

ESMERALDA

She never takes things quite so seriously as the rest of us.

And now I instantly felt that she had ranked herself with the newcomer. Somehow I also felt an inclination that way—something beyond my control urging me, despite my strong sense of loyalty; for, though Miss Esmeralda was overwhelmingly without the necessary social equipment, there was that about her which drew one irresistibly. But it was Mrs. Ted who really rescued the situation. She came forward with outstretched hand, and smiled.

"I consider that was very thoughtful," she said. "And really you're not late, after all. Here is dinner just going to be announced this minute."

Then mercifully Hoskins appeared in the doorway, and somehow or other we trailed toward dinner. Movement eased the strain we were all under; and, indeed, Mr. Collins and Mr. Willy, both of whom are usually a trifle heavy at dinner, seemed, for some mysterious reason, to take a new lease of life.