IV

LUCIA had come back to Tilling last night from the fêteful week at Riseholme, and she was sitting next morning after breakfast at the window of the garden-room in Miss Mapp's house. It was a magic casement to anyone who was interested in life, as Lucia certainly was, and there was a tide every morning in the affairs of Tilling which must be taken at the flood. Mrs. Wyse's Royce had lurched down the street, Diva had come out with her market-basket from quaint Irene's house, of which she was now the tenant, Miss Mapp's (she was already by special request 'Elizabeth') gardener had wheeled off to the greengrocer his daily barrowful of garden-produce. Elizabeth had popped in to welcome her on her return from Riseholme and congratulate her on the fête of which the daily illustrated papers had been so full, and, strolling about the garden with her had absently picked a few roses (Diva's had green fly); the Padre passing by the magic casement had wished her good morrow, Mistress Lucas, and finally Major Benjy had come out of his house on the way to catch the tram to the golf-links. Lucia called "Quai-hai" to him in silvery tones, for they had made great friends in the days she had already spent at Tilling, and reminded him that he was dining with her that night. With great gallantry he had taken off his cap, and bawled out that this wasn't the sort of engagement he was in any danger of forgetting, au reservoir.

The tide had ebbed now, and Lucia left the window. There was so much to think about that she hardly knew where to begin. First her eyes fell on the piano which was no longer the remarkable Blumenfelt belonging to

Elizabeth on which she had been granted the privilege to play, but one which she had hired from Brighton. No doubt it was quite true that, as Elizabeth had said, her Blumenfelt had been considered a very fine instrument, but nobody for the last twenty years or so, could have considered it anything but a remarkable curiosity. Some notes sounded like the chirping of canaries (Diva's canary was quite well again after its pip), others did not sound at all, and the *sostenuto* pedal was a thing of naught. So Lucia had hired a new piano, and had put the canary-piano in the little telephone-room off the hall. It filled it up, but it was still possible to telephone if you went in sideways. Elizabeth had shown traces of acidity about this when she discovered the substitution, and had rather pensively remarked that her piano had belonged to her dearest mamma, and she hoped the telephone-room wasn't damp. It seemed highly probable that it had been her mother's if not her grandmother's, but after all Lucia had not promised to play on it.

So much for the piano. There lay on it now a china bowl full of press-cuttings, and Lucia glanced at a few, recalling the triumphs of the past week. The fête, favoured by brilliant weather and special trains from Worcester and Gloucester and Birmingham, had been a colossal success. The procession had been cinematographed, so too had the scene on the *Golden Hind*, and the click of cameras throughout the whole performance had been like the noise of cicalas in the south. The Hurst had been the target for innumerable lenses (Lucia was most indulgent), and she was photographed at her piano and in Perdita's garden, and musing in an arbour, as Queen Elizabeth and as herself, and she had got one of those artists to take (rather reluctantly) a special photograph of Drake's poor wife. That had not been a success, for Daisy had moved, but Lucia's intention was of the kindest. And throughout, to photographers and interviewers alike, Lucia (knowing that nobody would believe it) had insisted that all the credit was due to Drake's

wife, who had planned everything (or nearly) and had done all the spade-work.

There had nearly been one dreadful disaster. In fact there had been the disaster, but the amazing Lucia, quite impromptu, had wrung a fresh personal triumph out of it. It was on the last day of the fête, when the Green would hardly contain the influx of visitors, and another tier of benches had been put up round the pond where the *Golden Hind* lay, that this excruciating moment had occurred. Queen Elizabeth had just left the deck where she had feasted on a plateful of kippered cinders, and the procession was escorting her away, when the whole of the stern of the *Golden Hind*, on which was the fire and the previously roasted sheep and a mast streaming with ancients and the crowd of cheering cooks, broke off, and with a fearful splash and hiss fell into the water. Before anyone could laugh, Lucia (remembering that the water was only three feet deep at the most and so there was no danger of anyone drowning) broke into a ringing cry. " Zounds and Zooks " she shouted. " Thus will I serve the damned galleons of Spain," and with a magnificent gesture of disdain at the cooks standing waist high in the water, she swept on with her procession. The reporters singled out for special notice this wonderful piece of symbolism. A few of the most highbrow deemed it not quite legitimate business, but none questioned the superb dramatic effect of the device, for it led on with such perfect fitness to the next topic, namely the coming of the Armada. The cooks waded ashore, rushed home to change their clothes, and were in time to take their places in the mob that escorted her white palfrey. Who would mind a ducking in the service of such a resourceful Queen? Of all Lucia's triumphs during the week that inspired moment was the crown, and she could not help wondering what poor Daisy would have done, if she had been on the throne that day. Probably she would have said: " Oh dear, oh dear, they've all fallen into the water. We must stop."

No wonder Riseholme was proud of Lucia, and Tilling

which had been greedily devouring the picture papers was proud too. There was one possible exception, she thought, and that was Elizabeth, who in her visit of welcome just now had said, "How dreadful all this publicity must be for you, dear! How you must shrink from it!"

But Lucia, as usual, had been quite up to the mark. "Sweet of you to be so sympathetic, Elizabeth," she had said. "But it was my duty to help dear Riseholme, and I mustn't regard the consequences to myself."

That put the lid on Elizabeth: she said no more about the fête.

Lucia, as these random thoughts suggested by that stack of press-cuttings flitted through her brain, felt that she would have soon to bring it to bear on Elizabeth, for she was becoming something of a problem. But first, for this was an immediate concern, she must concentrate on Georgie. Georgie at the present moment, unconscious of his doom, and in a state of the highest approbation with life generally, was still at Riseholme, for Adele Brixton's brother, Colonel Cresswell, had taken his house for two months and there were many bits of things, embroidery and sketches and little bottles with labels, "For outward application only," which he must put away. He had been staying with Daisy for the fête, for Foljambe and the rest of his staff had come to Tilling at the beginning of August and it was not worth while taking them all back, though it would be difficult to get on without Foljambe for a week. Then he had stopped on for this extra day with Daisy after the fête was over, to see that everything was tidy and discreet and Lucia expected him back this morning.

She had very upsetting news for him: ghastly in fact. The vague rumours which had been rife at Riseholme were all too true, and Cadman, her chauffeur, had come to Lucia last night with the bomb-shell that he and Foljambe were thinking of getting married. She had

seen Foljambe as well, and Foljambe had begged her to break the news to Georgie.

"I should take it very kind of you, ma'am, if you would," Foljambe had said, "for I know I could never bring myself to do it, and he wouldn't like to feel that I had made up my mind without telling him. We're in no hurry, me and Cadman, we shouldn't think of being married till after we got back to Riseholme in the autumn, and that'll give Mr. Georgie several months to get suited. I'm sure you'll make him see it the right way, if anybody can."

This handsome tribute to her tact had had its due weight, and Lucia had promised to be the messenger of these dismal tidings. Georgie would arrive in time for lunch to-day, and she was determined to tell him at once. But it was dreadful to think of poor Georgie on his way now, full of the pleasantest anticipations for the future (since Foljambe had expressed herself more than pleased with her bedroom) and rosy with the remarkable success of his Drake and the very substantial rent for which he had let his house for two months, with this frightful blow so soon to be dealt him by her hand. Lucia had no idea how he would take it, except that he was certain to be terribly upset. So, leaving the garden-room and establishing herself in the pleasant shade on the lawn outside, she thought out quite a quantity of bracing and valuable reflections.

She turned her thoughts towards Elizabeth Mapp. During those ten days before Lucia had gone to Riseholme for the fête, she had popped in every single day: it was quite obvious that Elizabeth was keeping her eye on her. She always had some glib excuse: she wanted a hot-water bottle, or a thimble or a screw-driver that she had forgotten to take away, and declining all assistance would go to look for them herself, feeling sure that she could put her hand on them instantly without troubling anybody. She would go into the kitchen wreathed in smiles and pleasant observations for Lucia's cook, she would

pop into the servants' hall and say something agreeable to Cadman, and pry into cupboards to find what she was in search of. (It was during one of these expeditions that she has discovered her dearest Mamma's piano in the telephone-room.) Often she came in without knocking or ringing the bell, and then if Lucia or Grosvenor heard her clandestine entry, and came to see who it was, she scolded herself for her stupidity in not remembering that for the present, this was not her house. So forgetful of her.

On one of these occasions she had popped out into the garden, and found Lucia eating a fig from the tree that grew against the garden-room, and was covered with fruit.

"Oh, you dear thief!" she said. "What about garden-produce?"

Then seeing Lucia's look of blank amazement, she had given a pretty peal of laughter.

"Lulu, dear! Only my joke," she cried. "Poking a little fun at Queen Elizabeth. You may eat every fig in my garden, and I wish there were more of them."

On another occasion Elizabeth had found Major Benjy having tea with Lucia, and she had said, "Oh, how disappointed I am! I had so hoped to introduce you to each other, and now someone else has taken that treat from me. Who was the naughty person?" But perhaps that was a joke too. Lucia was not quite sure that she liked Elizabeth's jokes, any more than she liked her informal visits.

This morning, Lucia cast an eye over her garden. The lawn badly wanted cutting, the flower-beds wanted weeding, the box-edgings to them wanted clipping, and it struck her that the gardener, whose wages she paid, could not have done an hour's work here since she left. He was never in this part of the garden at all, she seemed to remember, but was always picking fruit and vegetables in the kitchen-garden, or digging over the asparagus-bed, or potting chrysanthemums, or doing other jobs that did

not concern her own interests but Elizabeth's. There he was now, a nice genial man, preparing a second basketful of garden-produce to take to the greengrocer's, from whom eventually Lucia bought it. An inquiry must instantly be held.

"Good morning, Coplen," she said. "I want you to cut the lawn to-day. It's got dreadfully long."

"Very sorry, ma'am," said he. "I don't think I can find time to-day myself. I could get a man in perhaps to do it."

"I should prefer that you should," said Lucia. "You can get a man in to pick those vegetables."

"It's not only them," he said. "Miss Mapp she told me to manure the strawberry-beds to-day."

"But what has Miss Mapp got to do with it?" said she. "You're in my employment."

"Well, that does only seem fair," said the impartial Coplen. "But you see, ma'am, my orders are to go to Miss Mapp every morning and she tells me what she wants done."

"Then for the future please come to me every morning and see what I want done," she said. "Finish what you're at now, and then start on the lawn at once. Tell Miss Mapp by all means that I've given you these instructions. And no strawberry-bed shall be manured to-day, nor indeed until my garden looks less like a tramp who hasn't shaved for a week."

Supported by an impregnable sense of justice but still dangerously fuming, Lucia went back to her garden-room, to tranquillize herself with an hour's practice on the new piano. Very nice tone; she and Georgie would be able to start their musical hours again now. This afternoon, perhaps, if he felt up to it after the tragic news, a duet might prove tonic. Not a note had she played during that triumphant week at Riseholme. Scales first then, and presently she was working away at a new Mozart, which she and Georgie would subsequently read over together.

There came a tap at the door of the garden-room. It opened a chink, and Elizabeth in her sweetest voice said :

" May I pop in once more, dear ? "

Elizabeth was out of breath. She had hurried up from the High Street.

" So sorry to interrupt your sweet music, Lucia mia," she said. " What a pretty tune ! What fingers you have ! But my good Coplen has come to me in great perplexity. So much better to clear it up at once, I thought, so I came instantly though rather rushed to-day. A little misunderstanding, no doubt. Coplen is not clever."

Elizabeth seemed to be labouring under some excitement which might account for this loss of wind. So Lucia waited till she was more controlled.

"—And your new piano, dear ? " asked Elizabeth. " You like it ? It sounded so sweet, though not quite the tone of dearest mamma's. About Coplen then ? "

" Yes, about Coplen," said Lucia.

" He misunderstood, I am sure, what you said to him just now. So distressed he was. Afraid I should be vexed with him. I said I would come to see you and make it all right."

" Nothing easier, dear," said Lucia. " We can put it all right in a minute. He told me he had not time to cut the lawn to-day because he had to manure your strawberry-beds, and I said ' The lawn please, at once,' or words to that effect. He didn't quite grasp, I think, that he's in my employment, so naturally I reminded him of it. He understands now, I hope."

Elizabeth looked rather rattled at these energetic remarks, and Lucia saw at once that this was the stuff to give her.

" But my garden-produce, you know, dear Lulu," said Elizabeth. " It is not much use to me if all those beautiful pears are left to rot on the trees till the wasps eat them."

" No doubt that is so," said Lucia ; " but Coplen, whose

wages I pay, is no use to me if he spends his entire time in looking after your garden-produce. I pay for his time, dear Elizabeth, and I intend to have it. He also told me he took his orders every morning from you. That won't do at all. I shan't permit that for a moment. If I had engaged your cook as well as your gardener, I should not allow her to spend her day in roasting mutton for you. So that's all settled."

It was borne in upon Elizabeth that she hadn't got a leg to stand upon and she sat down.

"Lulu," she said, "anything would be better than that I should have a misunderstanding with such a dear as you are. I won't argue, I won't put my point of view at all. I yield. There! If you can spare Coplen for an hour in the morning to take my little fruits and vegetables to the greengrocer's I should be glad."

"Quite impossible, I'm afraid, dear Elizabeth," said Lucia with the greatest cordiality. "Coplen has been neglecting the flower-garden dreadfully, and for the present it will take him all his time to get it tidy again. You must get someone else to do that."

Elizabeth looked quite awful for a moment: then her face was wreathed in smiles again.

"Precious one!" she said. "It shall be exactly as you wish. Now I must run away. Au reservoir. You're not free I suppose, this evening to have a little dinner with me? I would ask Major Benjy to join us, and our beloved Diva, who has a passion, positively a passion for you. Major Benjy indeed too. He raves about you. Wicked woman, stealing all the hearts of Tilling."

Lucia felt positively sorry for the poor thing. Before she left for Riseholme last week, she had engaged Diva and Major Benjy to dine with her to-night, and it was quite incredible that Elizabeth, by this time, should not have known that.

"Sweet of you," she said, "but I have a tiny little party myself to-night. Just one or two, dropping in."

Elizabeth lingered a moment yet, and Lucia said to

herself that the thumb-screw and the rack would not induce her to ask Elizabeth, however long she lingered.

Lucia and she exchanged kissings of the hand as Elizabeth emerged from the front door, and tripped down the street. "I see, I must be a little firm with her," thought Lucia, "and when I've taught her her place, then it will be time to be kind. But I won't ask her to dinner just yet. She must learn not to ask me when she knows I'm engaged. And she shall not pop in without ringing. I must tell Grosvenor to put the door on the chain."

Lucia returned to her practice, but shovelled the new Mozart out of sight, when, in one of her glances out of the open window she observed Georgie coming up the street, on his way from the station. He had a light and airy step, evidently he was in the best of spirits and he waved to her as he caught sight of her.

"Just going to look in at the cottage one second," he called out, "to see that everything's all right, and then I'll come and have a chat before lunch. Heaps to tell you."

"So have I," said Lucia, ruefully thinking what one of those things was. "Hurry up, Georgie."

He tripped along up to the cottage, and Lucia's heart was wrung for him, for all that gaiety would soon suffer a total eclipse, and she was to be the darkener of his day. Had she better tell him instantly, she wondered, or hear his news first, and outline the recent Manœuvres of Mapp. These exciting topics might prove tonic, something to fall back on afterwards. Whereas, if she stabbed him straight away, they would be of no service as restoratives. Also there was stewed lobster for lunch, and Georgie who adored it would probably not care a bit about it if the blow fell first.

Georgie began to speak almost before he opened the door.

"All quite happy at the cottage," he said, "and Foljambe ever so pleased with Tilling. Everything in spick-

and-span order and my paint-box cleaned up and the hole in the carpet mended quite beautifully. She must have been busy while I was away."

("Dear, oh dear, she has," thought Lucia.)

"And everything settled at Riseholme," continued poor Georgie. "Colonel Cresswell wants my house for three months, so I said yes, and now we're both homeless for October, unless we keep on our houses here. I had to put on my Drake clothes again yesterday, for the *Birmingham Gazette* wanted to photograph me. My dear, what a huge success it all was, but I'm glad to get away, for everything will be as flat as ditchwater now, all except Daisy. She began to buck up at once the moment you left, and I positively heard her say how quickly you picked up the part of the Queen after watching her once or twice."

"No! Poor thing!" said Lucia with deep compassion.

"Now tell me all about Tilling," said Georgie, feeling he must play fair.

"Things are beginning to move, Georgie," said she, forgetting for the time the impending tragedy. "Night-marches, Georgie, manœuvres. Elizabeth, of course. I'm sure I was right, she wants to run me, and if she can't (if!) she'll try to fight me. I can see glimpses of hatred and malice in her."

"And you'll fight her?" asked Georgie eagerly.

"Nothing of the kind, my dear," said Lucia. "What do you take me for? Every now and then, when necessary, I shall just give her two or three hard slaps. I gave her one this morning: I did indeed. Not a very hard one, but it stung."

"No! Do tell me," said Georgie.

Lucia gave a short but perfectly accurate description of the gardener-crisis.

"So I stopped that," she said, "and there are several other things I shall stop. I won't have her, for instance, walking into my house without ringing. So I've told Grosvenor to put up the chain. And she calls me Lulu

which makes me sick. Nobody's ever called me Lulu and they shan't begin now. I must see if calling her Liblib will do the trick. And then she asked me to dinner to-night, when she must have known perfectly well that Major Benjy and Diva are dining with me. You're dining too, by the way."

"I'm not sure if I'd better," said Georgie. "I think Foljambe might expect me to dine at home the first night I get back. I know she wants to go through the linen and plate with me."

"No, Georgie, quite unnecessary," said she. "I want you to help me to give the others a jolly comfortable evening. We'll play bridge and let Major Benjy lay down the law. We'll have a genial evening, make them enjoy it. And to-morrow I shall ask the Wyses and talk about Countesses. And the day after I shall ask the Padre and his wife and talk Scotch. I want you to come every night. It's new in Tilling, I find, to give little dinners. Tea is the usual entertainment. And I shan't ask Liblib at all till next week."

"But my dear, isn't that war?" asked Georgie. (It did look rather like it.)

"Not the least. It's benevolent neutrality. We shall see if she learns sense. If she does, I shall be very nice to her again and ask her to several pleasant little parties. I am giving her every chance. Also Georgie. . . ." Lucia's eyes assumed that gimlet-like expression which betokened an earnest purpose, "I want to understand her and be fair to her. At present I can't understand her. The idea of her giving orders to a gardener to whom I give wages! But that's all done with. I can hear the click of the mowing-machine on the lawn now. Just two or three things I won't stand. I won't be patronized by Liblib, and I won't be called Lulu, and I won't have her popping in and out of my house like a cuckoo clock."

Lunch drew to an end. There was Georgie looking so prosperous and plump, with his chestnut-coloured hair no longer in the least need of a touch of dye, and his

beautiful clothes. Already Major Benjy, who had quickly seen that if he wanted to be friends with Lucia he must be friends with Georgie too, had pronounced him to be the best-dressed man in Tilling, and Lucia, who invariably passed on dewdrops of this kind, had caused Georgie the deepest gratification by repeating this. And now she was about to plunge a dagger in his heart. She put her elbows on the table, so as to be ready to lay a hand of sympathy on his.

"Georgie, I've got something to tell you," she said.

"I'm sure I shall like it," said he. "Go on."

"No, you won't like it at all," she said.

It flashed through his mind that Lucia had changed her mind about marrying him, but it could not be that, for she would never have said he wouldn't like it at all. Then he had a flash of intuition.

"Something about Foljambe," he said in a quavering voice.

"Yes. She and Cadman are going to marry."

Georgie turned on her a face from which all other expression except hopeless despair had vanished, and her hand of sympathy descended on his, firmly pressing it.

"When?" he said, after moistening his dry lips.

"Not for the present. Not till we get back to Riseholme."

Georgie pushed away his untasted coffee.

"It's the most dreadful thing that's ever happened to me," he said. "It's quite spoiled all my pleasure. I didn't think Foljambe was so selfish. She's been with me fifteen years, and now she goes and breaks up my home like this."

"My dear, that's rather an excessive statement," said Lucia. "You can get another parlour-maid. There are others."

"If you come to that, Cadman could get another wife," said Georgie, "and there isn't another parlour-maid like Foljambe. I have suspected something now and then, but I never thought it would come to this. What a fool

I was to leave her here when I went back to Riseholme for the fête! Or if only we had driven back there with Cadman instead of going by train. It was madness. Here they were with nothing to do but make plans behind our backs. No one will ever look after my clothes as she does. And the silver. You'll miss Cadman, too."

"Oh, but I don't think he means to leave me," said Lucia in some alarm. "What makes you think that? He said nothing about it."

"Then perhaps Foljambe doesn't mean to leave me," said Georgie, seeing a possible dawn on the wreck of his home.

"That's rather different," said Lucia. "She'll have to look after his house, you see, by day, and then at night he'd—he'd like her to be there."

"Horrible to think of," said Georgie bitterly. "I wonder what she can see in him. I've got a good mind to go and live in an hotel. And I had left her five hundred pounds in my will."

"Georgie, that was very generous of you. Very," put in Lucia, though Georgie would not feel the loss of that large sum after he was dead.

"But now I shall certainly add a codicil to say 'if still in my service,'" said Georgie rather less generously. "I didn't think it of her."

Lucia was silent a moment. Georgie was taking it very much to heart indeed, and she racked her ingenious brain.

"I've got an idea," she said at length. "I don't know if it can be worked, but we might see. Would you feel less miserable about it if Foljambe would consent to come over to your house say at nine in the morning and be there till after dinner? If you were dining out as you so often are, she could go home earlier. You see Cadman's at the Hurst all day, for he does odd jobs as well, and his cottage at Riseholme is quite close to your house. You would have to give them a charwoman to do the housework."

"Oh, that is a good idea," said Georgie, cheering up a little. "Of course I'll give her a charwoman or anything else she wants if she'll only look after me as before. She can sleep wherever she likes. Of course there may be periods when she'll have to be away, but I shan't mind that as long as I know she's coming back. Besides, she's rather old for that, isn't she?"

It was no use counting the babies before they were born, and Lucia glided along past this slightly indelicate subject with Victorian eyes.

"It's worth while seeing if she'll stay with you on these terms," she said.

"Rather. I shall suggest it at once," said Georgie. "I think I shall congratulate her very warmly, and say how pleased I am, and then ask her. Or would it be better to be very cold and preoccupied and not talk to her at all? She'd hate that, and then when I ask her after some days whether she'll stop on with me, she might promise anything to see me less unhappy again."

Lucia did not quite approve of this Machiavellian policy.

"On the other hand, it might make her marry Cadman instantly, in order to have done with you," she suggested. "You'd better be careful."

"I'll think it over," said Georgie. "Perhaps it would be safer to be very nice to her about it and appeal to her better nature, if she's got one. But I know I shall never manage to call her Cadman. She must keep her maiden name, like an actress."

Lucia duly put in force her disciplinary measures for the reduction of Elizabeth. Major Benjy, Diva and Georgie dined with her that night, and there was a plate of nougat chocolates for Diva, whose inordinate passion for them was known all over Tilling, and a fiery curry for the Major to remind him of India, and a dish of purple figs bought at the greengrocer's but plucked from the tree outside the garden-room. She could not resist

giving Elizabeth ever so gentle a little slap over this, and said that it was rather a roundabout process to go down to the High Street to buy the figs which Coplen plucked from the tree in the garden, and took down with other garden-produce to the shop: she must ask dear Elizabeth to allow her to buy them, so to speak, at the pit-mouth. But she was genuinely astonished at the effect this little joke had on Diva. Hastily she swallowed a nougat chocolate entire and turned bright red.

"But doesn't Elizabeth give you garden-produce?" she asked in an incredulous voice.

"Oh no," said Lucia, "just flowers for the house. Nothing else."

"Well, I never!" said Diva. "I fully understood, at least I thought I did——"

Lucia got up. She must be magnanimous and encourage no public exposure, whatever it might be, of Elizabeth's conduct, but for the pickling of the rod of discipline she would like to hear about it quietly.

"Let's go into the garden-room and have a chat," she said. "Look after Major Benjy, Georgie, and don't sit too long in bachelordom, for I must have a little game of bridge with him. I'm terribly frightened of him, but he and Mrs. Quantock must be kind to beginners like you and me."

The indignant Diva poured out her tale of Elizabeth's iniquities in a turgid flood.

"So like Elizabeth," she said. "I asked her if she gave you garden-produce, and she said she wasn't going to dig up her potatoes and carry them away. Well, of course I thought that meant she did give it you. So like her. Bismarck, wasn't it, who told the truth in order to deceive? And so of course I gave her my garden-produce and she's selling one and eating the other. I wish I'd known I ought to have distrusted her."

Lucia smiled that indulgent Sunday-evening smile which meant she was thinking hard on week-day subjects.

"I like Elizabeth so much," she said, "and what do a few figs matter?"

"No, but she always scores," said Diva, "and sometimes it's hard to bear. She got my house with garden-produce thrown in for eight guineas a week and she lets her own without garden-produce for twelve."

"No dear, I pay fifteen," said Lucia.

Diva stared at her open-mouthed.

"But it was down in Woolgar's books at twelve," she said. "I saw it myself. She is a one: isn't she?"

Lucia maintained her attitude of high nobility, but this information added a little more pickling.

"Dear Elizabeth!" she said. "So glad that she was sharp enough to get a few more guineas. I expect she's very clever, isn't she? And here come the gentlemen. Now for a jolly little game of bridge."

Georgie was astonished at Lucia. She was accustomed to lay down the law with considerable firmness, and instruct partners and opponents alike, but to-night a most unusual humility possessed her. She was full of diffidence about her own skill and of praise for her partner's: she sought advice, even once asking Georgie what she ought to have played, though that was clearly a mistake, for next moment she rated him. But for the other two she had nothing but admiring envy at their declarations and their management of the hand, and when Diva revoked she took all the blame on herself for not having asked her whether her hand was bare of the suit. Rubber after rubber they played in an amity hitherto unknown in the higher gambling circles of Tilling; and when, long after the incredible hour of twelve had struck, it was found on the adjustment of accounts that Lucia was the universal loser, she said she had never bought experience so cheaply and pleasantly.

Major Benjy wiped the foam of his third (surreptitious and hastily consumed) whisky and soda from his walrus-moustache.

"Most agreeable evening of bridge I've ever spent in

Tilling," he said. "Bless me, when I think of the scoldings I've had in this room for some little slip, and the friction there's been . . . Mrs. Plaistow knows what I mean."

"I should think I did," said Diva, beginning to simmer again at the thought of garden-produce. "Poor Elizabeth! Lessons in self-control are what she wants and after that a few lessons on the elements of the game wouldn't be amiss. Then it would be time to think about telling other people how to play."

This very pleasant party broke up, and Georgie hurrying home to Mallards Cottage, thought he could discern in these comments the key to Lucia's unwonted humility at the card-table. For herself she had only kind words on the subject of Elizabeth as befitted a large-hearted woman, but Diva and Major Benjy could hardly help contrasting, brilliantly to her advantage, the charming evening they had spent with the vituperative scenes which usually took place when they played bridge in the garden-room. "I think Lucia has begun," thought Georgie to himself as he went noiselessly upstairs so as not to disturb the slumbers of Foljambe.

It was known, of course, all over Tilling the next morning that there had been a series of most harmonious rubbers of bridge last night at Mallards till goodness knew what hour, for Diva spent half the morning in telling everybody about it, and the other half in advising them not to get their fruit and vegetables at the shop which dealt in the garden-produce of the Bismarckian Elizabeth. Equally well known was it that the Wyses were dining at Mallards to-night, for Mrs. Wyse took care of that, and at eight o'clock that evening the Royce started from Porpoise Street, and arrived at Mallards at precisely one minute past. Georgie came on foot from the Cottage thirty yards away in the other direction, in the highest spirits, for Foljambe after consultation with her Cadman had settled to continue on day duty after the return to Riseholme. So Georgie did not intend at present to

execute that vindictive codicil to his will. He told the Wyses whom he met on the doorstep of Mallards about the happy termination of this domestic crisis, while Mrs. Wyse took off her sables and disclosed the fact that she was wearing the order of the M.B.E. on her ample bosom; and he observed that Mr. Wyse had a soft crinkly shirt with a low collar, and velveteen dress clothes: this pretty costume caused him to look rather like a conjurer. There followed very polite conversations at dinner, full of bows from Mr. Wyse; first he talked to his hostess, and when Lucia tried to produce general talk and spoke to Georgie, he instantly turned his head to the right, and talked most politely to his wife about the weather and the news in the evening paper till Lucia was ready for him again.

"I hear from our friend Miss Mapp," he said to her, "that you speak the most beautiful and fluent Italian."

Lucia was quite ready to oblige.

"Ah, che bella lingua!" said she. "Ma ho dimenticato tutto, non parla nessuno in Riseholme."

"But I hope you will have the opportunity of speaking it before long in Tilling," said Mr. Wyse. "My sister Amelia, Contessa Faraglione, may possibly be with us before long, and I shall look forward to hearing you and she talk together. A lovely language to listen to, though Amelia laughs at my poor efforts when I attempt it."

Lucia smelled danger here. There had been a terrible occasion once at Riseholme when her bilingual reputation had been shattered by her being exposed to the full tempest of Italian volleyed at her by a native, and she had been unable to understand anything that he said. But Amelia's arrival was doubtful and at present remote, and it would be humiliating to confess that her knowledge was confined to a chosen though singularly limited vocabulary.

"Georgie, we must rub up our Italian again," she said. "Mr. Wyse's sister may be coming here before long. What an opportunity for us to practise!"

"I do not imagine that you have much need of practice," said Mr. Wyse, bowing to Lucia. "And I hear your Elizabethan fête" (he bowed to Queen Elizabeth) "was an immense success. We so much want somebody at Tilling who can organize and carry through schemes like that. My wife does all she can, but she sadly needs someone to help, or indeed direct her. The hospital for instance, terribly in need of funds. She and I were talking as to whether we could not get up a garden fête with some tableaux or something of the sort to raise money. She has designs on you, I know, when she can get you alone, for indeed there is no one in Tilling with ability and initiative."

Suddenly it struck Lucia that though this was very gratifying to herself, it had another purpose, namely to depreciate somebody else, and surely that could only be one person. But that name must not escape her lips.

"My services, such as they are, are completely at Mrs. Wyse's disposal," she said, "as long as I am in Tilling. This garden for instance. Would that be a suitable place for something of the sort?"

Mr. Wyse bowed to the garden.

"The ideal spot," said he. "All Tilling would flock here at your bidding. Never yet in my memory has the use of it been granted for such a purpose; we have often lamented it."

There could no longer be much doubt as to the subcurrent in such remarks, but the beautiful smooth surface must not be broken.

"I quite feel with you," said Lucia. "If one is fortunate enough, even for a short time, to possess a pretty little garden like this, it should be used for the benefit of charitable entertainment. The hospital: what more deserving object could we have? Some tableaux, you suggested. I'm sure Mr. Pillson and I would be only too glad to repeat a scene or two from our fête at Riseholme."

Mr. Wyse bowed so low that his large loose tie nearly dipped itself in an ice pudding.

"I was trying to summon my courage to suggest exactly that," he said. "Susan, Mrs. Lucas encourages us to hope that she will give you a favourable audience about the project we talked over."

The favourable audience began as soon as the ladies rose, and was continued when Georgie and Mr. Wyse followed them. Already it had been agreed that the Padre might contribute an item to the entertainment, and that was very convenient, for he was to dine with Lucia the next night.

"His Scotch stories," said Susan. "I can never hear them too often, for though I've not got a drop of Scotch blood myself, I can appreciate them. Not a feature of course, Mrs. Lucas, but just to fill up pauses. And then there's Mrs. Plaistow. How I laugh when she does the sea-sick passenger with an orange, though I doubt if you can get oranges now. And Miss Coles. A wonderful mimic. And then there's Major Benjy. Perhaps he would read us portions of his diary."

A pause followed. Lucia had one of those infallible presentiments that a certain name hitherto omitted would follow. It did.

"And if Miss Mapp would supply the refreshment department with fruit from her garden here, that would be a great help," said Mrs. Wyse.

Lucia caught in rapid succession the respective eyes of all her guests, each of whom in turn looked away. "So Tilling knows all about the garden-produce already," she thought to herself.

Bridge followed, and here she could not be as humble as she had been last night, for both the Wyses abased themselves before she had time to begin.

"We know already," said Algernon, "of the class of player that you are, Mrs. Lucas," he said. "Any hints you will give Susan and me will be so much appreciated. We shall give you no game at all I am afraid, but we shall have a lesson. There is no one in Tilling who has any pretensions of being a player. Major Benjy and Mrs.

Plaistow and we sometimes have a well-fought rubber on our own level, and the Padre does not always play a bad game. But otherwise the less said about our bridge the better. Susan, my dear, we must do our best."

Here indeed was a reward for Lucia's humility last night. The winners had evidently proclaimed her consumate skill, and was that, too, a reflection on somebody else, only once hitherto named, and that in connection with garden-produce? To-night Lucia's hands dripped with aces and kings: she denuded her adversaries of all their trumps, and then led one more for safety's sake, after which she poured forth a galaxy of winners. Whoever was her partner was in luck, and to-night it was Georgie who had to beg for change for a ten-shilling note and leave the others to adjust their portions. He recked nothing of this financial disaster, for Foljambe was not lost to him. When the party broke up Mrs. Wyse begged him to allow her to give him a lift in the Royce, but as this would entail a turning of that majestic car, which would take at least five minutes followed by a long drive for them round the church square and down into the High Street and up again to Porpoise Street, he adventured forth on foot for his walk of thirty yards and arrived without undue fatigue.

Georgie and Lucia started their sketching next morning. Like charity, they began at home, and their first subjects were each other's houses. They put their camp-stools side by side, but facing in opposite directions, in the middle of the street half-way between Mallards and Mallards Cottage; and thus, by their having different objects to portray, they avoided any sort of rivalry, and secured each other's companionship.

"So good for our drawing," said Georgie. "We were getting to do nothing but trees and clouds which needn't be straight."

"I've got the crooked chimney," said Lucia proudly. "That one beyond your house. I think I shall put it

straight. People might think I had done it crooked by accident. What do you advise ? "

" I think I wouldn't," said he. " There's character in its crookedness. Or you might make it rather more crooked than it is : then there won't be any doubt . . . Here comes the Wyses' car. We shall have to move on to the pavement. Tarsome."

A loud hoot warned them that that was the safer course, and the car lurched towards them. As it passed, Mr. Wyse saw whom he had disturbed, stopped the Royce (which had so much better a right to the road than the artists) and sprang out, hat in hand.

" A thousand apologies," he cried. " I had no idea who it was, and for what artistic purpose, occupying the roadway. I am indeed distressed, I would instantly have retreated and gone round the other way had I perceived in time. May I glance ? Exquisite ! The crooked chimney ! Mallards Cottage ! The West front of the church ! " He bowed to them all.

There followed that evening the third dinner-party when the Padre and wee wifie made the quartet. The Royce had called for him that day to take him to lunch in Porpoise Street (Lucia had seen it go by), and it was he who now introduced the subject of the proposed entertainment on behalf of the hospital, for he knew all about it and was ready to help in any way that Mistress Lucas might command. There were some Scottish stories which he would be happy to narrate, in order to fill up intervals between the tableaux, and he had ascertained that Miss Coles (dressed as usual as a boy) would give her most amusing parody of " The Boy stood on the burning deck," and that Mistress Diva said she thought that an orange or two might be procured. If not, a ripe tomato would serve the purpose. He would personally pledge himself for the services of the church choir to sing catches and glees and madrigals, whenever required. He suggested also that such members of the workhouse as were not bedridden might be entertained to tea, in

which case the choir would sing grace before and after buns.

"As to the expense of that, if you approve," he said, "put another baubee on the price of admission, and there'll be none in Tilling to grudge the extra expense wi' such entertainment as you and the other leddies will offer them."

"Dear me, how quickly it is all taking shape," said Lucia, finding that almost without effort on her part she had been drawn into the place of prime mover in all this, and that still a sort of conspiracy of silence prevailed with regard to Miss Mapp's name, which hitherto had only been mentioned as a suitable provider of fruit for the refreshment department. "You must form a little committee, Padre, for putting all the arrangements in hand at once. There's Mr. Wyse who really thought of the idea, and you——"

"And with yourself," broke in the Padre, "that will make three. That's sufficient for any committee that is going to do its work without any argle-bargle."

There flashed across Lucia's mind a fleeting vision of what Elizabeth's face would be like when she picked up, as she would no doubt do next morning, the news of all that was becoming so solid.

"I think I had better not be on the committee," she said, quite convinced that they would insist on it. "It should consist of real Tillingites who take the lead among you in such things. I am only a visitor here. They will all say I want to push myself in."

"Ah, but we can't get on wi'out ye, Mistress Lucas," said the Padre. "You must consent to join us. An' three, as I say, makes the perfect committee."

Mrs. Bartlett had been listening to all this with a look of ecstatic attention on her sharp but timid little face. Here she gave vent to a series of shrill minute squeaks which expressed a mouselike merriment, quite unexplained by anything that had been actually said, but easily accounted for by what had not been said. She hastily

drank a sip of water and assured Lucia that a crumb of something (she was eating a peach) had stuck in her throat and made her cough. Lucia rose when the peach was finished.

"To-morrow we must start working in earnest," she said. "And to think that I planned to have a little holiday in Tilling! You and Mr. Wyse are regular slave-drivers, Padre."

Georgie waited behind that night after the others had gone, and bustled back to the garden-room after seeing them off.

"My dear, it's getting too exciting," he said. "But I wonder if you're wise to join the committee."

"I know what you mean," said Lucia, "but there really is no reason why I should refuse, because they won't have Elizabeth. It's not me, Georgie, who is keeping her out. But perhaps you're right, and I think to-morrow I'll send a line to the Padre and say that I am really too busy to be on the committee, and beg him to ask Elizabeth instead. It would be kinder. I can manage the whole thing just as well without being on the committee. She'll hear all about the entertainment to-morrow morning, and know that she's not going to be asked to do anything, except supply some fruit."

"She knows a good deal about it now," said Georgie. "She came to tea with me to-day."

"No! I didn't know you had asked her."

"I didn't," said Georgie. "She came."

"And what did she say about it?"

"Not very much, but she's thinking hard what to do. I could see that. I gave her the little sketch I made of the Land-gate when we first came down here, and she wants me to send in another picture for the Tilling Art Exhibition. She wants you to send something too."

"Certainly she shall have my sketch of Mallards Cottage and the crooked chimney," said Lucia. "That will show good will. What else did she say?"

"She's getting up a jumble-sale in aid of the hospital," said Georgie. "She's busy, too."

"Georgie, that's copied from us."

"Of course it is; she wants to have a show of her own, and I'm sure I don't wonder. And she knows all about your three dinner-parties."

Lucia nodded. "That's all right then," she said. "I'll ask her to the next. We'll have some duets that night, Georgie. Not bridge I think, for they all say she's a perfect terror at cards. But it's time to be kind to her."

Lucia rose.

"Georgie, it's becoming a frightful rush already," she said. "This entertainment which they insist on my managing will make me very busy, but when one is appealed to like that, one can't refuse. Then there's my music, and sketching, and I haven't begun to rub up my Greek. . . . And don't forget to send for your Drake-clothes. Good night, my dear. I'll call to you over the garden-paling to-morrow if anything happens."

"I feel as if it's sure to," said Georgie with enthusiasm.