

Benson Edward Frederic

**Dodo: A Detail of the Day.  
Volumes 1 and 2**



Edward Benson

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**Benson E.**

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# **Benson E. F. Edward Frederic Dodo: A Detail of the Day. Volumes 1 and 2**

## **VOL. I**

And far out, drifting helplessly on that grey, angry sea, I saw a small boat at the mercy of the winds and waves. And my guide said to me, 'Some call the sea "Falsehood," and that boat "Truth," and others call the sea "Truth," and the boat "Falsehood;" and, for my part, I think that one is right as the other.' – The Professor of Ignorance.

## CHAPTER ONE

Poets of all ages and of all denominations are unanimous in assuring us that there was once a period on this grey earth known as the Golden Age. These irresponsible hard describe it in terms of the vaguest, most poetic splendour, and, apart from the fact, upon which they are all agreed, that the weather was always perfectly charming, we have to reconstruct its characteristics in the main for ourselves. Perhaps if the weather was uniformly delightful, even in this nineteenth century, the golden age might return again. We all know how perceptibly our physical, mental and spiritual level is raised by a few days of really charming weather; but until the weather determines to be always golden, we can hardly expect it of the age. Yet even now, even in England, and even in London, we have every year a few days which must surely be waifs and strays from the golden age, days which have fluttered down from under the hands of the recording angel, as he tied up his reports, and, after floating about for years in dim, interplanetary space, sometimes drop down upon us. They may last a week, they have been known to last a fortnight; again, they may curtail themselves into a few hours, but they are never wholly absent.

At the time at which this story opens, London was having its annual golden days; days to be associated with cool, early rides in the crumbly Row, with sitting on small, green chairs beneath the trees at the corner of the Park; with a general disinclination to exert oneself, or to stop smoking cigarettes; with a temper distinctly above its normal level, and a corresponding absence of moods. The crudeness of spring had disappeared, but not its freshness; the warmth of the summer had come, but not its sultriness; the winter was definitely over and past, and even in Hyde Park the voice of the singing bird was heard, and an old gentleman, who shall be nameless, had committed his annual perjury by asserting in the *Morning Post* that he had heard a nightingale in the elm-trees by the Ladies' Mile, which was manifestly impossible.

The sky was blue; the trees, strange to say, were green, for the leaves were out, and even the powers of soot which hover round London had not yet had time to shed their blackening dew upon them. The season was in full swing, but nobody was tired of it yet, and "all London" evinced a tendency to modified rural habits, which expressed themselves in the way of driving down to Hurlingham, and giving water parties at Richmond.

To state this more shortly, it was a balmy, breezy day towards the middle of June. The shady walks that line the side of the Row were full of the usual crowds of leisurely, well-dressed people who constitute what is known as London. Anyone acquainted with that august and splendid body would have seen at once that something had happened; not a famine in China, nor a railway accident, nor a revolution, nor a war, but emphatically "something." Conversation was a thing that made time pass, not a way of passing the time. Obviously the larger half of London was asking questions, and the smaller half was enjoying its superiority, in being able to give answers. These indications are as clear to the practised eye as the signs of the weather appear to be to the prophet Zadkiel. To the amateur one cloud looks much like another cloud: the prophet, on the other hand, lays a professional finger on one and says "Thunder," while the lurid bastion, which seems fraught with fire and tempest to the amateur, is dismissed with the wave of a contemptuous hand.

A tall, young man was slowly making his way across the road from the arch. He was a fair specimen of "the exhausted seedlings of our effete aristocracy" – long-limbed, clean-shaven, about six feet two high, and altogether very pleasant to look upon. He wore an air of extreme leisure and freedom from the smallest touch of care or anxiety, and it was quite clear that such was his normal atmosphere. He waited with serene patience for a large number of well-appointed carriages to go past, and then found himself blocked by another stream going in the opposite direction. However, all things come to an end, even the impossibility of crossing from the arch at the entrance of the Park to the trees on a fine morning in June, and on this particular morning I have to record no exception

to the rule. A horse bolting on to the Row narrowly missed knocking him down, and he looked up with mild reproach at its rider, as he disappeared in a shower of dust and soft earth.

This young gentleman, who has been making his slow and somewhat graceful entrance on to our stage, was emphatically "London," and he too saw at once that something had happened. He looked about for an acquaintance, and then dropped in a leisurely manner into a chair by his side.

"Morning, Bertie," he remarked; "what's up?"

Bertie was not going to be hurried. He finished lighting a cigarette, and adjusted the tip neatly with his fingers.

"She's going to be married," he remarked.

Jack Broxton turned half round to him with a quicker movement than he had hitherto shown.

"Not Dodo?" he said.

"Yes."

Jack gave a low whistle.

"It isn't to you, I suppose?"

Bertie Arbuthnot leaned back in his chair with extreme languor. His enemies, who, to do him justice, were very few, said that if he hadn't been the tallest man in London, he would never have been there at all.

"No, it isn't to me."

"Is she here?" said Jack, looking round.

"No I think not; at least I haven't seen her."

"Well, I'm –" Jack did not finish the sentence.

Then as an after-thought he inquired: "Whom to?"

"Chesterford," returned the other.

Jack made a neat little hole with the ferrule of his stick in the gravel in front of him, and performed a small burial service for the end of his cigarette. The action was slightly allegorical.

"He's my first cousin," he said. "However, I may be excused for not feeling distinctly sympathetic with my first cousin. Must I congratulate him?"

"That's as you like," said the other. "I really don't see why you shouldn't. But it is rather overwhelming, isn't it? You know Dodo is awfully charming, but she hasn't got any of the domestic virtues. Besides, she ought to be an empress," he added loyally.

"I suppose a marchioness is something," said Jack. "But I didn't expect it one little bit. Of course he is hopelessly in love. And so Dodo has decided to make him happy."

"It seems so," said Bertie, with a fine determination not to draw inferences.

"Ah, but don't you see –" said Jack.

"Oh, it's all right," said Bertie. "He is devoted to her, and she is clever and stimulating. Personally I shouldn't like a stimulating wife. I don't like stimulating people, I don't think they wear well. It would be like sipping brandy all day. Fancy having brandy at five o'clock tea. What a prospect, you know! Dodo's too smart for my taste."

"She never bores one," said Jack.

"No, but she makes me feel as if I was sitting under a flaming gas-burner, which was beating on to what Nature designed to be my brain-cover."

"Nonsense," said Jack. "You don't know her. There she is. Ah!"

A dog-cart had stopped close by them, and a girl got out, leaving a particularly diminutive groom at the pony's head. If anything she was a shade more perfectly dressed than the rest of the crowd, and she seemed to know it. Behind her walked another girl, who was obviously intended to walk behind, while Dodo was equally obviously made to walk in front.

Just then Dodo turned round and said over her shoulder to her, —

"Maud, tell the boy he needn't wait. You needn't either unless you like."

Maud turned round and went dutifully back to the dog-cart, where she stood irresolutely a few moments after giving her message.

Dodo caught sight of the two young men on the chairs, and advanced to them. The radiant vision was evidently not gifted with that dubious quality, shyness.

"Why, Jack," she exclaimed in a loudish voice, "here I am, you see, and I have come to be congratulated! What are you and Bertie sitting here for like two Patiences on monuments? Really, Jack, you would make a good Patience on a monument.

"Was Patience a man? I never saw him yet. I would come and sketch you if you stood still enough. What are you so glum about? You look as if you were going to be executed. I ought to look like that much more than you. Jack, I'm going to be a married woman, and stop at home, and mend the socks, and look after the baby, and warm Chesterford's slippers for him. Where's Chesterford? Have you seen him? Oh, I told Maud to go away. Maud," she called, "come back and take Bertie for a stroll: I want to talk to Jack. Go on, Bertie; you can come back in half an hour, and if I haven't finished talking then, you can go away again – or go for a drive, if you like, with Maud round the Park. Take care of that pony, though; he's got the devil of a temper."

"I suppose I may congratulate you first?" asked Bertie.

"That's so dear of you," said Dodo graciously, as if she was used to saying it. "Good-bye; Maud's waiting, and the pony will kick himself to bits if he stands much longer. Thanks for your congratulations. Good-bye."

Bertie moved off, and Dodo sat down next Jack.

"Now, Jack, we're going to have a talk. In the first place you haven't congratulated me. Never mind, we'll take that as done. Now tell me what you think of it. I don't quite know why I ask you, but we are old friends."

"I'm surprised," said he candidly; "I think it's very odd."

Dodo frowned.

"John Broxton," she said solemnly, "don't be nasty. Don't you think I'm a very charming girl, and don't you think he's a very charming boy?"

Jack was silent for a minute or two, then he said, —

"What is the use of this, Dodo? What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to say what you think. Jack, old boy, I'm very fond of you, though I couldn't marry you. Oh, you must see that. We shouldn't have suited. We neither of us will consent to play second fiddle, you know. Then, of course, there's the question of money. I must have lots of money. Yes, a big must *and* a big lot. It's not your fault that you haven't got any, and it wouldn't have been your fault if you'd been born with no nose; but I couldn't marry a man who was without either."

"After all, Dodo," said he, "you only say what every one else thinks about that. I don't blame you for it. About the other, you're wrong. I am sure I should not have been an exacting husband. You could have had your own way pretty well."

"Oh, Jack, indeed no," said she; — "we are wandering from the point, but I'll come back to it presently. My husband must be so devoted to me that anything I do will seem good and charming. You don't answer that requirement, as I've told you before. If I can't get that – I have got it, by the way – I must have a man who doesn't care what I do. You would have cared, you know it. You told me once I was in dreadfully bad form. Of course that clinched the matter. To my husband I must never be in bad form. If others did what I do, it might be bad form, but with me, no. Bad form is one of those qualities which my husband must think impossible for me, simply because I am I. Oh, Jack, you must see that – don't be stupid! And then you aren't rich enough. It's all very well to call it a worldly view, but it is a perfectly true one for me. Don't you see I must have everything I want. It is what I live on, all this," she said, spreading her hands out. "All these people must know who I am, and that they should do that, I must have everything at my command. Oh, it's all very well to talk of love in a cottage, but just wait till the chimney begins to smoke."

Dodo nodded her head with an air of profound wisdom.

"It isn't for you that I'm anxious," said Jack, "it's for Chesterford. He's an awfully good fellow. It is a trifle original to sing the husband's praise to the wife, but I do want you to know that. And he isn't one of those people who don't feel things because they don't show it – it is just the other way. The feeling is so deep that he can't. You know you like to turn yourself inside out for your friend's benefit, but he doesn't do that. And he is in love with you."

"Yes, I know," she said, "but you do me an injustice. I shall be very good to him. I can't pretend that I am what is known as being in love with him – in fact I don't think I know what that means, except that people get in a very ridiculous state, and write sonnets to their mistress's front teeth, which reminds me that I am going to the dentist to-morrow. Come and hold my hand – yes, and keep withered flowers and that sort of thing. Ah, Jack, I wish that I really knew what it did mean. It can't be all nonsense, because Chesterford's like that, and he is an honest man if you like. And I do respect and admire him very much, and I hope I shall make him happy, and I hear he's got a delightful new yacht; and, oh! do look at that Arbuthnot girl opposite with a magenta hat. It seems to me inconceivably stupid to have a magenta hat. Really she is a fool. She wants to attract attention, but she attracts the wrong sort. Now *she* is in bad form. Bertie doesn't look after his relations enough."

"Oh, bother the Arbuthnot girl," said Jack angrily. "I want to have this out with you. Don't you see that that sort of thing won't do with Chesterford? He is not a fool by any means, and he knows the difference between the two things."

"Indeed he doesn't," said Dodo. "The other day he was talking to me, and I simply kept on smiling when I was thinking of something quite different, and he thought I was adorably sympathetic. And, besides, I am not a fool either. He is far too happy for me to believe that he is not satisfied."

"Well, but you'll have to keep it up," said Jack. "Don't you see I'm not objecting to your theory of marriage in itself – though I think it's disgusting – but it strikes me that you have got the wrong sort of man to experiment upon. It might do very well if he was like you."

"Jack, you sha'n't lecture me," said Dodo; "I shall do precisely as I like. Have you ever known me make a fool of myself? Of course you haven't. Well, if I was going to make a mess of this, it would be contrary to all you or anyone else knows of me. I'm sorry I asked your opinion at all. I didn't think you would be so stupid."

"You told me to tell you what I thought," said Jack in self-defence. "I offered to say what you wanted, or to congratulate or condole or anything else; it's your own fault, and I wish I'd said it was charming and delightful, and just what I had always hoped."

Dodo laughed.

"I like to see you cross, Jack," she remarked, "and now we'll be friends again. Remember what you have said to-day – we shall see in time who is right, you or I. If you like to bet about it you may – only you would lose. I promise to tell you if you turn out to be right, even if you don't see it, which you must if it happens, which it won't, so you won't," she added with a fine disregard of grammar.

Jack was silent.

"Jack, you are horrible," said Dodo impatiently, "you don't believe in me one bit. I believe you are jealous of Chesterford; you needn't be."

Then he interrupted her quickly.

"Ah, Dodo, take care what you say. When you say I needn't be, it implies that you are not going to do your share. I want to be jealous of Chesterford, and I am sorry I am not. If I thought you loved him, or would ever get to love him, I should be jealous. I wish to goodness I was. Really, if you come to think of it, I am very generous. I want this to be entirely a success. If there is one man in the world who deserves to be happy it is Chesterford. He is not brilliant, he does not even think he is, which is the best substitute. It doesn't much matter how hard you are hit if you are well protected. Try to make him conceited – it is the best you can do for him."

He said these words in a low tone, as if he hardly wished Dodo to hear. But Dodo did hear.

"You don't believe in me a bit," she said. "Never mind, I will force you to. That's always the way – as long as I amuse you, you like me well enough, but you distrust me at bottom. A woman's a bore when she is serious. Isn't it so? Because I talk nonsense you think I am entirely untrustworthy about things that matter."

Dodo struck the ground angrily with the point of her parasol.

"I have thought about it. I know I am right," she went on. "I shall be immensely happy as his wife, and he will be immensely happy as my husband."

"I don't think it's much use discussing it," said he. "But don't be vexed with me, Dodo. You reminded me that we were old friends at the beginning of this extremely candid conversation. I have told you that I think it is a mistake. If he didn't love you it wouldn't matter. Unfortunately he does."

"Well, Jack," she said, "I can't prove it, but you ought to know me well enough by this time not to misjudge me so badly. It is not only unjust but stupid, and you are not usually stupid. However, I am not angry with you, which is the result of my beautiful nature. Come, Jack, shake hands and wish me happiness."

She stood up, holding out both her hands to him. Jack was rather moved.

"Dodo, of course I do. I wish all the best wishes that my nature can desire and my brain conceive, both to you and him, him too; and I hope I shall be outrageously jealous before many months are over."

He shook her hands, and then dropped them. She stood for a moment with her eyes on the ground, looking still grave. Then she retreated a step or two, leaned against the rail, and broke into a laugh.

"That's right, Jack, begone, dull care. I suppose you'll be Chesterford's best man. I shall tell him you must be. Really he is an excellent lover; he doesn't say too much or too little, and he lets me do exactly as I like. Jack, come and see us this evening; we're having a sort of Barnum's Show, and I'm to be the white elephant. Come and be a white elephant too. Oh, no, you can't; Chesterford's the other. The elephant is an amiable beast, and I am going to be remarkably amiable. Come to dinner first, the Show begins afterwards. No, on the whole, don't come to dinner, because I want to talk to Chesterford all the time, and do my duty in that state of life in which it has pleased Chesterford to ask me to play my part. That's profane, but it's only out of the Catechism. Who wrote the Catechism? I always regard the Catechism as only a half-sacred work, and so profanity doesn't count, at least you may make two profane remarks out of the Catechism, which will only count as one. I shall sing, too. Evelyn has taught me two little nigger minstrel songs. Shall I black my face? I'm not at all sure that I shouldn't look rather well with my face blacked, though I suppose it would frighten Chesterford. Here are Maud and Bertie back again. I must go. I'm lurching somewhere, I can't remember where, only Maud will know. Maud, where are we lurching, and have you had a nice drive, and has Bertie been making love to you? Good-bye, Jack. Remember to come this evening. You can come, too, Bertie, if you like. I have had a very nice talk with Jack, and he has been remarkably rude, but I forgive him."

Jack went with her to her dog-cart, and helped her in.

"This pony's name is Beelzebub," she remarked, as she took the reins, "because he is the prince of the other things. Good-bye."

Then he went back and rejoined Bertie.

"There was a scene last night," said Bertie. "Maud told me about it. She came home with Dodo and Chesterford, and stopped to open a letter in the hall, and when she went upstairs into the drawing-room, she found Dodo sobbing among the sofa cushions, and Chesterford standing by, not quite knowing what to do. It appeared that he had just given her the engagement ring. She was awfully-pleased with it, and said it was charming, then suddenly she threw it down on the floor, and buried her face in the cushions. After that she rushed out of the room, and didn't appear again for a quarter of an hour, and then went to the Foreign Office party, and to two balls."

Jack laughed hopelessly for a few minutes. Then he said, —

"It is too ridiculous. I don't believe it can be all real. That was drama, pure spontaneous drama. But it's drama for all that. I'm sure I don't know why I laughed, now I come to think of it. It really is no laughing matter. All the same I wonder why she didn't tell me that. But her sister has got no business to repeat those kind of things. Don't tell anyone else, Bertie."

Then after a minute he repeated to himself, "I wonder why she didn't tell me that."

"Jack," said Bertie after another pause, "I don't wish you to think that I want to meddle in your concerns, and so don't tell me unless you like, but was anything ever up between you and Dodo? Lie freely if you would rather not tell me, please."

"Yes," he said simply. "I asked her to marry me last April, and she said 'No.' I haven't told anyone till this minute, because I don't like it to be known when I fail. I am like Dodo in that. You know how she detests not being able to do anything she wants. It doesn't often happen, but when it does, Dodo becomes damnable. She has more perseverance than I have, though. When she can't get anything, she makes such a fuss that she usually does succeed eventually. But I do just the other thing. I go away, and don't say anything about it. That was a bad failure. I remember being very much vexed at the time."

Jack spoke dreamily, as if he was thinking of something else. It was his way not to blaze abroad anything that affected him deeply. Like Dodo he would often dissect himself in a superficial manner, and act as a kind of showman to his emotions; but he did not care to turn himself inside out with her thoroughness. And above all, as he had just said, he hated the knowledge of a failure; he tried to conceal it even from himself. He loved to show his brighter side to the world. When he was in society he always put on his best mental and moral clothes, those that were newest and fitted him most becomingly; the rags and tatters were thrown deep into the darkest cupboard, and the key sternly turned on them. Now and then, however, as on this occasion, a friend brought him the key with somewhat embarrassing openness, and manners prevented him from putting his back to the door. But when it was unlocked he adopted the tone of, "Yes, there are some old things in there, I believe. May you see? Oh, certainly; but please shut it after you, and don't let anyone else in. I quite forget what is in there myself, it's so long since I looked."

Bertie was silent. He was on those terms of intimacy with the other that do not need ordinary words of condolence or congratulation. Besides, from his own point of view, he inwardly congratulated Jack, and this was not the sort of occasion on which to tell him that congratulation rather than sympathy was what the event demanded. Then Jack went on, still with the air of a spectator than of a principal character, —

"Dodo talked to me a good deal about her marriage. I am sorry about it, for I think that Chesterford will be terribly disillusioned. You know he doesn't take things lightly, and he is much too hopelessly fond of Dodo ever to be content with what she will grant him as a wife. But we cannot do anything. I told her what I thought, not because I hoped to make any change in the matter, but because I wished her to know that for once in her life she has made a failure — a bad, hopeless mistake. That has been my revenge. Come, it's after one, I must go home. I shall go there this evening; shall I see you?"

## CHAPTER TWO

Jack went home meditating rather bitterly on things in general. He had a sense that Fate was not behaving very prettily to him. She had dealt him rather a severe blow in April last, which had knocked him down, and, having knocked him down, she now proceeded in a most unsportsmanlike way to kick him. Jack had a great idea of fair play, and Fate certainly was not playing fair. He would have liked to have a few words with her on the subject. The world had been very kind on the whole to him. He had always been popular, and his life, though perhaps rather aimless, was at least enjoyable. And since the world had been kind to him, he was generous to the world in general, and to his friends in particular. It had always held a high opinion of him, as a thoroughly healthy-minded and pleasant companion, and he was disposed to hold a similar opinion of it. Consequently, when Dodo had refused him that spring, he had not thought badly of her. He did not blame her, or get bitter about it; but though he had flattered himself that he was used to Dodo's ways, and had always recognised her capabilities in the way of surprising her friends, he had not been quite prepared for the news of her engagement. In fact, he was surprised, and also rather resentful, chiefly against the general management of mundane affairs, but partly also against Dodo herself. Dodo had not told him of her engagement; he had been left to find it out for himself. Then, again, she was engaged to a man who was hopelessly and entirely in love with her, and for whom, apart from a quiet, unemotional liking, she did not care two straws, except in so far as he was immensely rich and had a title, two golden keys which unlocked the most secret doors of that well-furnished apartment known as Society, which constituted Dodo's world. Hitherto her position had been precarious: she had felt that she was on trial. Her personality, her great attractiveness and talents, had secured for herself a certain footing on the very daïs of that room; but she had always known that unless she married brilliantly she would not be sure of her position. If she married a man who would not be always certain of commanding whatever money and position – for she would never have married a wealthy brewer – could command, or, worst of all, if in her unwillingness to accept anything but the best she could get, she did not marry at all, Dodo knew that she never would have that unquestioned position that she felt was indispensable to her. Jack knew all this perfectly well – in fact Dodo had referred to it that morning – and he accepted it philosophically as being inevitable. But what he did not like was being told that he would not have done on general grounds, that he was too fond of his own way, that he would not have given Dodo rein enough. He had known Dodo too long and too well, when he proposed to her, to have any of a lover's traditional blindness to the faults of his love. He knew that she was, above all things, strongly dramatic, that she moved with a view to effect, that she was unscrupulous in what she did, that her behaviour was sometimes in questionable taste; but this he swallowed whole, so to speak. He was genuinely attached to her, and felt that she possessed the qualities that he would most like to have in his wife. Bertie had said to him that morning that she was stimulating, and would not wear well. Stimulating she certainly was – what lovable woman is not? – and personally he had known her long, and she did wear well. The hidden depths and unsuspected shallows were exactly what he loved her for; no one ever fell in love with a canal; and though the shallows were commoner than the depths, and their presence was sometimes indicated by a rather harsh jarring of the keel, yet he believed, fully and sincerely, in the dark, mysterious depths for love to lose itself in. Besides, a wife, whose actions and thoughts were as perfectly calculable and as accurately calculated as the trains in a Bradshaw, was possessed of sterling qualities which, however estimable, were more suited to a housekeeper than a mistress.

These reflections were the outcome of an intimate knowledge of Dodo in the mind of a man who was in the habit of being honest with himself and the object of his love, a quality rare enough whether the lover is rejected or accepted.

He had had time to think over the matter quietly to himself. He knew, and had known for many weeks, that Dodo was out of his reach, and he sat down and thought about the inaccessible fruit, not

with the keen feelings of one who still hoped to get it, but with a resignation which recognised that the fruit was desirable, but that it must be regarded from a purely speculative point of view.

And to do him justice, though he was very sorry for himself, he was much more sorry for Chesterford. Chesterford was his cousin, they had been brought up together at Eton and Oxford, and he knew him with that intimacy which is the result of years alone.

Chesterford's old friends had all a great respect and liking for him. As Dodo had said, "He was an honest man if you like." Slight acquaintances called him slow and rather stupid, which was true on purely intellectual grounds. He was very loyal, and very much devoted to what he considered his duty, which consisted in being an excellent landlord and J.P. of his county, in voting steadily for the Conservative party in the House of Lords, in giving largely and anonymously to good objects, in going to Church on Sunday morning, where he sang hymns with fervour, and read lessons with respect, in managing a hunt in a liberal and satisfactory manner, and in avoiding any introspection or speculation about problems of life and being. He walked through the world with an upright gait, without turning his eyes or his steps to the right hand or the left, without ever concerning himself with what was not his business, but directing all his undoubtedly sterling qualities to that. He had a perfect genius for doing his duty. Nobody had ever called him shallow or foolish, but nobody on the other hand had ever, called him either deep or clever. He had probably only made one real mistake in his life, and that was when he asked Dodo to marry him; and we have seen that Jack, who knew Dodo well, and whose opinion might be considered to be based on good grounds, thought that Dodo had committed her first grand error in accepting him. The worst of the business certainly was that he was in love with Dodo. If he had been a different sort of man, if he had proposed to Dodo with the same idea that Dodo had, when she accepted him, if he had wanted a brilliant and fascinating woman to walk through life with, who could not fail to be popular, and who would do the duties of a mistress of a great house in a regal fashion, he could not have chosen better. But what he wanted in a wife was someone to love. He loved Dodo, and apparently it had not entered his calculations that she, in accepting him, might be doing it from a different standpoint from his own in proposing to her. Dodo had smiled on him with the air of a benignant goddess who marries a mortal, when he offered her his hand and heart, and he had taken that smile as a fulfilment of his own thought. Decidedly Jack might have justification for feeling apprehensive.

Jack's only hope lay in that vein which did exist in Dodo, and which she had manifested in that outburst of tears the night before. He put it down to her dramatic instincts to a large extent, but he knew there was something besides, for Dodo did not care to play to an empty house, and the presence of her future husband alone constituted anything but a satisfactory audience. Jack had always had a considerable belief in Dodo: her attractiveness and cleverness were, of course, beyond dispute, and required proof no more than the fact that the sun rose in the morning; but he believed in something deeper than this, which prompted such actions as these. He felt that there was some emotion that she experienced at that moment, of which her tears were the legitimate outcome, and, as he thought of this, there occurred to him the remark that Dodo had made that morning, when she expressed her regret at never having felt the sort of love that she knew Chesterford felt for her.

Mrs. Vane was perhaps perfectly happy that night. Was not her daughter engaged to a marquis and a millionaire? Was not her house going to be filled with the brightest and best of our land? She had often felt rather resentful against Dodo, who alternately liked and despised people whom Mrs. Vane would have given her right hand to be in a position to like, and both hands to be in a position to despise. Dodo was excellent friends with "London," only "London" did not come and seek her at her own house, but preferred asking her to theirs. Consequently, on Mrs. Vane and Maud devolved the comparatively menial duty of leaving their cards and those of Dodo, and attending her in the capacity of the necessary adjunct. They would be asked to the same houses as Dodo, but that was all; when they got there they had the privilege of seeing Dodo performing her brilliant evolutions, but somehow none of Dodo's glory got reflected on to them. To be the mirror of Dodo was one of Mrs.

Vane's most cherished ideas, and she did not recollect that there are many substances whose nature forbids their acting as such to the most brilliant of illuminations. Mr. Vane was kept still more in the background. It was generally supposed that he was looking after his affairs in the country, whilst the rest of the family were amusing themselves in London. It was well known that he was the proprietor of a flourishing iron foundry somewhere in Lancashire, and apparently the iron needed special care during the months of May, June and July. In any case he was a shadow in the background, rather than a skeleton at the banquet, whom it was not necessary to ignore, because he never appeared in a position in which he could be ignored. Mrs. Vane had two principal objects in life, the first of which was to live up to Dodo, and the second to obtain, in course of time, a suitable brilliant son-in-law. The latter of these objects had been practically obtained by Dodo herself, and the first of them was in a measure realised by the large and brilliant company who assembled in her rooms that night.

Mrs. Vane was a large, high-coloured woman of about middle age, whose dress seemed to indicate that she would rather not, but that, of course, may only have been the fault of the dressmaker. She had an effusive manner, which sometimes made her guests wonder what they could have done to have made her so particularly glad to see them. She constantly lamented Mr. Vane's absence from London, and remarked, with a brilliant smile, that she felt quite deserted. Mrs. Vane's smile always suggested a reformed vampire, who had permanently renounced her bloodthirsty habits, but had not quite got out of the way of gloating on what would have been her victims in the unregenerate days. It is only fair to say that this impression was due to the immensity of her smile, which could hardly be honestly accounted for by this uncharitable world. She was busily employed in receiving her guests when Jack came, and was, perhaps, more stupendously cordial than ever.

"So kind of you to come," she was just saying to a previous arrival when Jack came in. "I know Dodo was dying to see you and be congratulated. Darling," she said, turning to Maud, "run and tell Dodo that Lord Burwell has arrived. So good of you to come. And how do you do, dear Mr. Broxton? Of course Dodo has told you of our happiness. Thanks, yes – we are all charmed with her engagement. And the Marquis is your cousin, is he not? How nice! May I tell Maud she may call you Cousin Jack? *Such* pleasure to have you. Dodo is simply expiring to see you. Did she see you this morning? Really! she never told me of it, and my sweet child usually tells me everything."

Dodo was playing the amiable white elephant to some purpose. She was standing under a large chandelier in the centre of the room, with Chesterford beside her, receiving congratulations with the utmost grace, and talking nonsense at the highest possible speed. Jack thought to himself that he had never seen anyone so thoroughly charming and brilliant, and almost wondered whether he had not been doing her an injustice all day. He saw it was impossible to get near her for the present, so he wandered off among other groups, exchanging greetings and salutations. He had made the circuit of the room, and was standing about near the door, feeling a little lonely, when Dodo came quickly towards him. She was looking rather white and impatient.

"Come away out of this, Jack," she said; "this is horrible. We've done our duty, and now I want to talk. I've been smiling and grinning till my cheeks are nearly cracked, and everyone says exactly the same thing. Come to my room – come." She turned round, beckoning to him, and found herself face to face with Chesterford. "Dear old boy," she said to him, "I'm not going to bore you any more to-night. I shall bore you enough after we are married. Jack and I are going away to talk, and he's going to tell me to be a good girl, and do as his cousin bids me. Good-night; come again to-morrow morning."

"I came here on purpose to congratulate you," said Jack, grasping Chesterford's hand, "and I wish you all joy and prosperity."

"Come, Jack," said Dodo. "Oh, by the way, Chesterford, ask Jack to be your best man. You couldn't have a better, and you haven't got any brother, you know."

"I was just going to," said Chesterford. "Jack, you will be, won't you? You must."

"Of course I will," said Jack. "All the same we're all awfully jealous of you, you know, for carrying Dodo off."

"So you ought to be," said he, enthusiastically. "Why, I'm almost jealous of myself. But now go and talk to Dodo, if she wants you."

The sight of Chesterford with Dodo made Jack groan in spirit. He had accepted Dodo's rejection of him as quite final, and he never intended to open that closed book again. But this was too horrible. He felt a genuine impulse of pure compassion for Chesterford, and an irritated disgust for Dodo. Dodo was an admirable comrade, and, for some, he thought, an admirable wife. But the idea of her in comradeship with Chesterford was too absurd, and if she could never be his comrade, by what perversity of fate was it that she was going to become his wife? Jack's serenity was quite gone, and he wondered what had become of it. All he was conscious of was a chafing refusal to acquiesce just yet, and the anticipation of a somewhat intimate talk with Dodo. He felt half inclined to run away from the house, and not see her again, and as he followed her up to her room, he began to think that his wisdom had followed his serenity. After all, if he asked her again about her resolution to marry Chesterford, what was he doing but continuing the conversation they had in the Park that morning, in which Dodo herself had taken the initiative. "These things are on the knees of the gods," thought Jack to himself piously, as the door of Dodo's room closed behind him. Dodo threw herself down in a low arm-chair with an air of weariness.

"Go on talking to me, Jack," she said. "Interest me, soothe me, make me angry if you like. Chesterford's very nice. Don't you like him immensely? I do."

Jack fidgeted, lit a match and blew it out again. Really it was not his fault that the conversation was going to be on this subject. He again laid the responsibility on the knees of the gods. Then he said, —

"Dodo, is this irrevocable? Are you determined to marry this man? I swear I don't ask you for any selfish reasons, but only because I am sincerely anxious for your happiness and his. It is a confounded liberty I am taking, but I sha'n't apologise for it. I know that it isn't any business of mine, but I risk your displeasure."

Dodo was looking at him steadily. Her breath came rather quickly, and the look of weariness had left her face.

"Jack," she said, "don't say this sort of thing to me again. You are quite right, it is a confounded liberty, as you say. I shall do as I please in this matter. Ah, Jack, don't be angry with me," she went on as he shrugged his shoulders, and half turned away. "I know you are sincere, but I must do it. I want to be safe. I want to be married. Chesterford is very safe. Jack, old boy, don't make me quarrel with you. You are the best friend I have, but I'm sure you're wrong about this."

She rose and stood by him, and laid one hand on his as it lay on the mantelpiece. He did not answer her. He was disappointed and baffled. Then she turned away from him, and suddenly threw up her arms.

"Oh, my God," she said, "I don't know what to do. It isn't my fault that I am made like this. I want to know what love is, but I can't — I can't. You say I shall make him unhappy, and I don't want to do that. I don't believe I shall. Jack, why did you come here suggesting these horrible things?"

There was a great anger in her voice, and she stood trembling before him.

Just then the door opened, and a middle-aged lady walked in. She did not seem at all surprised. Nobody who had known Dodo long was often surprised.

She walked up to Dodo and kissed her.

"I came late," she said, "and your mother said you were in your room, so I came up to congratulate you with all my heart."

"Thank you very much," said Dodo, returning the kiss. "Jack, do you know Mrs. Vivian? — Mr. Broxton."

Mrs. Vivian bowed, and Jack bowed, and then nobody seemed quite to know what to say next. Mrs. Vivian recovered herself first.

"I wish you would show me the necklace Lord Chesterford has given you," she said to Dodo. "Mrs. Vane said the diamonds were magnificent."

"Certainly, I will fetch it," said Dodo, with unusual docility. "Don't go away, Jack."

Dodo left the room, and Mrs. Vivian turned to Jack.

"My dear young man," she said, "I am old enough to be your mother, and you mustn't mind what I am going to say. This sort of thing won't do at all. I know who you are perfectly well, and I warn you that you are playing with fire. You were at liberty to do so before Dodo was engaged, and I daresay you have burned your fingers already. Several young men have – but now it won't do. Besides that, it isn't fair on either Chesterford or Dodo herself."

Jack wanted to think "what an impertinent old woman," but there was something in her manner that forbade it.

"I believe you are right," he said simply; "but it wasn't wholly my fault."

Then he felt angry with himself for having shifted any of the blame on to Dodo.

"*Honi soit*," said the other ambiguously. "I don't mean that – Ah, here is Dodo."

The diamonds were duly shown and admired, and the three went downstairs again.

Mrs. Vivian took her leave shortly. She was very gracious to Jack, and as they parted she said, —

"Come and see me at any time; I should like to talk to you. Here is my address."

Jack sought Mrs. Vane to inquire who Mrs. Vivian was. Mrs. Vane was even more effusive than usual.

"Oh, she is quite one of our leading people," she said. – "She has not been in London, or, in fact, in England for two years. She was unhappily married. Her husband was a scamp, and after his death she suddenly left London, and has only just returned. She is quite an extraordinary woman – everyone used to rave about her. She never gave herself airs, but somehow she was more looked up to than anyone else. Quite royal in fact. I feel immensely honoured by her presence here. I hardly dared to ask her – so fascinating, and so clever."

Dodo came up to Jack before he left.

"Jack," she said, "I was angry with you, and I am sorry. Don't bear me malice. If Mrs. Vivian had not come in, I should have said something abominable. I am afraid of her. I don't quite know why. She always seems to be taking stock of one, and noticing how very small one is. Don't forget to-morrow. We're all going on a water-party at Richmond. Mind you come."

"I think I had better not," said Jack bluntly.

Dodo lifted her eyebrows in surprise that may have been genuine.

"Why not?" she asked.

Jack had no reasonable answer to give her.

"What did Mrs. Vivian say to you?" asked Dodo suddenly.

Jack paused.

"A few polite nothings," he said; "and half the royal motto. Mrs. Vane said she was quite royal, which, of course, explains it."

"I can't conceive what you're talking about," remarked Dodo. "It seems to me to be sheer nonsense."

Jack smiled.

"On the whole, I think it is sheer nonsense," he said. "Yes, I'll come."

Dodo swept him the prettiest little curtsey.

"How good of you," she said. "Good-night, Jack. Don't be cross, it really isn't worth while, and you can behave so prettily if you like. Oh, such a nice gentleman!"

"No, I expect it isn't worth while," said Jack.

## CHAPTER THREE

There is a particular beauty about the Thames valley for which you may search for years elsewhere, and not find; a splendid lavishness in the way that the woods are cast down broadcast along the river, and a princely extravagance of thick lush hayfields, that seem determined not to leave a spare inch of land between them and the water. The whole scene has been constructed with a noble disregard of expense, in the way of water, land, and warm wood-land air. The tall, clean-limbed beech-trees have room to stretch their great, lazy arms without being prosecuted for their clumsy trespasses, and the squirrels that chatter at you from their green houses seem to have a quite unusual sleekness about them, and their insolent criticisms to each other about your walk, and general personal unattractiveness, are inspired by a larger share of animal spirits than those of other squirrels. As you row gently up in the middle of the stream, you may see a heron standing in the shallows, too lazy to fish, too supremely confident to mind the approach of anything so inferior as yourself, and from the cool shadow of the woods you may hear an old cock pheasant talking to himself, and not troubling to practise a new and original method of rocketing in June, for he knows that his time is not yet.

At this time of year, too, you need not trouble to look round, to see if there are large boats full of noisy people bearing down on you; like the pheasant, their time is not yet. But now and then the long strings of creamy bubbles appearing on the deep, quiet water, and a sound rich in associations of cool plunges into frothy streams, warns you that a lock is near. And above you may see some small village clustering down to the river's edge, to drink of its sweet coolness, or a couple of shaggy-footed cart-horses, looking with mild wonder at this unexpected method of locomotion, lifting their dripping noses from the bright gravelly shallows to stare at you, before they proceed to finish their evening watering.

Dodo was very fond of the Thames valley, and she really enjoyed giving up a day of June in London to the woods and waters. They were to start quite early in the morning, Dodo explained, and everyone was to wear their very oldest clothes, for they were going to play ducks and drakes, and drink milk in dairies, and pick buttercups, and get entirely covered with freckles. Dodo herself never freckled, and she was conscious of looking rather better for a slight touch of the sun, and it would be very dear of Mrs. Vivian if she would come too, if she didn't mind being silly all day; and, if so, would she call for them, as they were on her way? Chesterford, of course, was going, and Jack, and Maud and her mother; it was quite a small party; and wasn't Jack a dear?

Mrs. Vane had got hold of a certain idea about Mrs. Vivian, distinctly founded on fact. She was one of those women who cannot help making an impression. How it is done, or exactly what it is, one would be puzzled to define, but everyone noticed when she came into a room, and was aware when she went out. It was not her personal appearance, for she was short rather than tall, stout rather than graceful, and certainly middle-aged rather than young. Dodo has mentioned the effect she produced on her, and many people felt in the same way that Mrs. Vivian was somehow on a higher plane than they, that her mind was cast in a larger mould. Happily for our peace of mind such people are not very common; most of our fellow-men are luckily much on the same level, and they are not more than units among units. But Mrs. Vivian was much more than a unit. Dodo had said of her that she was two or three at least. And evidently nothing was further from Mrs. Vivian's wishes than trying to make an impression, in fact, the very impressive element was rather due to her extreme naturalness. We are most of us so accustomed to see people behave, and to behave ourselves, in a manner not quite natural, that to see anyone who never does so, is in itself calculated to make one rather nervous.

Mrs. Vivian evidently intended to take her life up again at the point where she had left off, so to speak – in other words, at the period before her marriage. Of her husband, perhaps, the less said the better. He died, owing to an accident, after ten years of married unhappiness, and left Mrs. Vivian poorer than she had been before. After his death she had travelled abroad for two years, and

then returned to England to live with her sister, who had married a rich judge and kept house rather magnificently in Prince's Gate. Lady Fuller had always disapproved of her sister's marriage, and she was heartily glad to see her well quit of her husband, and, on her return to England, received her with open arms, and begged her, on behalf of her husband and herself, to make their home hers. Mrs. Vivian accordingly settled down in the "extremely commodious" house in Prince's Gate, and, as I said, took up her life where it had left off. A standing grievance that her husband had had with her was, that she interested herself in the poor, and in the East End slums, that she went to cabmen's shelters, and espoused the cause of overdriven factory girls. He had told her that it was meddling with other people's business; that nothing was so objectionable as an assumption of charitable airs; that a woman who went to balls and dinner-parties was a hypocrite if she pretended to care about the state of the poor, and that she only did it because she wished to appear unlike other people. But he altogether failed to perceive that her actions were entirely uninfluenced by the impression they were to make, and mistook her extreme naturalness for the subtlest affectation. However, Mrs. Vivian resolutely banished from her mind the remembrance of those ten years, and, being unable to think of her husband with tenderness or affection, she preferred to forget her married life altogether. The Vanes had been their neighbours in the country for many years, and she had known Dodo since she was a child. Dodo had once asked to accompany her in her visits to the East End, and had been immensely struck by what she saw, and determined to be charitable too. This sort of thing seemed extremely chic to Dodo's observant mind. So she took up a factory of miserable match-girls, and asked them all to tea, and got Mrs. Vivian to promise her help; but when the afternoon came, Dodo particularly wished to go to a morning concert, and on Mrs. Vivian's arrival she found, indeed, plenty of match-girls, but no Dodo. Dodo came back later and made herself extremely fascinating. She kissed the cleanest of the girls, and patted the rest on the shoulder, and sang several delightful little French songs to them to her own accompaniment on the banjo, and thanked Mrs. Vivian for being "such a dear about the slums." But on the next occasion when she had nothing to do, and called on Mrs. Vivian to ask to be taken to another of those "darling little slums," Mrs. Vivian hinted that, though she would be charmed to take her, she thought that Dodo had perhaps forgotten that the Four-in-hand Club met that day in Hyde Park. Dodo had forgotten it, and, as she had bespoken the box seat on one of her friends' coaches, she hurried home again, feeling it freshly borne in upon her that Mrs. Vivian thought she was very contemptible indeed.

Altogether Mrs. Vivian knew Dodo well, and when she went home that evening, she thought a good deal about the approaching marriage. She was glad to have had that occasion of speaking to Jack, he seemed to her to be worth doing it for. She knew that she ran the risk of being told, in chillingly polite English, that she was stepping outside her province, and that Jack did not belong to the East End class who welcomed any charitable hand; but she had a remarkably keen eye, and her intuitive perception told her at once that Jack's sense of the justice of her remark would stifle any feeling he might have that she was officious and meddling, and the event had justified her decision.

In the course of the next few days she met Jack several times. They both went to the water-party Dodo spoke of, and she took the opportunity to cultivate his acquaintance.

They were sitting on the bank of the river below the Clivedon woods, a little apart from the others, and she felt that as he had behaved so well, she owed him some apology.

"It was very nice of you, Mr. Broxton," she said, "to be so polite to me last night. To tell you the truth, I did know you, though you didn't know me. I was an old friend of your mother's, but I hadn't time to explain that, and you were good enough to take me without explanations. I always wonder what our attitude towards old friends of our mothers ought to be. I really don't see why they should have any claim upon one."

Jack laughed.

"The fact was that I knew you were right as soon as you spoke to me, though I wanted to resent it. I had been putting it differently to myself; that was why I spoke to Dodo."

"Tell me more," she said. "From the momentary glance I had of you and her, I thought you had been remonstrating with her, and she had been objecting. I don't blame you for remonstrating in the general way. Dodo's conduct used not to be always blameless. But it looked private, and that was what I did object to. I daresay you think me a tiresome, impertinent, old woman."

Jack felt more strongly than ever that this woman could not help being well-bred in whatever she did.

"It sounds disloyal to one's friends, I know," he said, "but it was because I really did care for both of them that I acted as I did. What will happen will be that he will continue to adore her, and by degrees she will begin to hate him. He will not commit suicide, and I don't think Dodo will make a scandal. Her regard for appearances alone would prevent that. It would be a confession of failure."

Mrs. Vivian looked grave.

"Did you tell Dodo this?"

"More or less," he replied. "Except about the scandal and the suicide."

Mrs. Vivian's large, grey, serious eyes twinkled with some slight amusement.

"I think while I was about it I should have told her that too," she said; "that's the sort of argument that appeals to Dodo. You have to scream if you want her to listen to what she doesn't want to hear. But I don't think it was quite well judged of you, you know."

"I think she ought to know it," said Jack, "though I realise I ought to have been the last person to tell her, for several reasons."

Mrs. Vivian looked at him inquiringly.

"You mean for fear of her putting a wrong construction on it? I see," she said.

Jack felt that it could not have been more delicately done.

"How did you know?"

"Oh," she said, "that is the kind of intuition which is the only consolation we women have for getting old. We are put on the shelf, no doubt, after a certain age, but we get a habit of squinting down into the room below. That is the second time I have shown myself a meddling old woman, and you have treated me very nicely both times. Let us join the others. I see tea is ready."

Dodo meanwhile had walked Chesterford off among the green cool woods that bordered the river. She had given Jack's remarks a good deal of consideration, and, whether or no she felt that he was justified in them on present data, she determined that she would make the event falsify his predictions. Dodo had an unlimited capacity for interfering in the course of destiny. She devoted herself to her aims, whatever they might be, with a wonderful singleness of purpose, and since it is a fact that one usually gets what one wants in this world, if one tries hard enough, it followed that up to this time she had, on the whole, usually got her way. But she was now dealing with an unknown quantity, which she could not gauge. She had confessed to Jack her inability to understand what love meant, and it was with a certain sense of misgiving that she felt that her answers for the future would be expressed in terms of that unknown quantity "x." To Dodo's concrete mind this was somewhat discouraging, but she determined to do her best to reduce things to an equation in which the value of "x" could be found in terms of some of those many symbols which she did know.

Dodo had an inexhaustible fund of vivacity, which was a very useful instrument to her; like a watch-key that fits all watches, she was able to apply it as required to very different pieces of mechanism. When she wished to do honour to a melancholy occasion, for instance, her vivacity turned any slight feeling of sorrow she had into hysterical weeping; when the occasion was joyful, it became a torrent of delightful nonsense. To-day the occasion was distinctly joyful. She had a large sense of success. Chesterford was really a very desirable lover; his immense wealth answered exactly the requirements of Dodo's wishes. Furthermore, he was safe and easily satisfied; the day was charming; Jack was there; she had had a very good lunch, and was shortly going to have a very good tea; and Chesterford had given orders for his yacht to be in readiness to take them off for a delightful honeymoon, directly after their marriage – in short, all her circumstances were wholly satisfactory.

She had said to him after lunch, as they were sitting on the grass, "Come away into those delicious woods, and leave these stupid people here," and he was radiant in consequence, for, to tell the truth, she had been rather indulgent of his company than eager for it the last day or two. She was in the highest spirits as they strolled away.

"Oh do give me a cigarette," she said, as soon as they had got out of sight. "I didn't dare smoke with that Vivian woman there. Chesterford, I am frightened of her. She is as bad as the Inquisition, or that odious man in Browning who used to walk about, and tell the king if anything happened. I am sure she puts it down in a book whenever I say anything I shouldn't. You know that's so tantalising. It is a sort of challenge to be improper. Chesterford, if you put down in a book anything I do wrong, I swear I shall go to the bad altogether."

To Chesterford this seemed the most attractive nonsense that ever flowed from female lips.

"Why, you can't do anything wrong, Dodo," he said simply; "at least not what I think wrong. And what does it matter what other people think?"

Dodo patted his hand, and blew him a kiss approvingly.

"That's quite right," she said; "bear that in mind and we shall never have a quarrel. Chesterford, we won't quarrel at all, will we? Everybody else does, I suppose, now and then, and that proves it's vulgar. Mrs. Vivian used to quarrel with her husband, so she's vulgar. Oh, I'm so glad she's vulgar. I sha'n't care how much she looks at me now. Bother! I believe it was only her husband that used to swear at her. Never mind, he must have been vulgar to do that, and she must have vulgar tastes to have married a vulgar person. I don't think I'm vulgar, do you? Really it's a tremendous relief to have found out that she's vulgar. But I am afraid I shall forget it when I see her again. You must remind me. You must point at her and say V, if you can manage it. Or are you afraid of her too?"

"Oh, never mind Mrs. Vivian," said he, "she can wait."

"That's what she's always doing," said Dodo. "Waiting and watching with large serious eyes. I can't think why she does it, for she doesn't make use of it afterwards. Now when I know something discreditable of a person, if I dislike him, I tell everybody else, and if I like him, I tell him that I know all about it, and I am *so* sorry for him. Then he thinks you are charming and sympathetic, and you have a devoted admirer for life."

Chesterford laughed. He had no desire to interrupt this rapid monologue of Dodo's. He was quite content to play the part of the Greek chorus.

"I'm going to sit down here," continued Dodo. "Do you mind my smoking cigarettes? I'm not sure that it is in good form, but I mean to make it so. I want to be the fashion. Would you like your wife to be the fashion?"

He bent over her as she sat with her head back, smiling up at him.

"My darling," he said, "do you know, I really don't care a straw whether you are the fashion or not, as long as you are satisfied. You might stand on your head in Piccadilly if you liked, and I would come and stand too. All I care about is that you are you, and that you have made me the happiest man on God's earth."

Dodo was conscious again of the presence of this unknown quantity. She would much prefer striking it out altogether; it seemed to have quite an unreasonable preponderance.

Chesterford did not usually make jokes, in fact she had never heard him make one before, and his remark about standing on his head seemed to be only accounted for by this perplexing factor. Dodo had read about love in poems and novels, and had seen something of it, too, but it remained a puzzle to her. She hoped her calculations might not prove distressingly incorrect owing to this inconvenient factor. But she laughed with her habitual sincerity, and replied, —

"What a good idea; let's do it to-morrow morning. Will ten suit you? We can let windows in all the houses round. I'm sure there would be a crowd to see us. It really would be interesting, though perhaps not a very practical thing to do. I wonder if Mrs. Vivian would come. She would put down a very large bad mark to me for that, but I shall tell her it was your suggestion."

Chesterford laughed with pure pleasure.

"Dodo," he said, "you are not fair on Mrs. Vivian. She is a very good woman."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," said Dodo, "but, you see, being good doesn't necessarily make one a pleasant companion. Now, I'm not a bit good, but you must confess you would rather talk to me than to the Vivian."

"Oh, you are different," said he rapturously. "You are Dodo."

Dodo smiled contentedly. This man was so easy to please. She had felt some slight dismay at Jack's ill-omened prophecies, but Jack was preposterously wrong about this.

They rejoined the others in course of time. Dodo made fearful ravages on the eatables, and after tea she suddenly announced, —

"Mrs. Vivian, I'm going to smoke a cigarette. Do you feel dreadfully shocked?"

Mrs. Vivian laughed.

"My dear Dodo, I should never venture to be shocked at anything you did. You are so complete that I should be afraid to spoil you utterly, if I tried to suggest corrections."

Dodo lit a cigarette with a slightly defiant air. Mrs. Vivian's manner had been entirely sincere, but she felt the same sort of resentment that a prisoner might feel if the executioner made sarcastic remarks to him. She looked on Mrs. Vivian as a sort of walking Inquisition.

"My darling Dodo," murmured Mrs. Vane, "I do so wish you would, not smoke, it will ruin your teeth entirely."

Dodo turned to Mrs. Vivian.

"That means you think it would be very easy to spoil me, as you call it."

"Not at all," said that lady. "I don't understand you, that's all, and I might be pulling out the key-stone of the arch unawares. Not that I suppose your character depends upon your smoking."

Dodo leaned back and laughed.

"Oh, this is too dreadfully subtle," she exclaimed. "I want to unbend my mind. Chesterford, come and talk to me, you are deliciously unbending."

## CHAPTER FOUR

Lord and Lady Chesterford were expected home on the 6th of December. The marriage took place late in August, and they had gone off on the yacht directly afterwards, in order to spend a few warm months in the Mediterranean. Dodo had written home occasionally to Mrs. Vane, and now and then to Jack. To Jack her letters had never been more than a word or two, simply saying that they were enjoying themselves enormously, and that Jack had been hopelessly wrong. Mrs. Vane also had much reason to be satisfied. She had spent her autumn in a variety of fashionable watering-places, where her dresses had always been the awe and wonder of the town; she had met many acquaintances, to whom she had poured out her rapture over Dodo's marriage; had declared that Chesterford was most charming, and that he and Dodo were quite another Adam and Eve in Paradise, and that she was really quite jealous of Dodo. When they left England, they had intended to spend the winter abroad and not come back till February, but early in December a telegram had arrived at Winston, Lord Chesterford's country house, saying that they would be back in ten days. About the same time Jack received a letter, saying that their change of plans was solely owing to the fact that Dodo was rather tired of the sea, and the weather was bad, and that she had never been so happy in her life. Dodo's eagerness to assure Jack of this struck him as being in rather bad taste. She ought to have entirely ignored his warnings. The happiness of a newly-married woman ought to be so absorbing, as to make her be unaware of the existence of other people; and this consciousness in Dodo of her triumphant superiority of knowledge, led him to suppose he was right rather than wrong. He was unfeignedly sorry not to be sure that she had been right. When he told Dodo that he wished to be jealous of Chesterford, he was quite sincere. Since he could not have Dodo himself, at any rate let her make someone happy. Dodo also informed him that they were going to have a house-party that Christmas and that he must come, and she had asked Mrs. Vivian, to show that she wasn't afraid of her any longer, and that Maud was coming, and she wished Jack would marry her. Then followed a dozen other names belonging to Dodo's private and particular set, who had all been rather disgusted at her marrying what they chose to call a Philistine. It had been quite hoped that she would marry Jack. Jack was not a Philistine at all, though the fact of his having proposed to her remained a secret. Maud, on the other hand, was a Philistine; and it was one of Dodo's merits that she did not drop those who originally had claims on her, when she became the fashion. She was constantly trying to bring Maud into notice, but Maud resisted the most well-meant shoves. She had none of Dodo's vivacity and talents; in fact, her talents lay chiefly in the direction of arranging the places at a dinner-party, and in doing a great deal of unnecessary worsted work. What happened to her worsted work nobody ever knew. It was chiefly remarkable for the predominance of its irregularities, and a suggestion of damaged goods about it, in consequence of much handling. To Dodo it seemed an incredible stupidity that anyone should do worsted work, or, if they did do it, not do it well. She used to tell Maud that it was done much more cheaply in shops, and much better. Then Maud would drop it for a time, and take to playing the piano, but that was even more oppressively stupid to Dodo's mind than the worsted work. Maud had a perfect genius for not letting her right hand know what her left hand was doing, a principle which was abhorrent to Dodo in every application. The consequence of all this was, that Dodo was apt to regard her sister as a failure, though she still, as in the present instance, liked giving Maud what she considered a helping hand. It must be confessed that Dodo's efforts were not altogether unselfish. She liked her environment to be as great a success as herself, as it thus added to her own completeness, just as a picture looks better in a good frame than in a shabby one. Maud, however, had no desire to be a success. She was perfectly happy to sit in the background and do the worsted work. She longed to be let alone. At times she would make her escape to the iron works and try to cultivate the domestic virtues in attending to her father. She thought with a kind of envy of the daughters of country clergymen, whose mediocre piano-playing was invaluable to penny readings

and village concerts, and for whose worsted work there was a constant demand, in view of old women and almshouses. She had hoped that Dodo's slumming experiences would bring her into connection with this side of life, and had dispensed tea and buns with a kind of rapture on the occasion of Dodo's tea-party, but her sister had dropped her slums, as we have seen, at this point, and Maud was too shy and uninitiative to take them up alone. She had an excellent heart, but excellent hearts were out of place in Mrs. Vane's establishment. Dodo had confessed her inability to deal with them.

Dodo's general invitation to Jack was speedily followed by a special one from Winston, naming the first week in January as the time of the party. Jack was met on his arrival by Chesterford, and as they drove back the latter gave him particulars about the party in the house.

"They are chiefly Dodo's friends," he said. "Do you know, Jack, except for you, I think I am rather afraid of Dodo's friends, they are so dreadfully clever, you know. Of course they are all very charming, but they talk about character. Now I don't care to talk about character. I know a good man when I see him, and that's all that matters as far as I can judge. Dodo was saying last night that her potentiality for good was really much stronger than her potentiality for evil, and that her potentiality for evil was only skin deep, and they all laughed, and said they didn't believe it. And Dodo said, 'Ask Chesterford if it isn't,' and God only knows what I said."

Jack laughed.

"Poor old fellow," he said, "you and I will go to the smoking-room, and talk about nothing at all subtle. I don't like subtleties either."

"Ah, but they expect great things of you," said Chesterford ruefully. "Dodo was saying you were an apostle. Are you an apostle, Jack?"

"Oh, that's only a nickname of Dodo's," he said, smiling. "But who are these dreadfully clever people?"

"Oh, there's Ledgers – you know him, I suppose – and a Miss Edith Staines, and a girl whom I don't know, called Miss Grantham, whom Ledgers said, when she was out of the room last night, that he had 'discovered.' What he meant Heaven knows. Then there's Maud, who is a nice girl. She went round to the keeper's with me this afternoon, and played with the baby. Then there's Bertie Arbuthnot, and I think that's all."

Jack laughed.

"I don't think we need mind them," he said. "We'll form a square to resist cavalry."

"Bertie's the best of the lot," said Chesterford, "and they laughed at him rather, I think. But he is quite unconscious of it."

They drove on in silence a little way. Then Chesterford said, —

"Jack, Dodo makes me the happiest of men. I am afraid sometimes that she is too clever, and wishes I was more so, but it makes no difference. Last night, as I was in the smoking-room she sent to say she wanted to see me, and I went up. She said that she wanted to talk to me, now she had got rid of all those tiresome people, and said so many charming things that I got quite conceited, and had to stop her. I often wonder, Jack, what I have done to deserve her. And she went on talking about our yachting, and those months in London when we were first engaged, and she told me to go on smoking, and she would have a cigarette too. And we sat on talking, till I saw she was tired, and then I went away, though he would hardly let me."

This communication had only the effect of making Jack rather uncomfortable. Knowing what he did, he knew that this was not all genuine on Dodo's part. It was obviously an effort to keep it up, to use a vulgar term. And since it was not all genuine, the doubt occurred as to whether any of it was. Jack had a profound belief in Dodo's dramatic talents. That the need for keeping it up had appeared already was an alarming symptom, but the real tragedy would begin on that day when Dodo first failed to do so. And from that moment Jack regarded his prophecy as certain to be fulfilled. The overture had begun, and in course of time the curtain would rise on a grim performance.

They drove up to the door, and entered the large oak-panelled hall, hung all round with portraits of the family. The night was cold, and there was a fire sparkling in the wide, open grate. As they entered, an old collie, who was enjoying the fruits of a well-spent life on the hearthrug, stretched his great, tawny limbs, and shoved a welcoming nose into Chesterford's hand. This produced heartburnings of the keenest order in the mind of a small fox-terrier pup, who consisted mainly of head and legs, which latter he evidently considered at present more as a preventive towards walking than an aid. Being unable to reach his hand the puppy contented himself with sprawling over his boots, and making vague snaps at the collie. It was characteristic of Chesterford that all animals liked him. He had a tender regard for the feelings of anything that was dependent on him. Dodo thought this almost inexplicable. She disliked to see animals in pain, because they usually howled, but the dumb anguish of a dog who considers himself neglected conveyed nothing to her. From within a door to the right, came sounds of talking and laughter.

There was something pathetic in the sight of this beautiful home, and its owner standing with his back to the fire, as Jack divested himself of his coat. Chesterford was so completely happy, so terribly unconscious of what Jack felt sure was going on. He looked the model of the typical English gentleman, with his tall stature and well-bred face. Jack remembered passing on the road a labourer who was turning into his cottage. The firelight had thrown a bright ray across the snow-covered road, and inside he had caught a momentary glimpse of the wife with a baby in her arms, and a couple of girls laying the table-cloth. He remembered afresh Dodo's remark about waiting until the chimney smoked, and devoutly hoped that the chimney of this well-appointed house was in good order.

Chesterford led the way to the drawing-room door, and pushed it open for Jack to enter. Dodo was sitting at the tea-table, talking to some half-dozen people who were grouped round her.

As Jack entered, she rose and came towards him with a smile of welcome.

"Ah, Jack," she said, "this is delightful; I am tremendously glad to see you! Let's see, whom do you know? May I introduce you to Miss Grantham? Mr. Broxton. I think you know everybody else. Chesterford, come here and sit by me at once. You've been an age away. I expect you've been getting into mischief." She wheeled a chair up for him, and planted him down in it. He looked radiantly happy.

"Now, Jack," she went on, "tell us what you've been doing all these months. It's years since we saw you. I think you look all right. No signs of breaking down yet. I hoped you would have gone into a rapid consumption, because I was married, but it doesn't seem to have made any difference to anybody except Chesterford and me. Jack, don't you think I shall make an excellent matron? I shall get Maud to teach me some of her crochet-stitches. Have you ever been here before? Chesterford, you shut it up, didn't you, for several years, until you thought of bringing me here? Sugar, Jack? Two lumps? Chesterford, you mustn't eat sugar, you're getting quite fat already. You must obey me, you know. You promised to love, honour and obey. Oh, no; I did that. However, sugar is bad for you."

"Dodo keeps a tight hand on me, you see," said Chesterford, from the depths of his chair. "Dodo, give me the sugar, or we shall quarrel."

Dodo laughed charmingly.

"He would quarrel with his own wife for a lump of sugar," said Dodo dramatically; "but she won't quarrel with him. Take it then."

She glanced at Jack for a moment as she said this, but Jack was talking to Miss Grantham, and either did not see, or did not seem to. Jack had a pleasant impression of light hair, dark grey eyes, and a very fair complexion. But somehow it produced no more effect on him than do those classical profiles which are commoner on the lids of chocolate boxes than elsewhere. Her "discoverer" was sitting in a chair next her, talking to her with something of the air of a showman exhibiting the tricks of his performing bear. His manner seemed to say, "See what an intelligent animal." The full sublimity of Lord Ledgers' remark had not struck him till that moment.

Miss Grantham was delivering herself of a variety of opinions in a high, penetrating voice.

"Oh, did you never hear him sing last year?" she was saying to Lord Ledgers. "Mr. Broxton, you must have heard him. He has the most lovely voice. He simply sings into your inside. You feel as if someone had got hold of your heart, and was stroking it. Don't you know how some sounds produce that effect? I went with Dodo once. She simply wept floods, but I was too far gone for that. He had put a little stopper on my tear bottle, and though I was dying to cry, I couldn't."

"I always wonder how sorry we are when we cry," said Lord Ledgers in a smooth, low voice. "It always strikes me that people who don't cry probably feel most."

"Oh, you are a horrid, unfeeling monster," remarked Miss Grantham; "that's what comes of being a man. Just because you are not in the habit of crying yourself, you think that you have all the emotions, but stoically repress them. Now I cultivate emotions. I would walk ten miles any day in order to have an emotion. Wouldn't you, Mr. Broxton?"

"It obviously depends on what sort of emotion I should find when I walked there," said Jack. "There are some emotions that I would walk further to avoid."

"Oh, of course, the common emotions, 'the litany things,' as Dodo calls them," said Miss Grantham, dismissing them lightly with a wave of her hand. "But what I like is a nice little sad emotion that makes you feel so melancholy you don't know what to do with yourself. I don't mean deaths and that sort of thing, but seeing someone you love being dreadfully unhappy and extremely prosperous at the same time."

"But it's rather expensive for the people you love," said Jack.

"Oh, we must all make sacrifices," said Miss Grantham. "It's quite worth while if you gratify your friends. I would not mind being acutely unhappy, if I could dissect my own emotions, and have them photographed and sent round to my friends."

"What a charming album we might all make," said Lord Ledgers. "Page 1. Miss Grantham's heart in the acute stage. Page 2. Mortification setting in. Page 3. The lachrymatory gland permanently closed by a tenor voice."

"Poor old Chesterford," thought Jack, "this is rather hard on him."

But Chesterford was not to be pitied just now, for Dodo was devoting her exclusive conversation to him in defiance of her duties as hostess. She was recounting to him how she had spent every moment of his absence at the station. Certainly she was keeping it up magnificently at present.

"And Mrs. Vivian comes to-morrow," she was saying. "You like her, don't you, Chesterford? You must be awfully good to her, and take her to see all the drunken idlers in the village. That will be dear of you. It's just what she likes. She has sort of passion for drunken cabmen, who stamp on their wives. If you stamped on me a little every evening, she would cultivate you to any extent. Shall I lie down on the floor for you to begin?"

Chesterford leant back in his chair in a kind of ecstasy.

"Ah, Dodo," he said, "you are wonderfully good to me. But I must go and write two notes before dinner; and you must amuse your guests. I am very glad Jack has come. He is a very good chap. But don't make him an apostle."

Dodo laughed.

"I shall make a little golden hoop for him like the apostles in the Arundels, and another for you, and when nobody else is there you can take them off, and play hoops with them. I expect the apostles did that when they went for a walk. You couldn't wear it round your hat, could you?"

Miss Grantham instantly annexed Dodo.

"Dodo," she said, "come and take my part. These gentlemen say you shouldn't cultivate emotions."

"No, not that quite," corrected Jack. "I said it was expensive for your friends if they had to make themselves miserable, in order to afford food for your emotions."

"Now, isn't that selfish?" said Miss Grantham, with the air of a martyr at the stake. "Here am I ready to be drawn and quartered for anyone's amusement, and you tell me you are sorry for your

part, but that it costs too much. Maud, come off that sofa, and take up the daggers for a too unselfish woman."

"I expect I don't know much about these things," said Maud.

"No; Maud would not go further than wrapping herself in a winding-sheet of blue worsted," remarked Dodo incisively.

Maud flushed a little.

"Oh, Dodo!" she exclaimed deprecatingly.

"It's no use hitting Maud," said Dodo pensively. "You might as well hit a feather bed. Now, if you hit Jack, he will hit back."

"Well, I'd prefer you hit me," said Jack, "than that you should hit anyone who can't hit back."

"Can't you see that I have determined not to hit feather beds," said Dodo in a low tone. "Really, Jack, you do me an injustice."

Jack looked up at her quickly.

"Do you say that already?" he asked.

"Oh, if you are going to whisper, I shall whisper too," remarked Miss Grantham calmly. "Lord Ledgers, I want to tell you a secret."

"I was only telling. Jack he was stupid," said Dodo. "I thought I would spare him before you all, but I see I have to explain. Have you seen Bertie yet, Jack? He's in the smoking-room, I think. Edith Staines is probably there too. She always smokes after tea, and Chesterford doesn't like it in the drawing-room. You know her, don't you? She's writing a symphony or something, and she's no use except at meal-times. I expect she will play it us afterwards. We must make Bertie sing too. There's the dressing-bell. I'm going to be gorgeous to-night in honour of you, Jack."

Jack found himself making a quantity of reflections, when he retired to his room that night. He became aware that he had enjoyed himself more that evening than he had done for a very long time. He questioned himself as to when he had enjoyed himself so much, and he was distinctly perturbed to find that the answer was, when he had last spent an evening with Dodo. He had formed an excellent habit of being exactly honest with himself, and he concluded that Dodo's presence had been the cause of it. It was a very unpleasant blow to him. He had accepted her refusal with an honest determination to get over it. He had not moped, nor pined, nor striven, nor cried. He had no intentions of dying of a broken heart, but the stubborn fact remained that Dodo exercised an unpleasantly strong influence over him. He could have repeated without effort all she had said that night. She had not said anything particularly remarkable, but somehow he felt that the most striking utterances of other men and women would not have produced any such effect on him. It really was very inconvenient. Dodo had married a man who adored her, for whom she did not care two pins' heads, and this man was one of his oldest friends. Decidedly there was something left-handed about this particular disposition of destiny. And the worst of it was that Chesterford was being hopelessly duped. About that he felt no doubt. Dodo's acting was so remarkably life-like, that he mistook it at present for reality. But the play must end some time, and the sequel was too dark and involved to be lightly followed out. He could not conceive why this elaborate drama on Dodo's part did not disgust him more. He wished he had been deceived by it himself, but having been behind the scenes, he had seen Dodo, as it were, in the green-room, putting on the rouge and powder. But failing that, he wished that a wholesome impulse of disgust and contempt had superseded his previous feelings with regard to her. But he believed with her that under the circumstances it was the best thing to do. The marriage was a grand mistake, true, but given that, was not this simply so many weeks of unhappiness saved? Then he had an immense pity for Dodo's original mistake. She had told him once that she was no more responsible for her philosophy than for the fact that she happened to be five foot eight in height, and had black eyes and black hair. "It was Nature's doing," she had said; "go and quarrel with her, but don't blame me. If I had made myself, I should have given myself a high ideal; I should have had something to live up to. Now, I have no ideal. The whole system of things seems to me such an immense puzzle, that I

have given up trying to find a solution. I know what I like, and what I dislike. Can you blame me for choosing the one, and avoiding the other? I like wealth and success, and society and admiration. In a degree I have secured them, and the more I secure them the more reason I have to be satisfied. To do otherwise would be like putting on boots that were too large for me – they are excellent for other people, but not for me. I cannot accept ideals that I don't feel. I can understand them, and I can sympathise with them, and I can and do wish they were mine; but, as Nature has denied me them, I must make the best of what I have."

Jack felt hopeless against this kind of reasoning, and angry with himself for letting this woman have such dominion over him. In a measure he felt himself capable of views bounded by a horizon not so selfishly fatalistic, and the idea of the smoking chimney in the cottage did not seem to matter, provided that Dodo was sitting on the other side of the hearthrug. He would willingly have sacrificed anything else, to allow himself to give full reins to his thought on this point. But the grand barrier which stood between him and Dodo, was not so much her refusal of him, but the existence of her husband. At this Jack pulled himself up sharp. There are certain feelings of loyalty that still rank above all other emotions. Miss Grantham would certainly have classed such among the litany things. There was nothing heroic about it. It simply consisted in a sturdy refusal to transgress, even in vaguest thought, a code which deals with the most ordinary and commonplace virtues and vices. There is nothing heroic in a street boy passing by the baker's cart without a grab at the loaves, and it sounds almost puritanical to forbid him to cast a glance at them, or inhale a sniff of their warm fragrance. "Certainly this side of morality is remarkably dull," thought Jack; and the worst of it is, that it is not only dull but difficult. With practice most of us could become a Simeon Stylites, provided we are gifted with a steady head, and a constitution that defies showers. It is these commonplace acts of loyalty, the ordinary and rational demands of friendship and society, that are so dreadfully taxing to most of us who have the misfortune not to be born saints. Then Jack began to feel ill-used. "Why the deuce should Chesterford be born a marquis and not I? What has he done to have a title and fortune and Dodo that I have been given the chance to do?" It struck him that his reflections were deplorably commonplace, and that his position ought to be made much more of. He wondered whether this sort of situation was always so flat. In novels there is always a touch of the heroic in the faithful friend who is loyal to his cousin, and steadily avoids his cousin's wife; but here he is in identically the same situation, feeling not at all heroic, but only discontented and quarrelsome with this ill-managed world. Decidedly he would go to bed.

Owing to a certain habit that he had formed early in life he slept soundly, and morning found him not only alive, but remarkably well and hearty, and with a certain eagerness to follow up what he had thought out on the previous night. He was in an excellently managed household, which imposed no rules on its inhabitants except that they should do what they felt most inclined to do; he was in congenial company, and his digestion was good. It is distressing how important those material matters are to us. The deeper emotions do but form a kind of background to our coarser needs. We come down in the morning feeling rather miserable, but we eat an excellent breakfast, and, in spite of ourselves, we are obliged to confess that we feel distinctly better.

As Jack crossed the hall, he met a footman carrying a breakfast tray into the drawing-room. The door was half open, and there came from within the sounds of vigorous piano-playing, and now and then a bar or two of music sung in a rich, alto voice. These tokens seemed to indicate that Miss Edith Staines was taking her breakfast at the piano. Jack found himself smiling at the thought; it was a great treat to find anyone so uniformly in character as Miss Staines evidently was. He turned into the dining-room, where he found Miss Grantham sitting at the table alone. Dodo was lolling in a great chair by the fire, and there were signs that Lord Chesterford had already breakfasted. Dodo was nursing a little Persian kitten with immense tenderness. Apparently she had been disagreeing with Miss Grantham on some point, and had made the kitten into a sort of arbitrator.

"Oh, you dear kitten," she was saying, "you must agree with me, if you think it over. Now, supposing you were very fond of a tom-cat that had only the woodshed to lie in, and another very presentable tom belonging to the Queen came – Ah, Jack, here you are. Chesterford's breakfasted, and there's going to be a shoot to-day over the home covers. Edith is composing and breakfasting. She says she has – an idea. So Grantie and I are going to bring you lunch to the keeper's cottage at half-past one."

"And Bertie?" asked Jack.

"Oh, you must get Edith to tell you what Bertie's going to do. Perhaps she'll want him to turn over the pages for her, or give her spoonfuls of egg and bacon, while she does her music. He's in the drawing-room now. Edith's appropriated him. She usually does appropriate somebody. We told Chesterford to get Bertie to come if possible, but Edith's leave is necessary. Maud is going to meet Mrs. Vivian, who comes this afternoon, and, as she has some shopping to do, she will lunch in Harchester, and drive out afterwards; Ledgers has had a telegram, and has made a blasphemous departure for town. He comes back this evening."

"Well, Dodo," remarked Miss Grantham, "now let's go on with what we were discussing. Mr. Broxton will make a much better umpire than the kitten."

"Oh, shut up, Grantie," said Dodo, with fine candour, "Jack agrees with neither of us."

"Tell me what it is," said Jack, "and then I'll promise to agree with somebody."

"I don't care about your agreeing with me," said Miss Grantham. "I know I'm right, so it doesn't signify what anybody else thinks."

Miss Grantham, it may be noticed, showed some signs of being ruffled:

"Oh, now, Grantie's angry," said Dodo. "Grantie, do be amiable. Call her Grantie, Jack," she added with feeling.

"Dodo, darling," said Miss Grantham, "you're really foolish, now and then. I'm perfectly amiable. But, you know, if you don't care for a man at all, and he does care for you a great deal, it's sure to be a failure. I can't think of any instance just now, but I know I'm right."

Dodo looked up and caught Jack's eye for a moment. Then she turned to Miss Grantham.

"Dear Grantie, please shut up. It's no use trying to convince me. I know a case in point just the other way, but I am not at liberty to mention it. Am I, Jack?"

"If you mean the same as the case I'm thinking of, certainly not," said Jack.

"Well, I'm sure this is very pleasant for me," said Miss Grantham, in high, cool tones.

At this moment a shrill voice called Dodo from the drawing-room.

"Dodo, Dodo," it cried, "the man brought me two tepid poached eggs! Do send me something else. Is there such a thing as a grilled bone?"

These remarks were speedily followed up by the appearance of Miss Staines at the dining-room door. In one hand she held the despised eggs, in the other a quire of music paper. Behind her followed a footman with her breakfast-tray, in excusable ignorance as to what was required of him.

"Dear Dodo," she went on, "you know when I'm composing a symphony I want something more exciting than two poached eggs. Mr. Broxton, I know, will take my side. You couldn't eat poached eggs at a ball – could you? They might do very well for a funeral march or a nocturne, but they won't do for a symphony, especially for the scherzo. A brandy-and-soda and a grilled bone is what one really wants for a scherzo, only that would be quite out of the question."

Edith Staines talked in a loud, determined voice, and emphasised her points with little dashes and nourishes of the dish of poached eggs. At this moment one of them flew on to the floor and exploded. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and at any rate this relieved the footman from his state of indecision. His immediate mission was clearly to remove it.

Dodo threw herself back in her chair with a peal of laughter.

"Go on, go on," she cried, "you are too splendid. Tell us what you write the presto on."

"I can't waste another moment," said Edith. "I'm in the middle of the most entrancing motif, which is working out beautifully. Do you mind my smoking in the drawing-room? I am awfully sorry, but it makes all the difference to my work. Burn a little incense there afterwards. Do send me a bone, Dodo. Come and hear me play the scherzo later on. It's the best thing I've ever done. Oh, by the way, I telegraphed to Herr Truffen to come to-morrow – he's my conductor, you know. You can put him up in the village or the coal-hole, if you like. He's quite happy if he gets enough beer. He's my German conductor, you know. I made him entirely. I took him to the Princess the other day when I was at Aix, and we all had beer together in the verandah of the Beau Site. You'll be amused with him."

"Oh, rather," said Dodo; "that will be all right. He can sleep in the house. Will he come early to-morrow? Let's see – to-morrow's Sunday. Edith, I've got an idea. We'll have a dear little service in the house – we can't go to church if it snows – and you shall play your Mass, and Herr What's-his-name shall conduct, and Bertie, and Grantie, and you and I will sing. Won't it be lovely? You and I will settle all that this afternoon. Telegraph to Truffler, or whatever his name is, to come by the eight-twenty. Then he'll be here by twelve, and we'll have the service at a quarter past."

"Dodo, that will be grand," said Edith. "I can't wait now. Good-bye. Hurry up my breakfast – I'm awfully sharp-set."

Edith went back to the drawing-room, whistling in a particularly shrill manner.

"*Oh*, did you ever!" said Dodo, who was laughing feebly in her chair. "Edith really is splendid. She is so dreadfully sure of herself, and she tells you so. And she does talk so loud – it goes right through your head like a chirping canary. Chesterford can't bear her."

Jack laughed.

"She was giving him advice about the management of his kennels at dinner last night," he said. "I heard her say to him impressively, as she left the room, 'Try brimstone.' It took Chesterford at least five minutes to recover. He was dreadfully depressed."

"He must take Mrs. Vivian in to-night," said Dodo. "You'll hear them talking about slums, and over-crowding, and marriage among minors, and the best cure for dipsomaniacs. The other night they were talking about someone called 'Charlie,' affectionately but gravely, and I supposed they meant your brother, Jack, but it was the second laundress's young man. Oh, they shook their heads over him."

"I don't think common people are at all interesting," said Miss Grantham. "They only think about things to eat, and heaven, and three aces, and funerals."

She had by this time finished her breakfast, and stood warming her back in a gentlemanly manner by the fire.

The door opened and Lord Chesterford came in.

"Morning, Jack," he said, "what a lazy chap you are. It's half-past ten, and you're still breakfasting. Dodo, what a beastly smell of smoke."

"Oh, it's Edith," remarked Dodo. "You mustn't mind her, dear. You know she's doing a symphony, and she has to smoke to keep the inspiration going. Dear old boy, you are so sweet about these things; you've never made a fuss since I knew you first. You look very nice this morning. I wish I could dress in a homespun Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers. Grantie and I are going to bring you lunch. What should you like? You'd better have some champagne. Don't step in that egg, dear; it will make your nice brown boots all beastly. It's awfully cold. You'd better have two bottles. Tell Raikes to send you two. Chesterford, I wish you'd tell Raikes to cut off the end of his nose. I'm always afraid he'll hit me with it when he hands things. He might have it grafted into his chin, you know; he hasn't got any chin. Jack, have you finished? Yes, you'd better start. We'll meet you at the bothy. I'll go and ask Edith if she can spare Bertie."

"What does she want Bertie for?" said Chesterford.

"Oh, I expect she'll let him come," remarked Dodo; "she's really busy this morning. She's been composing since a quarter past eight."

Dodo went across the hall and opened the drawing-room door. Edith was completely absorbed in her work. The grilled bone lay untouched on a small table by the piano. Bertie was sitting before the fire.

"Bertie," said Dodo, "are you coming shooting?"

This woke Edith up.

"Oh, it's splendid," she said. "Dodo, listen to this."

She ran her hands over the piano, and then broke out into a quick, rippling scherzo. The music flew on, as if all the winds of heaven were blowing it; then it slowed down, halted a moment, and repeated itself till Dodo burst out: "Oh, Edith, it's lovely! I want to dance." She wheeled a table out of the way, kicked a chair across the room, and began turning and twisting with breathless rapidity. Her graceful figure looked admirable in the quick movements of her impromptu dance. Bertie thought he had never seen anything so deliciously fresh. Dodo danced with peculiar abandon. Every inch of her moved in perfect time and harmony to the music.

She had caught up a thin, Indian shawl from one of the sofas, and passed it behind her back, round her head, this way and that, bending, till at one moment it swept the ground in front of her, at another flew in beautiful curves high above her head, till at last the music stopped, and she threw herself down exhausted in an arm-chair.

"Oh, that was glorious," she panted. "Edith, you are a genius. I never felt like that before. I didn't dance at all, it was the music that danced, and pulled me along with it."

"That was the best compliment my music has ever received," said Edith. "That scherzo was meant to make you want to dance. Now, Dodo, could I have done that after eating two poached eggs?"

"You may have grilled bones seven times a day," said Dodo, "if you'll compose another scherzo."

"I wanted a name for the symphony," said Edith, "and I shall call it the 'Dodo.' That's a great honour, Dodo. Now, if you only feel miserable during the 'Andante,' I shall be satisfied. But you came about something else, I forget what."

"Oh, about Bertie. Is he coming shooting?"

"I wish it was right for women to shoot," said Edith. "I do shoot when I'm at home, and there's no one there. Anyhow I couldn't to-day. I must finish this. Dodo, if you are going to take lunch with them, I'll come with you, if you don't go too early. You know this music makes me perfectly wild, but it can't be done on poached eggs. Now set me down at the Handel Festival, and I'll be content with high tea – cold meat and muffins, you know. Handel always reminds me of high tea, particularly the muffins. He must have written the 'Messiah' between tea and dinner on Sunday evening, after an afternoon service in summer. I've often thought of taking the Salvation Army hymn-book and working the tunes up into fugal choruses, and publishing them as a lost work of Handel's, Noah, or Zebedee's children, or the Five Foolish Virgins. I don't believe anyone would know the difference."

Dodo was turning over the leaves of Edith's score book.

"I give it up," she said at last; "you are such a jumble of opposites. You sit down and write a Sanctus, which makes one feel as if one wants to be a Roman Catholic archbishop, and all the time you are smoking cigarettes and eating grilled bone."

"Oh, everyone's a jumble of opposites," said Edith, "when you come to look at them. It's only because my opposites are superficial, that you notice them. A Sanctus is only a form of expression for thoughts which everyone has, even though their tastes appear to lie in the music-hall line; and music is an intelligible way of expressing these thoughts. Most people are born dumb with regard to their emotions, and you therefore conclude that they haven't got any, or that they are expressed by their ordinary actions."

"No, it's not that," said Dodo. "What I mean is that your Sanctus emphasises an emotion I should think you felt very little."

"I!" said Edith with surprise. "My dear Dodo, you surely know me better than that. Just because I don't believe that grilled bones are necessarily inconsistent with deep religious feeling, you assume that I haven't got the feeling."

Dodo laughed.

"I suppose one associates the champions of religion with proselytising," she said. "You don't proselytise, you know."

"No artist does," said Edith; "it's their business to produce – to give the world an opportunity of forming conclusions, not to preach their own conclusions to the world."

"Yes; but your music is the expression of your conclusions, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I don't argue about it, and try to convert the world to it. If someone says to me, 'I don't know what you mean! Handel seems to me infinitely more satisfactory, I can understand him,' I simply say, 'For Heaven's sake, then, why don't you go to hear Handel? Why leave a creed that satisfies you?' Music is a conviction, but Handel's music has nothing to do with my convictions, nor mine with Handel's."

Edith sat down sternly, and buried herself in her convictions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

It was a perfect winter's day, and when, two hours afterwards, Dodo and the others drove off to meet the shooting-party, the grass in the shadow was still crisp with the light, hoar frost, but where the sun had touched it, the fields were covered with a moist radiance. It had just begun to melt the little pieces of ice that hung from the bare, pendulous twigs of the birch-trees, and send them, shivering to the ground. Through the brown bracken you could hear the startled scuttle of the rabbit, or the quick tapping of a pheasant, who had realised that schemes were on foot against him. A night of hard frost had turned the wheel-ruts into little waves and billows of frozen mud, which the carriage wheels levelled as they passed over them.

They caught up the shooting party shortly before lunch, and, as it was cold, Edith and Dodo got out, leaving Miss Grantham, who preferred being cold to walking under any circumstances, to gather up the extra rugs round her.

"See that there's a good fire, Grantie," called Dodo after her, "and tell them to have the champagne opened."

The sight of abundant game was too much for Edith, and, as Lord Chesterford fell out of line to join Dodo, she asked him if she might have a couple of shots.

The keeper's face expressed some reasonable surprise when he observed Edith snapping the cartridges into her gun with a practised hand. His previous views with regard to women in connection with guns were based upon the idea that most women screamed, when they saw a gun, and considered it a purely unaccountable weapon, which might go off without the least encouragement or warning, and devastate the country for miles round. He was still more surprised when he saw her pick off a couple of pheasants with precision and deadliness of aim. She gave her gun back to Lord Chesterford as they neared the lodge, and volunteered to join them after lunch for an hour, if they didn't mind. Chesterford stole an appealing glance, at Dodo, who, however, only gave him a half-amused, half-pitying look, and nodded assent.

"The worst of it is," said Edith, "I care for such lots of things. There's my music, and then there's any sort of game – have you ever seen me play tennis? – and there isn't time for everything. I am a musician, and a good shot, and an excellent rider, and a woman, and heaps of other things. It isn't conceit when I say so – I simply know it."

Dodo laughed.

"Well, you know, Edith, you're not modest. Your worst enemies don't accuse you of that. I don't mean to say that I am, for that matter. Did you ever play, the game of marking people for beauty, and modesty, and cleverness, and so on? We played it here the night before you came, and you didn't get a single mark from anybody for modesty. I only got eleven, and five of those were from Chesterford, and six from myself. But I don't believe your husband will ever give you five. You see, Bertie didn't give you any, if you're thinking of marrying him."

"Oh, I'm not going to marry anybody," said Edith. "You know I get frightfully attached to someone about three times a week, and after that never think of any of them again. It isn't that I get tired of them, but somebody else turns up, and I want to know him too. There are usually several good points about everyone, and they show those to new acquaintances first; after that, you find something in them you don't like, so the best thing is to try somebody else."

"Oh, that depends on the people," said Dodo, meditatively. "Some people wear well, you know, and those improve on acquaintance. Now I don't. The first time a man sees me, he usually thinks I'm charming, and sympathetic, and lively. Well, so I am, to do myself justice. That remains all through. But it turns out that I've got a bad temper, that I smoke and swear, and only amuse myself. Then they begin to think they rated me too high at first, and if they happen to be people who wear well

themselves, it is just then that you begin to like them, which is annoying. So one goes on, disgusting the people one wants to like, and pleasing people whom one doesn't like at all. It's fate, I suppose."

Dodo plucked a piece of dead bracken, and pulled it to bits with a somewhat serious air.

"You oughtn't to complain, Dodo," said Edith. "You're married to a man who, I am sure, wears well, as you call it, though it's a dreadfully coarse expression, and he doesn't seem to get tired of you. I always wonder if it's really worth while trotting oneself out or analysing one's nature in this way. I don't think it is. It makes one feel small and stupid."

"Ah, but it's better to do it yourself, than to feel that other people think you small and stupid," said Dodo. "That's disagreeable, if you like. Wait till Mrs. Vivian comes, and she'll do it for you. She's the only person who makes me feel really cheap – about three-halfpence a dozen, including the box."

"Oh, but she won't make me feel small," said Edith coolly, "because I'm not small really. It's only myself that makes me feel small."

"I don't think I should call you morbidly modest," said Dodo. "But here's the keeper's cottage. I'm awfully hungry. I hope they've brought some *pâté*,

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