III

IT was hardly nine o'clock in the morning when they set out for the house-agent's, and the upper circles of Tilling were not yet fully astir. But there was a town-crier in a blue frock-coat ringing a bell in the High Street and proclaiming that the water-supply would be cut off that day from twelve noon till three in the afternoon. It was difficult to get to the house-agents', for the street where it was situated was being extensively excavated and they had chosen the wrong side of the road, and though they saw it opposite them when half-way down the street, a long detour must be made to reach it.

"But so characteristic, so charming," said Lucia. "Naturally there is a town-crier in Tilling, and naturally the streets are up. Do not be so impatient, Georgie. Ah, we can cross here."

There was a further period of suspense.

"The occupier of Mallards Cottage," said Mr. Woolgar (or it might have been Mr. Pipstow), "is wanting to let for three months, July, August and September. I'm not so sure that she would entertain——"

"Then will you please ring her up," interrupted Georgie, "and say you've had a firm offer for two months."

Mr. Woolgar turned round a crank like that used for starting rather old-fashioned motor-cars, and when a bell rang, he gave a number, and got into communication with the brown bungalow without proper plumbing.

"Very sorry, sir," he said, "but Miss Poppit has gone out for her sun-bath among the sand-dunes. She usually takes about three hours if fine."

"But we're leaving again this morning," said Georgie. "Can't her servant, or whoever it is, search the sand-dunes and ask her?"

"I'll inquire, sir," said Mr. Woolgar sympathetically. "But there are about two miles of sand-dunes, and she may be anywhere."

"Please inquire," said Georgie.

There was an awful period, during which Mr. Woolgar kept on saying "Quite," "Just so," "I see," "Yes, dear," with the most tedious monotony, in answer to unintelligible quacking noises from the other end.

"Quite impossible, I am afraid," he said at length. "Miss Poppit only keeps one servant, and she's got to look after the house. Besides, Miss Poppit likes—likes to be private when she's enjoying the sun."

"But how tarsome," said Georgie. "What am I to do?"

"Well, sir, there's Miss Poppit's mother you might get hold of. She is Mrs. Wyse now. Lately married. A beautiful wedding. The house you want is her property."

"I know," broke in Lucia. "Sables and a Rolls-Royce. Mr. Wyse has a monocle."

"Ah, if you know the lady, madam, that will be all right, and I can give you her address. Starling Cottage, Porpoise Street. I will write it down for you."

"Georgie, Porpoise Street!" whispered Lucia in an entranced aside. "Com' e bello e molto characteristuoso!"

While this was being done, Diva suddenly blew in, beginning to speak before she was wholly inside the office. A short tempestuous interlude ensued.

"— morning, Mr. Woolgar," said Diva, "and I've let Wasters, so you can cross it off your books; such a fine morning."

"Indeed, madam," said Mr. Woolgar. "Very satisfactory. And I hope your dear little canary is better."

"Still alive and in less pain, thank you, pip," said

Diva, and plunged through the excavations outside sooner than waste time in going round.

Mr. Woolgar apparently understood that "pip" was not a salutation but a disease of canaries, and did not say "So long" or "Pip pip." Calm returned again.

"I'll ring up Mrs. Wyse to say you will call, madam," he said. "Let me see: what name? It has escaped me for the moment."

As he had never known it, it was difficult to see how it could have escaped.

"Mrs. Lucas and Mr. Pillson," said Lucia. "Where is Porpoise Street?"

"Two minutes' walk from here, madam. As if you were going up to Mallards, but first turning to the right just short of it."

"Many thanks," said Lucia, "I know Mallards."

"The best house in Tilling, madam," said Mr. Woolgar, "if you were wanting something larger than Mallards Cottage. It is on our books, too."

The pride of proprietorship tempted Lucia for a moment to say "I've got it already," but she refrained. The complications which might have ensued, had she asked the price of it, were endless. . . .

"A great many houses to let in Tilling," she said.

"Yes, madam, a rare lot of letting goes on about this time of year," said Mr. Woolgar, "but they're all snapped up very quickly. Many ladies in Tilling like a little change in the summer."

It was impossible (since time was so precious, and Georgie so feverishly apprehensive, after this warning, that somebody else would secure Mallards Cottage before him, although the owner was safe in the sand-dunes for the present) to walk round the excavations in the street, and like Diva they made an intrepid short cut among gas-pipes and water mains and braziers and bricks to the other side. A sad splash of mud hurled itself against Georgie's fawn-coloured trousers as he stepped in a puddle, which was very tarsome, but it

was useless to attempt to brush it off till it was dry. As they went up the now familiar street towards Mallards they saw quaint Irene leaning out of the upper window of a small house, trying to take down a board that hung outside it which advertised that this house, too, was to let: the fact of her removing it seemed to indicate that from this moment it was to let no longer. Just as they passed, the board, which was painted in the most amazing colours, slipped from her hand and crashed on to the pavement, narrowly missing Diva who simultaneously popped out of the front door. It broke into splinters at her feet, and she gave a shrill cry of dismay. Then perceiving Irene she called up, "No harm done, dear," and Irene, in a voice of fury cried, "No harm? My beautiful board's broken to smithereens. Why didn't you catch it, silly?"

A snort of infinite contempt was the only proper reply, and Diva trundled swiftly away into the High Street again.

"But it's like a game of general post, Georgie," said Lucia excitedly, "and we're playing too. Are they all letting their houses to each other? Is that it?"

"I don't care whom they're letting them to," said Georgie, "so long as I get Mallards Cottage. Look at this tarsome mud on my trousers, and I daren't try to brush it off. What will Mrs. Wyse think? Here's Porpoise Street anyhow, and there's Starling Cottage. Elizabethan again."

The door was of old oak, without a handle, but with a bobbin in the strictest style, and there was a thickly patinated green bronze chain hanging close by, which Georgie rightly guessed to be the bell-pull, and so he pulled it. A large bronze bell, which he had not perceived, hanging close to his head, thereupon broke into a clamour that might have been heard not only in the house but all over Tilling, and startled him terribly. Then bobbins and gadgets were manipulated from within and they were shown into a room in which two very

diverse tastes were clearly exhibited. Oak beams crossed the ceiling, oak beams made a criss-cross on the walls: there was a large open fireplace of grey Dutch bricks, and on each side of the grate an ingle-nook with a section of another oak beam to sit down upon. The windows were latticed and had antique levers for their control: there was a refectory table and a spice-chest and some pewter mugs and a Bible-box and a coffin-stool. All this was one taste, and then came in another, for the room was full of beautiful objects of a very different sort. The refectory table was covered with photographs in silver frames: one was of a man in uniform and many decorations signed "Cecco Faraglione," another of a lady in Court dress with a quantity of plumes on her head signed "Amelia Faraglione." Another was of the King of Italy, another of a man in a frock-coat signed "Wyse." In front of these, rather prominent, was an open purple morocco box in which reposed the riband and cross of a Member of the Order of the British Empire. There was a cabinet of china in one corner with a malachite vase above it: there was an "occasional" table with a marble mosaic top: there was a satinwood piano draped with a piece of embroidery: a palm-tree: a green velvet sofa over the end of which lay a sable coat, and all these things spoke of post-Elizabethan refinements.

Long before Lucia had time to admire them all, there came a jingling from a door over which hung a curtain of reeds and beads, and Mrs. Wyse entered.

"So sorry to keep you waiting, Mrs. Lucas," she said, "but they thought I was in the garden, and I was in my boudoir all the time. And you must excuse my deshabille, just my shopping-frock. And Mr. Pillson, isn't it? So pleased. Pray be seated."

She heaved the sable-coat off the end of the sofa on to the window-seat.

"We've just been to see the house-agent," said Georgie in a great hurry, as he turned his muddied leg away

from the light, "and he told us that you might help me."

"Most happy I am sure, if I can. Pray tell me," said Mrs. Wyse, in apparent unconsciousness of what she could possibly help him about.

"Mallards Cottage," said Georgie. "There seems to be no chance of getting hold of Miss Poppit and we've got to leave before she comes back from her sun-bath. I so much want to take it for August and September."

Mrs. Wyse made a little cooing sound.

"Dear Isabel!" she said. "My daughter. Out in the sand-dunes all morning! What if a tramp came along? I say to her. But no use: she calls it the Browning Society, and she must not miss a meeting. So quick and clever! Browning, not the poet but the action of the sun."

"Most amusing!" said Georgie. "With regard to Mallards Cottage——"

"The little house is mine, as no doubt Mr. Woolgar told you," said Mrs. Wyse, forgetting she had been in complete ignorance of these manœuvres, "but you must certainly come and see over it, before anything is settled. . . . Ah, here is Mr. Wyse. Algernon: Mrs. Lucas and Mr. Pillson. Mr. Pillson wants to take Mallards Cottage."

Lucia thought she had never seen anyone so perfectly correct and polite as Mr. Wyse. He gave little bows and smiles to each as he spoke to them, and that in no condescending manner, nor yet cringingly, but as one consorting with his high-bred equals.

"From your beautiful Riseholme, I understand," he said to Lucia (bowing to Riseholme as well). "And we are all encouraging ourselves to hope that for two months at the least the charm of our picturesque—do you not find it so?—little Tilling will give Susan and myself the inestimable pleasure of being your neighbours. We shall look forward to August with keen anticipation. Remind me, dear Susan, to tell Amelia what is in store for us." He bowed to August, Susan and Amelia and

continued—"And now I hear that Mr. Pillson" (he bowed to Georgie and observed the drying spot of mud) "is 'after' as they say, after Mallards Cottage. This will indeed be a summer for Tilling."

Georgie, during this pretty speech which Mr. Wyse delivered in the most finished manner, was taking notes of his costume and appearance. His clean-shaven face, with abundant grey hair brushed back from his forehead was that of an actor who has seen his best days, but who has given command performances at Windsor. He wore a brown velveteen coat, a Byronic collar and a tie strictured with a cameo-ring: he wore brown knickerbockers and stockings to match, he wore neat golfing shoes. He looked as if he might be going to play golf, but somehow it didn't seem likely. . . .

Georgie and Lucia made polite deprecating murmurs.

"I was telling Mr. Pillson he must certainly see over it first," said Mrs. Wyse. "There are the keys of the cottage in my boudoir, if you'll kindly fetch them, Algernon. And the Royce is at the door, I see, so if Mrs. Lucas will allow us, we will all drive up there together, and show her and Mr. Pillson what there is."

While Algernon was gone, Mrs. Wyse picked up the photograph signed Amelia Faraglione.

"You recognize, no doubt, the family likeness," she said to Lucia. "My husband's sister Amelia who married the Conte di Faraglione, of the old Neapolitan nobility. That is he."

"Charming," said Lucia. "And so like Mr. Wyse. And that Order? What is that?"

Mrs. Wyse hastily shut the morocco box.

"So like servants to leave that about," she said. "But they seem proud of it. Graciously bestowed upon me. Member of the British Empire. Ah, here is Algernon with the keys. I was showing Mrs. Lucas, dear, the photograph of Amelia. She recognized the likeness at once. Now let us all pack in. A warm morning, is it not? I don't think I shall need my furs."

The total distance to be traversed was not more than a hundred yards, but Porpoise Street was very steep, and the cobbles which must be crossed very unpleasant to walk on, so Mrs. Wyse explained. They had to wait some little while at the corner, twenty yards away from where they started, for a van was coming down the street from the direction of Mallards, and the Royce could not possibly pass it, and then they came under fire of the windows of Miss Mapp's garden-room. As usual at this hour she was sitting there with the morning paper in her hand in which she could immerse herself if anybody passed whom she did not wish to see, but was otherwise intent on the movements of the street.

Diva Plaistow had looked in with the news that she had seen Lucia and Georgie at the house-agents', and that her canary still lived. Miss Mapp professed her delight to hear about the canary, but was secretly distrustful of whether Diva had seen the visitors or not. Diva was so imaginative; to have seen a man and a woman who were strangers was quite enough to make her believe she had seen Them. Then the Royce heaved into sight round the corner below, and Miss Mapp became much excited.

"I think, Diva," she said, "that this is Mrs. Lucas's beautiful car coming. Probably she is going to call on me about something she wants to know. If you sit at the piano you will see her as she gets out. Then we shall know whether you really——"

The car came slowly up, barked loudly and instead of stopping at the front door of Mallards, turned up the street in the direction of Mallards Cottage. Simultaneously Miss Mapp caught sight of that odious chauffeur of Mrs. Wyse's. She could not see more than people's knees in the car itself (that was the one disadvantage of the garden-room window being so high above the street), but there were several pairs of them.

"No, it's only Susan's great lumbering bus," she said, "filling up the street as usual. Probably she has found

out that Mrs. Lucas is staying at the 'Trader's Arms,' and has gone to leave cards. Such a woman to shove herself in where she's not wanted *I* never saw. Luckily I told Mrs. Lucas what a dreadful snob she was."

"A disappointment to you, dear, when you thought Mrs. Lucas was coming to call," said Diva. "But I did see them this morning at Woolgar's and it's no use saying I didn't!"

Miss Mapp uttered a shrill cry.

"Diva, they've stopped at Mallards Cottage. They're getting out. Susan first—so like her—and . . . it's Them. She's got hold of them somehow. . . . There's Mr. Wyse with the keys, bowing. . . . They're going in . . . I was right, then, when I saw them peering in through the windows yesterday. Mr. Pillson's come to see the house, and the Wyses have got hold of them. You may wager they know by now about the Count and Countess Faradiddleone, and the Order of the British Empire. I really didn't think Mrs. Lucas would be so easily taken in. However, it's no business of mine."

There could not have been a better reason for Miss Mapp being violently interested in all that happened. Then an idea struck her and the agitated creases in her face faded out.

"Let us pop in to Mallards Cottage, Diva, while they are still there," she said. I should hate to think that Mrs. Lucas should get her ideas of the society she will meet in Tilling from poor common Susan. Probably they would like a little lunch before their long drive back to Riseholme."

The inspection of the cottage had taken very little time. The main point in Georgie's mind was that Foljambe should be pleased, and there was an excellent bedroom for Foljambe, where she could sit when unoccupied. The rooms that concerned him had been viewed through the windows from the street the evening before. Consequently Miss Mapp had hardly had time to put

on her garden hat, and trip up the street with Diva, when the inspecting party came out.

"Sweet Susan!" she said. "I saw your car go by. . . . Dear Mrs. Lucas, good morning, I just popped across—this is Mrs. Plaistow—to see if you would not come and have an early lunch with me before you drive back to your lovely Riseholme. Any time would suit me, for I never have any breakfast. Twelve, half-past twelve? A little something?"

"So kind of you," said Lucia, "but Mrs. Wyse has just asked us to lunch with her."

"I see," said Miss Mapp, grinning frightfully. "Such a pity. I had hoped—but there it is."

Clearly it was incumbent on sweet Susan to ask her to join them at this early lunch, but sweet Susan showed no signs of doing anything of the sort. Off went Lucia and Georgie to the "Trader's Arms" to pack their belongings and leave the rest of the morning free, and the Wyses, after vainly trying to persuade them to drive there in the Royce, got into it themselves and backed down the street till it could turn in the slightly wider space opposite Miss Mapp's garden-room. This took a long time, and she was not able to get to her own front door till the manœuvre was executed, for as often as she tried to get round the front of the car it took a short run forward, and it threatened to squash her flat against the wall of her own room if she tried to squeeze round behind it.

But there were topics to gloat over which consoled her for this act of social piracy on the part of the Wyses. It was a noble stroke to have let Mallards for fifteen guineas a week without garden-produce, and an equally brilliant act to have got Diva's house for eight with garden-produce, for Diva had some remarkably fine plum-trees, the fruit of which would be ripe during her tenancy, not to mention apples: Miss Mapp foresaw a kitchen-cupboard the doors of which could not close because of the jam-pots within. Such reflections made

a happy mental background as she hurried out into the town, for there were businesses to be transacted without delay. She first went to the house-agents' and had rather a job to convince Mr. Woolgar that the letting of Mallards was due to her own advertisement in the *Times*, and that therefore she owed no commission to his firm, but her logic proved irresistible. Heated but refreshed by that encounter, she paid a visit to her greengrocer and made a pleasant arrangement for the sale of the produce of her own kitchen-garden at Mallards during the months of August and September. This errand brought her to the east end of the High Street, and there was Georgie already established on the belvedere busy sketching the Land-gate, before he went to breakfast (as those Wyses always called lunch) in Porpoise Street. Miss Mapp did not yet know whether he had taken Mallards Cottage or not, and that must be instantly ascertained.

She leaned on the railing close beside him, and moved a little, rustled a little, till he looked up.

"Oh, Mr. Pillson, how ashamed of myself I am!" she said. "But I couldn't help taking a peep at your lovely little sketch. So rude of me: just like an inquisitive stranger in the street. Never meant to interrupt you, but to steal away again when I'd had my peep. Every moment's precious to you, I know, as you're off this afternoon after your early lunch. But I must ask you whether your hotel was comfortable. I should be miserable if I thought that I had recommended it, and that you didn't like it."

"Very comfortable indeed, thank you," said Georgie.

Miss Mapp sidled up to the bench where he sat.

"I will just perch here for a moment before I flit off again," she said, "if you'll promise not to take any notice of me, but go on with your picky, as if I was not here. How well you've got the perspective! I always sit here for two or three minutes every morning to feast my eyes on the beauty of the outlook. What a pity

you can't stay longer here! You've only had a glimpse of our sweet Tilling."

Georgie held up his drawing.

"Have I got the perspective right, do you think?" he said. "Isn't it tarsome when you mean to make a road go downhill and it will go up instead?"

"No fear of that with you!" ejaculated Miss Mapp. "If I was a little bolder I should ask you to send your drawing to our Art Society here. We have a little exhibition every summer. Could I persuade you?"

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to finish it this morning," said Georgie.

"No chance then of your coming back?" she asked.

"In August, I hope," said he, "for I've taken Mallards Cottage for two months."

"Oh, Mr. Pillson, that is good news!" cried Miss Mapp. "Lovely! All August and September. Fancy!"

"I've got to be away for a week in August," said Georgie, "as we've got an Elizabethan fête at Riseholme. I'm Francis Drake."

That was a trove for Miss Mapp and must be published at once. She prepared to flit off.

"Oh how wonderful!" she said. "Dear me, I can quite see you. The *Golden Hind*! Spanish treasure! All the pomp and majesty. I wonder if I could manage to pop down to see it. But I won't interrupt you any more. So pleased to think it's only au reservoir and not good-bye."

She walked up the street again, bursting with her budget of news. Only the Wyses could possibly know that Georgie had taken Mallards Cottage, and nobody that he was going to impersonate Francis Drake. . . . There was the Padre talking to Major Benjy, no doubt on his way to the steam-tram, and there were Diva and Irene a little farther on.

"Good morning, Padre: good morning, Major Benjy," said she.

"Good morrow, Mistress Mapp," said the Padre.

"An' hoo's the time o' day wi' ye? 'Tis said you've a fair tenant for yon Mallards."

Miss Mapp fired off her news in a broadside.

"Indeed, I have, Padre," she said. "And there's Mallards Cottage, too, about which you won't have heard. Mr. Pillson has taken that, though he won't be here all the time as he's playing Francis Drake in a fête at Riseholme for a week."

Major Benjy was not in a very good temper. It was porridge morning with him, and his porridge had been burned. Miss Mapp already suspected something of the sort, for there had been loud angry sounds from within as she passed his dining-room window.

"That fellow whom I saw with Mrs. Lucas this morning with a cape over his arm?" he said scornfully. "Not much of a hand against the Spaniards, I should think. Ridiculous! Tea-parties with a lot of old cats more in his line. Pshaw!" And away he went to the tram, shovelling passengers off the pavement.

"Porridge burned, I expect," said Miss Mapp, thoughtfully, "though I couldn't say for certain. Morning, dear Irene. Another artist is coming to Tilling for August and September."

"Hoot awa', woman," said Irene, in recognition of the Padre's presence. "I ken that fine, for Mistress Wyse told me half an hour agone."

"But he'll be away for a week, though of course you know that, too," said Miss Mapp, slightly nettled. "Acting Francis Drake in a fête at Riseholme."

Diva trundled up.

"I don't suppose you've heard, Elizabeth," she said in a great hurry, "that Mr. Pillson has taken Mallards Cottage."

Miss Mapp smiled pityingly.

"Quite correct, dear Diva," she said. "Mr. Pillson told me himself hours ago. He's sketching the Landgate now—a sweet picky—and insisted that I should sit down and chat to him while he worked."

"Lor! How you draw them all in, Mapp," said quaint Irene. "He looks a promising young man for his age, but it's time he had his hair dyed again. Grey at the roots."

The Padre tore himself away; he had to hurry home and tell wee wifie.

"Aweel, I mustn't stand daffing here," he said, "I've got my sermon to think on."

Miss Mapp did a little more shopping, hung about on the chance of seeing Lucia again, and then went back to Mallards, to attend to her sweet flowers. Some of the beds wanted weeding, and now as she busied herself with that useful work and eradicated groundsel, each plant as she tore it up and flung it into her basket might have been Mr. and Mrs. Wyse. It was very annoying that they had stuck their hooks (so the process represented itself to her vigorous imagery) into Lucia, for Miss Mapp had intended to have no one's hook there but her own. She wanted to run her, to sponsor her, to arrange little parties for her, and cause Lucia to arrange other little parties at her dictation, and, while keeping her in her place, show her off to Tilling. Providence, or whatever less beneficent power ruled the world, had not been considerate of her clear right to do this, for it was she who had been put to the expense of advertising Mallards in the *Times*, and it was entirely owing to that that Lucia had come down here, and wound up that pleasant machine of sub-letting horses, so that everybody scored financially as well as got a change. But there was nothing to be done about that for the present: she must wait till Lucia arrived here, and then be both benignant and queenly. A very sweet woman, up till now, was her verdict, though possibly lacking in fine discernment, as witnessed by her having made friends with the Wyses. Then there was Georgie: she was equally well-disposed towards him for the present, but he, like Lucia, must be good, and recognize that she was the arbiter of all things social in Tilling. If he

behaved properly in that regard she would propose him as an honorary member of the Tilling Art Society, and, as member of the hanging committee, see that his work had a conspicuous place on the walls of the Exhibition, but it was worth remembering (in case he was not good) that quaint Irene had said that his hair was dyed, and that Major Benjy thought that he would have been very little use against the Spaniards.

But thinking was hungry work, and weeding was dirty work, and she went indoors to wash her hands for lunch after this exciting morning.

There was a dreadful block in Porpoise Street when Lucia's car came to pick up her and Georgie after their breakfast at Starling Cottage, for Mrs. Wyse's Royce was already drawn up there. The two purred and backed and advanced foot by foot, they sidled and stood on pavements meant for pedestrians, and it was not till Lucia's car had gone backwards again round the corner below Miss Mapp's garden-room, and Mrs. Wyse's forward towards the High Street, that Lucia's could come to the door, and the way down Porpoise Street lie open for their departure to Riseholme. As long as they were in sight, Susan stood waving her hand, and Algernon bowing.

Often during the drive Lucia tried, but always in vain, to start the subject which had kept them both awake last night, and tell Georgie that never would she marry again, but the moment she got near the topic of friendship, or even wondered how long Mrs. Plaistow had been a widow or whether Major Benjy would ever marry, Georgie saw a cow or a rainbow or something out of the window and violently directed attention to it. She could not quite make out what was going on in his mind. He shied away from such topics as friendship and widowhood, and she wondered if that was because he was not feeling quite ready yet, but was screwing himself up. If he only would let her develop those topics she could spare him the pain of a direct refusal, and thus soften the blow. But she had to give it up, determin-

ing, however, that when he came to dine with her that evening, she would not be silenced by his irrelevances: she would make it quite clear to him, before he embarked on his passionate declaration that, with all her affection for him, she could never marry him. . . . Poor Georgie!

She dropped him at his house, and as soon as he had told Foljambe about his having taken the house at Tilling (for that must be done at once), he would come across to the Hurst.

"I hope she will like the idea," said Georgie very gravely, as he got out, "and there is an excellent room for her, isn't there?"

Foljambe opened the door to him.

"A pleasant outing, I hope, sir," said she.

"Very indeed, thank you, Foljambe," said Georgie. "And I've got great news. Mrs. Lucas has taken a house at Tilling for August and September, and so have I. Quite close to hers. You could throw a stone."

"That'll be an agreeable change," said Foljambe.

"I think you'll like it. A beautiful bedroom for you."

"I'm sure I shall," said Foljambe.

Georgie was immensely relieved, and, as he went gaily across to the Hurst, he quite forgot for the time about this menace of matrimony.

"She likes the idea," he said before he had opened the gate into Perdita's garden, where Lucia was sitting.

"Georgie, the most wonderful thing," cried she. "Oh, Foljambe's pleased, is she? So glad. An excellent bedroom. I knew she would. But I've found a letter from Adele Brixton; you know, Lady Brixton who always goes to America when her husband comes to England, and the other way about, so that they only pass each other on the Atlantic; she wants to take the Hurst for three months. She came down here for a Sunday, don't you remember, and adored it. I instantly telephoned to say I would let it."

"Well, that is luck for you," said Georgie. "But three months—what will you do for the third?"

"Georgie, I don't know, and I'm not going to think," she said. "Something will happen: it's sure to. My dear, it's perfect rapture to feel the great tide of life flowing again. How I'm going to set to work on all the old interests and the new ones as well. Tilling, the age of Anne, and I shall get a translation of Pope's *Iliad* and of Plato's *Symposium* till I can rub up my Greek again. I have been getting lazy, and I have been getting —let us go into dinner—narrow. I think you have been doing the same. We must open out, and receive new impressions, and adjust ourselves to new conditions!"

This last sentence startled Georgie very much, though it might only apply to Tilling, but Lucia did not seem to notice his faltering step as he followed her into the panelled dining-room with the refectory table, below which it was so hard to adjust the feet with any comfort, owing to the foot-rail.

"Those people at Tilling," she said, "how interesting it will all be. They seemed to me very much alive. especially the women, who appear to have got their majors and their padres completely under their thumbs. Delicious, isn't it, to think of the new interchange of experience which awaits us. Here, nothing happens. Our dear Daisy gets a little rounder and Mrs. Arbuthnot a little deafer. We're in a rut: Riseholme is in a rut. We want, both of us, to get out of it, and now we're going to. Fresh fields and pastures new, Georgie. . . . Nothing on your mind, my dear? You were so *distrait* as we drove home."

Some frightful revivification, thought poor Georgie, had happened to Lucia. It had been delightful, only a couple of days ago, to see her returning to her normal interests, but this repudiation of Riseholme and the craving for the *Iliad* and Tilling and the *Symposium* indicated an almost dangerous appetite for novelty. Or was it only that having bottled herself up for a year, it was natural that, the cork being now out, she should overflow in these ebullitions? She seemed to be lashing

her tail, goading herself to some further revelation of her mental or spiritual needs. He shuddered at the thought of what further novelty might be popping out next. The question perhaps.

"I'm sorry I was *distrait*," said he. "Of course I was anxious about how Foljambe might take the idea of Tilling."

Lucia struck the pomander, and it was a relief to Georgie to know that Grosvenor would at once glide in. . . . She laughed and laid her hand affectionately on his.

"Georgie, dear, you are"—she took refuge in Italian as Grosvenor appeared—"you are una vecchia signorina." (That means "old maid," thought Georgie.) "Wider horizons, Georgie: that is what you want. Put the rest of the food on the table, Grosvenor, and we'll help ourselves. Coffee in the music-room when I ring."

This was ghastly: Lucia, with all this talk of his being an old maid and needing to adapt himself to new conditions, was truly alarming. He almost wondered if she had been taking monkey-gland during her seclusion. Was she going to propose to him in the middle of dinner? Never, in all the years of his friendship with her, had he felt himself so strangely alien. But he was still the master of his fate (at least he hoped so), and it should not be that.

"Shall I give you some strawberry fool?" he asked miserably.

Lucia did not seem to hear him.

"Georgie, we must have 'ickle talk, before I ring for coffee," she said. "How long have you and I been dear friends? Longer than either of us care to think."

"But all so pleasant," said Georgie, rubbing his cold moist hands on his napkin. . . . He wondered if drowning was anything like this.

"My dear, what do the years matter, if they have only deepened and broadened our friendship? Happy years, Georgie, bringing their sheaves with them. That lovely

scene in Esmondi; Winchester Cathedral! And now we're both getting on. You're rather alone in the world, and so am I, but people like us with this dear strong bond of friendship between us can look forward to old age—can't we?—without any qualms. Tranquillity comes with years, and that horrid thing which Freud calls sex is expunged. We must read some Freud, I think; I have read none at present. That was one of the things I wanted to say all the time that you would show me cows out of the window. Our friendship is just perfect as it is."

Georgie's relief when he found that Foljambe liked the idea of Tilling was nothing, positively nothing, to the relief he felt now.

"My dear, how sweet of you to say that," he said. "I, too, find the quality of our friendship perfect in every way. Quite impossible, in fact, to think of—I mean, I quite agree with you. As you say, we're getting on in years, I mean I am. You're right a thousand times."

Lucia saw the sunlit dawn of relief in Georgie's face, and though she had been quite sincere in hoping that he would not be terribly hurt when she hinted to him that he must give up all hopes of being more to her than he was, she had not quite expected this effulgence. It was as if instead of pronouncing his sentence, she had taken from him some secret burden of terrible anxiety. For the moment her own satisfaction at having brought this off without paining him was swallowed up in surprise that he was so far from being pained. Was it possible that all his concern to interest her in cows and rainbows was due to apprehension that she might be leading up, *via* the topics of friendship and marriage, to something exceedingly different from the disclosure which had evidently gratified him rather than the reverse?

She struck the pomander quite a sharp blow.

"Let us go and have our coffee then," she said. "It is lovely that we are of one mind. Lovely! And there's

another subject we haven't spoken about at all. Miss Mapp. What do you make of Miss Mapp? There was a look in her eye when she heard we were going to lunch with Mrs. Wyse that amazed me. She would have liked to bite her or scratch her. What did it mean? It was as if Mrs. Wyse—she asked me to call her Susan by the way, but I'm not sure that I can manage it just yet without practising—as if Mrs. Wyse had pocketed something of hers. Most extraordinary. I don't belong to Miss Mapp. Of course it's easy to see that she thinks herself very much superior to all the rest of Tilling. She says that all her friends are angels and lambs, and then just crabs them a little. Marcate mie parole, Georgino! I believe she wants to run me. I believe Tilling is seething with intrigue. But we shall see. How I hate all that sort of thing! We have had a touch of it now and then in Riseholme. As if it mattered who took the lead! We should aim at being equal citizens of a noble republic, where art and literature and all the manifold interests of the world are our concern. Now let us have a little music."

Whatever might be the state of affairs at Tilling, Riseholme during this month of July boiled and seethed with excitements. It was just like old times, and all circled, as of old, round Lucia. She had taken the plunge; she had come back (though just now for so brief a space before her entering upon Mallards) into her native centrality. Gradually, and in increasing areas, grey and white and violet invaded the unrelieved black in which she had spent the year of her widowhood; one day she wore a white belt, another there were grey panels in her skirt, another her garden-hat had a violet riband on it. Even Georgie, who had a great eye for female attire, could not accurately follow these cumulative changes: he could not be sure whether she had worn a grey cloak before, or whether she had had white gloves in church last Sunday. Then, instead of letting her hair

droop in slack and mournful braids over her ears, it resumed its old polished and corrugated appearance, and on her pale cheeks (ashen with grief) there bloomed a little brown rouge, which made her look as if she had been playing golf again, and her lips certainly were ruddier. It was all intensely exciting, a series of subtle changes at the end of which, by the middle of July, her epiphany in church without anything black about her, and with the bloom of her vitality quite restored, passed almost unremarked.

These outward and visible signs were duly representative of what had taken place within. Time, the great healer, had visited her sick-room, laid his hand on her languid brow, and the results were truly astonishing. Lucia became as good as new, or as good as old. Mrs. Arbuthnot and her tall daughters, Piggy and Goosie, Georgie and Daisy and her husband, greedy Robert, Colonel Boucher and his wife, and the rest were all bidden to dinner at the Hurst once more, and sometimes Lucia played to them the slow movement of the Moonlight Sonata, and sometimes she instructed them in such elements of Contract Bridge as she had mastered during the day. She sketched, she played the organ in church in the absence of the organist who had measles, she sang a solo, " O for the wings of a Dove " when he recovered and the leading chorister got chicken-pox, she had lessons in book-binding at " Ye Signe of ye Daffodille," she sat in Perdita's garden, not reading Shakespeare, but Pope's *Iliad*, and murmured half-forgotten fragments of Greek irregular verbs as she went to sleep. She had a plan for visiting Athens in the spring (" ' the violet-crowned,' is not that a lovely epithet, Georgie ? ") and in compliment to Queen Anne regaled her guests with rich thick chocolate. The hounds of spring were on the winter traces of her widowhood, and snapped up every fragment of it, and indeed spring seemed truly to have returned to her, so various and so multi-coloured were the blossoms that were unfolding. Never

at all had Riseholme seen Lucia in finer artistic and intellectual fettle, and it was a long time since she had looked so gay. The world, or at any rate Riseholme, which at Riseholme came to much the same thing, had become her parish again.

Georgie, worked to the bone with playing duets, with consulting Foljambe as to questions of linen and plate (for it appeared that Isabel Poppit, in pursuance of the simple life, slept between blankets in the backyard, and ate uncooked vegetables out of a wooden bowl like a dog), with learning Vanderbilt conventions, with taking part in Royal processions across the Green, with packing his bibelots and sending them to the bank, with sketching, so that he might be in good form when he began to paint at Tilling with a view to exhibiting in the Art Society, wondered what was the true source of these stupendous activities of Lucia's, whether she was getting fit, getting in training, so to speak, for a campaign at Tilling. Somehow it seemed likely, for she would hardly think it worth while to run the affairs of Riseholme with such energy, when she was about to disappear from it for three months. Or was she intending to let Riseholme see how dreadfully flat everything would become when she left them? Very likely both these purposes were at work; it was like her to kill two birds with one stone. Indeed, she was perhaps killing three birds with one stone, for multifarious as were the interests in which she was engaged there was one, now looming large in Riseholme, namely the Elizabethan fête, of which she seemed strangely unconscious. Her drive, her powers of instilling her friends with her own fervour, never touched that: she did not seem to know that a fête was being contemplated at all, though now a day seldom passed without a procession of some sort crossing the Green or a Morris-dance getting entangled with the choristers practising madrigals, or a crowd of soldiers and courtiers being assembled near the front entrance of the "Ambermere Arms," while Daisy harangued them

from a chair put on the top of a table, pausing occasionally because she forgot her words, or in order to allow them to throw up their hats and cry "God Save the Queen's Grace," "To hell with Spain," and other suitable ejaculations. Daisy, occasionally now in full dress, ruff and pearls and all, came across to the gate of the Hurst, to wait for the procession to join her, and Lucia sitting in Perdita's garden would talk to her about Tilling or the importance of being prudent if you were vulnerable at contract, apparently unaware that Daisy was dressed up at all. Once Lucia came out of the "Ambermere Arms" when Daisy was actually mounting the palfrey that drew the milk-cart for a full-dress rehearsal, and she seemed to be positively palfrey-blind. She merely said "Don't forget that you and Robert are dining with me to-night. Half-past seven, so that we shall get a good evening's bridge," and went on her way. . . . Or she would be passing the pond on which the framework of the *Golden Hind* was already constructed, and on which Georgie was even then kneeling down to receive the accolade amid the faint cheers of Piggy and Goosie, and she just waved her hand to Georgie and said: "Musica after lunch, Georgie?" She made no sarcastic comments to anybody, and did not know that they were doing anything out of the ordinary.

Under this pointed unconsciousness of hers, a species of blight spread over the scheme to which Riseholme ought to have been devoting its most enthusiastic energies. The courtiers were late for rehearsals, they did not even remove their cigarettes when they bent to kiss the Queen's hand, Piggy and Goosie made steps of Morris-dances when they ought to have been holding up Elizabeth's train, and Georgie snatched up a cushion, when the accolade was imminent, to protect his shoulder. The choir-boys droned their way through madrigals, sucking peppermints, there was no life, no keenness about it all, because Lucia, who was used to inspire all Riseholme's activities, was unaware that anything was going on.

One morning when only a fortnight of July was still to run, Drake was engaged on his croquet-lawn tapping the balls about and trying to tame his white satin shoes which hurt terribly. From the garden next door came the familiar accents of the Queen's speech to her troops.

"And though I am only a weak woman," declaimed Daisy who was determined to go through the speech without referring to her book. "Though I am only a weak woman, a weak woman——" she repeated.

"Yet I have the heart of a Prince," shouted Drake with the friendly intention of prompting her.

"Thank you, Georgie. Or ought it to be Princess, do you think?"

"No: Prince," said Georgie.

"Prince," cried Daisy. "Though I am only a weak woman, yet I have the heart of a Prince. . . . Let me see. . . . Prince."

There was silence.

"Georgie," said Daisy in her ordinary voice. "Do stop your croquet a minute and come to the paling. I want to talk."

"I'm trying to get used to these shoes," said Georgie. "They hurt frightfully. I shall have to take them to Tilling and wear them there. Oh, I haven't told you, Lady Brixton came down yesterday evening——"

"I know that," said Daisy.

"—and she thinks that her brother will take my house for a couple of months, as long as I don't leave any servants. He'll be here for the fête, if he does, so I wonder if you could put me up. How's Robert's cold?"

"Worse," she said. "I'm worse too. I can't remember half of what I knew by heart a week ago. Isn't there some memory-system?"

"Lots, I believe," said Georgie. "But it's rather late. They don't improve your memory all in a minute. I really think you had better read your speech to the troops, as if it was the opening of Parliament."

"I won't," said Daisy, taking off her ruff. "I'll learn it if it costs me the last breath of blood in my body —I mean drop."

"Well, it will be very awkward if you forget it all," said Georgie. "We can't cheer nothing at all. Such a pity, because your voice carries perfectly now. I could hear you while I was breakfasting."

"And it's not only that," said Daisy. "There's no life in the thing. It doesn't look as if it was happening."

"No, that's true," said Georgie. "These tarsome shoes of mine are real enough, though!"

"I begin to think we ought to have had a producer," said Daisy. "But it was so much finer to do it all ourselves, like—like Oberammergau. Does Lucia ever say anything about it? I think it's too mean for words of her to take no interest in it."

"Well, you must remember that you asked her only to be my wife," said Georgie. "Naturally she wouldn't like that."

"She ought to help us instead of going about as if we were all invisible," exclaimed Daisy.

"My dear, she did offer to help you. At least, I told you ages ago, that I felt sure she would if you asked her to."

"I feel inclined to chuck the whole thing," said Daisy.

"But you can't. Masses of tickets have been sold. And who's to pay for the *Golden Hind* and the roast sheep and all the costumes?" asked Georgie. "Not to mention all our trouble. Why not ask her to help, if you want her to?"

"Georgie, will you ask her?" said Daisy.

"Certainly not," said Georgie very firmly. "You've been managing it from the first. It's your show. If I were you, I would ask her at once. She'll be over here in a few minutes, as we're going to have a music. Pop in."

A melodious cry of "Georgino mio!" resounded from the open window of Georgie's drawing-room, and he hobbled away down the garden walk. Ever since that

beautiful understanding they had arrived at, that both of them shrank, as from a cup of hemlock, from the idea of marriage, they had talked Italian or baby language to a surprising extent from mere lightness of heart.

"Me tummin'," he called. "Oo very good girl, Lucia. Oo molto punctuale."

(He was not sure about that last word, nor was Lucia, but she understood it.)

"Georgino! Che curiose scalpe!" said Lucia, leaning out of the window.

"Don't be so cattiva. They are cattivo enough," said Georgie. "But Drake did have shoes exactly like these."

The mere mention of Drake naturally caused Lucia to talk about something else. She did not understand any allusion to Drake.

"Now for a good practice," she said, as Georgie limped into the drawing-room. "Foljambe beamed at me. How happy it all is! I hope you said you were at home to nobody. Let us begin at once. Can you manage the *sostenuto* pedal in those odd shoes?"

Foljambe entered.

"Mrs. Quantock, sir," she said.

"Daisy darling," said Lucia effusively. "Come to hear our little practice? We must play our best, Georgino."

Daisy was still in queenly costume, except for the ruff. Lucia seemed as usual to be quite unconscious of it.

"Lucia, before you begin——" said Daisy.

"So much better than interrupting," said Lucia. "Thank you, dear. Yes?"

"About this fête. Oh, for gracious' sake don't go on seeming to know nothing about it. I tell you there is to be one. And it's all nohow. Can't you help us?"

Lucia sprang from the music-stool. She had been waiting for this moment, not impatiently, but ready for it if it came, as she knew it must, without any scheming on her part. She had been watching from Perdita's garden the straggling procession smoking cigarettes, the listless halberdiers not walking in step, the courtiers

yawning in Her Majesty's face, the languor and the looseness arising from the lack of an inspiring mind. The scene on the *Golden Hind*, and that of Elizabeth's speech to her troops were equally familiar to her, for though she could not observe them from under her garden-hat close at hand, her husband had been fond of astronomy and there were telescopes great and small, which brought these scenes quite close. Moreover, she had that speech which poor Daisy found so elusive by heart. So easy to learn, just the sort of cheap bombast that Elizabeth would indulge in: she had found it in a small history of England, and had committed it to memory, just in case. . . .

"But I'll willingly help you, dear Daisy," she said. "I seem to remember you told me something about it. You as Queen Elizabeth, was it not, a roast sheep on the *Golden Hind*, a speech to the troops, Morris-dances, bear-baiting, no, not bear-baiting. Isn't it all going beautifully?"

"No! It isn't," said Daisy in a lamentable voice. "I want you to help us, will you? It's all like dough."

Great was Lucia. There was no rubbing in: there was no hesitation, there was nothing but helpful sunny cordiality in response to this S.O.S.

"How you all work me!" she said, "but I'll try to help you if I can. Georgie, we must put off our practice, and get to grips with all this, if the fête is to be a credit to Riseholme. Addio, caro Mozartino for the present. Now begin, Daisy, and tell me all the trouble."

For the next week Mozartino and the *Symposium* and contract bridge were non-existent and rehearsals went on all day. Lucia demonstrated to Daisy how to make her first appearance, and, when the trumpeters blew a fanfare, she came out of the door of the Hurst, and without the slightest hurry majestically marched down the crazy pavement. She did not fumble at the gate as Daisy always did, but with a swift imperious nod to Robert Quantock, which made him pause in the middle of a

sneeze, she caused him to fly forward, open it, and kneel as she passed through. She made a wonderful curtsey to her lieges and motioned them to close up in front of her. And all this was done in the clothes of to-day, without a ruff or a pearl to help her.

"Something like that, do you think, dear Daisy, for the start of the procession?" she said to her. "Will you try it like that and see how it goes? And a little more briskness, gentlemen, from the halberdiers. Would you form in front of me now, while Mrs. Quantock goes into the house. . . . Ah, that has more snap, hasn't it? Excellent. Quite like guardsmen. Piggy and Goosie, my dears, you must remember that you are Elizabethan Countesses. Very stately, please, and Countesses never giggle. Sweep two low curtsies, and while still down pick up the Queen's train. You opened the gate very properly, Robert. Very nice indeed. Now may we have that all over again. Queen, please," she called to Daisy.

Daisy came out of the house in all the panoply of Majesty, and with the idea of not hurrying came so slowly that her progress resembled that of a queen following a hearse. ("A little quicker, dear," called Lucia encouragingly. "We're all ready.") Then she tripped over a piece of loose crazy pavement. Then she sneezed, for she had certainly caught Robert's cold. Then she forgot to bow to her lieges, until they had closed up in procession in front of her, and then bobbed to their backs.

"Hey ho, nonny, nonny," sang Lucia to start the chorus. "Off we go! Right, left—I beg your pardon, how stupid of me—Left, right. Crescendo, choir. Sing out, please. We're being Merrie England. Capital!"

Lucia walked by the side of the procession across the Green, beating time with her parasol, full of encouragement and enthusiasm. Sometimes she ran on in front and observed their progress, sometimes she stood still to watch them go by.

"Open out a little, halberdiers," she cried, "so that

we can get a glimpse of the Queen from in front. Hey nonny! Hold that top G, choir-boys! Queen, dear, don't attempt to keep step with the halberdiers. Much more royal to walk as you choose. The train a little higher, Piggy and Goosie. Hey nonny, nonny HEY!"

She looked round as they got near the *Golden Hind*, to see if the cooks were basting the bolster that did duty for the sheep, and that Drake's sailors were dancing their hornpipes.

"Dance, please, sailors," she shrieked. "Go on basting, cooks, until the procession stops, and then begins the chorus of sailors on the last 'nonny Hey.' Cooks must join in, too, or we shan't get enough body of sound. Open out, halberdiers, leave plenty of room for the Queen to come between you. Slowly, Elizabeth! 'When the storm winds blow and the surges sweep.' Louder! Are you ready, Georgie? No; don't come off the *Golden Hind*. You receive the Queen on the deck. A little faster, Elizabeth, the chorus will be over before you get here."

Lucia clapped her hands.

"A moment, please," she said. "A wonderful scene. But just one suggestion. May I be Queen for a minute and show you the effect I want to get, dear Daisy? Let us go back, procession, please, twenty yards. Halberdiers still walking in front of Queen. Sailors' chorus all over again. Off we go! Now, halberdiers, open out. Half right and left turn respectively. Two more steps and halt, making an avenue."

It was perfectly timed. Lucia moved forward up the avenue of halberdiers, and just as the last "Yo ho" was yelled by cooks, courtiers and sailors, she stepped with indescribable majesty on to the deck of the *Golden Hind*. She stood there a moment quite still, and whispered to Georgie, "Kneel and kiss my hand, Georgie. Now, everybody together! 'God save the Queen.' 'Hurrah.' Hats in the air. Louder, louder! Now die away! There!"

Lucia had been waving her own hat, and shrilly cheering

herself, and now she again clapped her hands for attention, as she scrutinized the deck of the *Golden Hind.*

"But I don't see Drake's wife," she said. "Drake's wife, please."

Drake's wife was certainly missing. She was also the grocer's wife, and as she had only to come forward for one moment, curtsey and disappear, she was rather slack at her attendance of rehearsals.

"It doesn't matter," said Lucia. "I'll take Drake's wife, just for this rehearsal. Now we must have that over again. It's one of the most important moments, this Queen's entry on to the *Golden Hind.* We must make it rich in romance, in majesty, in spaciousness. Will the procession, please, go back, and do it over again?"

This time poor Daisy was much too early. She got to the *Golden Hind* long before the cooks and the chorus were ready for her. But there was a murmur of applause when Mrs. Drake (so soon to be Lady Drake) ran forward and threw herself at the Queen's feet in an ecstasy of loyalty, and having kissed her hand walked backwards from the Presence with head bent low, as if in adoration.

"Now step to the Queen's left, Georgie," said Lucia, "and take her left hand, holding it high and lead her to the banquet. Daisy dear, you *must* mind your train. Piggy and Goosie will lay it down as you reach the deck, and then you must look after it yourself. If you're not careful you'll tread on it and fall into the Thames. You've got to move so that it follows you when you turn round."

"May I kick it?" asked Daisy.

"No, it can be done without. You must practise that."

The whole company now, sailors, soldiers, courtiers and all were eager as dogs are to be taken out for a walk by their mistress, and Lucia reluctantly consented to come and look at the scene of the review at Tilbury. Possibly some little idea, she diffidently said, might

occur to her; fresh eyes sometimes saw something, and if they all really wanted her she was at their disposal. So off they went to the rendezvous in front of the "Ambermere Arms," and the fresh eyes perceived that according to the present grouping of soldiers and populace no spectator would see anything of the Queen at all. So that was rectified, and the mob was drilled to run into its proper places with due eagerness, and Lucia sat where the front row of spectators would be to hear the great speech. When it was over she warmly congratulated the Queen.

"Oh, I'm so glad you liked it," said the Queen. "Is there anything that strikes you?"

Lucia sat for a while in pensive silence.

"Just one or two little tiny things, dear," she said, thoughtfully. "I couldn't hear very well. I wondered sometimes what the mob was cheering about. And would it perhaps be safer to read the speech? There was a good deal of prompting that was quite audible. Of course there are disadvantages in reading it. It won't seem so spontaneous and inspiring if you consult a paper all the time. Still, I daresay you'll get it quite by heart before the time comes. Indeed, the only real criticism I have to make is about your gestures, your movements. Not quite, quite majestic enough, not inspiring enough. Too much as if you were whisking flies away. More breadth!"

Lucia sighed, she appeared to be lost in meditation.

"What kind of breadth?" asked Daisy.

"So difficult to explain," said Lucia. "You must get more variety, more force, both in your gestures and your voice. You must be fierce sometimes, the great foe of Spain, you must be tender, the mother of your people. You must be a Tudor. The daughter of that glorious cad, King Hal. Coarse and kingly. Shall I show you for a moment the sort of thing I mean? So much easier to show than to explain."

Daisy's heart sank: she was full of vague apprehen-

sions. But having asked for help, she could hardly refuse this generous granting of it, for indeed Lucia was giving up her whole morning.

"Very good of you," she said.

"Lend me your copy of the speech, then," said Lucia, "and might I borrow your ruff, just to encourage myself. Now let me read through the speech to myself. Yes . . . yes . . . crescendo, and flare up then . . . pause again; a touch of tenderness. . . . Well, as you insist on it I'll try to show you what I mean. Terribly nervous, though."

Lucia advanced and spoke in the most ingratiating tones to her army and the mob.

"Please have patience with me, ladies and gentlemen," she said, "while I go through the speech once more. Wonderful words, aren't they? I know I shan't do them justice. Let me see: the palfrey with the Queen will come out from the garden of the 'Ambermere Arms,' will it not? Then will the whole mob, please, hurry into the garden and then come out romping and cheering and that sort of thing in front of me. When I get to where the table is, that is to say, where the palfrey will stand as I make my speech, some of the mob must fall back, and the rest sit on the grass, so that the spectators may see. Now, please."

Lucia stalked in from the garden, joining the mob now and then to show them how to gambol, and nimbly vaulted (thanks to calisthenics) on to the table on which was the chair where she sat on horseback.

Then with a great sweep of her arm she began to speak. The copy of the speech which she carried flew out of hand, but that made no difference, for she had it all by heart, and without pause, except for the bursts of cheering from the mob, when she pointed at them, she declaimed it all, her voice now rising, now falling, now full of fire, now tender and motherly. Then she got down from the table, and passed along the line of her troops, beckoned to the mob—which in the previous scene had been cooks

and sailors and all sorts of things—to close up behind her with shouts and cheers and gambollings, and went off down the garden path again.

"That sort of thing, dear Daisy, don't you think?" she said to the Queen, returning her ruff. "So crude and awkwardly done I know, but perhaps that may be the way to put a little life into it. Ah, there's your copy of the speech. Quite familiar to me, I found. I dare say I learned it when I was at school. Now, I really must be off. I wish I could think that I had been any use."

Next morning Lucia was too busy to superintend the rehearsal: she was sure that Daisy would manage it beautifully, and she was indeed very busy watching through a field-glass in the music-room the muddled and anæmic performance. The halberdiers strolled along with their hands in their pockets. Piggy and Goosie sat down on the grass, and Daisy knew less of her speech than ever. The collective consciousness of Riseholme began to be aware that nothing could be done without Lucia, and conspiratorial groups conferred stealthily, dispersing or dropping their voices as Queen Elizabeth approached and forming again when she had gone by. The choir which had sung so convincingly when Lucia was there with her loud "Hey nonny nonny," never bothered about the high G at all, but simply left it out; the young Elizabethans who had gambolled like intoxicated lambkins under her stimulating eye sat down and chewed daisies; the cooks never attempted to baste the bolster; and the Queen's speech to her troops was received with the most respectful tranquillity.

Georgie, in Drake's shoes which were becoming less agonizing with use, lunched with Colonel and Mrs. Boucher. Mrs. Boucher was practically the only Riseholmite who was taking no part in the fête, because her locomotion was confined to the wheels of a bath-chair. But she attended every rehearsal and had views which were as strong as her voice.

"You may like it or not," she said very emphatically,

"but the only person who can pull you through is Lucia."

"Nobody can pull poor Daisy through," said Georgie. "Hopeless!"

"That's what I mean," said she. "If Lucia isn't the Queen, I say give it all up. Poor Daisy's bitten off, if you won't misunderstand me, as we're all such friends of hers, more than she can chew. My kitchen-cat, and I don't care who knows it, would make a better Queen."

"But Lucia's going off to Tilling next week," said Georgie. "She won't be here even."

"Well, beg and implore her not to desert Riseholme," said Mrs. Boucher. "Why, everybody was muttering about it this morning, army and navy and all. It was like a revolution. There was Mrs. Arbuthnot; she said to me, 'Oh dear, oh dear, it will never do at all,' and there was poor Daisy standing close beside her; and we all turned red. Most awkward. And it's up to you, Georgie, to go down on your knees to Lucia and say 'Save Riseholme!' There!"

"But she refused to have anything to do with it, after Daisy asked her to be my wife," said Georgie Drake.

"Naturally she would be most indignant. An insult. But you and Daisy must implore her. Perhaps she could go to Tilling and settle herself in and then come back for the fête, for she doesn't need any rehearsals. She could act every part herself if she could be a crowd."

"Marvellous woman!" said Colonel Boucher. "Every word of the Queen's speech by heart, singing with the choir, basting with the cooks, dancing with the sailors. That's what I call instinct, eh? You'd have thought she had been studying it all the time. I agree with my wife, Georgie. The difficulty is Daisy. *Would* she give it up?"

Georgie brightened.

"She did say that she felt inclined to chuck the whole thing, a few days ago," he said.

"There you are, then," said Mrs. Boucher. "Remind

her of what she said. You and she go to Lucia before you waste time over another rehearsal without her, and implore her. Implore! I shouldn't a bit wonder if she said yes. Indeed, if you ask me, I believe that she's been keeping out of it all until you saw you couldn't do without her. Then she came to help at a rehearsal, and you all saw what you could do when she was there. Why, I burst out cheering myself when she said she had the heart of a Prince. Then she retires again as she did this morning, and more than ever you see you can't do without her. I say she's waiting to be asked. It would be like her, you know."

That was an illuminating thought; it certainly seemed tremendously like Lucia at her very best.

"I believe you're right. She's cleverer than all of us put together," said Georgie. "I shall go over to Daisy at once and sound her. Thank God, my shoes are better."

It was a gloomy queen that Georgie found, a Queen of Sheba with no spirit left in her, but only a calmness of despair.

"It went worse than ever this morning," she remarked. "And I daresay we've not touched bottom yet. Georgie, what is to be done?"

It was more delicate to give Daisy the chance of abdicating herself.

"I'm sure I don't know," said he. "But something's got to be done. I wish I could think what."

Daisy was rent with pangs of jealousy and of consciousness of her supreme impotence. She took half a glass of port, which her regime told her was deadly poison.

"Georgie! Do you think there's the slightest chance of getting Lucia to be the Queen and managing the whole affair?" she asked quaveringly.

"We might try," said Georgie. "The Bouchers are for it, and everybody else as well, I think."

"Well, come quick then, or I may repent," said Daisy.

Lucia had seen them coming, and sat down at her

piano. She had not time to open her music, and so began the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata.

"Ah, how nice!" she said. "Georgie, I'm going to practise all afternoon. Poor fingers so rusty! And did you have a lovely rehearsal this morning? Speech going well, Daisy? I'm sure it is."

"Couldn't remember a word," said Daisy. "Lucia, we all want to turn the whole thing over to you, Queen and all. Will you——?"

"Please, Lucia," said Georgie.

Lucia looked from one to the other in amazement.

"But, dear things, how can I?" she said. "I shan't be here to begin with. I shall be at Tilling. And then all the trouble you've been taking, Daisy. I couldn't. Impossible. Cruel."

"We can't do it at all without you," said Daisy firmly. "So that's impossible too. Please, Lucia."

Lucia seemed quite bewildered by these earnest entreaties.

"Can't you come back for the fête?" said Georgie. "Rehearse all day, every day, till the end of the month. Then go to Tilling, and you and I will return just for the week of the fête."

Lucia seemed to be experiencing a dreadful struggle with herself.

"Dear Georgie, dear Daisy, you're asking a great sacrifice of me," she said. "I had planned my days here so carefully. My music, my Dante: all my lessons! I shall have to give them all up, you know, if I'm to get this fête into any sort of shape. No time for anything else."

A miserable two-part fugue of "Please, Lucia. It's the only chance. We can't do it unless you're Queen," suddenly burst into the happy strains of "It *is* good of you. Oh, thank you, Lucia," and the day was won.

Instantly she became extremely business-like.

"No time to waste then," she said. "Let us have a full rehearsal at three, and after that I'll take the Morris-

dancers and the halberdiers. You and Georgie must be my lieutenants, dear Daisy. We shall all have to pull together. By the way, what will you be now ? "

" Whatever you like," said Daisy recklessly.

Lucia looked at her fixedly with that gimlet-eye, as if appraising, at their highest, her possibilities.

" Then let us see, dear Daisy," she said, " what you can make of Drake's wife. Quite a short part, I know, but so important. You have to get into that one moment all the loyalty, all the devotion of the women of England to the Queen."

She rose.

" Let us begin working at once," she said. " This is the *Golden Hind* : I have just stepped on to it. Now go behind the piano, and then come tripping out, full of awe, full of reverence. . . . Oh, dear me, that will never do. Shall I act it for you once more ? " . . .