XII

IT was a calm and beautiful night with a high tide that overflowed the channel of the river. There was spread a great sheet of moonlit water over the submerged meadows at the margin, and it came up to the foot of the rebuilt bank opposite Grebe. Between four and five of the morning of April the first, a trawler entered the mouth of the river, and just at the time when the stars were growing pale and the sky growing red with the coming dawn, it drew up at the little quay to the east of the town, and was moored to the shore. There stepped out of it two figures clad in overalls and tarpaulin jackets.

"I think we had better go straight to Mallards, dear," said Elizabeth, "as it's so close, and have a nice cup of tea to warm ourselves. Then you can telephone from there to Grebe, and tell them to send the motor up for you."

"I shall ring up Georgie too," said Lucia. "I can't bear to think that his suspense should last a minute more than is necessary."

Elizabeth pointed upwards.

"See, there's the sun catching the top of the church-tower," she said. "Little did I think I should ever see dear Tilling again."

"I never had the slightest doubt about it," said Lucia. "Look, there are the fields we floated across on the kitchen-table. I wonder what happened to it."

They climbed the steps at the south-east angle of the town, and up the slope to the path across the churchyard. This path led close by the south side of the church, and the white marble of the cenotaph gleamed in the early sunlight.

"What a handsome tomb," said Elizabeth. "It's

quite new. But how does it come here? No one has been buried in the churchyard for a hundred years."

Lucia gave a gasp as the polished lead letters caught her eye.

"But it's us!" she said.

They stood side by side in their tarpaulins, and together in a sort of chant read the inscription aloud.

THIS STONE WAS ERECTED BY
GEORGE PILLSON
IN LOVING MEMORY OF
EMMELINE LUCAS AND Elizabeth Mapp
LOST AT SEA ON BOXING DAY. 1930

"IN DEATH THEY WERE NOT DIVIDED."

"I've never heard of such a thing," cried Lucia. "I call it most premature of Georgie, assuming that I was dead like that. The inscription must be removed instantly. All the same it was kind of him and what a lot of money it must have cost him! Gracious me, I suppose he thought—— Let us hurry, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth was still staring at the stone.

"I am puzzled to know why my name is put in such exceedingly small letters," she said acidly. "You can hardly read it. As you say, dear, it was most premature of him. I should call it impertinent, and I'm very glad dear Major Benjy had nothing to do with it. There's an indelicacy about it."

They went quickly on past Mallards Cottage where the blinds were still down, and there was the window of the garden-room from which each had made so many thrilling observations, and the red-brick front, glowing in the sunlight, of Mallards itself. As they crossed the cobbled way to the front door, Elizabeth looked down towards the High Street and saw on Major Benjy's house next door the house-agent's board announcing that the freehold of this desirable residence was for disposal. There

were bills pasted on the walls announcing the sale of furniture to take place there that very day.

Her face turned white, and she laid a quaking hand on Lucia's arm.

"Look, Major Benjy's house is for sale," she faltered. "Oh, Lucia, what has happened? Have we come back from the dead, as it were, to find that it's our dear old friend instead? And to think——" She could not complete the sentence.

"My dear, you mustn't jump at any such terrible conclusions," said Lucia. "He may have changed his house——"

Elizabeth shook her head; she was determined to believe the worst, and indeed it seemed most unlikely that Major Benjy who had lived in the same house for a full quarter of a century could have gone to any new abode but one. Meantime, eager to put an end to this suspense, Elizabeth kept pressing the bell, and Lucia plying the knocker of Mallards.

"They all sleep on the attic floor," said Elizabeth, "but I think they must hear us soon if we go on. Ah, there's a step on the stairs. Someone is coming down."

They heard the numerous bolts on the door shot back, they heard the rattle of the released chain. The door was opened and there within stood Major Benjy. He had put on his dinner jacket over his Jaeger pyjamas, and had carpet slippers on his feet. He was sleepy and bristly and very cross.

"Now what's all this about, my men," he said, seeing two tarpaulined figures on the threshold. "What do you mean by waking me up with that infernal——"

Elizabeth's suspense was quite over.

"You wretch," she cried in a fury. "What do *you* mean? Why are you in my house? Ah, I guess! He! He! He! You learned about my will, did you? You thought you wouldn't wait to step into a dead woman's shoes, but positively tear them off my living feet. My

will shall be revoked this day: I promise you that. . . . Now out you go, you horrid supplanter! Off to your own house with you, for you shan't spend another minute in mine."

During this impassioned address Major Benjy's face changed to an expression of the blankest dismay, as if he had seen something much worse (as indeed he had) than a ghost. He pulled pieces of himself together.

"But, my dear Miss Elizabeth," he said. "You'll allow me surely to get my clothes on, and above all to say one word of my deep thankfulness that you and Mrs. Lucas—it is Mrs. Lucas, isn't it?——"

"Get out!" said Elizabeth, stamping her foot. "Thankfulness indeed! There's a lot of thankfulness in your face! Go away! Shoo!"

Major Benjy had faced wounded tigers (so he said) in India, but then he had a rifle in his hand. He could not face his benefactress, and, with first one slipper and then the other dropping off his feet, he hurried down the few yards of pavement to his own house. The two ladies entered: Elizabeth banged the door and put up the chain.

"So that's that," she observed (and undoubtedly it was). "Ah, here's Withers. Withers, we've come back, and though you ought never to have let the Major set foot in my house, I don't blame you, for I feel sure he bullied you into it."

"Oh, miss!" said Withers. "Is it you? Fancy! Well, that is a surprise!"

"Now get Mrs. Lucas and me a cup of tea," said Elizabeth, "and then she's going back to Grebe. That wretch hasn't been sleeping in my room, I trust?"

"No, in the best spare bedroom," said Withers.

"Then get my room ready and I shall go to bed for a few hours. We've been up all night. Then, Withers, take all Major Benjy's clothes and his horrid pipes, and all that belongs to him, and put them on the steps outside. Ring him up, and tell him where he will find

them. But not one foot shall he set in *my* house again."

Lucia went to the telephone and rang up Cadman's cottage for her motor. She heard his exclamation of "My Gawd," she heard (what she supposed was) Foljambe's cry of astonishment, and then she rang up Georgie. He and his household were all a-bed and asleep when the telephone began its summons, but presently the persistent tinkle penetrated into his consciousness, and made him dream that he was again watching Lucia whirling down the flood on the kitchen-table and ringing an enormous dinner bell as she swept by the steps. Then he became completely awake and knew it was only the telephone.

"The tarsome thing!" he muttered. "Who on earth can it be ringing one up at this time? Go on ringing then till you're tired. I shall go to sleep again."

In spite of these resolutions, he did nothing of the kind. So ceaseless was the summons that in a minute or two he got out of bed, and putting on his striped dressing-gown (blue and yellow) went down to his sitting-room.

"Yes. Who is it? What do you want?" he said crossly.

There came a little merry laugh, and then a voice, which he had thought was silent for ever, spoke in unmistakable accents.

"Georgie! Georgino mio!" it said.

His heart stood still.

"What? What?" he cried.

"Yes, it's Lucia," said the voice. "Me's tum home, Georgie."

Eighty thousand pounds (less death duties) and Grebe seemed to sweep by him like an avalanche, and fall into the gulf of the things that might have been. But it was not the cold blast of that ruin that filled his eyes with tears.

"Oh my dear!" he cried. "Is it really you? Lucia, where are you? Where are you talking from?"

"Mallards. Elizabeth and I——"

"What, both of you?" called Georgie. "Then—where's Major Benjy?"

"Just gone home," said Lucia discreetly. "And as soon as I've had a cup of tea I'm going to Grebe."

"But I must come round and see you at once," said Georgie. "I'll just put some things on."

"Yes, do," said Lucia. "Presto, presto, Georgie."

Careless of his reputation for being the best-dressed man in Tilling, he put on his dress trousers and a pull-over, and his thick brown cape, and did not bother about his *toupet*. The front door of Mallards was open, and Elizabeth's servants were laying out on the top step a curious collection of golf clubs and tooth-brushes and clothes. From mere habit—everyone in Tilling had the habit—he looked up at the window of the garden-room as he passed below it, and was astonished to see two mariners in sou'-wester caps and tarpaulin jackets kissing their hands to him. He had only just time to wonder who these could possibly be when he guessed. He flew into Lucia's arms, then wondered if he ought to kiss Elizabeth too. But, there was a slight reserve about her which caused him to refrain. He was not brilliant enough at so early an hour to guess that she had seen the smaller lettering in which her loving memory was recorded.

There was but time for a few ejaculations and a promise from Georgie to dine at Grebe that night, before Lucia's motor arrived, and the imperturbable Cadman touched his cap and said to Lucia, "Very pleased to see you back, ma'am," as she picked her way between the growing deposits of socks and other more intimate articles of male attire which were now being ranged on the front steps. Georgie hurried back to Mallards Cottage to dress in a manner more worthy of his reputation, and Elizabeth up to her bedroom for a few hours' sleep. Below her oil-skins she still wore the ragged remains of the clothes in which she had left Tilling on Boxing Day, and now she drew out of the pocket of her frayed and sea-stained jacket, a half-

sheet of discoloured paper. She unfolded it and having once more read the mystic words "Take two hen lobsters," she stowed it safely away for future use.

Meantime Major Benjy next door had been the prey of the most sickening reflections; whichever way he turned, fate gave him some stinging blow that set him staggering and reeling in another direction. Leaning out of an upper window of his own house, he observed his clothes and boots and articles of toilet being laid out like a bird's breakfast on the steps of Mallards, and essaying to grind his teeth with rage he discovered that his upper dental plate must still be reposing in a glass of water in the best spare bedroom which he had lately quitted in such haste. To recover his personal property was the first necessity, and when from his point of observation he saw that the collection had grown to a substantial size, he crept up the pavement, seized a bundle of miscellaneous articles, as many as he could carry, then stole back again, dropping a nail-brush here and a sock-suspender there, and dumped them in his house. Three times he must go on these degrading errands, before he had cleared all the birds' breakfast away; indeed he was an early bird feeding on the worms of affliction.

Tilling was beginning to awake now: the milkman came clattering down the street and, looking in amazement at his dishevelled figure, asked whether he wanted his morning supply left at his own house or at Mallards: Major Benjy turned on him so appalling a face that he left no milk at either and turned swiftly into the less alarming air of Porpoise Street. Again he had to make the passage of his Via Dolorosa to glean the objects which had dropped from his overburdened arms, and as he returned he heard a bumping noise behind him, and saw his new portmanteau hauled out by Withers rolling down the steps into the street. He emerged again when Withers had shut the door, put more gleanings into it and pulled it into his house. There he made a swift and sorry toilet, for there was business to be done which

would not brook delay. Already the preparations for the sale of his furniture were almost finished; the carpet and hearth-rug in his sitting-room were tied up together and labelled Lot 1: the fire-irons and a fishing-rod and a rhinoceros-hide whip were Lot 2; a kitchen tray with packs of cards, a tobacco jar, a piece of chipped cloisonné ware and a roll of toilet paper formed an unappetizing Lot 3. The sale must be stopped at once and he went down to the auctioneer's in the High Street and informed him that owing to circumstances over which he had no control he was compelled to cancel it. It was pointed out to him that considerable expense had already been incurred for the printing and display of the bills that announced it, for the advertisements in the local press, for the time and trouble already spent in arranging and marking the lots, but the Major bawled out: "Damn it all, the things are mine and I won't sell one of them. Send me in your bill." Then he had to go to the house agent's and tell him to withdraw his house from the market and take down his board, and coming out of the office he ran into Irene, already on her way to Grebe, who cried out: "They've come back, old Benjy-wenjy. Joy! Joy!"

The most immediate need of having a roof over his head and a chair to sit on was now provided for, and as he had already dismissed his own servants, taking those of Mallards, he must go to another agency to find some sort of cook or charwoman till he could get his establishment together again. They promised to send an elderly lady, highly respectable though rather deaf and weak in the legs, to-morrow if possible. Back he came to his house with such cold comfort to cheer him, and observed on the steps of Mallards half a dozen bottles of wine. "My God, my cellar," muttered the Major, "there are dozens and dozens of my wine and my whisky in the house!" Again he crept up to the abhorred door and, returning with the bottles, put a kettle on to boil, and began cutting the strings that held the lots together. Just then

the church-bells burst out into a joyful peal, and it was not difficult to conjecture the reason of their unseemly mirth. All this before breakfast. . . .

A cup of hot strong tea without any milk restored not only his physical stability but also his mental capacity for suffering, and he sat down to think. There was the financial side of the disaster first of all, a thing ghastly to contemplate. He had bought (but not yet paid for) a motor, some dozens of wine, a suit of new clothes, as well as the mourning habiliments in which he had attended the memorial service, quantities of stationery with the Mallards stamp on it, a box of cigars and other luxuries too numerous to mention. It was little comfort to remember that he had refused to contribute to the cenotaph; a small saving like that did not seem to signify. Then what view, he wondered, would his benefactress, when she knew all, take of his occupation of Mallards? She might find out (indeed being who she was, she would not fail to do so) that he had tried to let it at ten guineas a week and she might therefore send him in a bill on that scale for the fortnight he had spent there, together with that for her servants' wages, and for garden-produce and use of her piano. Luckily he had only eaten some beet-root out of the garden, and he had had the piano tuned. Out of all these staggering expenses, the only items which were possibly recoverable were the wages he had paid to the staff of Mallards between Boxing Day and the date of his tenancy: these Elizabeth might consent to set against the debits. Not less hideous than this financial débâcle that stared him in the face, was the loss of prestige in Tilling. Tilling, he knew, had disapproved of his precipitancy in entering into Mallards, and Tilling, full, like Irene, of joy, joy for the return of the lost, would simply hoot with laughter at him. He could visualize with awful clearness the chatting groups in the High Street which would vainly endeavour to suppress their smiles as he approached. The day of swank was past and done, he would have to be quiet and humble

and grateful to anybody who treated him with the respect to which he had been accustomed.

He unrolled a tiger-skin to lay down again in his hall: a cloud of dust and deciduous hair rose from it, pungent like snuff, and the remaining glass eye fell out of the socket. He bawled "Quai-hai" before he remembered that till to-morrow at least he would be alone in the house, and that even then his attendant would be deaf. He opened his front door and looked out into the street again, and there on the door-step of Mallards was another dozen or so of wine and a walking-stick. Again he stole out to recover his property with the hideous sense that perhaps Elizabeth was watching him from the garden-room. His dental plate—thank God—was there too on the second step, all by itself, gleaming in the sun, and seeming to grin at him in a very mocking manner. After that throughout the morning he looked out at intervals as he rested from the awful labour of laying carpets and putting beds together, and there were usually some more bottles waiting for him, with stray golf clubs, bridge-markers and packs of cards. About one o'clock just as he was collecting what must surely be the last of these bird-breakfasts, the door of Mallards opened and Elizabeth stepped carefully over his umbrella and a box of cigars. She did not appear to see him. It seemed highly probable that she was going to revoke her will.

Georgie, as well as Major Benjy, had to do a little thinking, when he returned from his visit at dawn to Mallards. It concerned two points, the cenotaph and the kitchen-table. The cenotaph had not been mentioned in those few joyful ejaculations he had exchanged with Lucia, and he hoped that the ladies had not seen it. So after breakfast he went down to the stonemason's and begged him to send a trolly and a hefty lot of men up to the churchyard at once, and remove the monument to the backyard of Mallards Cottage, which at present was chiefly occupied by the kitchen-table under a tarpaulin. But Mr. Marble (such was his appropriate name)

shook his head over this: the cenotaph had been dedicated, and he felt sure that a faculty must be procured before it could be removed. That would never do: Georgie could not wait for a faculty, whatever that was, and he ordered that the inscription, anyhow, should be effaced without delay: surely no faculty was needed to destroy all traces of a lie. Mr. Marble must send some men up to chip, and chip and chip for all they were worth till those beautiful lead letters were detached and the surface of the stone cleared of all that erroneous information.

"And then I'll tell you what," said Georgie, with a sudden splendid thought, "Why not paint on to it (I can't afford any more cutting) the inscription that was to have been put on it when that man went bankrupt and I bought the monument instead? He'll get his monument for nothing, and I shall get rid of mine, which is just what I want. . . . That's beautiful. Now you must send a trolly to my house and take a very big kitchen-table, *the* one in fact, back to Grebe. It must go in through the door of the kitchen-garden and be put quietly into the kitchen. And I particularly want it done to-day."

All went well with these thoughtful plans. Georgie saw with his own eyes the last word of his inscription disappear in chips of marble; and he carried away all the lead letters in case they might come in useful for something, though he could not have said what: perhaps he would have "Mallards Cottage" let into the threshold of his house for that long inscription would surely contain the necessary letters. Rather a pretty and original idea. Then he ascertained that the kitchen-table had been restored to its place while Lucia slept, and he drove down at dinner-time feeling that he had done his best. He wore his white waistcoat with onyx buttons for the happy occasion.

Lucia was looking exceedingly well and much sunburnt. By way of resting she had written a larger number

of post cards to all her friends, both here and elsewhere, than Georgie had ever seen together in one place.

"Georgino," she cried. "There's so much to say that I hardly know where to begin. I think my adventures first, quite shortly, for I shall dictate a full account of them to my secretary, and have a party next week for all Tilling, and read them out to you. Two parties, I expect, for I don't think I shall be able to read it all in one evening. Now we go back to Boxing Day."

"I went into the kitchen that afternoon," she said as they sat down to dinner, "and there was Elizabeth. I asked her, naturally, don't you think?—why she was there, and she said, 'I came to thank you for that delicious *pâté*, and to ask if——' That was as far as she got—I must return to that later—when the bank burst with a frightful roar, and the flood poured in. I was quite calm. We got on to, I should really say into the table—— By the way, was the table ever washed up?"

"Yes," said Georgie, "it's in your kitchen now. I sent it back."

"Thank you, my dear. We got into the kitchen-table, really a perfect boat, I can't think why they don't make more like it, flew by the steps—oh, did the Padre catch a dreadful cold? Such a splash it was, and that was the only drop of water that we shipped at all."

"No, but he lost his umbrella, the one you'd given him," said Georgie, "and the Padre of the Roman Catholic Church found it, a week afterwards and returned it to him. Wasn't that a coincidence? Go on. Oh no, wait a minute. What did you mean by calling out 'Just wait till we get back?'"

"Why of course I wanted to tell you that I had found Elizabeth in my kitchen," said Lucia.

"Hurrah I guessed you meant something of the kind," said Georgie.

"Well, out we went—I've never been so fast in a kitchen-table before—out to sea in a blinding sea-fog. My dear; poor Elizabeth! No nerve of any kind! I

told her that if we were rescued, there was nothing to cry about, and if we weren't all our troubles would soon be over."

Grosvenor had put some fish before Lucia. She gave an awful shudder.

"Oh, take it away," she said. "Never let me see fish again, particularly cod, as long as I live. Tell the cook. You'll see why presently, Georgie. Elizabeth got hysterical and said she wasn't fit to die, so I scolded her—the best plan always with hysterical people—and told her that the longer she lived, the less fit she would be, and that did her a little good. Then it got dark, and there were fog-horns hooting all round us, and we called and yelled, but they had much more powerful voices than we, and nobody heard us. One of them grew louder and louder, until I could hardly bear it, and then we bumped quite gently into it, the fog-horn's boat I mean."

"Gracious, you might have upset," said Georgie.

"No, it was like a liner coming up to the quay," said Lucia. "No shock of any kind. Then when the fog-horn stopped, they heard us shouting, and took us aboard. It was an Italian trawler on its way to the cod fishery (that's why I never want to see cod again) on the Gallagher banks."

"That was lucky too," said Georgie, "you could make them understand a little. Better than if they had been Spanish."

"About the same, because I'm convinced, as I told Elizabeth, that they talked a very queer Neapolitan dialect. It was rather unlucky, in fact. But as the Captain understood English perfectly, it didn't matter. They were most polite, but they couldn't put us ashore, for we were miles out in the Channel by this time, and also quite lost. They hadn't an idea where the coast of England or any other coast was."

"Wireless?" suggested Georgie.

"It had been completely smashed up by the dreadful

gale the day before. We drifted about in the fog for two days, and when it cleared and they could take the sun again—a nautical expression, Georgie—we were somewhere off the coast of Devonshire. The captain promised to hail any passing vessel bound for England that he saw, but he didn't see any. So he continued his course to the Gallagher bank, which is about as far from Ireland as it is from America, and there we were for two months. Cod, cod, cod, nothing but cod, and Elizabeth snoring all night in the cabin we shared together. Bitterly cold very often: how glad I was that I knew so many callisthenic exercises! I shall tell you all about that time at my lecture. Then we found that there was a Tilling trawler on the bank, and when it was ready to start home we transhipped—they call it—and got back, as you know, this morning. That's the skeleton."

"It's the most wonderful skeleton I ever heard," said Georgie. "Do write your lecture quick."

Lucia fixed Georgie with her gimlet eye. It had lost none of its penetrative power by being so long at sea.

"Now it's your turn for a little," she said. "I expect I know rather more than you think. First about that memorial service."

"Oh, do you know about that?" he asked.

"Certainly. I found the copy of the Parish Magazine waiting for me, and read it in bed. I consider it to have been very premature. You attended it, I think."

"We all did," said Georgie. "And after all the Padre said extremely nice things about you."

"I felt very much flattered. But all the same it was too early. And you and Major Benjy were chief mourners."

Georgie considered for a moment.

"I'm going to make a clean breast of it," he said. "You told me you had left me Grebe, and a small sum of money, and your lawyer told me what that meant. My dear, I was too touched, and naturally, it was proper that I should be chief mourner. It was the same with

Major Benjy. He had seen Elizabeth's will, so there we were."

Suddenly an irresistible curiosity seized him.

"Major Benjy hasn't been seen all day," he said. "Do tell me what happened this morning at Mallards. You only said on the telephone that he had just gone home."

"Yes, bag and baggage," said Lucia. "At least he went first and his bag and baggage followed. Socks and things, you saw some of them on the top step. Elizabeth was mad with rage, a perfect fishwife. So suitable after coming back from the Gallagher bank. But tell me more. What was the next thing after the memorial service?"

The hope of keeping the knowledge of the cenotaph from Lucia became very dim. If Lucia had seen the February number of the Parish Magazine she had probably also seen the April number in which appeared the full page reproduction of that monument. Besides, there was the gimlet eye.

"The next thing was that I put up a beautiful cenotaph to you and Elizabeth," said Georgie firmly. "'In loving memory of by me.' But I've had the inscription erased to-day."

Lucia laid her hand on his.

"Dear Georgie, I'm glad you told me," she said. "As a matter of fact I knew, because Elizabeth and I studied it this morning. I was vexed at first, but now I think it's rather dear of you. It must have cost a lot of money."

"It did," said Georgie. "And what did Elizabeth think about it?"

"Merely furious because her name was in smaller letters than mine," said Lucia. "So like the poor thing."

"Was she terribly tarsome all these months?" asked Georgie.

"Tiresome's not quite the word," said Lucia judicially. "Deficient rather than tiresome, except incidentally.

She had no idea of the tremendous opportunities she was getting. She never rose to her chances, nor forgot our little discomforts and that everlasting smell of fish. Whereas I learned such lots of things, Georgie: the Italian for starboard and port—those are the right and left sides of the ship—and how to tie an anchor-knot and a running noose, and a clove-hitch, and how to splice two ends of fishing-line together, and all sorts of things of the most curious and interesting kind. I shall show you some of them at my lecture. I used to go about the deck barefoot (Lucia had very pretty feet) and pull on anchors and capstans and things, and managed never to tumble out of my berth on to the floor when the ship was rolling frightfully, and not to be seasick. But poor Elizabeth was always bumping on to the floor, and sometimes being sick there. She had no spirit. Little moans and sighs and regrets that she ever came down the Tilling hill on Boxing Day."

Lucia leaned forward and regarded Georgie steadfastly.

"I couldn't fathom her simply because she was so superficial," she said. "But I feel sure that there was something on her mind all the time. She used often to seem to be screwing herself up to confess something to me, and then not to be able to get it out. No courage. And though I can make no guess as to what it actually was, I believe I know its general nature."

"How thrilling!" cried Georgie. "Tell me!"

Lucia's eye ceased to bore, and became of far-off focus, keen still but speculative, as if she was Einstein concentrating on some cosmic deduction.

"Georgie, why did she come into my kitchen like a burglar on Boxing Day?" she asked. "She told me she had come to thank me for that *pâté* I sent her. But that wasn't true: anyone could see that it wasn't. Nobody goes into kitchens to thank people for *pâtés*."

"Diva guessed that she had gone there to see the Christmas-tree," said Georgie. "You weren't on very

good terms at the time. We all thought that brilliant of her."

"Then why shouldn't she have said so?" asked Lucia.

"I believe it was something much meaner and more underhand than that. And I am convinced—I have those perceptions sometimes, as you know very well—that all through the months of our Odyssey she wanted to tell me why she was there, and was ashamed of doing so. Naturally I never asked her, because if she didn't choose to tell me, it would be beneath me to force a confidence. There we were together on the Gallagher Bank, she all to bits all the time, and I should have scorned myself for attempting to worm it out of her. But the more I think of it, Georgie, the more convinced I am, that what she had to tell me and couldn't, concerned that. After all, I had unmasked every single plot she made against me before, and I knew the worst of her up till that moment. She had something on her mind, and that something was why she was in my kitchen."

Lucia's far-away prophetic aspect cleared.

"I shall find out all right," she said. "Poor Elizabeth will betray herself some time. But, Georgie, how in those weeks I missed my music! Not a piano on board any of the trawlers assembled there! Just a few concertinas and otherwise nothing except cod. Let us go, in a minute, into my music-room and have some Mozartino again. But first I want to say one thing."

Georgie took a rapid survey of all he had done in his conviction that Lucia had long ago been drowned. But if she knew about the memorial service and the cenotaph there could be nothing more except the kitchen-table, and that was now in its place again. She knew all that mattered. Lucia began to speak baby-talk.

"Georgie," she said. "Oo have had dweffel disappointy——"

That was too much. Georgie thumped the table quite hard.

"I haven't," he cried. "How dare you say that?"

"Ickle joke, Georgie," piped Lucia. "Haven't had joke for so long with that melancholy Liblib. 'Pologize, Oo not angry wif Lucia?"

"No, but don't do it again," said Georgie. "I won't have it."

"You shan't then," said Lucia, relapsing into the vernacular of adults. "Now all this house is spick and span, and Grosvenor tells me you've been paying all their wages, week by week."

"Naturally," said Georgie.

"It was very dear and thoughtful of you. You saw that my house was ready to welcome my return, and you must send me in all the bills and everything to-morrow and I'll pay them at once, and I thank you enormously for your care of it. And send me in the bill for the cenotaph too. I want to pay for it, I do indeed. It was a loving impulse of yours, Georgie, though, thank goodness, a hasty one. But I can't bear to think that you're out of pocket because I'm alive. Don't answer: I shan't listen. And now let's go straight to the piano and have one of our duets, the one we played last, that heavenly Mozartino."

They went into the next room. There was the duet ready on the piano, which much looked as if Lucia had been at it already, and she slid on to the top music-stool.

"We both come in on the third beat," said she. "Are you ready? Now! Uno, due, TRE!"