

reception. "Why, anybody'd say, to see the way you take it, you'd known it all a clear twelvemonth ago!"

"So I did, my child—all except the mere trifling detail of the date," Edie answered at once with prompt common-sense, and an arch look from under her dark eyebrows. "In fact I arranged it all myself most satisfactorily beforehand. But what I was really thinking of just now was simply this—why shouldn't one cake do duty for both at once, Elsie?"

"For both at once, Edie? For me and Warren? Why, of course, one cake always does do for the bride and bridegroom together, doesn't it? I never heard of anybody having a couple, darling."

"What a sweet little silly you are, you dear old goose, you! Are you two the only marriageable people in the universe, then? I didn't mean for you and Warren at all, of course; I meant for you and myself, stupid."

"You and myself!" Elsie echoed, bewildered. "You and myself, did you say, Edie?"

"Why, yes, you dear old blind bat, you," Edie went on placidly, with an abstracted air; "we might get them both over the same day, I think seriously: kill two weddings, so to speak, with one parson. They're such a terrible nuisance in a house always."

"Two weddings, my dear Edie?" Elsie cried in surprise. "Why, what on earth are you ever talking about? I don't understand you."

"Well, Mr. Hatherley's a very good critic," Edie answered, with a twinkle: "he's generally admitted to have excellent taste; and he ventured the other day on a critical opinion in my presence which did honour at once to the acuteness of his perceptions and the soundness and depth of his æsthetic judgment. He told me to my face, with the utmost gravity, I was the very sweetest and prettiest girl in all England."

"And what did you say to that, Edie?" Elsie asked, amused, with some dawning perception of the real meaning of this queer badinage.

"I told him, my dear, I'd always considered him the ablest and best of living authorities on artistic matters, and that it would ill become my native modesty to differ from his opinion on such an important question, in which, perhaps, that native modesty itself might unduly bias me to an incorrect judgment in the opposite direction. So then he enforced his critical view in a practical way by promptly kissing me."

"And you didn't object?"

"On the contrary, my child, I rather liked it than otherwise."

"After which?"

"After which he proceeded to review his own character and