

A MATTER OF DUTY

In this chapter of "Dolly Dialogues," the narrator, Mr. Carter, is summoned by Lady Mickleham, née Dolly Foster, fresh from her honeymoon, for a confidential consultation. The conversation gently orbits her adjustment to marriage and the weighty expectations set by her in-laws, with an emphasis on the peculiar and mildly onerous traditions of becoming a part of her husband Archie's family. Dolly candidly shares her dilemmas about adjusting to her new role, revealing her in-laws' mix of warmth and domineering guidance, especially from the dowager, who enlightens her on household management and Archie's preferences, some of which are amusingly bad for him.

The talk takes a turn when Dolly broaches a more delicate subject: whether she should disclose her past romantic interests to Archie, especially since those interests involved men they both now frequently socialize with. She expresses concern over the fairness and potential repercussions of her husband learning about these old flames from others rather than herself. Mr. Carter, playing the role of a confidante, humorously navigates through Dolly's inquiry, widens the perspective by questioning how the revelation might impact the men involved, and subtly attempts to gauge Archie's possible reaction by drawing parallels with his own past relationships.

The dialogue sparkles with wit and veiled references, drifting towards the concept of marital transparency and the discretionary silences that couples might choose to maintain. Mr. Carter teases out, without once being overt, the idea that Archie, too, might have a history he hasn't shared with Dolly, revealing Archie's past flirtations through a series of hinted names and suggested liaisons, which Dolly seems unaware of.

Their exchange showcases a dance of social etiquette, laced with the subtle acknowledgment of personal pasts that each has, and possibly prefers to keep, partly

shadowed from the other. It gently highlights the unspoken agreement between newlyweds about what is shared and what is silently acknowledged as irrelevant to the fresh bonds of marriage. The chapter concludes with a mutual understanding, if not agreement, that certain aspects of their pasts, including Mr. Carter's own admission of past affections for Dolly, are better left unexplored to maintain the harmony and sanctity of their new life together.

