

"I've been unpacking," he explained in answer to Sir Aylmer's look of enquiry.

"Talbot would have done that," said his father shortly, though his expression of sternness relaxed at sight of his lithe, handsome son. "It's part of his work."

Deryk wriggled his shoulder-blades impatiently.

"I can't stand a crowd of footmen fussing round me!" he exclaimed. "I'm half afraid to blow my own nose in this house. Besides, he'd have smashed everything. Look here, dad, you said at dinner that you'd got a mob of people coming here; I've been selecting suitable presents. When are they due, and who's coming?"

"To-morrow," answered Sir Aylmer. "By the way, Deryk, you'll remember not to go about in shirt sleeves, when they're here? It's rather a weakness of yours."

"I'll behave like a perfect gentleman," sighed Deryk, with humorous resignation. "Who's coming?"

"Several people. Raymond and his niece; George and Beryl Oakleigh—I don't think you know them; Summer-town and his sister; one of the Dainton boys and his sister—a good many of your friends, and a few of mine—I can't give them you out of my head. The night after next I've arranged for a little dance and invited the people round about here; to-morrow we shall just have a quiet dinner to ourselves, no one from outside."

Deryk nodded without any great show of interest. Yolande Stornaway was an old ally, and her name alone was welcome.

"Is Dina Penrose coming?" he asked. "I've chosen her rather a jolly necklace."

"I'm not having anyone from outside to-morrow," his father repeated. "The hounds are meeting here on the morning of the dance—Pebbleridge rang up to ask if it would amuse you; the fixture was for Bishop's Cross itself, but I hear that's under water; those are the only arrangements I've made. I thought we might talk things over before anyone comes. Before that, though, I want to know