

Margot and Irene never passed through these phases but I suppose there are hundreds of other brainy brilliant girls just like Laura. She's too clever, really, and far too intense. Intense isn't the word, my dear! She never can take a decent respectable interest in anything; she's always head over ears before one can say fruit knife . . . When she *is* good – what I call good – I'm not saying this because I'm her mother – I'm speaking quite impersonally – she's fascinating, irresistible! But then she so very seldom is *what I call good*.

Bee: I think she has got very handsome lately – don't you?

Toots: Yes, hasn't she! In the evenings, my dear, sometimes I can't take my eyes off her. She looks like some wonderful little foreign princess. And then perhaps next morning she'll come down in an old black blouse, a bit of black ribbon round her neck – *obviously* no stays, *bags* under her eyes, and ask in a hollow voice for coffee without any milk . . . On those occasions when I go up to her room I always find either Tolstoi under her pillow or that other man, the man with the impossible name – Dosty-something – *Dosty-osti* I always call him.⁷ Poor child! How it maddens her!

Bee: I think it is a very good thing for Laura that Margot is coming out here to live. It ought to steady her very much, having Margot here and the interest of Margot's life.

Toots: Yes, I expect you're right. I hadn't really thought what it would mean to anybody except to me. Think of it! I haven't seen the dear child for six months – and she always was – *such* a mother's baby.

Bee: I shouldn't be surprised if she were feeling more of a mother's baby than ever just now.

Toots: Why? What do you mean by *just now*?

Bee: Isn't there any talk of a family?

Toots: (energetically) Good Heavens! I hope not! She's never breathed a word to me. I think it's the greatest mistake for young married people to *rush* into having children. When you're young and with the whole of your life before you surely it's the height of folly to sit down calmly and have baby after baby. Besides it's so easily prevented now-a-days. Certainly if I had my time over again I'd never lead off with a baby. A baby is one of the *last cards* I should play . . . Besides there can't be anything of that sort in the wind. If there had been I don't think Duncan would have left her to travel by herself. He'd have waited for her. He never would have come on a month ahead like this.

Bee: Quite frankly – of course it's no affair of mine – I still can't understand why he has rushed on ahead like this and left her to settle up all their affairs. Of course he had his appointment but his appointment could surely have waited a month. It seems to me *odd*. No doubt I'm old fashioned and behind these independent times.

Toots: No, I agree. I think it *is* odd, very odd, but I'm afraid – typical. I