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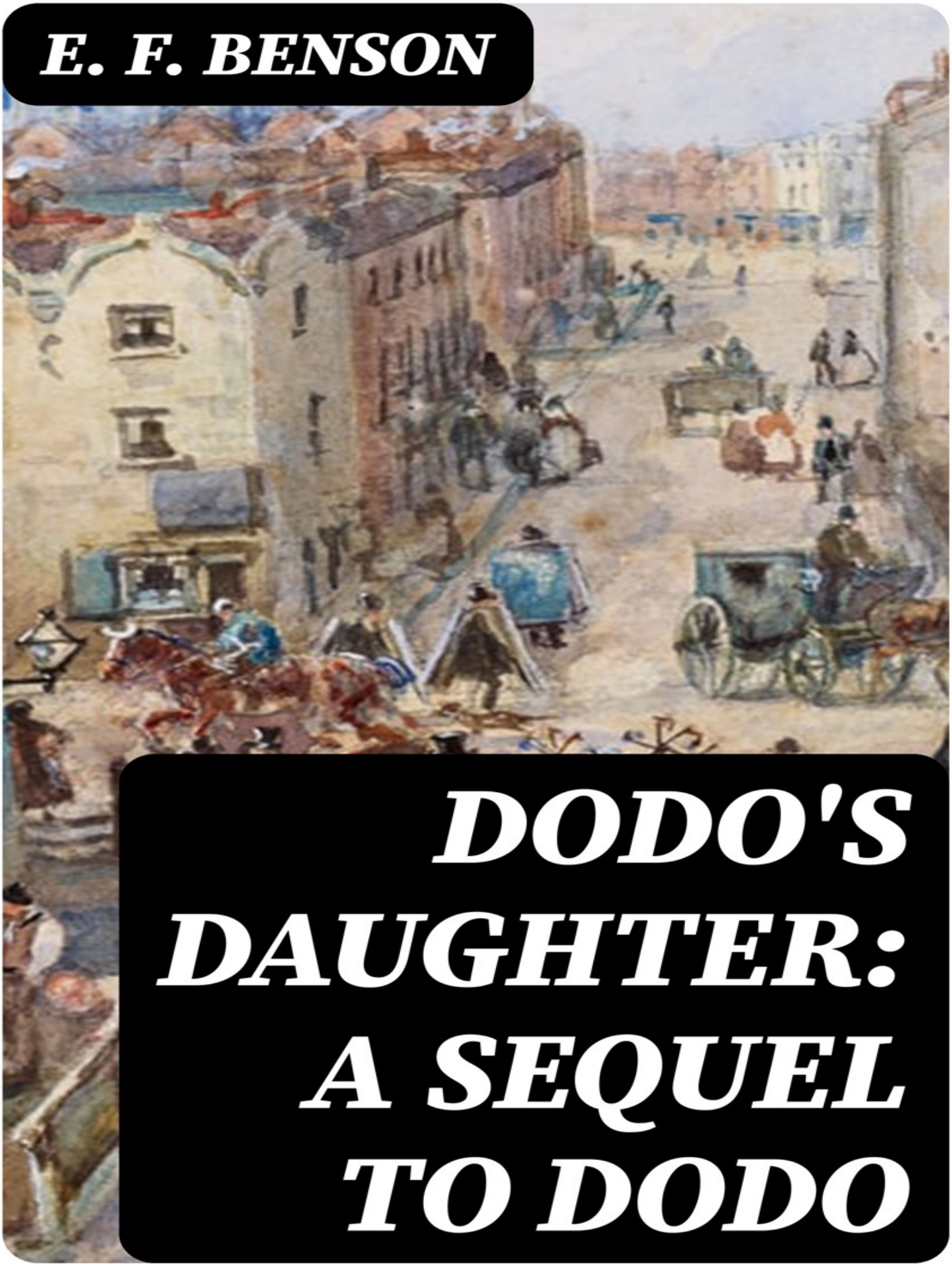

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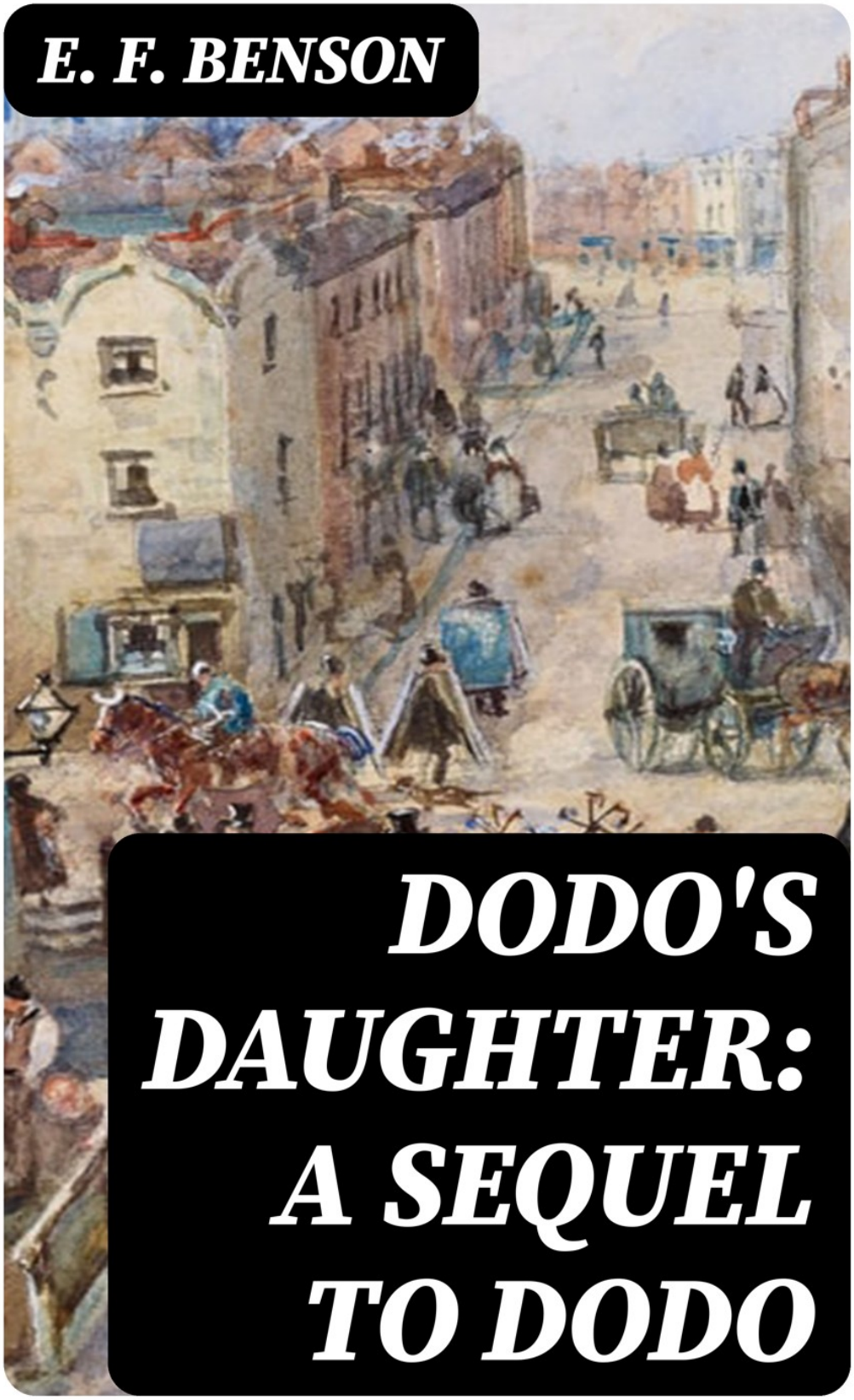

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E. F. Benson

Dodo's Daughter: A Sequel to Dodo

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DODO'S DAUGHTER

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CHAPTER I

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

The room at this period was completely black with regard to the color of carpet and floor and walls and ceiling. That was Nadine's last plan and since it was the last, of necessity, a very recent one. She had observed that when it was all white, people looked rather discolored, like mud on snow, whereas against a black background they seemed to be of gem-like brilliance. But since she always looked brilliant herself, the new scheme was prompted by a wholly altruistic motive. She liked her friends to look brilliant too,

and she would have felt thus even if she had not been brilliant herself, for out of a strangely compounded nature, anything akin to jealousy had been certainly omitted. There had been a good many friends in her bedroom lately, and there were a certain number here to-night. She expected more. Collectively they constituted that which was known as the clan.

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

"Heredity is such nonsense," said Nadine crisply, speaking with that precision which the English-born never

quite attain. "Look at me, for instance, and how nice I am, then look at Mama and Daddy."

Esther spilt a larger quantity of camomile tea than usual.

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

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

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

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

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

Bertie raised his head a little.

"Who?" he asked.

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

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

"No, donkey. You are thinking of some criminal. Mama was engaged to him, and she thought she couldn't—so *she* ripped—let her rip, is it not?—and got married to Daddy

instead. He was quite mad about darling Mama, but recovered very soon. He made a very bad recovery. Don't interrupt, Berts: I was talking about heredity. Well, there's Mama, and Daddy, well, we all know what Daddy is, and let me tell you he is the best of the family, which is poor. He is a gentleman after all, whatever he has done. And he's done a lot. Indeed he has never had an idle moment, except when he was busy!"

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

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

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

"Of course one has the ordinary number of great-grandparents, else you wouldn't be here at all," she said, "and you quarter anything you choose. Two quarterings of my great-grandfathers were hung and drawn apart from their quarterings. But really I don't think you understand what I mean by gentlemen. I mean people who have brains, and who have tastes and who have fine perceptions. English people think they know the difference between the *bourgeoisie* and the aristocrats. How wrong they are! As if living in a castle like poor Esther's parents had anything to

do with it! Look at some of your marquises—Esther darling, I don't mean Lord Ayr—what cads! Your dukes? What Aunt Sallys! Always making the float-face, don't you call it, the *bêtise*, the stupidity. Is that the aristocracy? Great solemn Aunt Sallys and the rest brewers! Show me an idea: show me a brain, show me somebody with the distinction that thoughts and taste bring about. I do not want a mere busy prating monkey thinking it is a man. But I want people: somebody with a man or woman inside it. Ah! give me a grocer. That will do!"

Bertie put down his head again.

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

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

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

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

There was a short silence. Bertie broke it.

"How old are you?" he asked.

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

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

"Holy Mother." She felt herself perfectly capable of managing everybody's affairs, and instead of being as broad as she was long, was as narrow as she was tall, and resembled an elderly guardsman.

Her degenerate daughter finished her sigh.

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

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

"Have you been comforting Hughie?" she asked.

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

The appreciative Esther sat up.

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

Nadine sat up also.

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

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

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

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

Nadine turned a little sideways on the bed.

"No, we will not talk of it," she said. "What else were we saying? Ah, my family! Yes, it is a wonder that I am not a horror. Daddy is the pick of the bunch, but such a bunch, *mon Dieu*, such wild flowers; and poor Daddy always gets a little drunk in the evening now; and to-night he was so more than a little. But he is such an original! Fancy his coming to stay with Mama here only a year after she divorced him. I think it is too sweet of her to let him come, and too sweet of him to suggest it. She is so remembering, too: she ordered him his particular brandy, without which he is never comfortable, and it is most expensive, as well as being strong. Well, that's Daddy: then there are my uncles: such histories. Uncle Josef murdered a groom (there is no doubt whatever about it) who tried to blackmail him. I think he was quite right; and I daresay the groom was quite right, but it is a horrible thing to blackmail; it is a cleaner thing to kill. Then there is Uncle Anthony who ought to have been divorced like Daddy, but he was so mean and careful and sly that they could do nothing with him. There was never anything careful about Daddy."

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

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

Berts gave a sympathetic wriggle.

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

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

"And then you refuse him?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What is that?" asked Nadine.

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

yourself, and see who you are."

"Poor John!" said Nadine. "He had his camomile tea brought into the drawing-room to-night while he was talking to the bishop about Gothic architecture and the, well—the state of Piccadilly. He was asking if confirmation was found to have a great hold on the masses. The bishop didn't seem to have the slightest idea."

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

Nadine sighed.

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

Bertie followed this counsel of commonsense.

"That seems a simple explanation," he said.

Esther frowned; she was not quite so well satisfied.

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

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

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

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

Nadine gurgled again.

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

golf. I am getting very English myself. Except when I talk fast you would not know I was not English."

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

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

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

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

"Gosh," said Tommy.

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

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

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

A chorus interrupted her.

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

"Oh, ripping!" said Bertie.

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

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

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

Princess Waldenech looked round her largely and brilliantly.

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

Hughie couldn't tell him it only counted two. It would have seemed unkind. Hugh has such tact."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, why not?" asked Esther.

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

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

Dodo laughed.

"Yes, that is just what education means now. And how nicely we get along. Nobody is shocked now, in consequence, which is much better for them. You can die of shock, so doctors say, without any other injury at all. So it is clearly wise not to be shocked. I was shocked once, when I was eight years old, because I was taken to the dentist without being told. I was told that I was to go for an ordinary walk with my sister Maud. And then, before I knew where I was, there was my mouth open as far as my uvula, and a dreadful man with a mirror and pincers was looking at my teeth. I lost my trust in human honor, which I have since

then regained. I think Maud was more shocked than me. I think it conduced to her death. You didn't remember Auntie Maud, Nadine, did you? You were so little and she was so unrememberable. Yes; a quantity of worsted work. But that's why I always want the bishop to come whenever he can."

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

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

new friend, who was quite old. 'Not so old as Grannie,' she said, 'but quite old!' And all the time I thought we were being girls together. At least I thought I was; I thought she was rather middle-aged. How is your mother, Berts? She doesn't approve of me, but I hope she is quite well."

Bertie also was a nephew by affection.

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

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

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

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

Berts felt goaded.

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

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

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

Staines, and when she has her songs sung at the Queen's Hall, she goes and conducts them."

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

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

Bertie uncoiled all his yards of height and stood up.

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

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

But Berts had not finished yet.

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

Esther shouted with laughter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tommy rose.

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

Dodo took a long draught of lemonade.

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

"I should dismiss her," said Nadine.

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

Balearic-isles beat you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Esther got up.

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

Bertie gave a long sigh.

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

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

Bertie got up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His mouth uncurled from its gravity.

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

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

"Mis-understanding?"

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

"That is what I feel anyhow," she said. "Of course I can't say 'this is love' and 'this is not love,' and label other people's emotions. There is one way of love and another way of love, and another and another. There are as many modes of love, I suppose, as there are people who are capable of it. And don't tell me everybody is capable of it. At least, tell me so if you like, but allow me to disagree. All I