

ACQUAINTANCE

He scrutinised the pretty features, anxiously; "I can't see it," he said.

"But I mean it—almost seriously. I don't want to be so aloof, but—I don't like to touch other people. It is rather horrid of me I suppose to be like those silky, plummy, luxurious Angora cats who never are civil to you and who always jump out of your arms at the first opportunity."

He laughed—and there was malice in his eyes, but he did not know her well enough to pursue the subject through so easy an opening.

It had occurred to her, too, that her simile might invite elaboration, and she sensed the laugh in his silence, and liked him for remaining silent where he might easily have been wittily otherwise.

This set her so much at ease, left her so confident, that they were on terms of gayest understanding presently, she gossiping about the guests at Shotover House, outlining the diversions planned for the two weeks before them.

"But we shall see little of one another; you will be shooting most of the time," she said—with the very faintest hint of challenge—too delicate, too impersonal to savour of coquetry. But the germ of it was there.

"Do *you* shoot?"

"Yes; why?"

"I am reconciled to the shooting, then."

"Oh, that is awfully civil of you. Sometimes I'd rather play Bridge."

"So should I—sometimes."

"I'll remember that, Mr. Siward; and when all the men are waiting for you to start out after grouse perhaps I may take that moment to whisper: 'May I play?'"