

## XI

THOUGH Georgie had thought that there would be nothing interesting left in life now that Lucia was gone, and though Tilling generally was conscious that the termination of the late rivalries would take all thrill out of existence as well as eclipsing its gaieties most dreadfully, it proved one morning when the sad days had begun to add themselves into weeks, that there was a great deal for him to do, as well as a great deal for Tilling to talk about. Lucia had employed a local lawyer over the making of her will, and to-day Mr. Causton (*re* the affairs of Mrs. Emmeline Lucas) came to see Georgie about it. He explained to him with a manner subtly compounded of sympathy and congratulation that the little sum of money to which Lucia had alluded was no less than £80,000. Georgie was, in fact, apart from certain legacies, her heir. He was much moved.

"Too kind of her," he said. "I had no idea——"

Mr. Causton went on with great delicacy.

"It will be some months," he said, "before in the absence of fresh evidence, the death of my client can be legally assumed——"

"Oh, the longer, the better," said Georgie rather vaguely, wiping his eyes, "but what do you mean about fresh evidence?"

"The recovery, by washing ashore or other identification, of the lamented corpses," said Mr. Causton. "In the interval the—the possibly late Mrs. Lucas has left no provision for the contingency we have to face. If and when her death is proved, the staff of servants will receive their wages up to date, and a month's notice. Until then the estate, I take it, will be liable for the out-

goings and the upkeep of Grebe. I would see to all that, but I felt that I must get your authority first."

"Of course, naturally," said Georgie.

"But here a difficulty arises," said Mr. Causton. "I have no authority for drawing on the late—or, we hope, the present Mrs. Lucas's balance at the bank. There is, you see, no fund out of which the current expenses of the upkeep of the house can be paid. There is more than a month's food and wages for her servants already owing."

George's face changed a little. A very little.

"I had better pay them myself," he said. "Would not that be the proper course?"

"I think, under the circumstances, that it would," said Mr. Causton. "In fact, I don't see what else is to be done, unless all the servants were discharged at once, and the house shut up."

"No, that would never do," said Georgie. "I must go down there and arrange about it all. If Mrs. Lucas returns, how horrid for her to find all her servants who had been with her so long, gone. Everything must carry on as if she had only gone for a visit somewhere and forgotten to send a cheque for expenses."

Here then, at any rate, was something to do already, and Georgie, thinking that he would like a little walk on this brisk morning, and also feeling sure that he would like a little conversation with friends in the High Street, put on his thinner cape, for a hint of spring was in the air, and there were snowdrops abloom in the flower border of his little garden. Lucia, he remembered, always detested snowdrops: they hung their heads and were feeble; they typified for her slack though amiable inefficiency. In order to traverse the whole length of the High Street and get as many conversations as possible he went down by Mallards and Major Benjy's house. The latter, from the window of his study, where he so often enjoyed a rest or a little refreshment before and after his game of golf, saw him pass, and beckoned him in.

"Good morning, old boy," he said. "I've had a tre-

mendous slice of luck : at least that is not quite the way to put it, but what I mean is——. In fact, I've just had a visit from the solicitor of our lamented friend Elizabeth Mapp, God bless her, and he told me the most surprising news. I was monstrously touched by it : hadn't a notion of it, I assure you."

" You don't mean to say——" began Georgie.

" Yes I do. He informed me of the provisions of that dear woman's will. In memory of our long friendship, these were the very words—and I assure you I was not ashamed to turn away and wipe my eyes, when he told me—in memory of our long friendship she has left me that beautiful Mallards and the sum of ten thousand pounds, which I understand was the bulk of her fortune. What do you think of that ?" he asked, allowing his exultation to get the better of him for the moment.

" No !" said Georgie, " I congratulate—at least in case——"

" I know," said Major Benjy. " If it turns out to be too true that our friends have gone for ever, you're friendly enough to be glad that what I've told you is too true, too. Eh ?"

" Quite, and I've had a visit from Mr. Causton," said Georgie, unable to contain himself any longer, " and Lucia's left me Grebe and eighty thousand pounds."

" My word ! What a monstrous fortune," cried the Major with a spasm of chagrin. " I congrat—— Anyhow, the same to you. I shall get a motor instead of going to my golf on that measly tram. Then there's Mallards for me to arrange about. I'm thinking of letting it furnished, servants and all. It'll be snapped up at ten guineas a week. Why, she got fifteen last summer from the other poor corpse."

" I wouldn't," said Georgie. " Supposing she came back and found she couldn't get into her house for another month because you had let it ?"

" God grant she may come back," said the Major, without falling dead on the spot. " But I see your

point : it would be awkward. I'll think it over. Anyhow, of course, after a proper interval, when the tragedy is proved, I shall go and live there myself. Till then I shall certainly pay the servants' wages and the upkeep. Rather a drain, but it can't be helped. Board wages of twelve shillings a week is what I shall give then : they'll live like fighting cocks on that. By Jove, when I think of that terrible sight of the kitchen-table lying out there on the beach, it causes me such a sinking still. Have a drink : wonderful pre-war whisky."

Georgie had not yet visited Grebe, and he found a thrilling though melancholy interest in seeing the starting-point of the catastrophe. The Christmas-tree, he ascertained, had stuck in the door of the kitchen, and the Padre had already been down to look at it, but had decided that the damage to it was irreparable. It was lying now in the garden from which soil and plants had been swept away by the flood, but Georgie could not bear to see it there, and directed that it should be put up, as a relic, in an empty outhouse. Perhaps a tablet on that as well as on the table. Then he had to interview Grosvenor, and make out a schedule of the servants' wages, the total of which rather astonished him. He saw the cook and told her that he had the kitchen-table in his yard, but she begged him not to send it back, as it had always been most inconvenient. Mrs. Lucas, she told him, had had a feeling for it ; she thought there was luck about it. Then she burst into tears and said it hadn't brought her mistress much luck after all. This was all dreadfully affecting, and Georgie told her that in this period of waiting during which they must not give up hope, all their wages would be paid as usual, and they must carry on as before, and keep the house in order. Then there were some unpaid bills of Lucia's, a rather appalling total, which must be discharged before long, and the kitchen must be renovated from the effects of the flood. It was after dark when he got back to Mallards Cottage again.

In the absence of what Mr. Causton called further evidence in the way of corpses, and of alibis in the way of living human bodies, the Padre settled in the course of the next week to hold a memorial service, for unless one was held soon, they would all have got used to the bereavement, and the service would lose point and poignancy. It was obviously suitable that Major Benjy and Georgie, being the contingent heirs of the defunct ladies, should sit by themselves in a front pew as chief mourners, and Major Benjy ordered a black suit to be made for him without delay for use on this solemn occasion. The church-bell was tolled as if for a funeral service, and the two walked in side by side after the rest of the congregation had assembled, and took their places in a pew by themselves immediately in front of the reading-desk.

The service was of the usual character, and the Padre gave a most touching address on the text "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided." He reminded his hearers how the two whom they mourned were as sisters, taking the lead in social activities, and dispensing to all who knew them their bountiful hospitalities. Their lives had been full of lovable energy. They had been at the forefront in all artistic and literary pursuits: indeed he might almost have taken the whole of the verse of which he had read them only the half as his text, and have added that they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. One of them had been known to them all for many years, and the name of Elizabeth Mapp was written on their hearts. The other was a newer comer, but she had wonderfully endeared herself to them in her briefer sojourn here, and it was typical of her beautiful nature that on the very day on which the disaster occurred, she had been busy with a Christmas-tree for the choristers in whom she took so profound an interest.

As regards the last sad scene, he need not say much about it, for never would any of them forget that touching,

that ennobling, that teaching sight of the two, gallant in the face of death as they had ever been in that of life, being whirled out to sea. Mrs. Lucas, in the ordeal which they would all have to face one day, that humorous greeting of hers, "au reservoir," which they all knew so well, to her friends standing in safety on the shore, and then turned again to her womanly work of comforting and encouraging her weaker sister. "May we all," said the Padre, with a voice trembling with emotion, "go to meet death in that serene and untroubled spirit, doing our duty to the last. And now——"

This sermon, at the request of a few friends, he had printed in the Parish Magazine next week, and copies were sent to everybody.

It was only natural that Tilling should feel relieved when the ceremony was over, for the weeks since the stranding of the kitchen-table had been like the period between a death and a funeral. The blinds were up again now, and life gradually resumed a more normal complexion. January ebbed away into February, February into March, and as the days lengthened with the returning sun, so the mirths and squabbles of Tilling grew longer and brighter.

But a certain stimulus which had enlivened them all since Lucia's advent from Riseholme was lacking. It was not wholly that there was no Lucia, nor, wholly, that there was no Elizabeth, it was the intense reactions which they had produced together that everyone missed so fearfully. Day after day those who were left met and talked in the High Street, but never was there news of that thrilling kind which since the summer had keyed existence up to so exciting a level. But it was interesting to see Major Benjy in his new motor, which he drove himself, and watch his hairbreadth escapes from collisions at sharp corners and to hear the appalling explosions of military language if any other vehicle came within a yard of his green bonnet.

"He seems to think," said Diva to Mrs. Bartlett, as they met on shopping errands one morning, "that now he has got a motor nobody else may use the road at all."

"A trumpery little car," said Mrs. Bartlett, "I should have thought, with ten thousand pounds as good as in his pocket, he might have got himself something better."

They were standing at the corner looking up towards Mallards, and Diva suddenly caught sight of a board on Major Benjy's house, announcing that it was for sale.

"Why, whatever's that?" she cried. "That must have been put up only to-day. Good morning, Mr. Georgie. What about Major Benjy's house?"

Georgie still wore a broad black band on his sleeve.

"Yes, he told me yesterday that he was going to move into Mallards next week," he said. "And he's going to have a sale of his furniture almost immediately."

"That won't be much to write home about," said Diva scornfully. "A few moth-eaten tiger-skins which he said he shot in India."

"I think he wants some money," said Georgie. "He's bought a motor, you see, and he has to keep up Mallards as well as his own house."

"I call that very rash," said Mrs. Bartlett. "I call that counting your chickens before they're hatched. Oh dear me, what a thing to have said! Dreadful!"

Georgie tactfully covered this up by a change of subject.

"I've made up my mind," he said, "and I'm going to put up a cenotaph in the churchyard to dear Lucia and Elizabeth."

"What? Both?" asked Diva.

"Yes, I've thought it carefully over, and it's going to be both."

"Major Benjy ought to go halves with you then," said Diva.

"Well, I told him I was intending to do it," said Georgie, "and he didn't catch on. He only said 'Capital idea,' and took some whisky and soda. So I shan't

say any more. I would really just as soon do it all myself."

"Well, I do think that's mean of him," said Diva. "He ought anyhow to bear some part of the expense, considering everything. Instead of which he buys a motor-car which he can't drive. Go on about the cenotaph."

"I saw it down at the stonemason's yard," said Georgie, "and that put the idea into my head. Beautiful white marble on the lines, though of course much smaller, of the one in London. It had been ordered, I found, as a tombstone, but then the man who ordered it went bankrupt, and it was on the stonemason's hands."

"I've heard about it," said Mrs. Bartlett, in rather a superior voice. "Kenneth told me you'd told him, and we both think that it's a lovely idea."

"The stonemason ought to let you have it cheap then," said Diva.

"It wasn't very cheap," said Georgie, "but I've bought it, and they'll put it in its place to-day, just outside the south transept, and the Padre is going to dedicate it. Then there's the inscription. I shall have in loving memory of them, by me, and a bit of the Padre's text at the memorial service. Just 'In death they were not divided.'"

"Quite right. Don't put in about the eagles and the lions," said Diva.

"No, I thought I would leave that out. "Though I liked that part," said Georgie for the sake of Mrs. Bartlett.

"Talking of whisky," said Diva, flying back, as her manner was, to a remote allusion, "Major Benjy's finished all the pre-war whisky that Lucia gave him. At least I heard him ordering some more yesterday. Oh, and there's the notice of his sale. Old English furniture—yes, that may mean two things, and I know which of them it is. Valuable works of Art. Well I never! A print of the 'Monarch of the Glen' and a photograph of the 'Soul's Awakening.' Rubbish! Fine tiger-skins! The skins may be all right, but they're bald."



"My dear, how severe you are," said Georgie. "Now I must go and see how they're getting on with the inscription. Au reservoir."

Diva nodded at Evie Bartlett.

"Nice to hear that again," she said. "I've not heard it—well, since."

The cenotaph with its inscription in bold leaded letters to say that Georgie had erected it in memory of the two undivided ladies, roused much admiration, and a full-page reproduction of it appeared in the Parish Magazine for April, which appeared on the last day of March. The stone-cutter had slightly miscalculated the space at his disposal for the inscription, and the words "Elizabeth Mapp" were considerably smaller than the words "Emmeline Lucas" in order to get them into the line. Though Tilling said nothing about that, it was felt that the error was productive of a very suitable effect, if a symbolic meaning was interpreted into it. Georgie was considered to have done it very handsomely and to be behaving in a way that contrasted most favourably with the conduct of Major Benjy, for whereas Georgie was keeping up Grebe at great expense, and restoring, all at his own charge, the havoc the flood had wrought in the garden, Major Benjy, after unsuccessfully trying to let Mallards at ten guineas a week, had moved into the house, and, with a precipitation that was as rash as it was indelicate, was already negotiating about the disposal of his own, and was to have a sale of his furniture on April the first. He had bought a motor, he had replenished the cellars of Mallards with strong wines and more pre-war whisky, he was spending money like water and on the evening of this last day of March he gave a bridge-party in the garden-room.

Georgie and Diva and Mrs. Padre were the guests at this party: there had been dinner first, a rich elaborate dinner, and bridge afterwards up till midnight. It had been an uncomfortable evening, and before it was over they all wished they had not come, for Major Benjy had alluded

to it as a house-warming, which showed that either his memory was going, or that his was a very callous nature, for no one whose perceptions were not of the commonest could possibly have used that word so soon. He had spoken of his benefactress with fulsome warmth, but it was painfully evident from what source this posthumous affection sprang. He thought of having the garden-room redecorated, the house wanted brightening up a bit, he even offered each of them one of Miss Mapp's water-colour sketches, of which was a profusion on the walls, as a memento of their friend, God bless her. . . . There he was straddling in the doorway with the air of a vulgar *nouveau riche* owner of an ancestral property, as they went their ways homeward into the night, and they heard him bolt and lock the door and put up the chain which Lucia in her tenancy had had repaired in order to keep out the uninvited and informal visits of Miss Mapp. "It would serve him jolly well right," thought Georgie, "if she came back."