I

THOUGH it was nearly a year since her husband's death, Emmeline Lucas (universally known to her friends as Lucia) still wore the deepest and most uncompromising mourning. Black certainly suited her very well, but that had nothing to do with this continued use of it, whatever anybody said. Pepino and she had been the most devoted couple for over twenty-five years, and her grief at his loss was heart-felt : she missed him constantly and keenly. But months ago now, she, with her very vital and active personality, had felt a most natural craving to immerse herself again in all those thrilling interests which made life at this Elizabethan village of Riseholme so exciting a business, and she had not yet been able to make up her mind to take the plunge she longed for. Though she had not made a luxury out of the tokens of grief, she had perhaps made, ever so slightly, a stunt of them.

For instance. There was that book-shop on the green, "Ye Signe of ye Daffodille," under the imprint of which Pepino had published his severely limited edition of *Fugitive Lyrics* and *Pensieri Persi*. A full six months after his death Lucia had been walking past it with Georgie Pillson, and had seen in the window a book she would have liked to purchase. But next to it, on the shelf was the thin volume of Pepino's *Pensieri Persi*, and, frankly, it had been rather stuntish of her to falter on the threshold and, with eyes that were doing their best to swim, to say to Georgie :

"I can't quite face going in, Georgie. Weak of me, I know, but there it is. Will you please just pop in, caro, and ask them to send me *Beethoven's Days of Boyhood*? I will stroll on."

So Georgie had pressed her hand and done this errand for her, and of course he had repeated this pathetic little incident to others. Tasteful embroideries had been tacked on to it, and it was soon known all over Riseholme that poor Lucia had gone into "Ye Signe of ye Daffodille" to buy the book about Beethoven's boyhood, and had been so sadly affected by the sight of Pepino's poems in their rough brown linen cover with dark green tape to tie them up with (although she constantly saw the same volume in her own house), that she had quite broken down. Some said that sal volatile had been administered.

Similarly, she had never been able to bring herself to have a game of golf, or to resume her Dante-readings, and having thus established the impression that her life had been completely smashed up it had been hard to decide that on Tuesday or Wednesday next she would begin to glue it together again. In consequence she had remained in as many pieces as before. Like a sensible woman she was very careful of her physical health, and since this stunt of mourning made it impossible for her to play golf or take brisk walks, she sent for a very illuminating little book, called *An Ideal System of Callisthenics for those no longer Young*, and in a secluded glade of her garden she exposed as much of herself as was proper to the invigorating action of the sun, when there was any, and had long bouts of skipping, and kicked, and jerked, and swayed her trunk, gracefully and vigorously, in accordance with the instructions laid down. The effect was most satisfactory, and at the very, very back of her mind she conceived it possible that some day she might conduct callisthenic classes for those ladies of Riseholme who were no longer young.

Then there was the greater matter of the Elizabethan fête to be held in August next, when Riseholme would be swarming with tourists. The idea of it had been entirely Lucia's, and there had been several meetings of the fête-Committee (of which, naturally, she was President) before Pepino's death. She had planned the great scene

in it : this was to be Queen Elizabeth's visit to the *Golden Hind*, when, on the completion of Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the world, Her Majesty went to dine with him on board his ship at Deptford and knighted him. The *Golden Hind* was to be moored in the pond on the village green ; or, more accurately, a platform on piles was to be built there, in the shape of a ship's deck, with masts and rudder and cannons and bulwarks, and banners and ancients, particularly ancients. The pond would be an admirable stage, for rows of benches would be put up all round it, and everybody would see beautifully. The Queen's procession with trumpeters and men-at-arms and ladies of the Court was planned to start from the Hurst, which was Lucia's house, and make its glittering and melodious way across the green to Deptford to the sound of madrigals and mediæval marches. Lucia would impersonate the Queen, Pepino following her as Raleigh, and Georgie would be Francis Drake. But at an early stage of these incubations Pepino had died, and Lucia had involved herself in this inextricable widowhood. Since then the reins of government had fallen into Daisy Quantock's podgy little hands, and she, in this as in all other matters, had come to consider herself quite the Queen of Riseholme, until Lucia could get a move on again and teach her better.

• One morning in June, some seven weeks before the date fixed for the fête, Mrs. Quantock telephoned from her house a hundred yards away to say that she particularly wanted to see Lucia, if she might pop over for a little talk. Lucia had heard nothing lately about the preparations for the fête, for the last time that it had been mentioned in her presence, she had gulped and sat with her hand over her eyes for a moment overcome with the memory of how gaily she had planned it. But she knew that the preparations for it must by this time be well in hand, and now she instantly guessed that it was on this subject that Daisy wanted to see her. She had premonitions of that kind sometimes, and she was sure

that this was one of them. Probably Daisy wanted to address a moving appeal to her that, for the sake of Riseholme generally, she should make this fête the occasion of her emerging from her hermetic widowhood. The idea recommended itself to Lucia, for before the date fixed for it, she would have been a widow for over a year, and she reflected that her dear Pepino would never have wished her to make this permanent suttee of herself: also there was the prestige of Riseholme to be considered. Besides, she was really itching to get back into the saddle again, and depose Daisy from her awkward, clumsy seat there, and this would be an admirable opportunity. So, as was usual now with her, she first sighed into the telephone, said rather faintly that she would be delighted to see dear Daisy, and then sighed again. Daisy, very stupidly, hoped she had not got a cough, and was reassured on that point.

Lucia gave a few moments' thought as to whether she would be found at the piano, playing the funeral march from Beethoven's Sonata in A flat which she now knew by heart, or be sitting out in Perdita's garden, reading Pepino's poems. She decided on the latter, and putting on a shady straw hat with a crêpe bow on it, and taking a copy of the poems from the shelf, hurried out into Perdita's garden. She also carried with her a copy of to-day's *Times*, which she had not yet read.

Perdita's garden requires a few words of explanation. It was a charming little square plot in front of the timbered façade of the Hurst, surrounded by yew hedges and intersected with paths of crazy pavement, carefully smothered in stone-crop, which led to the Elizabethan sundial from Wardour Street in the centre. It was gay in spring with those flowers (and no others) on which Perdita doted. There were "violets dim," and primroses and daffodils, which came before the swallow dared and took the winds (usually of April) with beauty. But now in June the swallow had dared long ago, and when spring and the daffodils were over, Lucia always allowed Perdita's garden

a wider, though still strictly Shakespearian scope. There was eglantine (Penzance briar) in full flower now, and honeysuckle and gillyflowers and plenty of pansies for thoughts, and yards of rue (more than usual this year), and so Perdita's garden was gay all the summer.

Here then, this morning, Lucia seated herself by the sundial, all in black, on a stone bench on which was carved the motto "Come thou north wind, and blow thou south, that my garden spices may flow forth." Sitting there with Pepino's poems and *The Times* she obscured about one-third of this text, and fat little Daisy would obscure the rest. . . . It was rather annoying that the tapes which tied the covers of Pepino's poems had got into a hard knot, which she was quite unable to unravel, for she had meant that Daisy should come up, unheard by her, in her absorption, and find her reading Pepino's lyric called "Loneliness." But she could not untie the tapes, and as soon as she heard Daisy's footsteps she became lost in reverie with the book lying shut on her lap, and the famous far-away look in her eyes.

It was a very hot morning. Daisy, like many middle-aged women who enjoy perfect health, was always practising some medical regime of a hygienic nature, and just now she was a devoted slave to the eliminative processes of the body. The pores of the skin were the most important of these agencies, and, after her drill of physical jerks by the open window of her bedroom, she had trotted in all this heat across the green to keep up the elimination. She mopped and panted for a little.

"Made quite a new woman of me," she said. "You should try it, dear Lucia. But so good of you to see me, and I'll come to the point at once. The Elizabethan fête, you know. You see it won't be till August. Can't we persuade you, as they say, to come amongst us again? We all want you: such a fillip you'd give it."

Lucia made no doubt that this request implied the hope that she might be induced to take the part of Queen Elizabeth, and under the spell of the exuberant sunshine

that poured in upon Perdita's garden, she felt the thrill and the pulse of life bound in her veins. The fête would be an admirable occasion for entering the arena of activities again, and, as Daisy had hinted (delicately for Daisy), more than a year of her widowhood would have elapsed by August. It was self-sacrificing, too, of Daisy to have suggested this herself, for she knew that according to present arrangements Daisy was to take the part of the Virgin Queen, and Georgie had told her weeks ago (when the subject of the fête had been last alluded to) that she was already busy pricking her fingers by sewing a ruff to go round her fat little neck, and that she had bought a most sumptuous string of Woolworth pearls. Perhaps dear Daisy had realized what a very ridiculous figure she would present as Queen, and was anxious for the sake of the fête to retire from so laughable a rôle. But, however that might be, it was nice of her to volunteer abdication.

Lucia felt that it was only proper that Daisy should press her a little. She was being asked to sacrifice her personal feelings which so recoiled from publicity, and for the sake of Riseholme to rescue the fête from being a farce. She was most eager to do so, and a very little pressing would be sufficient. So she sighed again, she stroked the cover of Pepino's poems, but she spoke quite briskly.

"Dear Daisy," she said, "I don't think I could face it. I cannot imagine myself coming out of my house in silks and jewels to take my place in the procession without my Pepino. He was to have been Raleigh, you remember, and to have walked immediately behind me. The welcome, the shouting, the rejoicing, the madrigals, the Morris-dances and me with my poor desolate heart! But perhaps I ought to make an effort. My dear Pepino, I know, would have wished me to. You think so, too, and I have always respected the soundness of your judgment."

A slight change came over Daisy's round red face. Lucia was getting on rather too fast and too far.

"My dear, none of us ever thought of asking you to be Queen Elizabeth," she said. "We are not so unsympathetic, for of course that would be far too great a strain on you. You must not think of it. All that I was going to suggest was that you might take the part of Drake's wife. She only comes forward just for a moment, and makes her curtsey to me—I mean to the Queen—and then walks backwards again into the chorus of ladies-in-waiting and halberdiers and things."

Lucia's beady eyes dwelt for a moment on Daisy's rather anxious face with a glance of singular disdain. What a fool poor Daisy was to think that she, Lucia, could possibly consent to take any subordinate part in tableaux or processions or anything else at Riseholme where she had been Queen so long! She had decided in her own mind that with a very little judicious pressing she would take the part of the Queen, and thus make her superb entry into Riseholme life again, but all the pressure in the world would not induce her to impersonate anyone else, unless she could double it with the Queen. Was there ever anything so tactless as Daisy's tact? . . .

She gave a wintry smile, and stroked the cover of Pepino's poems again.

"Sweet of you to suggest it, dear," she said, "but indeed it would be quite too much for me. I was wrong to entertain the idea even for a moment. Naturally I shall take the greatest, the *very* greatest interest in it all, and I am sure you will understand if I do not even feel equal to coming to it, and read about it instead in the *Worcestershire Herald*."

She paused. Perhaps it would be more in keeping with her empty heart to say nothing more about the fête. On the other hand, she felt a devouring curiosity to know how they were getting on. She sighed.

"I must begin to interest myself in things again," she said. "So tell me about it all, Daisy, if you would like to."

Daisy was much relieved to know that even the part

of Drake's wife was too much for Lucia. She was safe now from any risk of having the far more arduous part of the Queen snatched from her.

"All going splendidly," she said. "Revels on the Green to open with, and madrigals and Morris-dances. Then comes the scene on the *Golden Hind* which was entirely your idea. We've only elaborated it a little. There will be a fire on the poop of the ship, or is it the prow?"

"It depends, dear, which end of the ship you mean," said Lucia.

"The behind part, the stern. Poop, is it? Well, there will be a fire on the poop for cooking. Quite safe, they say, if the logs are laid on a sheet of iron. Over the fire we shall have an Elizabethan spit, and roast a sheep on it."

"I wouldn't," said Lucia, feeling the glamour of these schemes glowing in her. "Half of it will be cinders and the rest blood."

"No, dear," said Daisy. "It will really be roasted first at the 'Ambermere Arms,' and then just hung over the fire on the *Golden Hind*."

"Oh, yes: just to get a little kippered in the smoke," said Lucia.

"Not to matter. Of course I shan't really eat any, because I never touch meat of any sort now: I shall only pretend to. But there'll be the scene of cooking going on for the Queen's dinner on the deck of the *Golden Hind*, just to fill up, while the Queen's procession is forming. Oh, I wonder if you would let us start the procession from your house rather than mine. The route would be so much more in the open: everyone will see it better. I would come across to dress, if you would let me, half an hour before."

Lucia of course knew perfectly well that Daisy was to be the Queen, but she wanted to make her say so.

"Certainly start from here," said Lucia. "I am only

too happy to help. And dress here yourself. Let me see: what are you going to be?"

"They've all insisted that I should be Queen Elizabeth," said Daisy hurriedly. "Where had we got to? Oh yes: as the procession is forming, the cooking will be going on. Songs of course, a chorus of cooks. Then the procession will cross the Green to the *Golden Hind*, then dinner, and then I knight Drake. Such a lovely sword. Then Elizabethan games, running, jumping, wrestling and so on. We thought of baiting a bear, one out of some menagerie that could be trusted not to get angry, but we've given that up. If it didn't get angry, it wouldn't be baited, and if it did get angry it would be awful."

"Very prudent," said Lucia.

"Then I steal away into the 'Ambermere Arms' which is quite close, and change into a riding-dress. There'll be a white palfrey at the door, the one that draws the milk-cart. Oh, I forgot. While I'm dressing, before the palfrey comes round, a rider gallops in from Plymouth on a horse covered with soap-suds to say that the Spanish Armada has been sighted. I think we must have a megaphone for that, or no one will hear. So I come out, and mount my palfrey, and make my speech to my troops at Tilbury. A large board, you know, with Tilbury written up on it like a station. That's quite in the Shakespearian style. I shall have to learn it all by heart, and just have Raleigh standing by the palfrey with a copy of my speech to prompt me if I forget."

The old familiar glamour glowed brighter and brighter to Lucia as Daisy spoke. She wondered if she had made a mistake in not accepting the ludicrous part of Drake's wife, just in order to get a footing in these affairs again and attend committees, and, gradually ousting Daisy from her supremacy, take the part of the Queen herself. She felt that she must think it all over, and settle whether, in so advanced a stage of the proceedings, it could be done. At present, till she had made up her mind, it was wiser, in order to rouse no suspicions, to pretend that

these things were all very remote. She would take a faint though kindly interest in them, as if some elderly person was watching children at play, and smiling pensively at their pretty gambols. But as for watching the fête when the date arrived, that was unthinkable. She would either be Queen Elizabeth herself, or not be at Riseholme at all. That was that.

"Well, you have got your work cut out for you, dear Daisy," she said, giving a surreptitious tug at the knotted tape of Pepino's poems. "What fun you will have, and, dear me, how far away it all seems!"

Daisy wrenched her mind away from the thought of the fête.

"It won't always, dear," she said, making a sympathetic little dab at Lucia's wrist. "Your joy in life will revive again. I see you've got Pepino's poems there. Won't you read me one?"

Lucia responded to this gesture with another dab.

"Do you remember the last one he wrote?" she said. "He called it 'Loneliness.' I was away in London at the time. Beginning:

"'The spavined storm-clouds limp down the ruinous sky,
While I sit alone.
Thick through the acid air the dumb leaves fly. . . .'

But I won't read it you now. Another time."

Daisy gave one more sympathetic poke at her wrist, and rose to go.

"Must be off," she said. "Won't you come round and dine quietly to-night?"

"I can't, many thanks. Georgie is dining with me. Any news in Riseholme this morning?"

Daisy reflected for a moment.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Mrs. Arbuthnot's got a wonderful new apparatus. Not an ear-trumpet at all. She just bites on a small leather pad, and hears everything perfectly. Then she takes it out of her mouth and answers you, and puts it back again to listen."

"No!" said Lucia excitedly. "All wet?"

"Quite dry. Just between her teeth. No wetter anyhow than a pen you put in your mouth, I assure you."

Daisy hurried away to do some more exercises and drink pints and pints of hot water before lunch. She felt that she had emerged safely from a situation which might easily have become menacing, for without question Lucia, in spite of her sighs and her wistful stroking of the covers of Pepino's poems, and her great crêpe bow, was beginning to show signs of her old animation. She had given Daisy a glance or two from that beady eye which had the qualities of a gimlet about it, she had shown eager interest in such topics as the roasting of the sheep and Mrs. Arbuthnot's gadget, which a few weeks ago would not have aroused the slightest response from her stricken mind, and it was lucky, Daisy thought, that Lucia had given her the definite assurance that even the part of Drake's wife in the fête would be too much for her. For goodness only knew, when once Lucia settled to be on the mend, how swift her recuperation might be, or what mental horse-power in the way of schemings and domination she might not develop after this fallow period of quiescence. There was a new atmosphere about her to-day: she was like some spring morning when, though winds might still be chilly and the sun still of tepid and watery beams, the air was pregnant with the imminent birth of new life. But evidently she meant to take no hand in the fête, which at present completely filled Daisy's horizon. "She may do what she likes afterwards," thought Daisy, breaking into a trot, "but I will be Queen Elizabeth."

Her house, with its mulberry-tree in front and its garden at the back, stood next Georgie Pillson's on the edge of the Green, and as she passed through it and out on to the lawn behind, she heard from the other side of the paling that tap-tap of croquet-mallet and ball which now almost without cessation punctuated the hours of

any fine morning. Georgie had developed a craze for solitary croquet: he spent half the day practising all by himself, to the great neglect of his water-colour painting and his piano-playing. He seemed indeed, apart from croquet, to be losing his zest for life; he took none of his old interest in the thrilling topics of Riseholme. He had not been a bit excited at Daisy's description of Mrs. Arbuthnot's new apparatus, and the prospect of impersonating Francis Drake at the forthcoming fête aroused only the most tepid enthusiasm in him. A book of Elizabethan costumes, full of sumptuous coloured plates, had roused him for a while from his lethargy, and he had chosen a white satin tunic with puffed sleeves slashed with crimson, and a cloak of rose-coloured silk, on the reproduction of which his peerless parlour-maid Foljambe was at work, but he didn't seem to have any keenness about him. Of course he had had some rather cruel blows of Fate to contend against lately: Miss Olga Bracely the *prima donna* to whom he had been so devoted had left Riseholme a month ago for a year's operatic tour in the United States and Australia, and that was a desolate bereavement for him, while Lucia's determination not to do any of all these things which she had once enjoyed so much had deprived him of all the duets they used to play together. Moreover, it was believed in Riseholme (though only whispered at present) that Foljambe, that paragon of parlour-maids, in whom the smoothness and comfort of his domestic life was centred, was walking out with Cadman, Lucia's chauffeur. It might not mean anything, but if it did, if Foljambe and he intended to get married and Foljambe left Georgie, and if Georgie had got wind of this, then indeed there would be good cause for that lack of zest, that air of gloom and apprehension which was now so often noticeable in him. All these causes, the blows Fate had already rained on him, and the anxiety concerning this possible catastrophe in the future, probably contributed to the eclipsed condition of his energies.

Daisy sat down on a garden-bench, and began to do a little deep-breathing, which was a relic of the days when she had studied Yoga. It was important to concentrate (otherwise the deep-breathing did no good at all), or rather to attain a complete blankness of mind and exclude from it all mundane interests which were Maya, or illusion. But this morning she found it difficult: regiments of topics grew up like mushrooms. Now she congratulated herself on having made certain that Lucia was not intending to butt into the fête, now she began to have doubts—these were disconcerting mushrooms—as to whether that was so certain, for Lucia was much brisker to-day than she had been since Pepino's death, and if that continued, her reawakened interest in life would surely seek for some outlet. Then the thought of her own speech to her troops at Tilbury began to leak into her mind: would she ever get it so thoroughly by heart that she could feel sure that no attack of nervousness or movement on the part of her palfrey would put it out of her head? Above all there was that disturbing tap-tap going on from Georgie's garden, and however much she tried to attain blankness of mind, she found herself listening for the next tap. . . . It was no use and she got up.

"Georgie, are you there?" she called out.

"Yes," came his voice, trembling with excitement. "Wait a minute. I've gone through nine hoops and—Oh, how tarsome, I missed quite an easy one. What is it? I rather wish you hadn't called me just then."

Georgie was tall, and he could look over the paling. Daisy pulled her chair up to it, and mounted on it, so that they could converse with level heads.

"So sorry, Georgie," she said, "I didn't know you were making such a break. Fancy! Nine! I wanted to tell you I've been to see Lucia."

"Is that all? I knew that because I saw you," said Georgie. "I was polishing my bibelots in the drawing-room. And you sat in Perdita's garden."

"And there's a change," continued Daisy, who had kept her mouth open, in order to go on again as soon as Georgie stopped. "She's better. Distinctly. More interested, and not so faint and die-away. Sarcastic about the roast sheep for instance."

"What? Did she talk about the fête again?" asked Georgie. "That is an improvement."

"That was what I went to talk about. I asked her if she wouldn't make an effort to be Drake's wife. But she said it would be too great a strain."

"My dear, you didn't ask her to be Drake's wife?" said Georgie incredulously. "You might as well have asked her to be a confused noise within. What can you have been thinking of?"

"Anyhow, she said she couldn't be anything at all," said Daisy. "I have her word for that. But if she is recovering, and I'm sure she is, her head will be full of plans again. I'm not quite happy about it."

"What you mean is that you're afraid she may want to be the Queen," observed Georgie acutely.

"I won't give it up," said Daisy very firmly, not troubling to confirm so obvious an interpretation. "I've had all the trouble of it, and very nearly learnt the speech to the troops, and made my ruff and bought a rope of pearls. It wouldn't be fair, Georgie. So don't encourage her, will you? I know you're dining with her to-night."

"No, I won't encourage her," said he. "But you know what Lucia is, when she's in working order. If she wants a thing, she gets it somehow. It happens. That's all you can say about it."

"Well, this one shan't happen," said Daisy, dismounting from her basket-chair which was beginning to sag. "It would be too mean. And I wish you would come across now and let us practice that scene where I knight you. We must get it very slick."

"Not this morning," said Georgie. "I know my bit: I've only got to kneel down. You can practise on the end of a sofa. Besides, if Lucia is really waking up, I

shall take some duets across this evening, and I must have a go at some of them. I've not touched my piano for weeks. And my shoulder's sore where you knighted me so hard the other day. Quite a bruise."

Daisy suddenly remembered something more.

"And Lucia repeated me several lines out of one of Pepino's last poems," she said. "She couldn't possibly have done that a month ago without breaking down. And I believe she would have read one to me when I asked her to, but I'm pretty sure she couldn't undo one of those tapes that the book is tied up with. A hard knot. She was picking at it. . . ."

"Oh, she must be better," said he. "Ever so much."

So Georgie went in to practise some of the old duets in case Lucia felt equal to evoking the memories of happier days at the piano, and Daisy hit the end of her sofa some half-dozen times with her umbrella bidding it rise Sir Francis Drake. She still wondered if Lucia had some foul scheme in her head, but though there had ticked by some minutes, directly after their talk in Perdita's garden, which might have proved exceedingly dangerous to her own chance of being the Queen, these, by the time that she was knighting the sofa, had passed. For Lucia, still meditating whether she should not lay plots for ousting Daisy, had, in default of getting that knotted tape undone, turned to her unread *Times*, and scanned its columns with a rather absent eye. There was no news that could interest anybody, and her glance wandered up and down the lists of situations vacant and wanted, of the sailings of steamers, and finally of houses to be let for summer months. There was a picture of one with a plain pleasant Queen Anne front looking on to a cobbled street. It was highly attractive, and below it she read that Miss Mapp sought a tenant for her house in Tilling, called Mallards, for the months of August and September. Seven bedrooms, four sitting-rooms h. & c., and an old-world garden. At that precise psychological moment Daisy's prospects of being Queen Elizabeth became vastly

rosier, for this house to let started an idea in Lucia's mind which instantly took precedence of other schemes. She must talk to Georgie about it this evening: till then it should simmer. Surely also the name of Miss Mapp aroused faint echoes of memory in her mind: she seemed to remember a large woman with a wide smile who had stayed at the "Ambermere Arms" a few years ago, and had been very agreeable but slightly superior. Georgie would probably remember her. . . . But the sun had become extremely powerful, and Lucia picked up her *Times* and her book of poems and went indoors to the cool lattice-paned parlour where her piano stood. By it was a book-case with volumes of bound-up music, and she drew from it one which contained the duets over which Georgie and she used to be so gay and so industrious. These were Mozart quartettes arranged for four hands, delicious, rippling airs: it was months since she had touched them, or since the music-room had resounded to anything but the most sombre and pensive strains. Now she opened the book and put it on the music-rest. "Uno, due, tre," she said to herself and began practising the treble part which was the more amusing to play.

Georgie saw the difference in her at once when he arrived for dinner that evening. She was sitting outside in Perdita's garden and for the first time hailed him as of old in brilliant Italian.

"Buona sera, caro," she said. "Come sta?"

"Molto bene," he answered, "and what a caldo day. I've brought a little music across with me in case you felt inclined. Mozartino."

"What a good idea! We will have un po' di musica afterwards, but I've got tanto, tanto to talk to you about. Come in: dinner will be ready. Any news?"

"Let me think," he said. "No, I don't think there's much. I've got rather a bruised shoulder where Daisy knighted me the other day——"

"Dear Daisy!" said Lucia. "A little heavy-handed sometimes, don't you find? Not a light touch. She was in here this morning talking about the fête. She urged me to take part in it. What part do you think she suggested, Georgie? You'll never guess."

"I never should have, if she hadn't told me," he said. "The most ludicrous thing I ever heard."

Lucia sighed.

"I'm afraid not much more ludicrous than her being Queen Elizabeth," she said. "Daisy on a palfrey addressing her troops! Georgie dear, think of it! It sounds like that rather vulgar game called 'Consequences.' Daisy, I am afraid, has got tipsy with excitement at the thought of being a queen. She is running amok, and she will make a deplorable exhibition of herself, and Riseholme will become the laughing-stock of all those American tourists who come here in August to see our lovely Elizabethan village. The village will be all right, but what of Elizabeth? Tacete un momento, Georgie. Le domestiche."

Georgie's Italian was rusty after so much disuse, but he managed to translate this sentence to himself, and unerringly inferred that Lucia did not want to pursue the subject while Grosvenor, the parlour-maid and her colleague were in the room.

"Sicuro," he said, and made haste to help himself to his fish. The domestiche thereupon left the room again, to be summoned back by the stroke of a silver bell in the shape of a pomander which nestled among pepper- and mustard-pots beside Lucia. Almost before the door had closed on their exit, Lucia began to speak again.

"Of course after poor Daisy's suggestion I shall take no part myself in this fête," she said; "and even if she besought me on her knees to play Queen Elizabeth, I could not dream of doing so. She cannot deprive me of what I may call a proper pride, and since she has thought good to offer me the rôle of Drake's wife, who, she hastened to explain, only came on for one moment and curtsied

to her, and then retired into the ranks of men-at-arms and ladies-in-waiting again, my sense of dignity, of which I have still some small fragments left, would naturally prevent me from taking any part in the performance, even at the end of a barge-pole. But I am sorry for Daisy, since she knows her own deficiencies so little, and I shall mourn for Riseholme if the poor thing makes such a mess of the whole affair as she most indubitably will if she is left to organize it herself. That's all."

It appeared, however, that there was a little more, for Lucia quickly finished her fish, and continued at once.

"So after what she said to me this morning, I cannot myself offer to help her, but if you like to do so, Georgie, you can tell her—not from me, mind, but from your own impression—that you think I should be perfectly willing to coach her and make the best I can of her as the embodiment of great Queen Bess. Something might be done with her. She is short, but so was the Queen. She has rather bad teeth, but that doesn't matter, for the Queen had the same. Again she is not quite a lady, but the Queen also had a marked strain of vulgarity and bourgeoisie. There was a coarse fibre in the Tudors, as I have always maintained. All this, dear Georgie, is to the good. If dear Daisy will only not try to look tall, and if she will smile a good deal, and behave naturally these are advantages, real advantages. But in spite of them Daisy will merely make herself and Riseholme silly if she does not manage to get hold of some semblance of dignity and queenship. Little gestures, little turnings of the head, little graciousnesses; all that acting means. I thought it out in those dear old days when we began to plan it, and, as I say, I shall be happy to give poor Daisy all the hints I can, if she will come and ask me to do so. But mind, Georgie, the suggestion must not come from me. You are at liberty to say that you think I possibly might help her, but nothing more than that. Capite?"

This Italian word, not understanded of the people, came rather late, for already Lucia had struck the bell, as, unconsciously, she was emphasizing her generous proposal, and Grosvenor and her satellite had been in the room quite a long time. Concealment from le domestiche was therefore no longer possible. In fact both Georgie and Lucia had forgotten about the domestiche altogether.

"That's most kind of you, Lucia," said Georgie. "But you know what Daisy is. As obstinate as——"

"As a palfrey," interrupted Lucia.

"Yes, quite. Certainly I'll tell her what you say, or rather suggest what you might say if she asked you to coach her, but I don't believe it will be any use. The whole fête has become an awful bore. There are six weeks yet before it's held, and she wants to practise knighting me every day, and has processions up and down her garden, and she gets all the tradesmen in the place to walk before her as halberdiers and sea-captains, when they ought to be attending to their businesses and chopping meat and milking cows. Everyone's sick of it. I wish you would take it over, and be Queen yourself. Oh, I forgot, I promised Daisy I wouldn't encourage you. Dear me, how awful!"

Lucia laughed, positively laughed. This was an enormous improvement on the pensive smiles.

"Not awful at all, Georgino mio," she said. "I can well imagine poor Daisy's feverish fear that I should try to save her from being ridiculous. She loves being ridiculous, dear thing; it's a complex with her—that wonderful new book of Freud's which I must read—and subconsciously she pines to be ridiculous on as large a scale as possible. But as for my taking it over, that's quite out of the question. To begin with, I don't suppose I shall be here. Twelfth of August isn't it? Grouse-shooting opens in Scotland and bear-baiting at Riseholme."

"No, that was given up," said Georgie. "I opposed it

throughout on the Committee. I said that even if we could get a bear at all, it wouldn't be baited if it didn't get angry——"

Lucia interrupted.

"And that if it did get angry it would be awful," she put in.

"Yes. How did you know I said that?" asked Georgie. "Rather neat, wasn't it?"

"Very neat indeed, caro," said she. "I knew you said it because Daisy told me she had said it herself."

"What a cheat!" said Georgie indignantly.

Lucia looked at him wistfully.

"Ah, you mustn't think hardly of poor dear Daisy," she said. "Cheat is too strong a word. Just a little envious, perhaps, of bright clever things that other people say, not being very quick herself."

"Anyhow, I shall tell her that I know she has bagged my joke," said he.

"My dear, not worth while. You'll make quantities of others. All so trivial, Georgie, not worth noticing. Beneath you."

Lucia leaned forward with her elbows on the table, quite in the old braced way, instead of drooping.

"But we've got far more important things to talk about than Daisy's little pilferings," she said. "Where shall I begin?"

"From the beginning," said Georgie greedily. He had not felt so keen about the affairs of daily life since Lucia had buried herself in her bereavement.

"Well, the real beginning was this morning," she said, "when I saw something in *The Times*."

"More than I did," said Georgie. "Was it about Riseholme or the fête? Daisy said she was going to write a letter to *The Times* about it?"

"I must have missed that," said Lucia, "unless by any chance they didn't put it in. No, not about the fête, nor about Riseholme. Very much not about Riseholme. Georgie, do you remember a woman who stayed

at the 'Ambermere Arms' one summer called Miss Mapp?"

Georgie concentrated.

"I remember the name, because she was rather globular, like a map of the world," he said. "Oh, wait a moment: something's coming back to me. Large, with a great smile. Teeth."

"Yes, that's the one," cried Lucia. "There's telepathy going on, Georgie. We're suggesting to each other. . . . Rather like a hyæna, a handsome hyæna. Not hungry now but might be."

"Yes. And talked about a place called Tilling, where she had a Queen Anne house. We rather despised her for that. Oh, yes, and she came to a garden-party of mine. And I know when it was, too. It was that summer when you invented saying 'Au reservoir' instead of 'Au revoir.' We all said it for about a week and then got tired of it. Miss Mapp came here just about then, because she picked it up at my garden-party. She stopped quite to the end, eating quantities of red-currant fool, and saying that she had inherited a recipe from her grandmother which she would send me. She did, too, and my cook said it was rubbish. Yes: it was the au reservoir year, because she said au reservoir to everyone as they left, and told me she would take it back to Tilling. That's the one. Why?"

"Georgie, your memory's marvellous," said Lucia. "Now about the advertisement I saw in *The Times*. Miss Mapp is letting her Queen Anne house called Mallards, h. & c. and old-world garden, for August and September. I want you to drive over with me to-morrow and see it. I think that very likely, if it's at all what I hope, I shall take it."

"No!" cried Georgie. "Why of course I'll drive there with you to-morrow. What fun! But it will be too awful if you go away for two months. What shall I do? First there's Olga not coming back for a year, and now you're thinking of going away, and there'll be

nothing left for me except my croquet and being Drake."

Lucia gave him one of those glances behind which lurked so much purpose, which no doubt would be disclosed at the proper time. The bees were astir once more in the hive, and presently they would stream out for swarmings or stingings or honey-harvesting. . . . It was delightful to see her looking like that again.

"Georgie, I want change," she said, "and though I'm much touched at the idea of your missing me, I think I must have it. I want to get roused up again and shaken and made to tick. Change of air, change of scene, change of people. I don't suppose anyone alive has been more immersed than I in the spacious days of Elizabeth, or more devoted to Shakespearian tradition and environment—perhaps I ought to except Sir Sidney Lee, isn't it?—than I, but I want for the present anyhow to get away from it, especially when poor Daisy is intending to make this deplorable public parody of all that I have held sacred so long."

Lucia swallowed three or four strawberries as if they had been pills and took a gulp of water.

"I don't think I could bear to be here for all the rehearsals," she said; "to look out from the rue and honeysuckle of my sweet garden and see her on her palfrey addressing her lieges of Riseholme, and making them walk in procession in front of her. It did occur to me this morning that I might intervene, take the part of the Queen myself, and make a pageant such as I had planned in those happy days, which would have done honour to the great age and credit to Riseholme, but it would spoil the dream of Daisy's life, and one must be kind. I wash my hands of it all, though of course I shall allow her to dress here, and the procession to start from my house. She wanted that, and she shall have it, but of course she must state on the programmes that the procession starts from Mrs. Philip Lucas's house. It would be too much that the visitors, if there are any,

should think that my beautiful Hurst belongs to Daisy. And, as I said, I shall be happy to coach her, and see if I can do anything with her. But I won't be here for the fête, and I must be somewhere and that's why I'm thinking of Tilling."

They had moved into the music-room where the bust of Shakespeare stood among its vases of flowers, and the picture of Lucia by Tancred Sigismund, looking like a chessboard with some arms and legs and eyes sticking out of it, hung on the wall. There were Georgie's sketches there, and the piano was open, and *Beethoven's Days of Boyhood* was lying on the table with the paper-knife stuck between its leaves, and there was animation about the room once more.

Lucia seated herself in the chair that might so easily have come from Anne Hathaway's cottage, though there was no particular reason for supposing that it did.

"Georgie, I am beginning to feel alive again," she said. "Do you remember what wonderful Alfred says in *Maud*? 'My life hath crept so long on a broken wing.' That's what my life has been doing, but now I'm not going to creep any more. And just for the time, as I say, I'm 'off' the age of Elizabeth, partly poor Daisy's fault, no doubt. But there were other ages, Georgie, the age of Pericles, for instance. Fancy sitting at Socrates's feet or Plato's, and hearing them talk while the sun set over Salamis or Pentelicus. I must rub up my Greek, Georgie. I used to know a little Greek at one time, and if I ever manage any tableaux again, we must have the death of Agamemnon. And then there's the age of Anne. What a wonderful time, Pope and Addison! So civilized, so cultivated. Their routs and their tea-parties and rapes of the lock. With all the greatness and splendour of the Elizabethan age, there must have been a certain coarseness and crudity about them. No one reveres it more than I, but it is a mistake to remain in the same waters too long. There comes a tide in the

affairs of men, which, if you don't nip it in the bud, leads on to boredom."

"My dear, is that yours?" said Georgie. "And absolutely impromptu like that! You're too brilliant."

It was not quite impromptu, for Lucia had thought of it in her bath. But it would be meticulous to explain that.

"Wicked of me, I'm afraid," she said. "But it expresses my feelings just now. I do want a change, and my happening to see this notice of Miss Mapp's in *The Times* seems a very remarkable coincidence. Almost as if it was sent: what they call a leading. Anyhow, you and I will drive over to Tilling to-morrow and see it. Let us make a jaunt of it, Georgie, for it's a long way, and stay the night at an inn there. Then we shall have plenty of time to see the place."

This was rather a daring project, and Georgie was not quite sure if it was proper. But he knew himself well enough to be certain that no passionate impulse of his would cause Lucia to regret that she had made so intimate a proposal.

"That'll be the greatest fun," he said. "I shall take my painting things. I haven't sketched for weeks."

"Cattivo ragazzo!" said Lucia. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing. There's been no one to play the piano with, and no one, who knows, to show my sketches to. Hours of croquet, just killing the time. Being Drake. How that fête bores me!"

"Oo poor thing!" said Lucia, using again the baby talk in which she and Georgie used so often to indulge. "But me's back again now, and me will scold oo vewy vewy much if oo does not do your lessons."

"And me vewy glad to be scolded again," said Georgie. "Me idle boy! Dear me, how nice it all is!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

The clock on the old oak dresser struck ten, and Lucia jumped up.

"Georgie, ten o'clock already," she cried. "How time has flown. Now I'll write out a telegram to be sent to Miss Mapp first thing to-morrow to say we'll get to Tilling in the afternoon, to see her house, and then 'ickle musica. There was a Mozart duet we used to play. We might wrestle with it again."

She opened the book that stood on the piano. Luckily that was the very one Georgie had been practising this morning. (So too had Lucia.)

"That will be lovely," he said. "But you mustn't scold me if I play vewy badly. Months since I looked at it."

"Me too," said Lucia. "Here we are! Shall I take the treble? It's a little easier for my poor fingers. Now: Uno, due, tre! Off we go!"