"Hold on to me, Nadine," he cried. "Or lie down."

He felt her arm in his, and they stood there together.

The scream increased in volume, becoming a maniac bellow. Then, like a solid wall, the wind hit them. It did not begin, out of the dead calm, as a breeze; it did not grow from breeze to wind; it came from seawards, like the waters of the Red Sea on the hosts of Pharaoh, an overwhelming wall of riot and motion. Nadine's books, all but the one she had cast over the cliff's edge, turned over, and lay with flapping pages; then like wounded birds they were blown along

the hillside. The hat she had brought out with her, but had not put on, rose straight in the air, and vanished. Hugh, with Nadine on his arm, had leaned forward against this maniac blast, and the two were not thrown down by it. The path to the house lay straight up the steep hillside behind them, and turning they were so blown up it, that they stumbled in trying to keep pace to that irresistible torrent of wind that hurried them along. It took them but five minutes to get up the steep brae, while it had taken them ten minutes to walk down, and already there flew past them seaweed and sand and wrack, blown up from the beach below. Above, the sun was completely veiled, a riot of cloud had already obscured the higher air, but below, all was clear, and it looked as if a stone could be tossed upon the hills on the farther side of the bay.

They had to cross the garden before they came to the house. Already two trees had fallen before this hurricane-blast, and even as they hurried over the lawn, an elm, screaming in all its full-foliaged boughs, leaned towards them, and cracked and fell. Then a chimney in the house itself wavered in outline, and next moment it crashed down upon the roof, and a covey of flying tiles fell round them.

It required Hugh's full strength to close the door again, after they had entered, and Nadine turned to him, flushed and ecstatic.

"Hughie, how divine!" she said. "It can't be measured, that lovely force. It's infinite. I never knew there was strength like that. Why have we come in? Let's go out again. It's God: it's just God."

His eyes, too, were alight with it and his soul surged to his lips.

"Yes, God," he said. "And that's what love is. Rather—rather big, isn't it?"

And then for the first time, Nadine understood. She did not feel, but she was able to understand.

"Oh, Hughie," she said, "how splendid it must be to feel like that!"

The section of the party which had gone to play golf on this changeable morning, were blown home a few minutes later, and they all met at lunch. Edith Arbuthnot had arrived before any of them got back, and asked if the world had been blown away. As it had not, she expressed herself ready to chaperone anybody.

"And Berts is happy too," said Seymour, when he came in very late for lunch, since he wished to change all his clothes first, as they 'smelled of wind,' "because Berts has at last driven a ball two hundred yards. Don't let us mention the subject of golf. It would be tactless. There was no wind when he accomplished that remarkable feat, at least not more wind than there is now.

What there was was behind him, and he topped his ball heavily. I said 'Good shot.' But I have tact. Since I have tact, I don't say to Nadine that it was a good day to sit out on the hillside and read. I would scorn the suggestion."

A sudden sound as of drums on the window interrupted this tactful speech, and the panes streamed.

"Anyhow I shall play golf," said Edith. "What does a little rain matter? I'm not made of paper."

"That's a good thing, Mother," said Berts.

"If you want to win a match, play with Berts," said Seymour pensively. "But if you only want to be blown away and killed, anybody will do. I shall get on with my embroidery this afternoon, and my maid will sit by me and hold my hand. Dear me, I hope the house is well built."

For the moment it certainly seemed as if this was not the case, for the whole room shook under a sudden gust more appalling than anything they had felt yet. Then it died away again, and once more the windows were deluged with sheets of rain flung, it seemed, almost horizontally against them. For a few minutes only that lasted, and then the wind settled down, so it seemed, to blow with a steady uniform violence.

Nadine had finished lunch and gone across to the window. The air was perfectly clear, and the hills across the bay seemed again but a stone's-throw away. Overhead, straight across the sky, stretched a roof of cloud, but away to the West, just above the horizon line, there was an arch of perfectly clear sky, of pale duck's-egg green, and out of this it seemed as out of a funnel the fury of the gale was poured. The garden was strewn with branches and battered foliage and the long gravel path flooded by the tempest of rain was discharging itself upon the lawn, where pools of bright yellow water were spreading. Across it too lay the wreck of the fallen trees, the splintered corpses of what an hour ago had been secure and living things, waiting, warm and drowsy, for the tingle of springtime and rising sap. Like the bodies of young men on a battlefield, with their potentialities of love and life unfulfilled, there, by the blast of the insensate fury of the wind they lay stricken and dead, and the birds would no more build in their branches, nor make their shadowed nooks melodious with love-songs. No more would summer clothe them in green, nor autumn in their liveries of gold: they were dead things and at the most would make a little warmth on the hearth, before the feathery ash, all that was left of them, was dispersed on the homeless winds.

But the pity of this blind wantonness of destruction was more than compensated for in the girl's mind by the savagery and force of the unlooked-for hurricane, and she easily persuaded Hugh to come out with her and be

beaten and stormed upon. Always sensitive to the weather, this portentous storm had aroused in her a sort of rapture of restlessness: she rejoiced in it, and somehow feared it for its ruthlessness and indifference.

They took the path that led downward to the beach, for it was the tumult and madness of the sea that Nadine especially wished to observe. Though as yet the gale had been blowing only an hour or two, it had raised a monstrous sea, and long before they came down within sight of it, they heard the hoarse thunder and crash of broken waters penetrating the screaming bellow of the gale, and the air was salt with spray and flying foam. To the West there was still clear that arch of open sky through which the gale poured; somewhere behind the clouds to the left of it, the sun was near to its setting, and a pale livid light shone out of it, catching the tops of the breakers as they streamed landwards. Between these foam-capped tops lay gray hollows and darknesses, out of which would suddenly boil another crest of mountainous water. The tide was only at half flood, but the sea, packed by the astounding wind, was already breaking at the foot of the cliffs themselves, while in the troughs of the waves as they rode in, there appeared and disappeared again the scattered rocks from some remote cliff-fall, that were strewn about the beach. Sometimes a wave would strike one of these full, and be shattered against it, spouting heavenwards in a column of solid water; oftener the breakers swept over them unbroken, until with menace of their toppling crests they flung themselves with huge tongues of hissing water on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs. Then with the scream of the withdrawn shingle the spent water was furiously dragged back to the base of the next incoming wave, and was caught up again to hurl itself against the land. Sometimes a sudden blast of wind would cut off the crest of the billow even as it curled over, and fling it, a monstrous riband of foam, through the air, sometimes two waves converging rose up in a fountain of water, and fell back without having reached the shore. This way and that, rushing and rolling, in hills and valleys of water, the maddened sea crashed and thundered, and every moment the spray rose more densely from the infernal cauldron. Then as the tide rose higher, the waves came in unbroken, and hurled their tons of water against the face of the cliff itself. Above, continuous as a water-fall, rose the roar and scream of the gale, ominous, insensate, bewildering: it was as if the elements were being transferred back into the chaos out of which they came.

Nadine and Hugh, clinging together for support, stood there for some minutes, half-way down the side of the cliff, watching the terror and majesty of the spectacle, she utterly absorbed in it and cruelly unconscious of him. Then, since they could no longer get down to the base of the cliff, they skirted along it till they came to the sandy foreshore of the bay. There from water-level they could better see the hugeness of the tumult, the strange hardness and steepness

of the wave-slopes. It was as if a line of towers and great buildings were throwing themselves down upon the sands, and breaking up into walls and eddies of foam-sheeted water, while behind them there rose again another street of toppling buildings, which again shattered itself on the beach. Great balls of foam torn from the spent water trundled by them on the sands, and bunches of brown seaweed torn from the rocks were flung in handfuls at their feet. Once from the arch in the sky westwards, a dusky crimson light suddenly burned, turning the wave crests to blood, and then as the darkness of the early winter sunset gathered, they turned, and were blown up the steep cliff-path again, wet and buffeted. Conversation had been altogether impossible, and they could but communicate with pointing finger, and nodding head. Yet, somehow, to be together thus, cut off by the rise of winds and waves, from all sense of the existence of others, in that pandemonium of tempest, gave to Hugh at least a closer feeling of intimacy with Nadine, than he had ever yet known. She clung to him, she sheltered under his shoulder, unconsciously, instinctively, as an animal trusts his master, without knowing it is trusting. And that to his aching hunger for her was something....

But the gale was to bring them closer together yet.

CHAPTER X

All the evening and all night long the gale continued. Now and then the constant scream of it would leap upwards a couple of octaves as a shriller blast struck the houses and again for a moment the mad chant would drop into silence. From time to time like a tattoo of drums the rain battered at the window-panes, but through it all, whether in hushes of the wind or when its fiercest squall descended, the beat of the surf sounded ever louder. And all through the night, the result perhaps of his agitated talk with Nadine in the morning, or of his intimate gale-encompassed isolation with her in the afternoon, Hugh turned and tossed midway between sleeping and waking. Sometimes he seemed to himself to be yelling round the house among the spirits of the air seeking admittance, sometimes it seemed to him that he was being beaten on by the hammer of the surf, and whether he was homelessly wandering outside among the spirits of the wind, or was being done to death by those incessant blows of the beating waves, it was Nadine that he sought. And as the night went on the anguish of his desire grew ever more acute, and the beating of the waves a more poignant torture, until while yet no faintest lightening of winter's dawn had touched the gross blackness of the night, he roused himself completely, and sat up in bed and turned on his light.

To him awake the riot outside was vastly magnified compared with the dimmer trouble of his dream; so was his yearning for Nadine. His windows looked eastwards away from the quarter of the gale, and getting out of bed, he lifted a sash, and peered out. Nothing whatever could be seen; it was as if he gazed into the darkness of the nethermost pit, out of which blown by the blast of the anger of God came the shrieks of souls that might not rest, driven forever along, drenched by the river of their unavailing tears. Even though he was awake the strange remote horror of nightmare was on him, and it was in vain that he tried to comfort himself, by saying, like some child repeating a senseless lesson, "A deep depression has reached us traveling eastwards from the Atlantic." He tried to read, but still the nightmare-sense possessed him, and he fancied he had to read a whole line, neither more nor less, between the poundings of the waves. Then as usually happens towards the end of these Walpurgis nights, he got back to bed again, and slept calmly and dreamlessly.

He and Seymour alone out of the party put in an appearance at breakfast time: it seemed probable that the others were compensating themselves for a disturbed night by breakfasting upstairs, and afterwards the two went out together to look at the doings of the night. By this time the wind had considerably moderated, the rain had ceased altogether, and the thick pall of cloud that had last night overlain the sky was split up into fragments and islands, and flying vapors, so that here and there pale shafts of sunlight shone upon land and sea. But the thunder of the surf had immeasurably increased, and when they went to the cliff-edge which he and Nadine had passed down yesterday afternoon, they looked upon an indescribable confusion of tremendous waters. The tide was low, but the bay was still packed with the sea heaped-up by the wind, and the end of the reef with its big scattered rocks was out beyond the walls of breaking water. The sea appeared to have been driven distraught by the stress of the night; cross currents carried the waves in all directions: it almost seemed that some, shrinking from the wall of cliff in front, were trying to beat out to sea again. Quite out, away from land, they jousted and sparred with each other, not jestingly, but, it seemed, with some grim purpose, as if they were practising their strength for deeds of earnest violence, as for some fierce civil war among themselves. It was round the furthest rocks of the reef that this sport of billowy giants most centered: right across the bay ran some current that set on to the end of the reef, and there it met with the waves coming straight in-shore from the direction of the blowing of the gale. Then they spouted and foamed together, yet not in play: some purpose, so regular were these rounds of combat, seemed to underlie their wrestlings.

Hugh threw away a charred peninsula of paper, once a cigarette, which the wind had smoked for him. He never had felt much sense of comradeship in the

presence of Seymour, and their after-breakfast stroll had no more virtue than was the reward of necessary politeness.

"There is something rather senseless in this display of wasted energy," said Seymour. "Each of those waves would probably cook a dinner, if its force was reasonably employed."

Hugh, in spite of his restless night, had something of Nadine's thrilled admiration for the turmoil, and felt slightly irritated.

"They would certainly cook your goose or mine," he remarked.

Seymour wondered whether it would be well to say, "Do you allude to Nadine as our goose?" but, perhaps wisely, refrained.

"That would be to the good," he said. "Goose is a poor bird at any time, but uneatable unless properly roasted."

Hugh did not attend to this polite rejoinder, for he had caught sight of something incredible not so far out at sea, and he focused his eyes instantly on it. For the moment, what he thought he had seen completely vanished; directly afterwards he caught sight of it again, a fishing-boat with mast broken, reeling drunkenly on the top of a huge wave. His quick, long-sighted eye told him in that one moment of slewing deck that it presented to them, before it was swallowed from sight in the trough of the next wave, that there were two figures on it, clinging to the stump of the broken mast.

"Look," he said, "there is a boat out there."

It rose again to the crest of a wave and again plunged giddily out of sight. The incoming tide was bearing it swiftly shorewards, swiftly also the cross-current that set towards the end of the reef was bearing it there.

Hugh did not pause. He laid hold of Seymour by the shoulder.

"Run up to the house," he said, "and fetch a couple of men. Bring down with you as much rope as you can find. Don't say anything to Nadine and the women. But be quick."

He ran down to the beach himself, as Seymour went on his errand, seeing at once that there were two things that might happen to this stricken wanderer of a ship. In one case, the incoming tide with its following waves might bear it straight on to the sandy beach; in the other the cross-current, in which now it was laboring, might carry it across to the reef where the waves were wrestling and roaring together. It was in case of this first contingency that he ran down upon the sands to be ready. The beach was steep there: it would ride it until it was flung down by that fringe of toppling, hard-edged breakers. In that tumble and scurry of surf it might easily be that strong arms could drag out of the fury

of the backwash whatever was cast there. The boat, a decked fishing-boat, would be dumped down on the sand: there would be a half-minute, or a quarter-minute, when something might be done. On the other hand this greedy sucking current might carry it on to the reef. Then, by the mercy of God, a rope might be of some avail, if a man could reach them.

As he ran down the cliff, a sudden splash of sunlight broke through the clouds, making a bright patch of illumination round the boat as it swung over another breaker. There was only one figure there now, lying full length on the deck, and clinging with both hands to the stump of the mast. Then once again the water broke over it, lucidly green in the sunlight, and all Hugh's heart went out to that solitary prone body, lying there helpless in the hands of God and the gale. His heart stood still to see whether when next the drifting boat reappeared it would be tenantless, and with a sob in his throat, "Oh, thank God," he said, when he saw it again.

It was still doubtful whether the current or the tide would win, and Hugh pulled off his coat and waistcoat, and threw them on the beach, in order to be able to rush in unimpeded of hand and muscle. Then with a strange sickness of heart, he saw that the boat was getting in nearer, but moving sideways across to the left, where the reef lay. And he waited, in the suspense of powerlessness. The wind now had quite abated; it was as if it had done its work, in making ready this theater of plunging water; now waited to observe what drama should be moving across the stage of billows.

Soon from behind, he heard across the shingle at the top of the beach the approach of the others. Seymour had brought Berts and two men with him, and they brought with them half-a-dozen long coils of rope, part of the fire-rescue apparatus of the house. While watching and waiting for them, his plan was quite made. It was no longer possible to hope that the boat would come to land on the sandy beach, where without doubt two or three able-bodied men could rescue any one cast up, but was driving straight on to the rocks. Once there, rescue was all but impossible; the only chance lay in reaching it before it was smashed to atoms on the immense boulders and sharp-toothed fangs. Quickly he tied three of the ropes together, and fastened the end round his body just below the shoulders, and took off his boots.

"I'm going in," he said; "you all hold the rope and pay it out. If I come near the end of it, tie a fresh piece on—"

Suddenly across the shingle came footsteps, and a cry. Nadine ran down the beach towards them. She was clad only in a dressing-gown, that rainbow-hued one in which one night last June she had entertained a company in her bedroom, and slippers so that her ankles showed white and bare. She saw what Hugh intended, and something within her, some denizen of her soul, who till

that moment had been unknown to her, took possession of her.

"No, Hughie, not you, not you," she screamed. "Seymour, anybody, but not you!"

The cry had come from her very heart; she could no more have stifled it than she could have stopped the beating of it. Then, suddenly, she realized what she had said, and sank down on the beach, burying her face in her hands.

"Take care of her, Seymour," said Hugh, and there was more heroism required for these few little words, than for the desperate feat he was about to attempt. He did not look round again, nor wish to say anything more, and there was no time to lose.

"Now, you chaps!" he called out, and ran forward to the edge of the water.

At the moment an immense billow poised and curled just in front of him. The wash of it covered him waist-deep and he floundered and staggered as the rush of water went by him. Then as it drew out to sea again he ran with it, to where another breaker was toppling in front of him. With a low outward spring he dived into the hollowed water head foremost and passed through it.

The beach was very steep here, and coming up again through and beyond the line of surf, he found himself in deep water. Behind him lay the breaking line of billows, but in front the huge mountains of water rose and fell unbroken. As he was lifted up on the first of these, swimming strongly against it, he saw not a hundred yards from him his helpless and drifting goal. He could see, too, who it was who lay there, desperately clinging to the stump of the mast with white slender wrists; it was quite a young boy. And at that sight, Hugh's pity and determination were strung higher than ever. Here was a young creature, in desperate plight among these desperate waterways, one who should not yet have known what peril meant. And at the risk of spending a little strength, when strength was so valuable, Hugh gave a great shout of notice and encouragement. Then he was swallowed up in the trough of a wave again. But when he rose next, he saw that the boy had raised his head, and that he saw him.

The current that swept towards the rocks, swept also a little shorewards, and Hugh measuring the distance between the boat and the fatal breakers with his eye, and measuring again the distance between the boat and himself, knew that he must exert himself to the point of exhaustion to get to the boat before it was drifted to its final destruction. But as he swam he knew he had made a mistake in not taking off his shirt and trousers also and giving himself an unimpeded use of his limbs. His trousers particularly dragged and hampered him; then suddenly he remembered a water-game at which he used to be expert at school, namely taking a header into the bathing-place in flannels and

undressing in the water. It seemed worth while to sacrifice a few seconds to accomplish that, and, as cool and collected as when he was doing it for mere sport at school, he trod water, slipped his legs out of his trousers, and saw them float away from him. Then twice as vigorous, he struck out again. His shirt did not bother him: besides, the rope was tied round his chest, and there was not time for more disencumbrances.

For the next five minutes, for he was fighting the tide, he just swam and swam. Occasionally rising to a wave it seemed to him that he was making no headway at all, but somehow that did not discourage him. The only necessity that concerned him was that he must go till he could go no longer. And all the time, like a dream and yet like a draught of wine to him was Nadine's involuntary cry, "No, Hughie, not you!" He did not trouble to guess what that meant. He was only conscious that it invigorated and inspired him.

The minutes passed; once the rope seemed to jerk him back, and he found himself swearing underneath his breath. Then, though it was terribly heavy, he realized that it was free again, and that he was not being hampered. Then he suddenly found himself much closer to the boat than he had any idea of, and this, though he was getting very tired, gave him a new supply of nervous force. He swam into three valleys more, he surmounted three ridges of water, and lo, the boat was on the peaks directly opposite to him, and from opposite sides they plunged into the same valley together. Not fifty yards off to the left, incredible fountains of foam spouted and aspired.

Then, oh, blessed moment! he caught hold of the side of the lurching fishing-smack, and a pale little boyish frightened face was close to his. He clung for a second to the side, and they went up and down two big billows together. Then he got breath enough to speak.

"Now, little chap," he said, "don't be frightened, for we're all right. Catch hold of the rope here, close to my body, and just jump in. Yes, that's right. Plucky boy! Take hold with both hands of the rope. Not so cold, is it?"

Once again, before he let go of the boat, they rose to an immense wall of water, and Hugh saw the figures on the beach, four of them standing in the wash of the sea, paying out the rope, and one standing there also a little apart waving seawards, clapping her hands. And what she said came to him clear and distinct across the hills and valleys of destruction.

"Oh, Hughie, well done, well done!" she cried.

"Now pull, all of you, pull him in!"

He was glad she added that, for in the hurry of the moment he had given no instructions as to what they were to do when he reached the boat; and what

seemed so obvious out here might not have seemed so obvious to those on the beach, and he was not sure that there was enough power left in him to shout to them. But Nadine understood: once she had said she understood him too well. It was enough now that she understood him enough.

He let go of the boat. For a moment it seemed inclined to follow them, and he thought the bowsprit was going to hit him. Then he felt a little pull on the rope under his shoulders, and the boat made a sort of bow of farewell, and slid away towards the spouting towers of foam. Hugh was utterly exhausted: he could just paddle with a hand or kick downwards to keep his head above water, but he gave away one breath yet.

"Nothing to be frightened at," he said. "We're all right now."

The buoyant water, for all the wickedness of its foam and savage hunger, sustained him sufficiently. He turned round seawards in the water so that the great surges did not overwhelm him from behind, and put an arm on the rope underneath the boy's neck, so as to support them both. He forced himself even in his utter weariness to be collected and to remember that for several minutes yet there was nothing whatever to be done, except with the minimum possible of exertion to keep afloat, while the rope towed them back towards that line of steep towers and curling precipices beyond which lay the shore, and those who stood on the shore. Sometimes the crest of a wave broke over them, almost smothering him, but then again they found themselves on a downward hillside of water, where the panting lungs could be satisfied, and the laboring heart supplied. Somewhere inside of him he knew he wanted to know where this poor foundered fishing-smack had come from and how this young boy had managed to cling to it, but he had not sufficient strength to give voice to his desire, for all that he had must be husbanded to meet that final assault of the row of breakers through which they had to pass.

And as they got nearer, he began to form his plan. This young unknown life, precious to him now as an unborn baby to a woman, was given into his charge. It seemed to him that, as a woman has to bring the life within her to birth whatever it costs her, so he had to save the life of this unknown little fisher-boy, and take all risks himself. Whatever lay beyond that line of breakers, his business was here, and he did not for one second argue the values. He did not forget Nadine nor her last cry to him as he set forth on his peril, but for the moment there was something that concerned him even more than Nadine, and he had to make the best plans he could for saving this young life that had been put in his hands, even if he fought God over it. The only question was how to get the best chance of saving it.

They were close in now, and this three-minute pause of floating had restored him. He was just conscious of bitter cold, even as he was conscious of the

group on the edge of the sand, and of the hissing waters. But none of these things seemed to have anything to do with him; they were but external phenomena. Between him and the shore were still three towering lines of breakers, sharp-edged and steep as rocks: the third of these suddenly fumbled and disappeared with a thick thud, and an uprising of shattered spray. And suddenly his plan proved itself, fully-finished to his mind.

He had been swimming for not more than a quarter of an hour, and the minutes of that fierce outward struggle which had seemed so long to him had to Nadine passed in a flash. For once she had got completely outside herself, and, concentrated and absorbed in another, the time had gone by in one flare of triumphant expectation. For one moment after that heart's cry had been flung out of her she had sat dazed and bewildered by the consciousness that it seemed to have revealed to her, for until she had cried out that Seymour, that anybody but Hugh, must make the desperate attempt, she had not known her own heart, nor could she have, for it was not till then that it was unlocked to herself. When she looked up again Hugh had already plunged through the breakers, and was swimming, and instantly her soul was with him there in the inhuman sea, glorying in his strength, proud of the splendid and desperate adventure, and not for one moment doubtful of its success. None but he, she felt, could do it, and it was impossible that he should fail. She would not have had him back by her side saying that the attempt was mere suicide, for all the happiness that the world contained, and had she been able to change places with the boy who clung to the helpless boat, she would have sprung ecstatic to the noble risk, for the sake of having Hugh battle the seas on his way to rescue her. Failing that, it had been gloriously ordained that he should do this, and that she should stand with heart uplifted and be privileged to see the triumphant venture. She saw him reach the boat, knowing that he would, and clapped her hands and called to him, and with bright eyes and laughing mouth she eagerly watched him getting nearer. Then, just at the moment when Hugh made his plan, she realized that between him and her there lay that precipice of water that kept flinging itself down in thunder on the shore, and ever re-forming again. And the light died out of her face, and she grew ashen gray to the lips and watched.

Hugh had been floating with his face seawards. Now he turned round to the shore again. She saw him smile at the boy, as they rose on the crest of a wave, and she saw him speak.

"Now we're all right," was what he said. "Get on my back, and hold on to my shoulders."

The rope had ceased to pull. The men in control of it just held it taut, waiting to pull when the exact moment came. The boy did as he was told, and next

moment the two rose up on the crest of the line of breakers. Twenty feet below him as they topped it, Hugh looked over upon the backwash of the preceding wave which was being dragged into the billow which bore them and was growing higher as it rose to its ruin. But the boy's fall would be broken: at least this plan seemed to give the best chance.

Then the wave curled, and he was flung forwards, twisting as he fell. He saw the slim little figure he had been carrying shot over his shoulder, and flung clear of the direct impact of the wave on the beach, and he heard his mind say, "That won't hurt him."

Then he felt something stupendous, as heavy as the world, strike him on the back. After that he felt nothing more at all.

As dusk was closing in, Nadine sat in the window of her big black-painted bedroom, where so many well-attended sessions had been held. Hugh had been in the surgeon's hands since they carried him in, and all that could be done had been done. Afterwards Nadine had seen the surgeon, and learned from him all there was to fear and the little there was to hope for. It was possible that Hugh might not live till the morning, but simply pass away from the shock of his injuries. On the other hand his splendid constitution might pull him through that. But given that he lived through the immediate danger, it was doubtful if he could ever lead an active life again. The boy he had saved was practically unhurt, and was fast asleep.

Nadine sat there very quiet both in mind and body. She did not want to rave or rebel, she merely let her mind sit, as it were, in front of these things, and contemplate them, like a picture, until they became familiar. She felt they were not familiar yet; though she knew them to be true, they were somehow unreal and incredible. She did not yet grasp them: it seemed to her that her mind was stunned and was incapable of apprehending them. So she had to keep her attention fixed on them, until they became real. Yet she found it difficult to control her mind: it kept wandering off into concentric circles round the center of the only significant thing in the world.

Out on the sea the sun had set, and there were cloud-bars of fading crimson on the horizon level across a field of saffron yellow. This yellow toned off into pale watery green, and high up in the middle of that was one little cloud like an island that still blazed in the sunlight of the upper air. Somehow that aroused a train of half-forgotten reminiscences. There had been a patch of sunlight once like an island, on the gray of the sea ... it was connected with a picture ... yes, it was a sketch which Esther had made for Hugh, and she had put in the island reluctantly, saying it looked unreal in nature and would be worse in art. But Hugh had wanted it there, and, as Esther worked, she herself had walked with him along the beach from which he had been carried up to-

day, and she had told him that he lived in unrealities, and pictured to himself that some day he and she would live on some golden sunlit island together. She remembered it all now.

Her mind came back to the center again, and started off anew on that splendid deed of the morning. She had quite lost her head when she called out, "No, Hughie, not you!" It must have been Hugh to do it, no one else could have done it. The idea of Berts or Seymour wrestling with and overcoming that mountainous and maddened sea was unthinkable. Only Hugh could have done it, and the deed was as much part of him as his brown eyes or his white strong teeth. And if at the end the sea had flung him down and broken him, that was after he had laughed at the peril and snatched its prey out of its very jaws! Even as things were now with him, Nadine could not regret what he had done, and if time had run back, and she saw him again plunging into that riot and turmoil, she felt that she would not now cry out to him like that. She would have called Godspeed to him instead.

Once again her mind rippled away from its center. She had called out to Seymour or Berts to go. At the time it had been quite instinctive, but she saw now what had prompted her instinct. She meant—though then she did not know she meant it—that she could spare any one but Hugh. That was what it came to, and she wondered if Hugh had understood that. Seymour without doubt must have done so: he was so clever. Probably he would tell her he understood, and ask her if it was not that which was implied. But all such consideration seemed to her to matter very little. There was only one thing that mattered, and that was not whether Hugh lived or died even, but simply the fact of Hugh.

Her mother had telegraphed that she was coming at once; and Nadine remembering that she had not told the servants got up and rang the bell. But before it was answered there came an interruption for which she had been waiting. One of the two nurses whom the surgeon from Chester had brought with him knocked at the door. She had been tidying up, and removing all traces of what had been done.

"The room is neat again now," she said, "and you may come and just look at him."

"Is he conscious or in pain?" asked Nadine.

"No; but he may regain consciousness at any time, but I don't think he will have any pain."

They went together up the long silent passages in which there hung that curious hush which settles down on a house when death is hovering by it, and came to his door which stood ajar. Then from some sudden qualm and

weakness of flesh, Nadine halted, shrinking from entering.

"Do not come unless you feel up to it," said Nurse Bryerley. "But there is nothing that will shock you."

Nadine hesitated no more, but entered.

They had carried him not to his own room, but to another with a dressing-room adjoining. His bed stood along the wall to the left of the door, and he lay on his back with his head a little sideways towards it. There was nothing in the room that suggested illness, and when Nadine looked at his face there was nothing there that suggested it either. His eyes were closed, but his face was as untroubled as that of some quiet sleeper. In the wall opposite were the western-looking windows and the room was lit only by that fast-fading splendor. The cloud-island still hung in the sky, but it had turned gray as the light left it.

Then even as Nadine looked at him, his eyes opened and he saw her.

"Nadine," he said.

The nurse stepped to the bedside.

"Ah, you are awake again," she said. "How do you feel?"

"Rather tired. But I want to speak to Nadine."

"Yes, you can speak to her," she said and signed to the girl to come.

Nadine came across the room to him, and knelt down.

"Oh, Hughie," she said, "well done!"

He looked at her, puzzled for the moment, with troubled eyes.

"You said that before," he said. "It was the last thing you said. Why did you—oh, I remember now. Yes, what a bang I came! How's the little fellow, the one on my back?"

"Quite unhurt, Hughie. He is asleep."

"I thought he wouldn't be hurt. It was the best plan I could think of. I say, why did you call to me not to go at first? I had to."

"I know now you had to," said she.

"I want to ask you something else. How badly am I hurt?"

Nadine looked up at the nurse a moment, who nodded to her. She understood exactly what that meant.

"You are very badly hurt, dear Hughie," she said; "But—but it is worth it fifty

times over."

Hugh was silent a moment.

"Am I going to die?" he asked.

Nadine did not need instruction about this.

"No, a thousand times, no!" she said. "You're going to get quite well. But you must be patient and rest and sleep."

Nadine's throat grew suddenly small and aching, and she could not find her voice for a moment.

"You are quite certainly going to live," she said. "To begin with, I can't spare you!"

Hugh's eyelids fluttered and quivered.

"By Jove!" he said, and next moment they had quite closed.

The nurse signed to Nadine to get up and she rose very softly and tiptoed away. At the door she looked round once at Hugh, but already he was asleep. Then still softly she came back and kissed him on the forehead and was gone again.

She had been with him but a couple of minutes, but as she went back to her room, she heard the stir of arrivals in the hall, and went down. Dodo had that moment arrived.

"Nadine, my dear," she said, "I started the moment I got your telegram. Tell me all you can. How is he? How did it happen? You only said he had had a bad accident, and wanted me."

Nadine kissed her.

"Oh! Mama," she said. "Thank God it wasn't an accident. It was done on purpose. He meant it just like that. But you don't know anything; I forgot. Will you come to my room?"

"Yes, let us go. Now tell me at once."

"We have had a frightful gale," she said, "and this morning Hughie saw a fishing-boat close in land, driving on to the reef. There was just one shrimp of a boy on it, and Hughie went straight in, like a duck to water, and got him off and swam back with him. There was a rope and Seymour and Berts pulled him in. And when they got close in, Hughie put the boy on his back—oh, Mama, thank God for men like that!—and the breakers banged him down on the beach, and the boy was unhurt. And Hughie may die very soon, or he may live __"

Nadine's voice choked for a moment. All day she had not felt a sob rise in her throat.

"And if he lives," she said, "he may never be able to walk again, and I love him."

Then came the tempest of tears, tears of joy and sorrow, a storm of them, fruitful as autumn rain, fruitful as the sudden deluges of April, with God-knows-what warmth of sun behind. The drought of summer in her, the ice of winter in her had been broken up in the rain that makes the growth and the life of the world. The frozen ground melted under it, the soil, cracked with drought, drank it in: the parody of life that she had lived became but the farce that preceded sweet serious drama, tragedy it might be, but something human.... And Dodo, woman also, understood that: she too had lived years that parodied herself, and knew what the awakening to womanhood was, and the immensity of that unsuspected kingdom. It had come late to her, to Nadine early: some were almost born in consciousness of their birthright, others died without realizing it. So, mother and daughter, they sat there in silence, while Nadine wept her fill.

"It was the splendidest adventure," she said at length, lifting her head. "It was all so gay. He shouted to that little boy in the boat to encourage him to cling on, and oh, those damned reefs were so close. And when they rode in, Hughie like a horse with a child on his back over that—that precipice, he said something again to encourage him."

Nadine broke down again for a moment.

"Hughie never thought about himself at all," she said. "He used always to think about me. But when he went on his adventure he didn't think about me. He thought only of that little stupid boy, God bless him. And, oh, Mummie, I gave myself away—I got down to the beach just before Hughie went in, and I lost my head and I screamed out, 'Not you, Hughie: Seymour, Berts, anybody, but not you!' It wasn't I who screamed; something inside me screamed, and the one who screamed was—was my love for Hughie, and I never knew of it. But inside me something swelled, and it burst. Yes: Hughie heard, I am sure, and Seymour heard, and I don't care at all."

Nadine sat up, with a sort of unconscious pride in her erectness.

"I saw him just now," she said, "and he quite knew me, and asked if he was going to die. I told him 'he certainly was not; I couldn't spare him.'"

Nadine gave a little croaking laugh.

"And he instantly went to sleep," she said.

The veracious historian is bound to state that this was an adventure absolutely after Dodo's heart. All her life she had loved impulse, and disregarded its possibly appalling consequences. Never had she reasoned before she acted, and she could almost have laughed for joy at these blind strokes of fate. Hugh's splendid venture thrilled her, even as it thrilled Nadine, and for the moment the result seemed negligible. A great thing had 'got done' in the world: now by all means let them hope for the best in its sequel, and do their utmost to bring about the best, not with a fainting or regretful heart, but with a heart that rejoiced and sang over the glory of the impetuous deed that brought about these dealings of love and life.

Dodo's eyes danced as she spoke, danced and were dim at the same time.

"Oh, Nadine, and you saw it!" she said. "How glorious for you to see that, and to know at the same moment that you loved him. And, my dear, if Hughie is to die, you must thank God for him without any regret. There is nothing to regret. And if he lives—"

"Oh, Mama, one thing at a time," said Nadine. "If he only lives, if only I am going to be allowed to take care of him, and to do what can be done."

She paused a moment.

"I am so glad you have come," she said; "it was dear of you to start at once like that. Did Papa Jack want you not to go?"

"My dear, he hurried me off to that extent that I left the only bag that mattered behind."

"That was nice of him. They have been so hopeless, all of them here, because they didn't understand. Berts has been looking like a funeral all day, the sort with plumes. And Edith has been running in and out with soup for me, soup and mince and glasses of port I think—I think Seymour understood though, because he was quite cheerful and normal. Oh, Mama, if Hughie only lives, I will marry Seymour as a thank-offering."

Dodo looked at her daughter in amazement.

"Not if Seymour understands," she said.

Nadine frowned.

"It's the devil's own mess," she observed.

"But the devil never cleans up his messes," said Dodo. "That's what we learn by degrees. He makes them, and we clean them up. More or less, that is to say."

She paused a moment, and flung the spirit of her speech from her.

"I don't mean that," she said. "It is truer to say that God makes beautiful things, and we spoil them. And then He makes them beautiful again. It is only people who can't see at all, that see the other aspect of it. I think they call them realists—I know it ends in 'ist.' But it doesn't matter what you call them. They are wrong. We have got to hold our hearts high, and let them beat, and let ourselves enjoy and be happy and taste things to the full. It is easier to be miserable, my dear, for most people. We are the lucky ones. Oh, if I had been a charwoman, like that thing in the play, with a husband who stole and was sent to prison, I should have found something to be happy about. Probably a large diamond in the grate, which I should have sold without being traced."

These remarkable statements were not made without purpose. Dodo knew quite well that courage and patience and cheerfulness would be needed by Nadine, and she was willing to talk the most outrageous nonsense to give the sense of vitality to her, to make her see that no great happening like this, whatever the end, was a thing to moan and brood over. It must be taken with much more than resignation—a quality which she despised—and with hardly less than gaiety. Such at any rate was her private human gospel, which she found had not served her so badly.

"I have quite missed my vocation," she said. "I ought to have been born in poverty-stricken and criminal classes to show the world that being hungry does not make you unhappy any more than having three diamond tiaras makes you happy. You've got that birthright, Nadine, live up to it. Never anticipate trouble, and if it comes embrace and welcome it: it is part of life, and thus it becomes your friend. Oh, I wish I had been here this morning! I would have shouted for glee to see that darling Hughie go churning out to sea. I am jealous of you. Just think: if Papa Jack had come a-wooing of you, as I really thought he might be doing in the summer, you would have married him and I should be looking after Hughie. Isn't that like me? I want everybody's good times myself."

These amazing statements were marvelously successful.

"I won't give my good time away even to you," said Nadine.

"No, you are sharper than a serpent's tooth. Now, darling, we will go very quietly along the passage, and just see if Hughie is asleep. I should so like to wake him up—I know he is asleep—in order to tell him how splendid it all is. Don't be frightened: I'm not going to. We will just go to the door, and that enormous nurse whom I saw peering over the banisters, will tell us to go away. And then I shall go to dress for dinner, and you will too—"

"Oh, Mama, I can't come down to dinner," said Nadine.

"Yes, dear, you can and you will. There's going to be no sadness in my house.

If you don't, I shall send Edith up to you with mince and her 'cello and soup. Oh, Nadine, and it was all just for a little stupid boy, who very likely would have been better dead. He will now probably grow up, and be an anxiety to his parents, if he's got any—they usually haven't—and come to a bad and early end. What a great world!"

CHAPTER XI

Nadine enquired at Hugh's door again that night before she went to bed, and found that he was still asleep. She had promised her mother not to sit up, but as she undressed she almost smiled at the uselessness of going to bed, so impossible did it seem that sleep should come near her. After her one outburst of crying, she had felt no further agitation, for something so big and so quiet had entered her heart that all poignancy of anxiety and suspense were powerless to disturb it. As has been said, it was scarcely even whether Hugh lived or died that mattered: the only thing that mattered was Hugh. Had she been compelled to say whether she believed he would live or not, she would have given the negative. And yet there was a quality of peace in her that could not be shaken. It was a peace that humbled and exalted her. It wrapped her round very close, and yet she looked up to it, as to a mountain-peak on which dawn has broken.

Despite her conviction that sleep was impossible, she had hardly closed her eyes, when it embraced and swallowed up all her consciousness. This cyclone of emotion, in the center of which dwelt the windless calm, had utterly tired her out, though she was unaware of fatigue, and her rest was dreamless. Then suddenly she was aware that there was light in the room, and that she was being spoken to, and she passed from unconsciousness back to the full possession of her faculties, as swiftly as they had been surrendered. She found Dodo bending over her.

"Come, my darling," she said.

Nadine had no need to ask any question, but as she put on her slippers and dressing-gown Dodo spoke again.

"He has been awake for an hour and asking for you," she said. "The nurse and the doctor are with him: they think you had better come. It is possible that if he sees you there, he may go off to sleep again. But it is possible—you are not afraid, darling?"

Nadine's mouth quivered into something very like a smile.

"Afraid of Hughie?" she asked.

They went up the stairs, and along the passage together. The moon that last night had been hidden by the tempest of storm-clouds, or perhaps blown away from the sky by the wind, now rode high and cloudlessly amid a multitude of stars. No wind moved across those ample floors: only from the beach they heard the plunge and thunder of the sea that could not so easily resume its tranquillity. The moonlight came through the window of Hugh's room also, making on the floor a shadow-map of the bars.

He was lying again with his face towards the door, but now his eyes were vacantly open, and his whole face had changed. There was an agony of weariness over it, and from his eyes there looked out a dumb, unavailing rebellion. Before they had got to the door they had heard a voice inside speaking, a voice that Nadine did not recognize. It kept saying over and over again, "Nadine, Nadine."

As she came across the room to the bed, he looked straight at her, but it was clear he did not see her, and the monotonous, unrecognizable voice went on saying, "Nadine, Nadine."

The doctor was standing by the head of the bed, looking intently at Hugh, but doing nothing: the nurse was at the foot.

He signed to Nadine to come, and took a step towards her.

"You've got to make him feel you are here," he said. Then with his hand he beckoned to the nurse and to Dodo, to stand out of sight of Hugh, so that by chance he might think himself alone with the girl.

Nadine knelt down on the floor, so that her face was close to those unseeing eyes, and the mouth that babbled her name. And the great peace was with her still. She spoke in her ordinary natural voice without tremor.

"Yes, Hughie, yes," she said. "Don't go on calling me. Here I am. What's the use of calling now? I came as soon as I knew you wanted me."

"Nadine, Nadine," said Hughie, in the same unmeaning monotone.

"Hughie, you are quite idiotic!" she said. "As if you didn't know in your own heart that I would always come when you wanted me. I always would, my dear. You need never be afraid that I shall leave you. I am yours, don't you see?"

"Nadine, Nadine," said Hugh.

Nadine's whole soul went into her words.

"Hughie, you are not with me yet," she said. "I want you, too, and I mean to

have you. I didn't know till to-day that I wanted you, and now I can't do without you. Hughie, do you hear?" she said. "Oh, answer me, Hughie dear!"

There was dead silence. Then Hugh gave a great sigh.

"Nadine!" he said. But it was Hugh's voice that spoke then.

She bent forward.

"Oh, Hughie, you have come then," she said. "Welcome; you don't know how I wanted you!"

"Yes, I'm here all right," said Hugh in a voice scarcely audible. "But I'm so tired. It's horrible; it's like death!"

Nadine gave her little croaking laugh.

"It isn't like anything of the kind," she said. "But of course you are tired. Wouldn't it be a good thing to go to sleep?"

"I don't know," said Hugh.

"But I do. I'm tired too, Hughie, awfully tired. If I leaned my head back against your bed I should go to sleep too."

"Nadine, it is you?" said Hugh.

"Oh, my dear! What other girl could be with you?"

"No, that's true. Nadine, would it bore you to stop with me a bit? We might talk afterwards, when—when you've had a nap."

"That will be ripping," said Nadine, assuming a sleepy voice.

There was silence for a little. Then once again, but in his own voice, Hugh spoke her name. This time she did not answer, and she felt his hand move till it rested against her plaited hair.

Then in the silence Nadine became conscious of another noise regular and slow as the faint hoarse thunder of the sea, the sound of quiet breathing. After a while the doctor came round the head of the bed.

"We can manage to wrap you up, and make you fairly comfortable," he whispered. "I think he has a better chance of sleeping if you stop there."

The light and radiance in Nadine's eyes were a miracle of beauty, like some enchanted dawn rising over a virgin and unknown land. She smiled her unmistakable answer, but did not speak, and presently Dodo returned with pillows and blankets, which she spread over her and folded round her.

"The nurse will be in the next room," said the doctor; "call her if anything is

wanted."

Dodo and the doctor went back to their rooms, and Nadine was left alone with Hugh. That night was the birthnight and the bridal-night of her soul: there was it born, and through the long hours of the winter night it watched beside its lover and its beloved, in that stillness of surrender to and absorption in another, that lies beyond and above the unrest of passion amid the snows and sunshine of the uttermost regions to which the human spirit can aspire. She knew nothing of the passing of the hours, nor for a long time did any thought or desire of sleep come near her eyelids, but the dim room became to her the golden island of which once in uncomprehending mockery she had spoken to Hugh. She knew it to be golden now, and so far from being unreal, there was nothing in her experience so real as it.

She could just turn her head without disturbing Hugh's hand that lay on her plaited hair, and from time to time she looked round at him. His face still wore the sunken pallor of exhaustion, but as his sleep, so still and even-breathing, began to restore the low-ebb of his vital force, it seemed to Nadine that the darkness of the valley of the shadow, to the entrance of which he had been so near, cleared off his face as eclipse passes from the moon. How near he had been, she guessed, but it seemed to her that for the present his face was set the other way. She knew, too, that it was she who had had the power to make him look life-wards again, and the knowledge filled her with a sort of abasing pride. He had answered to her voice when he was past all other voices, and had come back in obedience to it.

She did not and she could not yet be troubled with the thought of anything else besides the fact that Hugh lived. As far as was known yet, he might never recover his activity of movement again, and years of crippled life were all that lay in front of him; but in the passing away of the immediate imminent fear, she could not weigh or even consider what that would mean. Similarly the thought of Seymour lay for the present outside the focus of her mind: everything but the fact that Hugh lived was blurred and had wavering outlines. As the hours went on the oblongs of moonshine on the floor moved across the room, narrowing as they went. Then the moon sank and the velvet of the cloudless sky grew darker, and the stars more luminous. One great planet, tremulous and twinkling, made a glory beside which all the lesser lights paled into insignificance. No wind stirred in the great halls of the night, the moans and yells of its unquiet soul were still, and the boom of the surf grew ever less sonorous, like the thunder of a retreating storm. Occasionally the night-nurse appeared at the doorway of the room adjoining, where she sat, and as often Nadine looked up at her smiling. Once, very softly, she came round the head of the bed, and looked at Hugh, then bent down towards the girl.

"Won't you get some sleep?" she said, and Nadine made a little gesture of raised eyebrows and parted hands that was characteristic of her.

"I don't know," she whispered. "Perhaps not. I don't want to."

Then her solitary night vigil began again, and it seemed to her that she would not have bartered a minute of it for the best hour that her life had known before. The utter peace and happiness of it grew as the night went on, for still close to her head there came the regular uninterrupted breathing, and the weight, just the weight of a hand absolutely relaxed, lay on her hair. Not the faintest stir of movement other than those regular respirations came from the bed, and all the laughter and joy of which her days had been full was as the light of the remotest of stars compared to the glorious planet that sang in the windless sky, when weighed against the joy that that quiet breathing gave her. She did not color her consciousness with hope, she did not illuminate it by prayer; there was no room in her mind for anything except the knowledge that Hugh slept and lived.

It was now near the dawning of the winter day; the stars were paling in the sky, and the sky grew ensaffroned with the indescribable hue that heralds day. Footfalls, muffled and remote, began to stir in the house, and far away there came the sound of crowing cocks, faint but exultant, hailing the dawn. About that time, Nadine looked round once more at Hugh, and saw in the pallid light of morning that the change she had noticed before was more distinct. There had come back to his face something of the firm softness of youth, there had been withdrawn from it the droop and hardness of exhaustion. And turning again, she gave one sigh and fell fast asleep.

Lover and beloved they lay there sleeping, while the dawn brightened in the sky, she leaning against the bed where he was stretched, he with his hand on her hair. And strangely, the moment that she slept, their positions seemed to be reversed, and Hugh in his sleep appeared unconsciously to keep watch over and guard her, though all night she had been awake for him. Once her head slipped an inch or two, so that his hand no longer lay on her hair, but it seemed as if that movement reached down to him fathom-deep in his slumber and immediately afterwards his hand, which had lain so motionless and inert all night, moved, as if to a magnet, after that bright hair, seeking and finding it again. And dawn brightened into day, and the sun leaped up from his lair in the East, and still Nadine slept, and Hugh slept. It was as if until then the balance of vitality had kept the girl awake to pour into him of her superabundance: now she was drained, and sleep with the level stroke of his soft hand across the furrows of trouble and the jagged edges of injury and exhaustion comforted both alike.

It had been arranged after these events of storm that the party should disperse,

and Dodo went to early breakfast downstairs with her departing guests, who were leaving soon after. But first she went into the nurse's room, next door to where Hugh lay, to make enquiries, and was taken by her to look into the sick-room. With daylight their sleep seemed only to have deepened: it was like the slumber of lovers who have been long awake in passion of mutual surrender, and at the end have fallen asleep like children, with mere effacement of consciousness. Nadine's head was a little bowed forward, and her breath came not more evenly than his. It was the sleep of childlike content that bound them both, and bound them together.

Dodo looked long, and then with redoubled precaution moved softly into the nurse's room again, with mouth quivering between smiles and tears.

"My dear, I never saw anything so perfectly sweet," she said. "Do let them have their sleep out, nurse. And Nadine has slept in Hugh's room all night. What ducks! Please God it shall so often happen again!"

Nurse Bryerley was not unsympathetic, but she felt that explanations were needed.

"I understood the young lady was engaged to some one else," she said.

Dodo smiled.

"But until now no one has quite understood the young lady herself," she said. "Least of all, has she understood herself. I think she will find that she is less mysterious now."

"Mr. Graves will have to take some nourishment soon," said Nurse Bryerley.

Dodo considered.

"Then could you not give him his nourishment very cautiously, so that he will go to sleep again afterwards?" she asked. "I should like them to sleep all day like that. But then, you see, nurse, I am a very odd woman. But don't disturb them till you must. I think their souls are getting to know each other. That may not be scientific nursing, but I think it is sound nursing. It's too bad we can't eternalize such moments of perfect equilibrium."

"Certainly the young lady was awake till nearly dawn," said Nurse Bryerley. "It wouldn't hurt her to have a good rest."

Dodo beamed.

"Oh, leave them as long as possible," she said. "You have no idea how it warms my heart. There will be trouble enough when they awake."

Seymour was among those who were going by the early train, and when Dodo came down he had finished breakfast. He got up just as she entered.

"How is he?" he asked.

Dodo's warm approbation went out to him.

"It was nice of you to ask that first, dear Seymour," she said. "He is asleep: he has slept all night."

Seymour lit a cigarette.

"I asked that first," he said, "because it was a mixture of politeness and duty to do so. I suppose you understand."

Dodo took the young man by the arm.

"Come out and talk to me in the hall," she said. "Bring me a cup of tea."

The morning sunshine flooded the window-seat by the door, and Dodo sat down there for one moment's thought before he joined her. But she found that no thought was necessary. She had absolutely made up her mind as to her own view of the situation, and with all the regrets in the world for him, she was prepared to support it. In a minute Seymour joined her.

"Nadine came down to the beach just before Hugh went in yesterday morning," he said, "and she called out—called?—shouted out, 'Not you, Hughie: Seymour, Berts, anybody, but not you!' There was no need for me to think what that meant."

Dodo looked at him straight.

"No, my dear, there was no need," she said.

"Then I have been a—a farcical interlude," said he, not very kindly. "You managed that farcical interlude, you know. You licensed it, so to speak, like the censor of plays."

"Yes, I licensed it, you are quite right. But, my dear, I didn't license it as a farce; there you wrong me. I licensed it as what I hoped would be a very pleasant play. You must be just, Seymour: you didn't love her then, nor she you. You were good friends, and there was no shadow of a reason to suppose that you would not pass very happy times together. The great love, the real thing, is not given to everybody. But when it comes, we must bow to it.... It is royal."

All his flippancy and quickness of wit had gone from him. Next conversation remained only because it was a habit.

"And I am royal," he said. "I love Nadine like that."

"Then you know that when that regality comes," she said quickly, "it comes without control. It is the same with Nadine; it is by no wish of hers that it

came."

"I must know that from Nadine," he said. "I can't take your word for it, or anybody's except hers. She made a promise to me."

"She cannot keep it," said Dodo. "It is an impossibility for her. She made it under different conditions, and you put your hand to it under the same. And Nadine said you understood, and behaved so delightfully yesterday. All honor to you, since behind your behavior there was that knowledge, that royalty."

"I had to. But don't think I abdicated. But she was in terrible distress, and really, Aunt Dodo, the rest of your guests were quite idiotic. Berts looked like a frog; he had the meaningless pathos of a frog on his silly face—"

"Nadine said he looked like a funeral with plumes," Dodo permitted herself to interpolate.

"More like a frog. Edith kept pouring out glasses of port to take to Nadine, but I think she usually forgot and drank them herself. It was a lunatic asylum. But Nadine felt."

"Ah, my dear," said Dodo, with a movement of her hand on to his.

Seymour quietly disengaged his own.

"Very gratifying," he said, "but as I said, I take nobody's word for it, except Nadine's. She has got to tell me herself. Where is she? I have to go in five minutes, but to see her will still leave me four to spare."

Dodo got up.

"You shall see her," she said. "But come quietly, because she is asleep."

"If she is only to talk to me in her sleep—" began he.

"Come quietly," said Dodo.

But all her pity was stirred, and as they went along the passage to Hugh's room, she slipped her arm into his. She knew that her *coup* was slightly theatrical, but there seemed no better way of showing him. It might fail: he might still desire explanations, but it was worth trying.

"And remember I am sorry," she said, "and be sure that Nadine will be sorry."

"Riddles," said Seymour.

"Yes, my dear, riddles if you will," said she. "But you may guess the answer."

Dodo quietly turned the handle of the door into the nurse's room, and entered with her arm still in his. She made a sign of silence, and took Seymour straight through into the sick-room. All was as she had left it a quarter-of-an-hour ago;

Nadine still slept and Hugh, in that same attitude of security and love. Her head was drooped; she slept as only children and lovers sleep. But Dodo with all her intuition did not see as much as Seymour, who loved her, saw. The truth of it was branded into his brain, whereas it only shone in hers. She saw the situation: he felt it.

Then with a signal of pressure on his arm, she led him out again.

"She has been there all night," she said. "She only fell asleep at dawn."

They were in the passage again before Seymour spoke.

"There is no need for me to awake her or talk to her," he said. "You were quite right. And I congratulate you on your *ensemble*. I should have guessed that it required most careful rehearsal. And I should have been wrong. And now, for God's sake, don't be kind and tender—"

He took his arm away from hers, feeling for her then more resentment than he might feel against the footman who conveyed cold soup to him. He did not want the footman's sympathy, nor did he want Dodo's.

"And spare me your optimism," he said. "If you tell me it is all for the best, I shall scream. It isn't for the best, as far as I am concerned. It is damned bad. I was a Thing, and Nadine made a man of me. Now she is tired of her handiwork, and says that I shall be a Thing again. And don't tell me I shall get over it. The fact that I know I shall, makes your information, which was on the tip of your tongue, wanton and superfluous. But if you think I shall love Hugh, because he loves Nadine, you are utterly astray. I am not a child in a Sunday school, letting the teacher smack both sides of my face. I hate Hugh, and I am not the least touched by the disgusting spectacle you have taken me on tiptoe to see. They looked like two amorous monkeys in the monkey-house."

Seymour suddenly paused and gasped.

"They didn't," he said. "At any rate Nadine looked as I have often pictured her looking. The difference is that it was myself, not Hugh, beside whom I imagined her falling asleep. That makes a lot of difference if you happen to be the person concerned. And now I hope the motor is ready to take me away, and many thanks for an absolutely damnable visit. Don't look pained. It doesn't hurt you as much as it hurts me. There is a real *cliché* to finish with."

Dodo's *coup* had been sufficiently theatrical to satisfy her, but she had not reckoned with the possible savageness that it might arouse. Seymour's temper, as well as his love, was awake, and she had not thought of the two as being at home simultaneously, but had imagined they played Box-and-Cox with each other in the minds of men. Here Box and Cox met, and they were hand-in-hand. He was convinced and angry: she had imagined he would be convinced

and pathetic. With that combination she had felt herself perfectly competent to deal. But his temper roused hers.

"You are at least interesting," she said briskly, "and I have enjoyed what you call your damnable visit as much as you. You seem to have behaved decently yesterday, but no doubt that was Nadine's mistake."

"Not at all: it was mine," he said.

"Which you now recognize," said she. "I am afraid you must be off, if you want to catch your train. Good-by."

"Good-by," said he.

He turned from her at the top of the stairs, and went down a half-dozen of them. Then suddenly he turned back again.

"Don't you see I'm in hell?" he said.

Dodo entirely melted at that, and ran down the stairs to him.

"Oh, Seymour, my dear," she said. "A woman's pity can't hurt you. Do accept it."

She drew that handsome tragical face towards her, and kissed him.

"Do you mind my kissing you?" she said. "There's my heart behind it. There is, indeed."

"Thanks, Aunt Dodo," he said. "And—and you might tell Nadine I saw her like that. I am not so very stupid. I understand: good-by."

"And Hugh?" she asked, quite unwisely, but in that optimistic spirit that he had deprecated.

"Don't strain magnanimity," he said. "It's quality is *not* strained. Say good-by to Nadine for me. Say I saw her asleep, and didn't disturb her. I never thought much of her intelligence, but she may understand that. She will have to tell me what she means to do. That I require. At present our wedding-day is fixed."

Seymour broke off suddenly and ran downstairs without looking back.

Dodo was quite sincerely very sorry for him, but almost the moment he had gone she ceased to think about him altogether, for there were so many soul-absorbing topics to occupy her, and forgetting she had had no breakfast, she went to Edith's room (Edith alone had not the slightest intention of going away) to discuss them. Her optimism was luckily quite incurable: she could not look on the darker aspect of affairs for more than a minute or two. She found Edith breakfasting in bed, with a large fur cape flung over her shoulders. Her breakfast had been placed on a table beside her, but for greater

convenience she had disposed the plates round her, on her counterpane. There were also disposed there sheets of music-paper, a pen and ink-bottle, and a box of cigarettes. The window was wide open, and as Dodo entered the draught caused the music paper to flutter, and Edith laid hasty restraining hands on it, and screamed with her mouth full.

"Shut the door quickly!" she cried. "And then come and have some breakfast, Dodo. I don't think I shall get up to-day. I have been composing since six this morning, and if I get up the thread may be entirely broken. Beethoven worked at the C minor Symphony for three days and nights without eating, sleeping, or washing."

"I see you are eating," remarked Dodo. "I hope that won't prevent your giving us another C minor."

"The C minor is much over-rated work," said Edith; "it is commonplace melodically, and clumsily handled. If I had composed it, I should not be very proud of it."

"Which is a blessing you didn't, because then you would have composed something of which you were not proud," said Dodo, ringing the bell. "Yes, I shall have some breakfast with you. Oh, Edith, everything is so interesting, and Hughie has slept all night, and Nadine with him. They are sleeping now, Nadine on the floor half-sitting up with her head against the bed, looking too sweet for anything. And poor dear Seymour has just gone away. I took him in to see them by way of breaking it to him. Whoever guessed that he would fall in love with her? It is very awkward, for I thought it would be such a nice sensible marriage. And now of course there will be no marriage at all."

At this moment the bell was answered, and Edith in trying to prevent her music-paper from practising aviation, upset the ink-bottle. Several minutes were spent in quenching the thirst of sheets of blotting paper at it, as you water horses when their day's work is over.

"One of the faults of your mind, Dodo," said Edith, as this process was going on, "is that you don't concentrate enough. You have too many objects in focus simultaneously. Now my success is due to the fact that I have only one in focus at a time. For instance this Stygian pool of ink does not distress me in the slightest—"

"No, darling, it's not your counterpane," said Dodo.

"It wouldn't distress me if it was. But if I opened your mind I should find Hugh's recovery, Nadine's future, and your baby in about equally vivid colors, and all in sharp outline. Also you make too many plans for other people. Do leave something to Providence sometimes."

"Oh, I leave lots," said Dodo. "I only try to touch up the designs now and then. Providence is often rather sketchy and unfinished. But yesterday's design was absolutely wonderful. I can hardly even be sorry for Hugh."

Edith shook her head.

"You are quite incorrigible," she said. "Providence sent what was clearly intended to be a terrible event, but you see all sorts of glories in it. I don't thing it is very polite. It is like laughing at a ghost story instead of being terrified."

Dodo's breakfast had been brought in, and she fell to it with an excellent appetite.

"There is nothing like scenes before breakfast to make one hungry," she said. "Think how hungry a murderer would be if he was taken out to be hanged before breakfast, and then given his breakfast afterwards. I had a scene with Seymour, you know. I am very sorry for him, but somehow he doesn't seem to matter. He lost his temper, which I rather respected, and showed me he had an ideal. That I respect too. I remember the struggles I used to go through in order to get one."

"Were they successful?" asked Edith.

"Only by a process of elimination. I did everything that I wanted, and found it was a mistake. So, last of all, I married Jack. What a delightful life I have led, and how good this bacon is. Don't you think David is a very nice name? I am going to call my baby David."

"It may be a girl," said Edith.

"Then I shall call it Bathsheba," said Dodo without pause. "Or do I mean Beersheba? Bath, I think. Edith, why is it that when I am most anxious and full of cares, I feel it imperative to talk tommy-rot? I'm sure there is enough to worry me into a grave if not a vault, between Seymour and Nadine and Hugh. But after all, one needn't worry about Nadine. It is quite certain that she will do as she chooses, and if she wants to marry Hugh with both arms in slings, and two crutches, and a truss and one of those sort of scrapers under one foot she certainly will. I brought her up on those lines, to know her own mind, and then do what she wanted. It has been a failure hitherto, because she has never really wanted anything. But now I think my system of education is going to be justified. I am also suffering from reaction. Last night I thought our dear Hughie was dying, and I am perfectly convinced this morning that he isn't. So, too, I am sure, is Nadine: otherwise she couldn't have fallen asleep like that. And what Hughie did was so splendid. I am glad God made men like that, but it doesn't prevent my eating a huge breakfast and talking rot. I hope you don't mean to go away. It is so dull to be alone in the house with two young lovers,

even when one adores them both."

"Aren't you getting on rather quick, Dodo?" asked Edith.

"Probably: but Seymour is *congédié*—how do you say it—spun, dismissed, and quite certainly Nadine has fallen in love with Hugh. There isn't time to be slow, nowadays. If you are slow you are left gasping on the beach like a fish. I still swim in the great waters, thank God."

Dodo got up, and her mood changed utterly. She was never other than genuine, but it had pleased Nature to give her many facets, all brilliant, but all reflecting different-colored lights.

"Oh, my dear, life is so short," she said, "and every moment should be so precious to everybody. I hate going to sleep, for fear I may miss something. Fancy waking in the morning and finding you had missed something, like an earthquake or suffragette riot! My days are reasonably full, but I want them to be unreasonably full. And just now Jack keeps saying, 'Do rest: do lie down: do have some beef-tea.' Just as if I didn't know what was good for David! Edith, he is going to be such a gay dog! All the girls and all the women are going to fall desperately in love with him. He is going to marry when he is thirty, and not a day before, and he will be absolutely simple and unspoiled and a wicked little devil on his marriage morning. And then all his energies will be concentrated on one point, and that will be his wife. He will utterly adore her, and think of nobody else except me. I shall be seventy-four, you perceive, at that time, and so I shall be easy to please. The older one gets the easier one is to please. Already little things please me quite enormously, and big ones, as you also perceive, make me go off my head. Oh, I am sure heaven will be extremely nice, if I ever die, which God forbid; but however nice it is, it won't be the same as this. You agree there I know; you want to make all the music you can first—"

"As a protest against what seems to be the music of heaven," said Edith firmly, "if we may judge by hymn tunes and chants, and the first act of Parsifal, and I suppose the last of Faust, and Handel's oratorios. It is very degrading stuff; all the changes of key are childishly simple, and the proportion of full closes is nearly indecent. And I want another ink-bottle."

Edith whistled a short phrase on her teeth, as a gentle hint to her hostess.

"It's for the flutes," she said, "and the 'cellos take it up two octaves lower."

She grabbed at her music-paper.

"Then the horns start it again in the subdominant," she said, "and all the silly audience will think they are merely out of tune. That's because they got what they didn't expect. To be any good, you must surprise the ear. I'll surprise

them. But I want another ink-bottle. And may I have lunch in my room, Dodo, if necessary? I don't know when I shall be able to get up."

Dodo was not attending in any marked manner.

"We will all do what we choose," she said genially.

"We will be a sort of harmless Medmenham Abbey. You shall spill all the ink you please, and Nadine shall marry Hugh, who will get quite well, and I shall go and order dinner and see if Nadine is awake. I am afraid I am rather fatuously optimistic this morning, like Mr. Chesterton, and that is always so depressing, both to other people at the time, and to oneself subsequently. Dear me, what a charming world if there was no such thing as reaction. As a matter of fact I do not experience much of it."

Edith gave a great sigh of relief as Dodo left the room, and concentrated herself with singular completeness on the horn-tune in the subdominant. She was quite devoted to Dodo, but the horn-tune was in focus just now, and she knew if Dodo had stopped any longer, she would have become barely tolerant of her presence. Shortly afterwards the fresh supply of ink came also, and Edith proceeded straight up into the seventh heaven of her own compositions, which, good or bad, were perfection itself to their author.

Dodo found a packet of letters waiting for her and among them a telegram from Miss Grantham saying, "Deeply grieved. Can I do anything?" This she swiftly answered, replying, "Darling Grantie. Nothing whatever," and went to Nadine's room, where she found Nadine, half-dressed, rosy from her bath, and radiant of spirit.

"Oh, Mama, I never had such a lovely night," she said. "How delicious it must be to be married! I didn't wake till half-an-hour ago, and simultaneously Hughie woke, which looks as if we suited each other, doesn't it? And then the doctor came in, and looked at him, and said he was much stronger, much fuller of vitality for his long sleep, and he congratulated me on having made him sleep. And the nurse told me the first great danger, that he would not rally after the shock of the operation, was over. As far as that goes he will be all right."

Nadine kissed her mother, and clung round her neck, dewy-eyed.

"I'm not going to think about the future," she said. "Sufficient to the day is the good thereof. It is enough this morning that Hughie has got through the night and is stronger. If I had been given any wish to be fulfilled I should have chosen that. And if on the top of that I had been given another, it would have been that I should have helped towards it, which I suppose is the old Eve coming in. I think I had better finish dressing, Mama, instead of babbling. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes, dear, I had it with Edith. She is in bed making tunes and pouring ink over the counterpane, and not minding."

Nadine's face clouded for a moment, in spite of the accomplishment of her wishes.

"And then I must see Seymour," she said. "It is no use putting that off. But, oh, Mama, to think that till yesterday I was willing to marry him, with Hugh in the world all the time. Whatever happens to Hugh, I can't marry him, Seymour, I mean, if the ridiculous English pronouns admit of any meaning; and I must tell him."

"Seymour left half an hour ago," said Dodo. "But there's no need for you to tell him. I took him into Hugh's room and he saw you asleep. He understands. He couldn't very well help understanding, darling. He told me he understood before, when you called out to Hugh not to attempt the rescue. But he only understood it pretty well, as the ordinary person says he understands French. But when he saw you asleep, not exactly in Hugh's arms, but sufficiently close, he understood it like a real native, poor boy!"

"What did he do?" asked Nadine.

"He behaved very rightly and properly, and lost his temper with me, just as I lose my temper with the porter at the station if I miss my train. I had been just porter to him. He thanked me for a horrid visit, only he called it damnable, and so I lost my temper, too, and we had a few flowers of speech on the staircase, not big ones, but just promising buds. And then, poor chap, he came back to me, and told me he was in hell, and I kissed him, and he didn't seem to mind much, and I suppose he caught his train. Otherwise he would have been back by now. I'm exceedingly sorry for him, Nadine, and you must write him a sweet little letter, which won't do any good at all, but it's one of the things you have to do. Darling, I wonder if jilting runs in families like consumption and red faces. You see I jilted my darling Jack, to marry into your family. But you must write the sweet little letter I spoke of, because you are sorry, only you couldn't help it."

"Did you write a sweet little letter under—under the same circumstances to Papa Jack?" asked Nadine.

"No, dear, because I hadn't got anybody exceedingly wise to give me that good advice," said Dodo. "Also, because I was a little brute there is no reason why you should be."

"Perhaps it runs in the family, too," suggested Nadine.

"Then the quicker it runs out of the family the better. Besides you are sorry for Seymour."

Nadine opened her hands wide.

"Am I? I hope so," she said. "But if you are quite full of gladness for one thing, Mama, it is a little difficult to find a corner for anything else."

Dodo turned to leave the room.

"Anywhere will do. Just under the stairs," she said. "I don't want to put it in the middle of the drawing-room. After all, darling, you propose to jilt him."

"There's something in that," said Nadine. "Oh, Mama, I used not to have any heart at all, and now that I've got one it doesn't belong to me."

"No woman's heart belongs to her," said Dodo. "If it belongs to her, it isn't a heart."

"I should have thought that nonsense yesterday," said Nadine. "Oh, wait while I finish dressing; I shan't be ten minutes. What meetings we have had in my lovely back room! One, I remember so particularly. You and Esther and Berts all lay on my bed like sardines in evening dresses, and I had just refused to marry Hugh, who was playing billiards with Uncle Algie. Somehow the things like love and devotion seemed to me quite old-fashioned, or anyhow they seemed to me signs of age. They did, indeed. I thought a clear brain was infinitely preferable to a confused heart, especially if it belonged to somebody else. I'm not used to it, Mama: it still seems to me very odd like a hat that doesn't fit. But it's a fact, and I suppose I shall grow into it, not that any one ever grew into a hat. But when Hugh swam out yesterday morning, something came tumbling down inside me. Or was it that only something cracked, like the shell of a nut? It does not much matter, so long as it is not mended again. But how queer that it should happen in a second, like that. I suppose time has nothing to do with what concerns one's soul. I believe Plato says something about it. I don't think I shall look it up. He wrote wonderfully, but when a thing happens to oneself, that seems to matter more than Plato's reflections on the subject."

There was a short pause as Nadine brushed her teeth, but Dodo sitting on the unslept-in bed did not feel inclined to break it. She wondered whether a particular point in the situation would occur to Nadine, whether her illumination as regards a woman's heart threw any light on that very different affair, a man's heart. She was not left long in doubt. The question of a man's heart was altogether unilluminated, and to Dodo there was something poignantly pathetic about Nadine's blissful ignorance. She came and sat down on the bed close to her mother.

"Hughie will see I love him," she said, "because he won't be able to help it. I shall just wait, oh, so happily, for him to say again what he has so often said

before. He will know my answer, before I give it him. I hope he will say it soon. Then we shall be engaged, and people who are engaged are a little freer, aren't they, Mama?"

Dodo felt incapable of clouding that radiant face, for she knew in the days that were coming, all its radiance would be needed: not a single sparkle of light must be wasted. But it did not seem to her very likely that Hugh, whose joyous strength and splendid activity had been so often rejected by Nadine, would be likely to offer to her again what would be, in all probability, but a crippled parody of himself. But her sense of justice told her that Nadine owed him all the strength and encouragement her eager vitality could give him. It was only fair that she should devote herself to him, and let him feel all the inspiration to live that her care of him could give him. But it seemed to her very doubtful if Hugh would consent, even if he perceived that it was love not warm friendship that she gave him, to let himself and his crippled body appeal to her. In days gone by, she would not marry him for love, and it seemed to Dodo that a real man, as Hugh was, would not allow her to marry him for pity. He had offered her his best, and she had refused it; it would not be surprising if he refused to offer her his worst. The joy that had inspired Dodo so that she had softly melted over the sight of Nadine asleep by Hugh, and had exultantly mopped up the spilt ink with Edith, suddenly evaporated, leaving her dry and cold.

"You must wait, Nadine," she said. "You must make no plans. Give Hughie your vitality, and don't ask more."

She got up.

"Now, my darling, I shall go downstairs," she said, "and order your breakfast. You must be hungry. And then you can say your prayers, and breakfast will be ready."

Nadine, absorbed in her own thoughts, felt nothing of this.

"Prayers?" she said. "Why I was praying all night till dawn. At least, I was wanting, just wanting, and not for myself. Isn't that prayers?"

Dodo loved that: it was exactly what she meant in her inmost heart by prayers. She drew Nadine to her and kissed her.

"Darling, you have said enough for a week," she said, "if not more. And you said them because you must, which is the only proper plan. If you don't feel you must say your prayers, it is just as well not to say them at all. But you shall have breakfast, whether you feel you must or not. I say you must."

CHAPTER XII

One morning a fortnight later, Jack, Dodo, and Edith were sitting together on the cliff above the bay, looking down to the sandy foreshore. Jack, finding that Dodo was obliged to stop at Meering with Nadine, had personally abandoned his third shooting-party, leaving Berts, whom he implicitly trusted to make himself and everybody else quite comfortable, in charge. Among the guests was Berts' father, whom Berts apparently kept in his place. Jack had just told Dodo and Edith the contents of Berts' letter, received that morning. All was going very well, but Berts had arranged that his father should escort two ladies of the party to see the interesting town of Lichfield one afternoon, instead of shooting the Warren beat, where birds came high and Berts' father was worse than useless. But it was certain that he would enjoy Lichfield very much, and the shoot would be more satisfactory without him. If his mother was still at Meering, Berts sent his love, and knew she would agree with him.

Edith just now, working her way through the entire orchestra, was engaged on the *cor anglais* which, while Hugh was still so ill, Dodo insisted should not be played in the house. It gave rather melancholy notes, and was productive of moisture. But she finished a passage which seemed to have no end, before she acknowledged these compliments. Then she emptied the *cor anglais* into the heather.

"Poor Bertie is a drone," she said; "he never thinks it worth while to do anything well. Berts is better: he thinks it worth while to sit on his father really properly. I thought my energy might wake Bertie up, and that was chiefly why I married him. But it only made him go to sleep. Lichfield is about his level. I don't know anything about Lichfield, and I don't know much about Bertie. But they seem to me rather suitable. And much more can be done with the *cor anglais* than Wagner ever imagined. The solo in *Tristan* is absolute child's play. I could perform it myself with a week's practice."

Dodo had been engaged in a small incendiary operation among the heather, with the match with which she had lit her cigarette. For the moment it seemed that her incendiarism was going to fulfil itself on larger lines than she had intended.

"Jack, I have set fire to Wales, like Lloyd George," she cried. "Stamp on it with your great feet. What great large strong feet! How beautiful are the feet of them that put out incendiary attempts in Wales! About Bertie, Edith, if you will stop playing that lamentable flute for a moment—"

"Flute?" asked Edith.

"Trombone, if you like. The point is that your vitality hasn't inspired Bertie; it has only drained him of his. You set out to give him life, and you have become

his vampire. I don't say it was your fault: it was his misfortune. But Berts is calm enough to keep your family going. The real question is about mine. Yes, Jack, that was where Hughie went into the sea, when the sea was like Switzerland. And those are the reefs, before which, though it's not grammatical, he had to reach the boat. He swam straight out from where your left foot is pointing. A Humane Society medal came for him yesterday, and Nadine pinned it upon his bed-clothes. He says it is rot, but I think he rather likes it. She pinned it on while he was asleep, and he didn't know what it meant. He thought it was the sort of thing that they give to guards of railway trains. The dear boy was rather confused, and asked if he had joined the station-masters."

Jack shaded his eyes from the sun.

"And a big sea was running?" he asked.

"But huge. It broke right up to the cliffs at the ebb. And into it he went like a duck to water."

Edith got up.

"I have heard enough of Hugh's trumpet blown," she said.

"And I have heard enough of the *cor anglais*," said Dodo. "Dear Edith, will you go away and play it there? You see, darling, Jack came out this morning to talk to me, and I came out to talk to him. Or we will go away if you like: the point is that somebody must."

"I shall go and play golf," said Edith with dignity. "I may not be back for lunch. Don't wait for me."

Dodo was roused to reply to this monstrous recommendation.

"If I had been in the habit of waiting for you," she said, "I should still be where I was twenty years ago. You are always in a hurry, darling, and never in time."

"I was in time for dinner last night," said Edith.

"Yes, because I told you it was at eight, when it was really at half past."

Edith blew a melancholy minor phrase.

"*Leit-motif*," she said, "describing the treachery of a friend."

"Tooty, tooty, tooty," said Dodo cheerfully, "describing the gay impenitence of the same friend."

Edith exploded with laughter, and put the *cor anglais* into its green-baize bag.

"Good-by," she said, "I forgive you."

"Thanks, darling. Mind you play better than anybody ever played before, as usual."

"But I do," said Edith passionately.

Dodo leaned back on the springy couch of the heather as Edith strode down the hillside.

"It's not conceit," she observed, "but conviction, and it makes her so comfortable. I have got a certain amount of it myself, and so I know what it feels like. It was dear of you to come down, Jack, and it will be still dearer of you if you can persuade Nadine to go back with you to Winston."

"But I don't want to go back to Winston. Anyhow, tell me about Nadine. I don't really know anything more than that she has thrown Seymour over, and devotes herself to Hugh."

"My dear, she has fallen head over ears in love with him."

"You are a remarkably unexpected family," Jack allowed himself to say.

"Yes; that is part of our charm. I think somewhere deep down she was always in love with him, but, so to speak, she couldn't get at it. It was like a seam of gold: you aren't rich until you have got down through the rock. And Hugh's adventure was a charge of dynamite to her; it sent the rock splintering in all directions. The gold lies in lumps before his eyes, but I am not sure whether he knows it is for him or not. He can't talk much, poor dear; he is just lying still, and slowly mending, and very likely he thinks no more than that she is only sorry for him, and wants to do what she can. But in a fortnight from now comes the date when she was to have married Seymour. He can't have forgotten that."

"Forgotten?" asked Jack.

"Yes; he doesn't remember much at present. He had severe concussion as well as that awful breakage of the hip."

"Do they think he will recover completely?" asked Jack.

"They can't tell yet. His little injuries have healed so wonderfully that they hope he may. They are more anxious about the effects of the concussion than the other. He seems in a sort of stupor still; he recognizes Nadine of course, but she hasn't, except on that first night, seemed to mean much to him."

"What was that?"

"He so nearly died then. He kept calling for her in a dreadful strange voice,

and when she came he didn't know her for a time. Then she put her whole soul into it, the darling, and made him know her, and he went to sleep. She slept, or rather lay awake, all night by his bed. She saved his life, Jack; they all said so."

"It seems rather perverse to refuse to marry him when he is sound, and the moment he is terribly injured to want to," said Jack.

"My darling, it is no use criticizing people," said Dodo, "unless by your criticism you can change them. Even then it is a great responsibility. But you could no more change Nadine by criticizing her, than you could change the nature of the wildcat at the Zoo by sitting down in front of its cage, and telling it you didn't like its disposition, and that it had not a good temper. You may take it that Nadine is utterly in love with him."

"And as he has always been utterly in love with her, I don't know why you want me to take Nadine away. Bells and wedding-cake as soon as Hugh can hobble to church."

"Oh, Jack, you don't see," she said. "If I know Hughie at all, he wouldn't dream of offering himself to Nadine until it is certain that he will be an able-bodied man again. And she is expecting him to, and is worrying and wondering about it. Also, she is doing him no good now. It can't be good for an invalid to have continually before him the girl to whom he has given his soul, who has persistently refused to accept it. It is true that they have exchanged souls now—as far as that goes my darling Nadine has so much the best of the bargain—but Hugh has to begin the—the negotiations, and he won't, even if he sees that Nadine is a willing Barkis, until he knows he has something more than a shattered unmendable thing to offer her. Consequently he is silent, and Nadine is perplexed. I will go on saying it over and over again if it makes it any clearer, but if you understand, you may signify your assent in the usual manner. Clap your great hands and stamp your great feet: oh, Jack, what a baby you are!"

"Do you suppose she would come away?" said Jack, coughing a little at the dust his great feet had raised from the loose soil.

"Yes, if you can persuade her that her presence isn't good for Hugh. So you will try; that's all right. Nadine has a great respect for Papa Jack's wisdom, and I can't think why. I always thought a lot of your heart, dear, but very little of your head. You mustn't retort that you never thought much of either of mine, because it wouldn't be manly, and I should tell you you were a coward as the Suffragettes do when they hit policemen in the face."

"And why should it be I to do all this?" asked Jack.

"Because you are Papa Jack," said Dodo, "and a girl listens to a man when she would not heed a woman. Oh, you might tell her, which is probably true, that Edith is going away to-morrow, and you want somebody to take care of you at Winston. I think even Nadine would see that it would not quite do if she was left here alone with Hughie. At least it is possible she might see that: you could use it to help to preach down a stepdaugher's heart. You must think of these things for yourself, though, because in my heart I am really altogether on Nadine's side. I think it is wonderful that she should now be waiting so eagerly and humbly for Hugh, poor crippled Hugh, as he at present is, to speak. She has chosen the good part like Mary, and I want you for the present to take it away from her. It's wiser for her to go, but am I," asked Dodo grammatically, "to supply the ruthless foe, which is you, with guns and ammunition against my daughter?"

"You can't take both sides," remarked Jack.

"Jack, I wish you were a woman for one minute, just to feel how ludicrous such an observation is. Our lives—not perhaps Edith's—are passed in taking both sides. My whole heart goes out to Hugh, who has been so punished for his gallant recklessness, and then the moment I say 'punished' I think of Nadine's awakened love and shout, 'No, I meant rewarded.' Then I think of Nadine, and wonder if I could bear being married to a cripple, and simultaneously, now that she has shown she can love, I cannot bear the thought of her being married to anybody else. After all Nelson had only one eye and one arm, and though he wasn't exactly married to Lady Hamilton, I'm sure she was divinely happy. But then, best of all, I think of Hugh making a complete recovery, and once more coming to Nadine with his great brown doggy eyes, and telling her.... Then for once I don't take both sides, but only one, which is theirs, and if it would advance their happiness, I would even take away from poor little Seymour his jade and his Antoinette, which is all that Nadine left him with, without a single qualm of regret."

Jack considered this a moment.

"After all, she has left him where she found him," said Jack, who had rather taken Edith's view about their marriage. "He had only his Antoinette and his jade when she accepted him, and until you make a further raid, he will have them still."

Dodo shook her head.

"Jack, it is rather tiresome of you," she said. "You are making me begin to have qualms for Seymour. She had found his heart for him, you see, and now having taken everything out of it, she has gone away again, leaving him a cupboard as empty as Mother Hubbard's."

"He will put the jade back—and Antoinette," said Jack hopefully.

Dodo got up.

"That is what I doubt," she said. "Until we have known a thing, we can't miss it. We only miss it when we have known it, and it is taken away, leaving the room empty. Then old things won't always go back into their places again; they look shabby and uninteresting, and the room is spoiled. It is very unfortunate. But what is to happen when a girl's heart is suddenly awakened? Is she to give it an opiate? What is the opiate for heart-ache? Surely not marriage with somebody different. Yet jilt is an ugly word."

Dodo looked at Jack with a sort of self-deprecation.

"Don't blame Nadine, darling," she said. "She inherited it; it runs in the family."

Jack jumped up, and took Dodo's hands in his.

"You shall not talk horrible scandal about the woman I love," he said.

"But it's true," said Dodo.

"Therefore it is the more abominable of you to repeat it," said he.

But there was a certain obstinacy about Dodo that morning.

"I think it's good for me to keep that scandal alive in my heart," she said. "Usen't the monks to keep peas in their boots to prevent them from getting too comfortable?"

"Monks were idiots," said Jack loudly, "and any one less like a monk than you, I never saw. Monk indeed! Besides, I believe they used to boil the peas first."

Dodo's face, which had been a little troubled, cleared considerably.

"That showed great commonsense," she said. "I don't think they can have been such idiots. Jack, if I boil that pea, would you mind my still keeping it in my boot?"

"Rather messy," said he. "Better take it out. After all, you did really take it out when you married me."

Dodo raised her eyes to his.

"David shall take it out," she said.

Jack had not at present heard of this nomenclature. In fact, it does him credit that he instantly guessed to whom allusion was being made.

"Oh, that's settled, is it?" he said. "And now, David's mother, give me a little

news of yourself. Is all well?"

Dodo's mouth grew extraordinarily tender.

"Oh, so well, Jesse," she said, "so well!"

She was standing a foot or so above him, on the steep hillside, and bending down to him, kissed him, and was silent a moment. Then she decided swiftly and characteristically that a few words like those that had just passed between them were as eloquent as longer speeches, and became her more usual self again.

"You are such a dear, Jack," she said, "and I will forgive your dreadful ignorance of the name of David's mother. Oh, look at the sea-gulls fishing for their lunch. Oh, for the wings of a sea-gull, not to fly away and be at rest at all, but to take me straight to the dining-room. And I feel certain Nadine will listen to you, and it would be a good thing to take her away for a little. She is living on her nerves, which is as expensive as eating pearls like Cleopatra."

"Drinking," said Jack. "She dissolved them—"

"Darling, vinegar doesn't dissolve pearls: it is a complete mistake to suppose it does. She took the pearls like a pill, and drank some vinegar afterwards. Jack, pull me up the hill, not because I am tired, but because it is pleasanter so. I am sorry you are going to-morrow, and I shall make love to Hughie after you've gone and pretend it's you. I do pray Hughie may get quite well, and he and Nadine, and you and I all have our heart's desire. Edith too: I hope she will write a symphony so beautiful that by common consent we shall throw away all the works of Beethoven and Bach and Brahms just as we throw away antiquated Bradshaws."

She was rather out of breath after delivering herself of this series of remarkable statements, and Jack got in a word.

"And who was David's mother?" he asked, with a rather tiresome reversion to an abandoned topic.

"I don't know or care," said Dodo with dignity. "But I'm going to be."

It required all Jack's wisdom to persuade Nadine to go away with him, more particularly because at the first opening of the subject, Edith, who was present, and whom Jack had unfortunately forgotten to take into his confidence, gave a passionate denial to the fact that she was departing also. But in the end she yielded, for during this last fortnight she had felt (as by the illumination of her love she could not help doing) that at present she 'meant' very little to Hugh. Her presence, which on that first critical night had not done less than set his face towards life instead of death, had, she felt, since then, dimly troubled and

perplexed him. Every day she had thought that he would need her, but each day passed, and he still lay there, with a barrier between him and her. Yet any day he might want her, and she was loth to go. But she knew how tired and overstrained she felt herself, and the ingenious Papa Jack made use of this.

"You have given him all you can, my dear, for the present," he said. "Come away and rest, and—what is Dodo's phrase?—fill your pond again. You mustn't become exhausted; you will be so much wanted."

"And I may come back if Hughie wants me?" she asked.

That was easy to answer. If Hugh really wanted her, the difficult situation solved itself. But there was one thing more.

"I don't suppose I need ask it," said Nadine, "but if Hughie gets worse, much worse, then I may come? I—I couldn't be there, then."

Jack kissed her.

"My dear girl," he said, "what do you take me for? An ogre? But we won't think about that at all. Please God, you will not come back for that reason."

Nadine very rudely dried her eyes on his rough homespun sleeve.

"You are such a comfort, Papa," she said. "You're quite firm and strong, like—like a big wisdom-tooth. And when we are at Winston, will you let Seymour come down and see me if he wants to? And—and if he comes will you come and interrupt us in half-an-hour? I've behaved horribly to him, but I can't help it, and it—that we weren't to be married, I mean—was in the *Morning Post* to-day, and it looked so horrible and cold. But whatever he wants to say to me, I think half-an-hour is sufficient. I wonder—I wonder if you know why I behaved like such a pig."

"I think I might guess," said Jack.

"Then you needn't, because there's only one possible guess. So we'll assume that you know. What a nuisance women are to your poor, long-suffering sex. Especially girls."

Jack laughed.

"They are just as much a nuisance afterwards," said he. "Look at your mother, how she is making life one perpetual martyrdom to me."

"But she used to be a nuisance to you, Papa Jack," said Nadine.

"There again you are wrong," he said. "I always loved her."

"And does that prevent one's being a nuisance?" asked Nadine. "Are you sure? Because if you are, you needn't interrupt Seymour quite so soon. I said half-

an-hour, because I thought that would be time enough for him to tell me what a nuisance I was—"

"You're a heartless little baggage," observed Jack.

"Not quite," said Nadine.

"Well, you're an April day," said he, seeing the smile break through.

"And that is a doubtful compliment," said she. "But you are wrong if you think I am not sorry for Seymour. Yet what was I to do, Papa Jack, when I made The Discovery?"

"Well, you're not a heartless little baggage," conceded Jack, "but you have taken your heart out of one piece of the baggage, and packed it in another."

"Oh, la, la," said Nadine. "We mix our metaphors."

Nadine left with Jack in the motor soon after breakfast next morning. It had been settled that she should not tell Hugh she was going, until she said good-by to him, and when she went to his room next morning to do so, she found him still asleep, and the tall nurse entirely refused to have him awakened.

"Much better for him to sleep than to say good-by," said this adamantine woman. "When he wakes, he shall be told you have gone, if he asks."

"Of course he'll ask," said Nadine.

She paused a moment.

"Will you let me know if he doesn't?" she added.

Nurse Bryerley's grim capable face relaxed into a smile. She did not quite understand the situation, but she was quite content to do her best for her patient according to her lights.

"And shall I say that you'll be back soon?" she asked.

Nadine had no direct reply to this.

"Ah, do make him get well," she said.

"That's what I'm here for. And I will say that you'll be back soon, shall I, if he wants you?"

"Soon?" said Nadine. "That minute."

Hugh slept long that morning, and Dodo was not told he was awake and ready to receive a morning call till the travelers had been gone a couple of hours. She had spent them in a pleasant atmosphere of conscious virtue, engendered by the feeling that she had sent Jack away when she would much have

preferred his stopping here. But as Dodo explained to Edith it took quite a little thing to make her feel good, whereas it took a lot to make her feel wicked.

"A nice morning, for instance," she said, "or sending my darling Jack away because it's good for Nadine, or getting a postal-order. Quite little things like that make me feel a perfect saint. Whereas the powers of hell have to do their worst, as the hymn says, to make me feel wicked."

Edith gave a rather elaborate sigh. She had to sigh carefully because she had a cigarette and a pen in her mouth, while she was scratching out a blot she had made on the score she was revising. So care was needed; otherwise cigarette and pen might have been shot from her mouth. When she spoke her utterance was indistinct and mumbling.

"I suppose you infer that you are more at home in heaven than hell," she said, "since just a touch makes you feel a saint. I should say it was the other way about. You are so at home in the other place that the most abysmal depths of infamy have to be presented to you before you know they are wicked at all, whereas you hail as divine the most infinitesimal distraction that breaks the monotonous round of vice. Perhaps I am expressing myself too strongly, but I feel strongly. The world is more high-colored to me than to other people."

"Darling, I never heard such a moderate and well-balanced statement," said Dodo. "Do go on."

"I don't want to. But I thought your optimism about yourself was sickly, and wanted a—a dash of discouragement. But you and Nadine are both the same: if you behave charmingly, you tell us to give the praise to you; if you behave abominably you say, 'I can't help it: it was Nature's fault for making me like that.' Now I am not like that: whatever I do, I take the responsibility, and say, 'I am I. Take me or leave me.' But I have no doubt that Nadine believes it has been *too* wonderful of her to fall in love with Hugh. And when she jilts Seymour, she says 'Enquire at Nature's Workshop; this firm is entirely independent.' Bah!"

Dodo laughed, but her laugh died rather quickly.

"Ah, don't be hard, Edith," she said. "We most of us want encouragement at times, and we have to encourage ourselves by making ourselves out as nice as we can. Otherwise we should look on the mess we make of things as a hopeless job. Perhaps it is hopeless but that is the one thing we mustn't allow. We are like"—Dodo paused for a simile—"we are like children to whom is given a quantity of lovely little squares of mosaic, and we know, our souls know, that they can be put together into the most beautiful patterns. And we begin fairly well, but then the devil comes along, and jogs our elbow, and

smashes it all up. Probably it is our own stupidity, but it is more encouraging to say it is the devil or nature, something not ourselves. Good heavens, my elbow has jogged often enough! And when the pattern gets on well, we encourage ourselves by saying, 'This is clever and good and wise Me doing it now!' And then perhaps something very big and solemn comes our way, and we bow our heads, and know it isn't ourselves at all."

Edith had finished erasing her blot, and was gathering her sheets together. She tapped them dramatically with an inky forefinger.

"This is big and solemn," she said. "But it's Me. The artist's inspiration never comes from outside: it is always from within. I'm going to send it to have the band parts copied to-day."

At the moment the message came that Hugh received, and Dodo got up. He had received Edith one morning, but the effect was that he had eaten no lunch and had dozed uneasily all afternoon. Edith had been content with the explanation that her vitality was too strong for him, and, while ready to give him another dose of it, did not press the matter; anyhow, she had other business on hand.

He lay propped up in bed, with a wad of pillows at his back. He looked far more alert and present than he had yet done. Hitherto, he had been slow to grasp the meaning of what was said to him, and he hardly ever volunteered a statement or question, but this morning he smiled and spoke with quite unusual quickness.

"Morning, Aunt Dodo," he said. "I'm awfully brisk to-day."

Nurse Bryerley put in a warning word.

"Don't be too brisk," she said. "Please don't let him be too brisk," she added, looking at Dodo.

"Hughie, dear, you do look better," she said; "but we'll all be quite calm, and self-contained like flats."

Hugh frowned for a moment; then his face cleared again.

"I see," he said. "Bright, aren't I? Aunt Dodo, I have certainly woke up this morning. You look real, do you know; before I was never quite certain about you. You looked as if you might be a good forgery, but spurious. Have a cigarette, and why shouldn't I?"

"Wiser not," said Nurse Bryerley laconically.

Hugh's briskness did not seem to be entirely good-natured.

"How on earth could a cigarette hurt me?" he said. "Perhaps it would be wiser

for Lady Chesterford not to smoke either. Aunt Dodo, you mustn't smoke. Wiser not."

Nurse Bryerley smiled with secret content.

"That's right, Mr. Graves," she said. "I like to see my patients irritable. It always shows they are getting better."

"I should have thought you might have seen that without annoying me," said Hugh.

"Well, well, I don't mind your having one cigarette to keep Lady Chesterford company," said the nurse. "But you'll be disappointed."

Dodo took out her case as Nurse Bryerley left the room. "Here you are, Hughie," she said.

Hugh lit one, and blew a cloud of smoke through his nostrils.

"Are they quite fresh, Aunt Dodo?" he said.

"Yes, dear, quite. Doesn't it taste right?"

"Yes, delicious," said Hugh, absolutely determined not to find it disappointing. "I say, what a sunny morning!"

"Is it too much in your eyes?"

"It is rather. Will you ask Nurse Bryerley to pull the blind down? Why should you?"

"Chiefly, dear, because it isn't any trouble."

Dodo pulled down the blind too far on the first attempt to be pleasing, not far enough on the second. Hugh felt she was very clumsy.

"Isn't Nadine coming to see me this morning?" he asked. "But I daresay she is tired of sitting with me every day."

Dodo came back to her chair by the bed again.

"She went off with Jack to Winston this morning," she said. "Just for a change. She was very much tired and overdone. You've been a fearful anxiety to her, you dear bad boy."

Hugh put his cigarette down and shut his mouth, as if firmly determined never to speak again.

"She came in to say good-by to you," she said, "but you were asleep and they didn't want to wake you."

There was still dead silence on Hugh's part.

"It was only settled she should go yesterday," she continued, "and she had to be persuaded. But Jack wanted one of us, and, as I say, she was very much overdone. Now I'm not the least overdone. So I stopped. But I wish she could have seen how much more yourself you were when you woke to-day."

At length Hugh spoke.

"What is the use of telling me that sort of tale?" he said. "She is going to be married to Seymour in a few days. She has gone away for that. I suppose in some cold-blooded way she thought it better to sneak off without telling me. No doubt it was very tactful of her."

Dodo turned round towards him.

"No, Hughie, you are quite wrong," she said. "Nadine is not going to marry Seymour at all."

Hugh lifted his right hand, and examined it cursorily. A long cut, now quite healed, ran up the length of his forefinger.

"I see," he said. "She said she would marry Seymour in order to get rid of me, and now that I have been got rid of in other ways, she has no further use for him. Isn't that it?"

His face had become quite white, and the hand with the healed wound trembled so violently that the bed shook.

"No, that is not it," said Dodo quietly. "And don't be so nervous and fidgety, my dear."

Suddenly the trembling ceased.

"Aunt Dodo, if it is not that, what is it?" he asked, in a voice that would have melted Rhadamanthus.

She turned a shining face on him, and laid her hand on his.

"Oh, Hughie, lie still and get well," she said. "And then ask Nadine herself. She will come back when you want her. She told Nurse Bryerley to tell you so, if you asked."

Hugh moved across his other hand, so that Dodo's lay between his.

"I must ask you one more thing," he said. "Is it because of me in any way that she chucked Seymour? I entreat you to say 'no' if it is 'no.'"

"I can't say 'no,'" said Dodo.

Hugh drew one long sobbing breath.

"It's mere pity then," he said. "Nadine always liked me, and she was always

impulsive like that. I daresay she won't marry him till I'm better, if I am ever better. She will wait till I am strong enough to enjoy it thoroughly."

Dodo interrupted him.

"Hughie, don't say bitter and untrue things like that," she said. "And don't feel them. She is not going to marry Seymour, either now or afterwards."

Once again Hugh was silent, and after an interval Dodo spoke, divining exactly what was in his irritable convalescent mind.

"I have never deceived you before, Hughie," she said, "and you have no right to distrust me now. I am telling you the truth. I also tell you the truth when I say you must get bitter thoughts out of your mind. Ah, my dear, it is not always easy. There's a beast within each of us."

"There's a beast within me," said Hugh.

"And there's a dear brave fellow whom I am so proud of," said Dodo.

Hugh's lip quivered, but there was a quality in his silence as different from that which had gone before, as there was between his callings for Nadine on the night when she fought death for him.

"And now that's enough," said Dodo. "Shall I read to you, Hughie, or shall I leave you for the present?"

He held her hand a moment longer.

"I think I will lie still and—and think," he said.

"Good luck to your fishing, dear," said she, rising.

"Good luck to your fishing?" he said. "It's on a picture. Small boy fishing, kneeling in the waves."

Dodo beat a strategic retreat.

"Is it?" she said.

But it seemed to Hugh that her voice lacked the blank enquiry tone of ignorance.

Hugh settled himself a little lower down on his backing of pillows, after Dodo had left him, and tried to arrange his mind, so that the topics that concerned it stood consecutively. But Dodo's last remark, which certainly should have stood last also in his reflections, kept on shouldering itself forward. She had wished him "good luck to his fishing," and he could not bring himself to believe that, consciously or unconsciously, there was not in her mind a certain picture, of a little winged boy, kneeling in the waves, who dropped a red line

into the unquiet sea. He could not, and did not try to remember the painter, but certainly the picture had been at some exhibition which he and Nadine had attended together. A little winged boy.... The title was printed after the number in the catalogue.

Nadine was not to marry Seymour now or afterwards.... There came a black speck again over his thoughts. He himself had been got rid of by this crippling accident, and now she had expunged Seymour also. 'And though she saw all heaven in flower above, she would not love.' The lines came into his mind without any searching for them; for the moment he could not remember where he had heard them. And then memory began to awake.

Hitherto, he had not been able to recall anything of the day or two that preceded his catastrophe. A few of the immediate events before it he had never forgotten. He remembered Nadine calling out, "No Hugh, not you," he remembered her cry of "Well done"; he remembered that he had toppled in on that line of toppling waters with a small boy on his back. But now a fresh line of memory had been awakened: some connection in his brain had been restored, and he remembered their quarrel and reconciliation on the day the gale began; how she had said, "Oh, Hughie, if only I loved you!" Soon after came the portentous advent of the wind, with the blotting out of the sun, and the transformation of the summer sea.

He heard with unspeakable irritation the entry of Nurse Bryerley. That seemed an unwarrantable intrusion, for he felt as if he had been alone with Nadine, and now this assiduous grenadier broke in upon them with a hundred fidgety offices to perform. She restored to him a fallen pillow, she closed a window through which a breeze was blowing rather freely, she brought him a cup of chicken-broth. It seemed an eternity before she asked him if he was comfortable, and made her long-delayed exit. Even then she reminded him that the doctor was due in half-an-hour.

But for half-an-hour he would be alone now, and for the first time since his accident he found that he wanted to think. Hitherto his mind had sat vacant, like an idle passenger who sees without observation or interest the transit of the country. But Dodo's visit this morning and her communications to him had made life appear a thing that once more concerned him; till now it was but a manœuver taking place round him, but outside him. Now the warmth of it reached him again, and began to circulate through him. And what she had told him was being blown out, as it were, in his brain, even as a lather of soapsuds is blown out into an iridescent bubble, on which gleam all the hues of sunset and moonrise and rainbow. The rainbow was not one of the vague dreams in which, lately, his mind had moved; it was a real thing, not receding but coming nearer to him, blown towards him by some steady breeze, not idly

vagrant in the effortless air. Should it break on his heart, not into nothingness, but into the one white light out of which the sum of all lights and colors is made?

He could not doubt that it was this which Dodo meant. Nadine had thrown over Seymour and that concerned him. And then swift as the coming of the storm which they had seen together, came the thought, clear and precise as the rows of thunder-clouds, that for all he knew a barrier forever impenetrable lay between them. For he could never offer to her a cripple; the same pride that had refused to let him take an intimate place beside her after she, by her acceptance of Seymour, had definitely rejected him, forbade him, without possibility of discussion, to let her tie herself to him, unless he could stand sound and whole beside her. He must be competent in brain and bone and body to be Nadine's husband. And for that as yet he had no guarantee.

Since his accident he had not up till now cared to know precisely what his injuries were, nor whether he could ever completely recover from them. The concussion of the brain had quenched all curiosity, and interest not only in things external to him, but in himself, and he had received the assurance that he was going on very well with the unconcern that we feel for remote events. But now his thoughts flew back from Nadine and clustered round himself. He felt that he must know his chances, the best or the worst ... and yet he dreaded to know, for he could live for a little in a paradise by imagining that he would get completely well, instead of in a shattered ruin which the knowledge of the worst would strew round him.

But this morning the energy of life which for those two weeks had lain dormant in him, began to stir again. He wanted. It seemed to him but a few moments since his nurse left him that Dr. Cardew came in. He saw the flushed face and brightened eyes of his patient, and after an enquiry or two took out the thermometer which he had not used for days, and tested Hugh's temperature. He put it back again in its nickel case with a smile.

"Well, it's not any return of fever, anyhow," he said. "Do you feel different in any way this morning?"

"Yes. I want to get well."

"Highly commendable," said Dr. Cardew.

Hugh fingered the bed-clothes in sudden agitation.

"I want to know if I shall get well," he said. "I don't mean half well, in a Bath-chair, but quite well. And I want to know what my injuries were."

Dr. Cardew looked at him a moment without speaking. But it was perfectly clear that this fresh color and eagerness in Hugh's face was but the lamp of life

burning brighter. There was no reason that he should not know what he asked, now that he cared to know.

"You broke your hip-bone," he said. "You also had very severe concussion of the brain. There were a quantity of little injuries."

"Oh, tell me the best and the worst of it quickly," said Hugh with impatience.

"I can tell you nothing for certain for a few days yet about the fracture. There is no reason why it should not mend perfectly. And to-day for the first time I am not anxious about the other."

Quite suddenly Hugh put his hands before his face and broke into a passion of weeping.

CHAPTER XIII

A week later, Dodo was interviewing Dr. Cardew in her sitting-room at Meering. He had just spoken at some little length to her, and she had time to notice that he looked like a third-rate actor, and recorded the fact also that Edith seemed to have gone back to scales and the double-bass. This impression was conveyed from next door. He spoke like an actor, too, and said things several times over, as if it was a play. He talked about fractures and conjunctions, and X-ray photographs, and satisfaction, and the recuperative powers of youth and satisfaction and X-rays. Eventually Dodo could stand this harangue no longer.

"It is all too wonderful," she said, "and I quite see that if science hadn't made so many discoveries, we couldn't tell if Hughie would have a Bath-chair till doomsday or not. But now, Dr. Cardew, he is longing to hear, and dreading to hear, poor lamb, and won't you let me be the butcher, or I suppose I should say, 'Mary'? You've been such a clever butcher, if you understand, and I do want to be Mary, who had a little lamb"—she added in desperation, lest he should never understand her allusive conversation. "Of course he's not my little lamb, but my daughter's, and he wants to know so frightfully. Yes: I understand about his intellect, too. It seems to me as bright as it ever was, and I notice no change whatever. He always spoke as if he was excited. May I go?"

Dodo intended to go, whether she might or not, but just at the door, she seemed to herself to have treated this distinguished physician with some abruptness. She unwillingly paused.

"Do stop to lunch," she said, "it will be lunch in ten minutes, and you will find me not so completely distracted. I shall be quite sensible, and would you ring

the bell and tell them you are stopping? Don't mind the scales and the double-bass, dear Dr. Cardew; it is only Mrs. Arbuthnot, of whom you have heard. She will not play at lunch. I know you think you have come to a mad-house, but we are all quite sane. And I may go and tell Hughie what you have told me? If you hear loud screams of joy, it will only be me, and you needn't take any notice."

Dodo slid along the passage, upset a chair in Nurse Bryerley's room, and knelt down on the floor by Hugh's bed. She clawed at something with her eager hands, and it was chiefly bed-clothes.

"Oh, praise God, Hughie," she said. "Amen. There! Now you know, and there won't be any crutches, my dear, or the shadow of a Bath-chair, whatever that is like. You won't have chicken-broth, and a foolish nurse; not you, dear Nurse Bryerley, I didn't mean you, and you will walk again and run again, and play the fool, just like me, for a hundred years more. I told Dr. Cardew you weren't ever very calm or unexcited, and your poor broken hip has mended itself, and your kidneys aren't mixed up with your liver and lights, and you've—you've got your strong young body back again, and your silly young brain. Oh, Hughie!"

Dodo leaned forward and clutched a more satisfactory handful of Hugh's shoulders.

"I couldn't let anybody but myself tell you," she said. "I had to tell you. But nobody else knows. You can tell anybody else you want to tell."

Hugh was paying but the very slightest attention to Dodo.

"Telegraph-form," he said rather rudely to Nurse Bryerley.

Dodo loved this inattention to herself. There was nothing *banal* about it. He had no more thought of her than he would have had for a newspaper that contained ecstatic tidings. He did not stroke or kiss or shake hands with a mere newspaper that told him such great things.

"It's so funny not to have telegraph-forms handy," he said.

"I know, dear. They ought always to be in every room. But servants are so forgetful. Talk to me until Nurse Bryerley gets one."

Hugh looked at her with shining eyes.

"How can I talk?" he said. "There's nothing to say. I want that telegraph-form."

Dodo, human and practical and explosive, yearned for the statement of what she knew.

"Whom are you going to telegraph to?" she asked.

Hugh had time for one contemptuous glance at her.

"Oh, Aunt Dodo, you ass!" he said. "Oh, by Jove, how awfully rude of me, and I haven't thanked you for coming to tell me. Thanks so much: I am so grateful to you for all your goodness to me—ah!"

He took a telegraph-form and scribbled a few words.

"May it go now?" he said.

Dodo was almost embarrassingly communicative at lunch, at which meal Edith did not appear, and the continued booming of the double-bass indicated that Art was being particularly long that morning. Consequently Dodo found herself alone with an astonished physician.

"If only a man could be a clergyman and a doctor," she said, "you could tell him everything, because clergy know all about the soul and doctors all about the body, and when you completely understand anything, you can't be shocked at it. I think I should have poisoned you, Dr. Cardew, if you had said that Hughie would never be the same man again: anyhow I shouldn't have asked you to lunch. Ah, in that case I couldn't have poisoned you! How difficult it must be to plan a crime really satisfactorily. I always have had a great deal of sympathy with criminals, because my great-grandfather was hanged for smuggling. Do have some more mutton, which calls itself lamb. I certainly shall. I'm going to have a baby, you know, or perhaps you didn't. Isn't it ridiculous at my age, and he's going to be called David."

"In case—" began Dr. Cardew.

"No, in any case," said Dodo. "I mean it certainly is going to be a boy. You shall see. What a day for January, is it not? The year has turned, though I hope that doesn't mean it will go bad. I wish you had seen Hughie's face when I told him he wasn't going to have a Bath-chair. He looked like one of Sir Joshua Reynolds' angels with a three weeks' beard, which I shouldn't wonder if he was shaving now, since, as I said, there aren't going to be any Bath-chairs."

"I don't quite follow," said Dr. Cardew politely but desperately.

"I'm sure I don't wonder," said Dodo cordially, "although it's so clear to me. But you see, he's going to propose to my daughter now that it's certain he will be the same man again and not a different one, and no eligible young man ever has a beard. What a good title for a sordid and tragic romance 'Beards and Bath-chairs' would be. Of course Hughie instantly called for a telegraph-form, and when I asked him who he was telegraphing to, he called me an ass, in so many words, or rather so few. After all I had done for him, too! Oh, here's Edith; Dr. Cardew and I have not been listening to your playing, but we're sure it has been lovely. Do you know Dr. Cardew? And it's Mrs. Arbuthnot, or

ought I to say 'she's Mrs. Arbuthnot'? Edith, if you don't mind our smoking, Dr. Cardew and I will wait and talk to you for a little, but if you do, we won't."

Edith shook hands so warmly with the doctor, that he felt he must have been an old friend of hers, and that the fact had eluded his memory. But it was only the general zeal which a long musical morning gave her.

"I'm sure you came to see our poor Hugh," she said. "Do tell me, is there the slightest chance of his ever walking again?"

"Not the smallest," said Dodo; "I've just been to break the news to him, and he has telegraphed to Nadine to come at once—I can't keep it up. Edith, he is going to be perfectly well again, and he has telegraphed to Nadine just the same."

Edith looked a little disappointed.

"Then I suppose we must resign ourselves to a perfectly conventional and Philistine ending," she said. "There was all the makings of a twentieth century tragedy about the situation, and now I am afraid it is going to tail off and be domestic and happy and utterly inartistic. I had better hopes for Nadine, she always looked as if there might be some wild destiny in store for her, and when she engaged herself to Seymour without caring two straws for him, I thought I heard a great fate knocking at the door—"

This was too gross an inconsistency for even Dodo to pass over.

"And you said at the time you thought the engagement was horrible and unnatural and me a wicked mother for permitting it," she cried.

"Very possibly. No doubt then I was being a woman, now I am talking as an artist. You always confuse the two, Dodo, for all your general acumen. When I have been playing all morning—"

"Scales," said Dodo.

"A great deal of the finest music in the world is based on scale passages, and the second movement of my symphony is based on them too. When I have been playing all morning, I see things as an artist. I know Dr. Cardew will agree with me: sometimes he sees things as a surgeon, sometimes as a man. As a surgeon if a hazardous operation is in front of him, he says to himself, 'This is a wonderful and dangerous thing, and it thrills me.' As a man he says, 'Poor devil, I am afraid he may die under the knife.' As for you, Dodo, artistically speaking, you spoiled a situation as—lurid as a play by Webster. 'Princess Waldenech' might have been as classical in real life as the 'Duchess of Malfi.' Artistically an atmosphere as stormy as the first act of the Valkyries surrounded you. And now instead of the '*Götterdämmerung*' you are going to

give us '*Hänsel und Gretel*' with flights of angels."

Dodo exploded with laughter.

"And while I was still giving you 'Princess Waldenech'," she said, "you cut me for a year."

"As a woman," cried Edith; "as an artist I adored you. You were as ominous as Faust's black poodle. Of course your first marriage to a man who adored you, for whom you did not care one bar of the 'Hallelujah chorus,' was a thing that might have happened to anybody; but when, as soon as he was mercifully delivered, you got engaged to Jack, and at the last moment jilted him for that melodramatic drunkard, I thought great things were going to happen. Then you divorced him, and I waited with a beating heart. And now, would you believe it, Dr. Cardew!" cried Edith, pointing a carving fork with a slice of ham on the end of it at him. "She has married Lord Chesterford, as you know, and is going to have a baby. And all that wealth of potential tragedy is going to end in a silver christening-mug. The silly suffragette with her hammer and a plate-glass window has more sense of drama than you, Dodo. And now Nadine is going to take after you, and marry the man she loves. Hugh is just as bad: instead of dying for the sake of that blear-eyed child who comes up to enquire after him every day, he is going to live for the sake of Nadine. Drama is dead. Of course it has long been dead in literature, but I hoped it survived in life."

Dodo turned anxiously to Dr. Cardew.

"She isn't mad," she said reassuringly. "You needn't be the least frightened. She will play golf immediately after lunch."

Edith had been brought her large German pewter beer-mug, and for the moment she had put her face into it, like old-fashioned gentlemen praying into their hats on Sunday morning before service. There was a little froth on the end of her rather long nose when she took it out.

"Why not?" she said. "All artistic activity is a sort of celestial disease, and its antidote is bodily activity which is a material disease. A perfectly healthy body, like mine, does not need exercise, except in order to bring down the temperature of the celestial fever. When I am playing golf, my artistic soul goes to sleep and rests. And when I am composing, I should not know a golf-ball from an egg. That is me. You might think I am being egoistic, but I only take myself as an instance of a type. I speak for the whole corporate body of artists."

"Militant here on earth," remarked Dodo.

"Militant? Of course all artists are militant, and they fight against blind eyes

and deaf ears. They scream and lighten, and hope to shake this dull world into perception. But it is fighting against prodigious odds. The drama that seems to interest the world now is a presentation of the hopeless lives of suburban people. Any note of romance or distinction is sufficient to secure a failure. It's the same in music: Debussy when he tells us of rain in the garden makes the rain fall into a small backyard with sooty blighted plants growing in it, out of a foggy sky. When he gives us '*reflets dans l'eau*' the water is a little cement basin in the same backyard, with anemic goldfish swimming about in it. As for Strauss, he began and finished with that terrible 'domestic symphony.' It went from the kitchen into the scullery, and back again. Fiction is the same. Any book that deals with entirely dull people, provided that they, none of them, ever show a spark of real fire or are touched by romance or joy or beauty, makes success. They must have the smell of oilcloth and Irish stew around them, and then the world says, 'This is art' or 'This is reality.' There's the mistake! Art is never real: it is fantasy, a fairy-story, a soap-bubble sailing into the sunset. It is Art because it takes you out of reality. Of course artists are militant; they fight against dullness, and they will fight forever, and they will never win. As for their being militant here on earth, you must be militant somewhere. I shall be militant in heaven by and by. I wonder if you understand. As I said, I was disappointed in Nadine artistically, but I am enraptured with her humanly. On that same plane I am enraptured with you, Dodo. Humanly speaking, I have watched you with sobs in my throat, battling perilously on the great seas. And now you are like a battered ship, having weathered all storms, and putting into port, with all the piers and quays shouting congratulation. Artistically speaking, you are a derelict, and I should like to have you blown up. Hullo, what has happened to Dr. Cardew?"

Dodo looked quickly round. The thought just crossed her mind that he might be asleep or having a fit. But there was no Dr. Cardew there, nor anywhere about, to be seen.

"He has gone away while we weren't attending, just as a conjurer changes a rabbit to an omelette while you aren't attending," she said, "and I'm sure I don't wonder. Oh, Edith, at last the 'Hunting of the Snark' has come true. I see now that we are *Boojums*. People softly and silently vanish away when you and I are talking, poor dears. They can't stand it, and I've noticed it before. Dear old Chesterford used to vanish sometimes like that, and I never knew until I saw he wasn't there. I'm sure Bertie vanishes too sometimes. I suppose we ought to vanish also, as the table must be laid again for dinner to-night."

Edith finished her beer.

"I had breakfast, lunch and dinner on the same cloth once," she said. "I was composing all day, and at intervals things were stuck in front of me while I ate

or drank. I didn't move from nine in the morning till half-past eight in the evening, and I wrote forty pages of full score, and the inspiration never flagged for a moment. I wonder why artists are so fond of writing what they call 'My Memories'; they ought to be content, as I am, to stand or fall by what they have done. Thank God, I have never had any doubts about my standing. Oh, I see a telegraph-boy coming up the drive. It is sure to be for me. I am expecting a quantity."

This particular one happened to be for Dodo. Edith was disposed to take it as a personal insult.

Nadine during the days she had spent at Winston had not done much looking after Papa Jack, which had been the face-reason of her going there; and it is doubtful whether the real reason had found itself fulfilled, since there was substituted for the strain of seeing Hugh daily, the strain of wanting to see him. Dodo, with her own swift recuperative powers, and the genius she had for being absorbed in her immediate surroundings, had not reckoned with Nadine's inferior facility in this respect, nor had she realized how completely the love which had at last touched Nadine drained and dominated her whole nature. All her zest for living, all her sensitiveness and intelligence seemed to have been, as by some alchemical touch, transformed into the gold which, all her life, had been missing from her. She explained this to Esther, who, with an open-mindedness that might have appeared rather unsisterly, ranged her sympathies in opposition to Seymour.

"How long I shall be able to stop here," she said, "I don't know. I promised Mama I would go away for at least a week, unless Hughie wanted me, but after that I think I shall go back whether he wants me or not. I can't attend to anything else, and last night when I was playing billiards I carefully put the chalk into my coffee, which is not at all the sort of thing I usually do. It is very odd: all my life I have been quite unaware of this one thing, now I am not really aware of anything else. You are rather dream-like yourself to me: I am not quite sure if you have really happened, or are part of a general background."

"I am not part of any background," said Esther firmly.

"No, so you say; but perhaps it is only the background that tells me so. And I suppose I ought to think a great deal about Seymour. I try to do that, but when I've thought about him for about a minute and a quarter, I find my thoughts wander, and I wonder if Hughie has had his beef-tea or not. I do hope that he is not unhappy, but having hoped it, I have finished with that, and remember that just at this moment Hughie is being made comfortable for the night. But do pin me down to Seymour. Did you see him in town, and does he mean to tell me what he thinks?"

"Yes, I saw him. He was exceedingly cross, but I don't think his crossness came from temper; it came from his mind's hurting him. He told me he had meant to come down here and have it out with you, but presently he said you weren't worth it. So I took your side."

"That was darling of you," said Nadine; "but I am not sure that Seymour is not right."

"How can he be right? You haven't changed towards him."

"Oh, doesn't jilting him make a change?" asked Nadine hopefully.

"No, that is an accident, as I told him. You didn't do it on purpose. You might as well say that to be knocked down by a motor-car is done on purpose. You get knocked down by Hughie. You hadn't ever loved Seymour at all, and really you said you would marry him largely because you wanted Hughie to stop thinking about you. It was chiefly for Hughie's sake you said you would marry Seymour, and it was so wonderful of you. Then came another accident and Seymour fell in love with you. I warned him when we were on the family improvement tour in the summer that he was doing rather a risky thing—"

Nadine got up.

"Risky?" she said. "Oh, how risky it is. It is that which makes it so splendid! You risk everything: you go for it blind. Do you think Seymour went for it blind? I don't believe he did. I think he had one eye open all the time. He couldn't be quite blind I think: his intelligence would prevent it. And I don't think he would be cross now, if he had been quite blind. So I am not properly sorry for him."

"I went to lunch with him," said Esther. "He ate an enormous lunch, which I suppose is a consoling sign. But then Seymour would eat an enormous breakfast on the morning he was going to be hung. He would feel that he would never have any more breakfasts, so he would eat one that would last forever. I think we have given enough time to Seymour. It is much more important that you shouldn't think of me as a background."

Nadine apparently thought differently.

"But I want to be nice to Seymour," she said, "and I don't see how to begin. And—and he's part of the background, too. He doesn't seem really to matter. But if he was really fond of me, like that, it's hateful of me not to care. But how can I care? I've tried to care every day, and often twice a day, but—oh, a huge 'but.'"

The two were talking in Dodo's sitting-room, which Nadine had very wisely appropriated. At this moment the door opened, and Seymour stood there.

"I made up my mind not to come and see you," he said to Nadine, "and then I changed it."

Esther sprang up.

"Oh, Seymour, how mean of you," she said, "not to ask Nadine if you might come."

"Not at all. She was bound to see me. But I didn't come to see you. You had better go away."

"If Nadine wishes—" she began.

"It does not matter what Nadine wishes. Nadine, please tell her to go."

Seymour spoke quite quietly, and having spoken he turned aside and lit a cigarette he held in his hand. By the time he had finished doing that the door had closed behind Esther. He looked round.

"What a charming room!" he said. "But if you are going to sit in a room like this, you ought to dress for it."

Nadine felt that all the sorrow she had been conscious of for him was being squeezed out of her. He tiptoed about, now looking at a picture, and now fingering an embroidery. He stopped for a moment opposite a Louis Seize tapestry chair, and gently flicked off it the cigarette ash that he had let drop there. He looked at the faded crimson of the Spanish silk on the walls, and examined with extreme care a Dutch picture of a frozen canal with peasants skating, that hung above the mantelpiece. There was an Aubonne carpet on the floor, and after one glance at it he went softly off it, and stood on the hearth-rug.

"I should put three-quarters of this room into a museum," he said, "and the rest into a dust-bin. You are going to ask me what I should put into the dust-bin. I should put that sham Watteau picture there, and that bureau that thinks it is Jacobean."

"And me?" asked Nadine.

"I am not sure. No: I am sure. I don't put you anywhere. I want to know where you put yourself. Perhaps you think you don't owe me an explanation. But I disagree with you. I think you owe it me. Of course I know you haven't got an explanation. But I should like to hear your idea of one."

Standing on the hearth-rug he pointed his toe as he spoke, looking at the well-polished shoe that shod it. Nadine was just on the point of telling him that he was thinking not about her, but about his shoe, but he was too quick for her.

"Of course I'm thinking about my shoe," he said. "I was wondering how it is

that Antoinette polishes shoes better than any one in the world."

"Is that what you have come to talk about?" asked Nadine.

"That is a very foolish question, Nadine. You have quibbled and chattered so incessantly that sometimes I think you can do nothing else. You might retort with a *tu quoque*, but it would not be true. I was capable anyhow of falling in love with you, I regret to say."

Seymour paused a moment, and then raised his eyes, which had been steadily regarding the masterpieces of Antoinette, to Nadine.

"I am wrong: I don't regret it," he said.

Suddenly his sincerity and his reality reached and touched Nadine. He stepped out of the background, so to speak, and stood firmly and authentically beside her.

"I regret it very much," she said, "and I am as powerless to help you, as I am to help myself."

"You seem to have been helping yourself pretty freely," said he in a sudden exasperation. But she, usually so quick to flare into flame, felt no particle of resentment.

"There is no good in saying that," she said.

"I did not mean there to be. Good? I did not come down here to do you good."

"Why did you come? Just to reproach me?"

"Partly."

Again Seymour paused.

"I came chiefly in order to look at you," he said at length. "You are quite as beautiful as ever, you may like to know."

It was as if a further light had been turned on him, making him clearer and more real. She had confessed to Esther her inability to be "properly sorry" for him, but now found herself not so incapable.

"I can't help either you or myself," she said again. "We have both been taken in control by something outside ourselves, which never happened to either of us before. You feel that I have behaved atrociously to you, and any one you ask would agree with you. But the atrocity was necessary. I couldn't help it. Only you must not think that I am not sorry for the effect that such necessity has had on you. I regret it very much. But if you ask me whether I am ashamed of myself, I answer that I am not."

She went on with growing rapidity and animation.

"If you have been in love with me, Seymour," she said, "you will understand that, for you will know that compulsion has been put upon me. How was it any longer possible for me to marry you, when I fell in love with Hughie? I jilted you: it is a word quite hideous, like flirt, but just as never in my life did I flirt, so I have not jilted you in the hideous sense. It was not because I was tired of you, or had a fancy for some one else. There was no getting away from what happened. Hughie enveloped me. My walls fell down, and went to Jericho. It wasn't my fault. The trumpets blew, just that."

"And in walked Hugh," said Seymour.

"I am not sure about that," said Nadine. "I think he was there all the time, walled up."

Seymour was silent a moment.

"How is he?" he asked.

"He is going on well. They do not know more than that yet. He is getting over the concussion, but they cannot tell yet whether he will be able to walk again."

"And are you going to marry him in any case, if he is a cripple, I mean?" he asked.

"If Hughie will have me. I daresay I shall propose to him, and be refused, just as used to happen the other way round in the old days. Oh, I know what his soul is like so well! He will say that he will not let me spend all my life looking after a cripple. But I shall have my way in the end. I am much stronger than he."

Seymour saw and understood the change in her face when she spoke of Hugh. Admirable as her beauty always was, he had not dreamed that such tender transformation could come to it, or that it was capable of assuming so inward-burning and devoted a quality and yet shining with its habitual brilliance uneclipsed. The love which he had dreamed would some day awake there for him, he saw now in the first splendor of its dawning, and from it he could guess what would be the glory of its full noonday, and with how celestial a ray she would shine on her lover. For the moment it seemed to him not to matter that it was another, not he, on whom that dawn should break, for whom it should grow to noonday, and sink at last in the golden West of a life truly and lovingly lived without fear of the lengthening shadows and the night that must inevitably close as it had preceded it; for by the power of his own love, he could detach himself from himself, and though only momently reach that summit of devotion far below which, remote and insignificant, lies the mere husk and shell of the world that spins through the illimitable azure. So Dante

saw the face of Beatrice, when he passed into the sweetness of the Earthly Paradise, and there came to him she whom the chariot with its harnessed griffins drew. And not otherwise, in his degree and hers, Seymour looked now at Nadine's face, glorified and made tender by her love, and in the perception that his own love gave him, he hailed and adored it....

"I came to scold and reproach," he said, "but I also came just to see you, to look at you. There is no harm in that. And if there is I can't help it. Nadine, I used to wonder what you would look like when you loved. You have shown me that. I—I didn't guess. There's a poem by Browning which ends 'Those who win heaven, blest are they.' The man who speaks was just in my case. But he managed to say that. I say it too, very quickly, because I know this unnatural magnanimity won't last. I agree with all you have said: it wasn't your fault. I hope you won't be tied to a cripple all your life, or, if he has to be a cripple, I hope you will be tied to him. There! I've said it, and it is true, but it rather reminds me of holding my breath. Give me a kiss, please, and then I'll climb swiftly down out of this rarefied atmosphere."

He kissed her on the mouth, as his right had been, and for a moment held her to him in an embrace more intimate than he had ever yet claimed from her. Edith, it may be remembered, had once seen him kiss her, and had pronounced it an anemic salutation. But it was not anemic now: his blood was alert and virile; its quality was not inferior to that which, one day in the summer, made Hugh seize her wrists, demanding the annulment of the profanation of her marriage with Seymour. In both, too, was the same fierceness of farewell.

For a few seconds Seymour held her close to him, and felt her neither shrink from him nor respond. Her willing surrender to his right was the utmost she could give, and he knew there was nothing else for him.

And then he proceeded to descend from what he had called the rarefied atmosphere with the speed of a yet-unopened parachute.

"Damn Hugh," he said. "Yes, damn him. For God's sake, don't tell him I asked after him, or hoped he was getting better. I don't want him to die, since I don't suppose that would do me any good, nor do I want him to be crippled for life, since that also would be quite useless after what you have told me. But if you said to him that I had asked after him, I should sink into the earth for shame. He would think it noble and nice of me, and I'm not noble or nice. I should hate to be thought either. His good opinion of me would make me choke and retch. I should not be able to sleep if I thought Hugh was thinking well of me. So hold your tongue."

Nadine had never been able quite to keep pace with Seymour: she always lagged a little behind, just as Hugh lagged so much more behind her. She was

still gasping from the violence of his seizure of her, when he had descended, so to speak, a thousand feet or so. Tenderness still clung about her like soaked raiment.

"Oh, Seymour," she said. "I didn't realize you felt like that: I didn't, really. What are you going to do?"

His clever handsome face wore an uncompromising look, but there was humor in his eyes.

"I may take to drink," he said, "like your angelic father. Very likely I shan't, because I notice that it spoils your breakfast if you are intoxicated the evening before. I shall certainly try to get some more jade, and I shan't marry Antoinette, because she is buxom. If I marry, I shall marry some girl who reminds me of asparagus, like you. Not the stout French asparagus, of course, but the lean English variety. I should not wonder if I came to your wedding, and wrote an account of it to a ladies' newspaper. I shall say you were looking hideous. I haven't got any other plans, except to go away from this place. You are a sort of chucker-out, Nadine, at Winston. You chucked out Hugh in the summer, and now in the winter you chuck me out. You are a vampire, I think. You suck people dry, and then you throw them away like orange skins. Don't argue with me: if you argued I should become rude. I was rude to Aunt Dodo the other day, when she showed me you sleeping on the floor by Hugh's bed. It was a sickening spectacle: I told her so at the time, and I tell you so now."

Poor complicated Nadine! Her complications had been canceled like vulgar fractions, and she was left in a state of the most deplorable simplicity. There was a numerator, and that was Hugh; there was a nought below and that was she. The simplest arithmetician could see that the nought "went into" the numerator an infinite number of times. The result was that there was Hugh and nothing else at all. Her surrendered reply indicated this: it indicated also her knowledge of it.

"But it was Hughie there," she said.

And then suddenly Seymour's unexpanded parachute opened, and he floated in liquid air, with the azure encompassing him.

"Your Hughie," he said.

"Mine," said Nadine.

There came an interruption. A footman entered with a telegram which he gave to Nadine. And once again the ineffable light came into her face, coming from below, transfiguring it.

"That's from the cripple," said Seymour unerringly.

She passed him the words Hugh had written that morning. They could not have been simpler, nor could he, by any expenditure of separate half-pennies have said more.

"Come back," he had written, "important. Good news."

Seymour got up.

"So you are going," he said.

Nadine did not seem to hear this. She addressed the footman.

"Tell them to send round the Napier car at once," she said.

"Yes, Miss. But his lordship ordered the Napier to meet the shooters—"

"Has it gone?"

"No, Miss: it was to pick up Lady Esther—"

"Then I want it at once, instead. I am going to start instantly. Tell them to send the car round at once. And tell my maid to pack a bag for me, and follow with the rest of my luggage."

"Yes, Miss. Where to, shall I say?"

"Meering, of course. She will go by train."

She turned her unclouded radiance to Seymour again, and held out both her hands.

"Oh, Seymour," she said. "I feel such a brute, such a brute. But it's my nature to."

"Clearly. Go and put on your hat."

"Will you let me hear of you sometimes?" she asked.

"I don't see why I should write to you, if you mean that," he said.

"Nor do I, now I come to think of it. I made a conventional observation. Will you let them know if you want lunch, or want to be taken to the station?"

"Yes. Thanks. Good-by. And good luck."

She lingered one moment more.

"Thank you," she said. "And don't think of me without remembering I am sorry."

It was still an hour short of sunset when the car emerged from the mountainous inland on to the coast. The plain and the line of sand-dunes that bordered the sea slept under a haze of golden winter sun; a few wisps of light

cloud hung round the slopes of Snowdon, but otherwise the sky was of pale unflecked blue, from rim to rim, and the sea was as untroubled as the turquoise vault which it reflected. Though January had still a half-dozen of days to run, a hint and promise of spring was in the air, and Nadine sat in the open car unchilled by its headlong passage. They had taken but five hours to come from the midlands, and they seemed to have passed for her in one throb of eager consciousness, so that she looked bewildered to find that the familiar landmarks of home were close about her, and that they were already close to their journey's end. Soon they began to climb out of the plain again up the outlying flank of hill that formed the south end of the bay, and culminated in the steep bluff of rock at the top of which she and Hugh had sat and quarreled and been reconciled on the morning of the gale. To-day no tumult of maddened water beat at the base of it, nor did thunder of surges break into spray and flying foam, and the line of reef that ran out from it lay, with its huge scattered rocks, as quiet as a herd of sea-beasts grazing. As they got higher she could see over the sand-dunes the beach itself; no ramparts and towers of surf or ruins of shattered billows fringed it now; a child could have played on that zone of shattering and resistless forces. Of its dangers and menaces nothing was left; the great gift that it had brought to Nadine's heart alone remained, and flowered there like the rose-pink almond blossom in spring. Nature had healed where she had hurt, and what had seemed but a blind and wanton stroke, had proved to be the smiting of the rock, so that the spring burst forth, and rivers ran in the dry places.

The house, gray and welcoming, stood dozing in the afternoon sun, and Nadine, suddenly conscious that they had arrived without a halt, said a contrite word to the chauffeur on the subject of lunch. She recollected also that she had sent no reply to Hugh's telegram, and that her arrival would be unexpected. Unexpected it certainly was, and Dodo, who had just seen Edith off to play golf better than anybody else had ever done, jumped up with a scream as she entered.

"But, my darling, is it you?" she cried. "We have been expecting to hear from you, but seeing is better than hearing. Oh, Nadine, such news! Of course you guess it, so I shall not tell you, as it is unnecessary, and besides Hughie must do that. He has been shaved, and looks quite clean and young again. Will you go up to see him at once? Perhaps it is equally unnecessary to ask that. Shall I come up with you? My darling, there's a third unnecessary question. Of course I shall do nothing of the kind. Ask the great grenadier if you may go in to him without his being told you are coming. It might be rather a shock, but personally I believe shocks of joy are always good for one. At least they have never hurt me. Go upstairs, dear, and after an unreasonable time you might ring for me."

The nurse's room was a dressing-room attached to the bedroom where Hugh lay. Nadine went in through this, and the door into the room beyond being open, she saw that Nurse Bryerley was in there. At this moment she looked up and saw Nadine. She turned towards Hugh's bed.

"Here's a visitor for you," she said, and beckoned to Nadine to enter. She heard Hugh ask "Who?" in a voice that sounded somehow expectant, and she went in. In the doorway she passed Nurse Bryerley coming out, and the door closed behind her.

Hugh had raised himself on his elbow in bed, and the light in his eyes showed that, though he had asked who his visitor was, his heart knew. He neither spoke nor moved while Nadine came across the room to his bedside. Then in a whisper:

"It is Nadine," he said.

She knelt down by the bed.

"Yes, Hughie. You wanted me," she said.

"I always want you," he answered.

For a moment Nadine hid her face in her hands without replying. Then she raised it again to him.

"Hughie, you have always got me," she said.

She drew that beloved head down to hers.

"And the news?" she said presently.

"Oh, that!" said Hugh. "It's only that I am going to get quite well and strong again. That's all."

CHAPTER XIV

Dodo was sitting in her room in Jack's house in Eaton Square, one morning towards the end of May, being moderately busy. She was trying to engage in a very intimate conversation with her husband, and simultaneously to conduct communication through the telephone, to smoke a cigarette, and to write letters. Considering the complicated nature of the proceeding viewed as a whole, she was getting on fairly well, but occasionally became a little mixed up in her mind, and spoke of intimate things to Jack in the determined telephone voice habitually used, or puffed cigarette smoke violently into the receiver. She had just done this and apologized to the Central exchange.

"I never knew you could send smoke down a telephone," remarked Jack.

"Double one two four Gerrard," said Dodo. "In these days of modern science you can't tell what is going to happen, and it's well to anticipate anything. No, you fool, I mean Miss, I said double one two four, eleven hundred and twenty four, if that makes it simpler. As I was saying, Jack, I don't see why I shouldn't stop in town, and have my baby here. You can put lots of straw down, like Margery Daw, and that always looks so interesting. I should like to have straw down permanently, why don't we? Darling, how are you, and as Jack's going out to lunch, and I shall be quite alone, do come round—"

Dodo's face suddenly became seraphically blank.

"Oh, are you?" she said. "Then will you tell Mrs. Arbuthnot that I hope she will come round to lunch with Lady Chesterford. Jack, I said all that to Edith's footman, who always smiles at me. I wonder if he will come to lunch instead, and say I asked him, which after all is quite true. But Edith talks so much like a man, that of course I thought it was she, whereas it was he. Yes, I don't see why I should go down to Winston for it. Babies born in London are just as healthy as babies born in Staffordshire, and people will drop in more easily afterwards. Besides I must go to Nadine's wedding if I possibly can. It would be like reading a story that you know quite well is going to end happily, and finding that the last chapter of all, which you have been saving up for, so to speak, is torn out. I shall have the most enormous lump in my throat when I see her and Hughie go up to the altar-rails together, and I love lumps in the throat. Don't you? I don't mean quinzy."

"I'll tell you all about the last chapter," said Jack.

"That would be very dear of you, but it wouldn't be the same thing at all. I want to see it, to see Hugh walking as if he had never been smashed into ten thousand smithereens, and Nadine, as if she had never thought about anybody else since her cradle. Oh, by the way, they have settled at last that they would like to go on the yacht for their honeymoon. They are both bad sailors, but I suppose there are lots of harbors or breakwaters about, and they think it is the only plan by which they can be certain of being undisturbed. If it is rough, they will find a sort of pleasure in being sick into one basin: I really think they will. They are in that sort of foolishness, that whatever they do together will be in the Garden of Eden. And they are just forty-five years old between them which is exactly what I am all by myself. It seems quite a coincidence, though I have no idea what it coincides with. So let them have the yacht, Jack, as you suggested, and the moon will be lovely, honey, and they will be exceedingly unwell!"

Dodo finished her letter, and having telephoned enough for the present, came

and sat in a chair by her husband, in order to continue the intimate conversation.

"Jack, dear," she said, "I never do behave quite like anybody else, as you have known, poor wretch, for I don't know how many years. So you must be prepared for surprises when I give you that darling David. Something ridiculous will happen. There'll be two or three of them, and the papers will say I have had a litter, or I shall die, or David will arrive quite unexpectedly like a flash of lightning, and I shall say, 'Good heavens, David, is it you?' I should be exceedingly annoyed if I died—"

"So should I," said Jack.

"I really believe you would. But it would be more annoying for me, because however nice the next world is going to be, I haven't had enough of this. I want years and years more, because eternity is there just the same, and if I live to be a hundred there won't be anything the less of that. Eternity is safe, so to speak: it is invested in the bank, but time is just pocket-money, of which you always say I want such a lot. Eternity will always be on tap, or else it wouldn't be eternal. But this particular brew will come to an end, and I shall be so sorry when the last gurgle sounds, and one knows there is no more. It couldn't come more nicely, if when it sounded, I had given you a son. I can't imagine any nicer way to die. On the other hand, there's no reason anywhere near as nice for living."

Jack put a great hand on her arm.

"Dodo, if you talk about dying, I shall be—shall be as sick as Hughie and Nadine together," he said.

"Oh, don't. But you see since we are us—is that right?—there is nothing I can't say to you, because I am only talking to myself. I wonder if I had better write a quantity of letters to my son, as some woman, I believe a spinster, did. David shall read them when he has learned how to read. Oh, I could tell him so well how to make love, I know exactly what women like a man to be. Luckily, so few men really know it, otherwise the world would go round much quicker, and we should all be blown off it. Oh, Jack, fancy a woman who had never known what child-bearing meant attempting to describe it! You might as well sit down at your bureau and write letters to David."

"I could write jolly good ones," said Jack serenely.

"I am sure they would be excellent, but they would be nonsense from the other's point of view. It is so holy—so holy! Once it wasn't holy to me; it was merely a bore. Then, when Nadine was born, it was not holy, but very exciting, and hugely delightful. But now it is holy."

Dodo put up her foot, and kicked Jack's knee.

"It's yours, as well as mine," she said. "Poor dear holy Jack. But I love you; that makes such a difference."

Jack caught Dodo's foot in his hand.

"Oh, Jack, let go," she said. "It's bad for me."

Instantly his fingers relaxed; and a look of agonized apology came over his face. Dodo laughed.

"Oh, Jack, you silly old woman," she said. "It is so easy to take you in."

But her laughter quickly ceased, and she became quite grave again.

"I don't want you to be as sick as Nadine and Hughie combined," she cried, "but I should like to make a few cheerful remarks about dying. We've all got to do it, and it doesn't make it any closer to talk about it. It's a pity we can't practise it, so as to be able to do it nicely, but it's one performance only, without rehearsals, unless you die daily like St. Paul. I don't think I shall do it at all solemnly or tragically, Jack, for it would not be the least in keeping with my life to have one tragic scene at the end. Nor would it suit the rest of my life to be frightened at it. You see if we all held hands and stood in a row and said, 'One, two, three, now we'll die,' it wouldn't be at all alarming. And then you see from a religious point of view, God has been such a brick—is that profane? I don't think it is—such a brick to me all my life, that it seems most unlikely that He won't see me through. Jack, dear, you look depressed. I won't talk about it any more. I shall very likely out-live you, and I shall be such a comfort to you when you are dying. I shall be exceedingly annoyed, just as you said you would be if I did it, but, oh, my dear, I shall say *au revoir* to you with such a stout heart, and when I pass through the valley of the shadow myself how I shall look for your dear gray eyes to welcome me. It will be interesting! And now, as they say at the end of sermons, I must get ready to go out with Nadine. I promised to go out with her for an hour before lunch. Pull me up, and give me a chaste salute on my marble brow. What a good invention you are! It would be worse than going back to the days of hansoms and four-wheelers to be without you. Without undue flattery, it would!"

Dodo's slight attack of seriousness evaporated completely, and having tried the effect of her hat, which comprised, so she said, the entire flora and fauna of Brazil, on Jack's head, put it on her own, and sent a message to Nadine that she had been waiting an hour and a half.

"But Hughie shall not come out with us," she said, "since he and Nadine don't pay the smallest attention to me, when they are together, and I feel alone in London. Besides, Nadine has to buy things that young gentlemen don't

know anything about—and here you are at last, my darling Nadine, but I'm not going to take your darling with us, any more than he takes you to his haberdasher, or whoever it is sells that sort of thing. Don't look cross, Hughie, because Jack's going to let you have the yacht, and you and Nadine can be unwell to your heart's content. Go and sulk at your club, dear, for an hour, and then you come back to lunch, and stop for tea and dinner if you like. But the obduracy of your esteemed mother-in-law elect on the subject of the drive is quite invincible. Dear me, what beautiful language!"

Nadine and her mother did their errands, and as only Edith was going to lunch with them, who was almost invariably half-an-hour late, but who, if she arrived in time, would be quite certain to begin lunch without them, they prolonged their outing by a turn in the Park. The morning was of that exquisite tempered heat that lies midway between the uncertain warmth of spring and the fierceness of true midsummer weather, and following, as it did, on a week of rainy days had brought out both crowds and flowers. The little green seats and shady alleys were full of kaleidoscopic color from hats and parasols and summer dresses, and more stable than these, but hardly less brilliant, were the clumps of full-flowered rhododendrons and beds of blossomings. The dust had been laid on the roads, and washed from the angled planes, and summer sat in the lap of spring. Summer and spring too, as it were, sat side by side in Dodo's motor, and who could say which was the more glorious, the mother in the splendor of her full-blown life, or Nadine, that exquisite opening bud, still dewy in the morning of her days, no wild-flower, but more like an orchid, fragrant and subtle and complex. All that still remained to her: she would never be wild-rose or honeysuckle, in spite of the big simple human love which had come to her, and daily sprang higher, flame-like.

To-day neither paid much attention to the crowd that contained so many friends. Occasionally Dodo blew a sudden gale of kissed finger-tips at some especially beloved face, but the smile that never left her face, though it did duty for general salutation, was really inspired from within. Her daughter's awakening was a deep joy to Dodo.

"You and Hughie and Jack and I ought to be stuffed and put in the South Kensington Museum, darling," she said, "as curious survivals of absolutely happy people, who are getting exceedingly rare. I should utter a few words of passionate protest when the executioner and the taxidermist arrived, but I think I should consent for the good of the nation in general."

Nadine disagreed altogether.

"We are much more useful alive," she said, "because we're infectious. Or would our broad fatuous grins be infectious when we were stuffed? Oh, there's Seymour, Mama. Do kiss your hand violently, because it wouldn't be suitable

for me to. I can only smile regretfully."

"But you don't regret," said Dodo, after giving him a perfect volley of kissed finger-tips.

"No, but only because I can't. My will regrets. He has sent me a lovely necklace of jade, with a little label, 'Jade for the jade,' on it. So I think he must feel better, as it's a sort of joke. I wrote him quite a nice little note, and said how dear it would be of him to come to my wedding, if he felt up to it."

Dodo giggled.

"My dear, that is exactly what I should have done at your age," she said. "But I think I should have kissed my hand to him just now, and people would certainly have thought you heartless, if you had, just because they have got great wooden hearts themselves, accurately regulated, that pump exactly sixty times in a minute, neither more nor less. You do feel kindly and warmly to poor Seymour, and you trust he is getting over it. About stuffing us, now. I'm not quite sure I should stuff Papa Jack. He's anxious about me, poor old darling, as if at my age I didn't know how to have a baby properly. I talked about dying a little, which upset him, I'm afraid, though it wasn't in the least meant to. My dear, to think that in ten days from now you'll be married! Nadine, I do look forward to being a grandmama: I want to be lots of grandmamas, if you see what I mean. Then there'll be Papa Hughie, and Papa Jack, and look, there's Papa Waldenech. I never knew he was in town. We must stop a moment: I have not seen him since he came uninvited to my ball in the autumn, a little bit on. Ah, what a fool I am: he meant me not to tell you, so bear in mind that I haven't. Waldenech, my dear, what a surprise!"

They drew up at the curb, and he came to the carriage-door, hat in hand, courteous, distinguished and evil.

"I have just come from Paris," he said. "It is charming of you to welcome me. Nadine, too. Nadine, is your father to be allowed to come to your wedding? May I—"

Dodo had half-risen to greet him, and he saw the lines of her figure. He broke off short.

"You are going to be a mother again?" he said.

"Yes, my dear, but you needn't tell the Albert Memorial about it," said she. "And of course you may come to Nadine's wedding. I had no notion you would be in England."

He appeared to pay not the slightest attention to this—but looked at her eagerly, hungrily, at those wonderful brown eyes, at the still youthful oval of

her face, at the mouth he had so often kissed.

"My God, you are a beautiful woman!" he said. "And you used to be mine!"

Then he turned abruptly, and walked straight away from them without another glance. Dodo looked after him in silence a moment, frowning and smiling together.

"Poor old chap: it was a shock to him somehow," she said. "But he'll go back to the Ritz and steady himself. How old he has got to look, Nadine."

But Nadine had the frown without the smile.

"I didn't like the way he went off," she said. "He didn't give another thought to my wedding, Mama, after he saw. He looked hungry for you, and he looked horrible. He admired you so enormously. He was thinking of what he had lost and what Papa Jack had gained. And I felt frightened of him, just as I felt frightened one night when I was very little, and he came stumbling into the nursery, and wanted to say good-night to me. I remember my nurse tried to turn him out, and he looked as if he would have murdered her. Poor Daddy isn't a nice man, you know."

But Nadine looked more puzzled than vexed.

Dodo's frown had quite cleared away. She was far too essentially happy to mind little surface disturbances.

"Poor old Daddy," she said. "He was startled, darling, and when people are startled they look like themselves, that is all, and Daddy isn't quite nice, any more than the rest of us are. But it was rather sweet of him to want to go to your wedding. I hope he will be sober. He will probably want to kiss us all in the vestry, all of us except Jack. I shall certainly kiss him, if he shows the slightest wish that I should do so. But he might be nasty to Jack. Perhaps we had better not tell Jack he is here. It might make him anxious again, like when I talked about death this morning. Oh, Nadine, look at those delicious horses, cantering along, and praising God because they feel so strong and young! What a rotten seat that man has: oh, of course he has, because he's Berts. How he fidgets his horse—Berts, dear—"

And Dodo blew a shower of kisses on the end of her fingers.

Nadine's enjoyment in this liquid air had been suddenly extinguished. She herself hardly knew why, but her lowered pleasure she felt to be connected with her father. She tried, very sensibly, to get rid of it by speech, for the unreal thing when spoken, became so fantastically absurd.

"Was Daddy ever very jealous about you?" she asked.

Dodo recalled her mind from the tragedy of Berts riding so badly.

"But violently pea-green with it," she said, "so that sometimes I didn't know if I could say good-morning to the butler in safety. That was in the early days, and I am bound to confess that he got over it. After that came my turn to be jealous, but I never took my turn, for between the particular old brandy and Mademoiselle Chose, if you understand, poor Daddy became entirely impossible. But for auld lang syne I shall certainly kiss him in the vestry after your wedding, and he shall sign his name if he feels up to it."

Dodo's face recovered all its radiance.

"And he was the father who begot you," she said. "How can I ever forget that, you joy of mine? I should be a beast if I wanted to. But he did look rather wicked just now. I think we had better turn, or Edith will have finished lunch and gone away."

Waldenech's appearance did not belie him: he both looked and felt very wicked indeed. The sight of Dodo so soon to become the mother of another man's child had caused to break out into hideous activity a volcano that had long smoldered under the slag and ashes of his drunken and debauched days, and he flamed with a jealousy the more passionate because it had so long slumbered. He felt confused and bewildered by the violence of this unexpected passion, and, as Dodo had said, he felt he must steady himself. He wanted to think clearly and constructively, to determine exactly what he must do, and how he must do it. At present he knew only of one necessity, that, even as he had taken Dodo away from Jack years ago, so now he must take Jack away from Dodo. The particular old brandy, taken in sufficient quantities, would clear his head, and enable him to think out ways and means.

He shut himself into his sitting-room at the Ritz, and by degrees the monstrous nightmare-like lucidity that alcohol brings to heavy drinkers brightened in his brain, and he sat there emancipated from all moral laws, and thought clearly and connectedly, seeing himself and his desires as the legitimate center of all existence; nothing else and nobody else could be reckoned with. His jealousy that had shot flaming up, no longer flared and flickered: it shone with a steady and tremendous light, a beacon to guide him, and show him the way he must follow. What should happen to himself he did not care, nor did it enter into his calculations: most likely it would be better when he had accounted for Jack to account for himself also. That would arrange itself: he would see, when the time came, how he felt about it. And the time had better be soon, for there was no reason for delay. But he pushed away from him a glass which he had just refilled: he had drunk himself steady, and knew that if he went on he would drink himself maudlin and confused again. It would have been strange if by this time he did not know the stages, even as a man knows the stairs in his own

house.

He sat still a moment longer, rehearsing in his mind what he had taken so long to construct. He would go to the house in Eaton Square, so that Dodo would be there, and he would see her look on what he had done. To make the picture complete that touch was necessary, though he did not want to hurt her. Then he would have finished with them, and would finish with himself, instead of waiting for the farce of a trial, and the ignominy of what must follow.

The afternoon had already waned, and looking at his watch he saw that it was after seven. That was a suitable hour to go on his errand, for it was probable that Jack would be at home now, soon to dress for dinner. As he got up to get from his despatch-box the revolver that he knew was there, he saw the glass of brandy which a little while ago he had pushed away from him, still standing there, and from habit merely he drank it off. Then he put the weapon, completely loaded, into his pocket, and took one more look round before leaving the room. Somehow deep down in him, and smothered and shadowed, was some vague repugnance towards what he was going to do, and once more, forgetful of his resolution not to trespass on the steadiness of nerves the spirit brought him, he refilled and emptied his glass. That, he felt sure, would soon stifle any conflicting voices within him. His plan was actively seated in his brain; inertia, almost, would achieve it.

He had been indoors all the afternoon, and an instinct for fresh air and the evening breeze caused him to go on foot across the Green Park. The air was fresh but coldish, and it or the extra brandy he had just taken seemed quickly to harmonize and quiet that vague jangle of repugnance that twanged discordantly in his mind, and he became reconciled to himself again. But the wish not to hurt Dodo became rather more pronounced in his poor fuddled brain. He had to kill Jack, but he hoped she would not mind very much: he could make her understand surely that he was obliged to do it. He had always been devoted to her, even when he most outraged the merest decencies of their married life, and this morning the sight of her glorious beauty had wakened not jealousy only. She was superb in her wonderful womanhood: she was more beautiful now than she had ever been, and Nadine was not fit to sit beside her.

It was with surprise that he saw he had come to the house. A motor was at the door, which stood open. On the pavement there was a footman bearing a coat and hat, holding a rug in his hand: another, bareheaded, stood by the door. Waldenech told himself that he had come very opportunely, for it was clear that they would soon come out.

He hesitated a moment, swaying a little where he stood, not certain whether he should just wait for them, or go into the house. Soon he decided to take this

latter course, for it was possible that Dodo or Nadine might be going without Jack, and seeing him standing there would ask him what he wanted. That risked his whole plan: they might suspect something, and with one hand in his coat pocket, where his fingers grasped the thing he had brought with him, he went up the three steps that led to the front door.

"Is Lord Chesterford in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. But his Lordship is just going out," said the man.

"Please tell him that Prince Waldenech would like to speak to him. I shall not detain his Lordship more than a moment!"

Dodo and her husband had dined early, for they were going to the opera which began at eight, and at this moment the dining-room door, which opened on to the back of the hall opposite the staircase, was thrown open, and Waldenech heard Dodo's voice.

"Come on, Jack," she said, "or we shall miss the overture which is the best part, and you will say it is my fault."

She came quickly round the corner, resplendent and jeweled, and saw his figure with its back to the light that came in through the open door, so that for half-a-second she did not recognize him. Simultaneously, Jack came out of the dining-room just behind her. As he came out he turned up the electric light in the hall which had not been lit, and she saw Waldenech's face. And at the moment he took out of his pocket what his right hand was fingering.

"Stand aside, Dodo," he said rather thickly. "It is not for you."

Not more than half-a-dozen paces separated them, and for answer Dodo walked straight up to him, with arms outstretched so that he could not pass her, screening Jack. She was menacing as a Greek fury, beautiful as the dawn, dominant as the sun.

"You coward and murderer," she said. "Give me that."

For one half-second he stood nerveless and irresolute, his poor sodden wits startled into sobriety by the power and glory of her, and without a moment's hesitation she seized the revolver that was pointed straight at her, and tore it from his hand. By a miracle of good luck it did not go off.

"Out of the house," she cried, "for I swear to you that in another second I will shoot you like a dog. Did you think you would frighten me? Frighten me! you drunken brute."

She stood there like some splendid wild animal at bay, absolutely fearless and irresistible. Without a single word, he turned, and shuffled out into the street

again.

"Shut the door," said Dodo to the footman.

Then suddenly and unmistakably she felt the life within her stir, and a start of blinding pain shot through her. So short had been the whole scene that Jack hurrying after her had only just reached her side, when she dropped the revolver, and laid her arms on his shoulders, leaning on him with all her weight.

"Jack, my time has come," she said. "Oh, glory to God, my dear!"

Just as dawn began to brighten in the sky, Dodo's baby was born, and soon made a lusty announcement that he lived. Presently Jack was admitted for a moment just to see his son, and then went out again to wait. It was but a couple of hours afterwards that he was again sent for by a well-pleased nurse.

"I never saw such vitality," said this excellent woman. "It's like what they tell about the gipsies."

Dodo was lying propped up in bed, and her baby was at her breast. She gave Jack a brilliant smile of welcome.

"Oh, Jack, you and David and I!" she said. "Was there ever such a family? I may talk to you for five minutes, and then David and I are going to sleep. But about last night. I don't know how much the servants saw, or what they know, but Waldenech came here to shoot you. He was drunk, poor wretch, he couldn't face me for a moment. It was such a deplorable failure that I feel sure he won't try it again, but I should be happier if he left England. See your solicitor about it, have him threatened if he doesn't go. Do that this morning, dear, and when I wake be able to tell me he has gone. And now, oh, you and David and I! I told you I should behave in some unusual manner, but I didn't think Waldenech would be concerned in it. Jack, kiss the top of David's adorable head, but don't disturb him. And then, my dearest, kiss me, and I shall instantly go to sleep. And neither Waldenech nor I will be able to go to Nadine's wedding, but my reason for not going is much the nicest. Isn't it, oh my David?"

About ten o'clock Jack went out to do as Dodo had bidden him, and preferring to walk, crossed the Green Park, and went through the arcade fronting the Ritz Hotel. He had forgotten to ask Dodo where Waldenech was staying, but fancied that when he was in England last winter, he had stopped here. So he went through the revolving-door, and into the Bureau.

"Is Prince Waldenech stopping here?" he asked.

The clerk looked down to consult the register of guests before he answered:

"His Serene Highness left for Paris this morning."

THE END