

24 THE BEWILDERED BENEDICT

"There are two things I *must* know," cried Sophonisba when we were alone together, "I shall burst if I don't! How much is it, and how much will he settle on the girls, and—— and what about the gardener's wife, Edward?"

I could offer no solution.

"He never mentions her, at least of course he wouldn't do that, but I mean he talks as if there hadn't been one. Perhaps there wasn't really, people always think the worst. At anyrate she will be sure to be dead, so that doesn't matter, an' it can't be helped anyway. Only her husband bein' still in the neighbourhood makes it so tiresome. You know what those sort of people are—so fussy and curious. He's been askin' questions about her already."

"Dear me," I said startled.

"Yes, he's quite upset, and he said to Dorothea, who repeated it to me, that he 'hoped to God he weren't bringin' of her back,' and Dorothea said she would enquire and let him know. What had I better say?"

It seemed to me the least said the better, and I implied as much.

"Darlin' you're not bein' a bit helpful. One has to say somethin', if only to choke the absurd old thing off. I shall say she is dead," she announced with decision, "then everybody will feel comfortable."

In the middle of the night I was awakened by a piercing shriek coming from the direction of Sophonisba's bed. I knew at once what had happened, and seizing the toothache tincture and the cotton-wool brought it to her side. The poor child has a most annoying sort of tooth. When she can't possibly have the dentist to take it instantly out, such as in the middle of the night, an' on Sundays, the thing gives her a most awful time. Then when I have persuaded