

# Lucia in London

## CHAPTER I

CONSIDERING that Philip Lucas's aunt who died early in April was no less than eighty-three years old, and had spent the last seven of them bedridden in a private lunatic asylum, it had been generally and perhaps reasonably hoped among his friends and those of his wife that the bereavement would not be regarded by either of them as an intolerable tragedy. Mrs. Quantock, in fact, who, like everybody else at Riseholme, had sent a neat little note of condolence to Mrs. Lucas, had, without using the actual words "happy release," certainly implied it or its close equivalent.

She was hoping that there would be a reply to it, for though she had said in her note that her dear Lucia mustn't dream of answering it, that was a mere figure of speech, and she had instructed her parlour-maid who took it across to 'The Hurst' immediately after lunch to say that she didn't know if there was an answer, and would wait to see, for Mrs. Lucas might perhaps give a little hint ever so vaguely about what the expectations were concerning which everybody was dying to get information. . . .

While she waited for this, Daisy Quantock was busy, like everybody else in the village on this beautiful afternoon of spring, with her garden, hacking about with

a small but destructive fork in her flower-beds. She was a gardener of the ruthless type, and went for any small green thing that incautiously showed a timid spike above the earth, suspecting it of being a weed. She had had a slight difference with the professional gardener who had hitherto worked for her on three afternoons during the week, and had told him that his services were no longer required. She meant to do her gardening herself this year, and was confident that a profusion of beautiful flowers and a plethora of delicious vegetables would be the result. At the end of her garden path was a barrow of rich manure, which she proposed, when she had finished the slaughter of the innocents, to dig into the depopulated beds. On the other side of her paling her neighbour Georgie Pillson was rolling his strip of lawn, on which during the summer he often played croquet on a small scale. Occasionally they shouted remarks to each other, but as they got more and more out of breath with their exertions the remarks got fewer. Mrs. Quantock's last question had been "What do you do with slugs, Georgie?" and Georgie had panted out, "Pretend you don't see them."

Mrs. Quantock had lately grown rather stout owing to a diet of sour milk, which with plenty of sugar was not palatable; but sour milk and pyramids of raw vegetables had quite stopped all the symptoms of consumption which the study of a small but lurid medical manual had induced. To-day she had eaten a large but normal lunch in order to test the merits of her new cook, who certainly was a success, for her husband had gobbled up his food with great avidity instead of turning it over and over with his fork as if it was hay. In consequence, stoutness, surfeit, and so much stooping had made her feel rather giddy, and she was standing up to recover, wondering if this giddiness was a symptom of something dire, when

de Vere, for such was the incredible name of her parlour-maid, came down the steps from the dining-room with a note in her hand. So Mrs. Quantock hastily took off her gardening gloves of stout leather, and opened it.

There was a sentence of formal thanks for her sympathy which Mrs. Lucas immensely prized, and then followed these ridiculous words :

It has been a terrible blow to my poor Pepino and myself. We trusted that Auntie Amy might have been spared us for a few years yet.

Ever, dear Daisy, your sad  
LUCIA.

And not a word about expectations! . . . Lucia's dear Daisy crumpled up the absurd note, and said "Rubbish," so loud that Georgie Pillson in the next garden thought he was being addressed.

"What's that?" he said.

"Georgie, come to the fence a minute," said Mrs. Quantock. "I want to speak to you."

Georgie, longing for a little gossip, let go of the handle of his roller, which, suddenly released, gave a loud squeak and rapped him smartly on the elbow.

"Tarsome thing!" said Georgie.

He went to the fence and, being tall, could look over it. There was Mrs. Quantock angrily poking Lucia's note into the flower-bed she had been weeding.

"What is it?" said Georgie. "Shall I like it?"

His face red and moist with exertion, appearing just over the top of the fence, looked like the sun about to set below the flat grey horizon of the sea.

"I don't know if you'll like it," said Daisy, "but it's your Lucia. I sent her a little note of condolence about the aunt, and she says it has been a terrible blow to Pepino and herself. They hoped that the old lady might have been spared them a few years yet."

"No!" said Georgie, wiping the moisture off his forehead with the back of one of his beautiful pearl-grey gloves.

"But she did," said the infuriated Daisy, "they were her very words. I could show you if I hadn't dug it in. Such a pack of nonsense! I hope that long before I've been bedridden for seven years, somebody will strangle me with a bootlace, or anything handy. Why does Lucia pretend to be sorry? What does it all mean?"

Georgie had long been devoted henchman to Lucia (Mrs. Lucas, wife of Philip Lucas, and so Lucia), and though he could criticise her in his mind, when he was alone in his bed or his bath, he always championed her in the face of the criticism of others. Whereas Daisy criticised everybody everywhere. . . .

"Perhaps it means what it says," he observed with the delicate sarcasm that never had any effect on his neighbour.

"It can't possibly do that," said Mrs. Quantock. "Neither Lucia nor Pepino have set eyes on his aunt for years, nor spoken of her. Last time Pepino went to see her she bit him. Sling for a week afterwards, don't you remember, and he was terrified of blood-poisoning. How can her death be a blow, and as for her being spared——"

Mrs. Quantock suddenly broke off, remembering that de Vere was still standing there and drinking it all in.

"That's all, de Vere," she said.

"Thank you, ma'am," said de Vere, striding back towards the house. She had high-heeled shoes on, and each time she lifted her foot, the heel which had been embedded by her weight in the soft lawn came out with the sound of a cork being drawn. Then Daisy came closer to the fence, with the light of inductive reasoning, which was much cultivated at Riseholme, veiling the fury of her eye.

“Georgie, I’ve got it,” she said. “I’ve guessed what it means.”

Now though Georgie was devoted to his Lucia, he was just as devoted to inductive reasoning, and Daisy Quantock was, with the exception of himself, far the most powerful logician in the place.

“What is it, then?” he asked.

“Stupid of me not to have thought of it at once,” said Daisy. “Why, don’t you see? Pepino is Auntie’s heir, for she was unmarried, and he’s the only nephew, and probably he has been left piles and piles. So naturally they say it’s a terrible blow. Wouldn’t do to be exultant. They must say it’s a terrible blow, to show they don’t care about the money. The more they’re left, the sadder it is. So natural. I blame myself for not having thought of it at once. Have you seen her since?”

“Not for a quiet talk,” said Georgie. “Pepino was there, and a man who, I think, was Pepino’s lawyer. He was frightfully deferential.”

“That proves it,” said Daisy. “And nothing said of any kind?”

Georgie’s face screwed itself up in the effort to remember.

“Yes, there was something,” he said, “but I was talking to Lucia, and the others were talking rather low. But I did hear the lawyer say something to Pepino about pearls. I do remember the word pearls. Perhaps it was the old lady’s pearls.”

Mrs. Quantock gave a short laugh.

“It couldn’t have been Pepino’s,” she said. “He has one in a tie-pin. It’s called pear-shaped, but there’s little shape about it. When do wills come out?”

“Oh, ages,” said Georgie. “Months. And there’s a house in London, I know.”

“Whereabouts?” asked Daisy greedily.

Georgie's face assumed a look of intense concentration.

"I couldn't tell you for certain," he said, "but I know Pepino went up to town not long ago to see about some repairs to his aunt's house, and I think it was the roof."

"It doesn't matter where the repairs were," said Daisy impatiently. "I want to know where the house was."

"You interrupt me," said Georgie. "I was telling you. I know he went to Harrod's afterwards and walked there, because he and Lucia were dining with me and he said so. So the house must have been close to Harrod's, quite close I mean, because it was raining, and if it had been any reasonable distance he would have had a taxi. So it might be Knightsbridge."

Mrs. Quantock put on her gardening-gloves again.

"How frightfully secretive people are," she said. "Fancy his never having told you where his aunt's house was."

"But they never spoke of her," said Georgie. "She's been in that nursing-home so many years."

"You may call it a nursing-home," observed Mrs. Quantock, "or, if you choose, you may call it a post office. But it was an asylum. And they're just as secretive about the property."

"But you never talk about the property till after the funeral," said Georgie. "I believe it's to-morrow."

Mrs. Quantock gave a prodigious sniff.

"They would have, if there hadn't been any," she said.

"How horrid you are," said Georgie. "How——"

His speech was cut off by several loud sneezes. However beautiful the sleeve-links, it wasn't wise to stand without a coat after being in such a heat.

"How what?" asked Mrs. Quantock, when the sneezing was over.

"I've forgotten now. I shall get back to my rolling. A little chilly. I've done half the lawn."

A telephone-bell had been ringing for the last few seconds, and Mrs. Quantock localised it as being in his house, not hers. Georgie was rather deaf, however much he pretended not to be.

"Your telephone bell's ringing, Georgie," she said.

"I thought it was," said Georgie, who had not heard it at all.

"And come in presently for a cup of tea," shouted Mrs. Quantock.

"Should love to. But I must have a bath first."

Georgie hurried indoors, for a telephone call usually meant a little gossip with a friend. A very familiar voice, though a little husky and broken, asked if it was he.

"Yes, it's me, Lucia," he said in soft firm tones of sympathy. "How are you?"

Lucia sighed. It was a long, very audible, intentional sigh. Georgie could visualise her putting her mouth quite close to the telephone, so as to make sure it carried.

"Quite well," she said. "And so is my Pepino, thank heaven. Bearing up wonderfully. He's just gone."

Georgie was on the point of asking where, but guessed in time.

"I see," he said. "And you didn't go. I'm very glad. So wise."

"I felt I couldn't," she said, "and he urged me not. It's to-morrow. He sleeps in London to-night——"

(Again Georgie longed to say "where," for it was impossible not to wonder if he would sleep in the house of unknown locality near Harrod's.)

"And he'll be back to-morrow evening," said Lucia without pause. "I wonder if you would take pity on me and come and dine. Just something to eat, you know: the house is so upset. Don't dress."

"Delighted," said Georgie, though he had ordered oysters. But they could be scolloped for to-morrow. . . . "Love to come."

"Eight o'clock then? Nobody else of course. If you care to bring our Mozart duet."

"Rather," said Georgie. "Good for you to be occupied, Lucia. We'll have a good go at it."

"Dear Georgie," said Lucia faintly. He heard her sigh again, not quite so successfully, and replace the ear-piece with a click.

Georgie moved away from the telephone, feeling immensely busy: there was so much to think about and to do. The first thing was to speak about the oysters, and, his parlour-maid being out, he called down the kitchen-stairs. The absence of Foljambe made it necessary for him to get his bath ready himself, and he turned the hot water tap half on, so that he could run downstairs again and out into the garden (for there was not time to finish the lawn if he was to have a bath and change before tea) in order to put the roller back in the shed. Then he had to get his clothes out, and select something which would do for tea and also for dinner, as Lucia had told him not to dress. There was a new suit which he had not worn yet, rather daring, for the trousers, dark fawn, were distinctly of Oxford cut, and he felt quite boyish as he looked at them. He had ordered them in a moment of reckless sartorial courage, and a quiet tea with Daisy Quantock, followed by a quiet dinner with Lucia, was just the way to make a beginning with them, far better than wearing them for the first time at church on Sunday, when the whole of Riseholme



simultaneously would see them. The coat and waistcoat were very dark blue: they would look blue at tea and black at dinner; and there were some grey silk socks, rather silvery, and a tie to match them. These took some time to find, and his search was interrupted by volumes of steam pouring into his bedroom from his bathroom; he ran in to find the bath full nearly to the brim of boiling water. It had been little more than lukewarm yesterday, and his cook had evidently taken to heart his two-sharp words after breakfast this morning. So he had to pull up the plug of his bath to let the boiling contents subside, and fill up with cold.

He went back to his bedroom and began undressing. All this news about Lucia and Pepino, with Daisy Quantock's penetrating comments, was intensely interesting. Old Miss Lucas had been in this nursing-home or private asylum for years, and Georgie didn't suppose that the inclusive charges could be less than fifteen pounds a week, and fifteen times fifty-two was a large sum. That was income too, and say it was at five per cent., the capital it represented was considerable. Then there was that house in London. If it was freehold, that meant a great deal more capital: if it was on lease it meant a great deal more income. Then there were rates and taxes, and the wages of a caretaker, and no doubt a margin. And there were the pearls.

Georgie took a half-sheet of paper from the drawer in a writing-table where he kept half-sheets and pieces of string untied from parcels, and began to calculate. There was necessarily a good deal of guesswork about it, and the pearls had to be omitted altogether, since nobody could say what "pearls" were worth without knowing their quantity or quality. But even omitting these, and putting quite a low figure on the possible rent of the

house near Harrod's, he was astounded at the capital which these annual outgoings appeared to represent.

"I don't put it at a penny less than fifty thousand pounds," he said to himself, "and the income at two thousand six hundred."

He had got a little chilly as he sat at his figures, and with a luxurious foretaste of a beautiful hot bath, he hurried into his bathroom. The whole of the boiling water had run out.

"How tarsome! Damn!" said Georgie, putting in the plug and turning on both taps simultaneously.

His calculations, of course, had only been the materials on which his imagination built, and as he dressed it was hard at work, between glances at his trousers as reflected in the full-length mirror which stood in his window. What would Lucia and Pepino do with this vast increase of fortune? Lucia already had the biggest house in Riseholme and the most Elizabethan decor, and a motor, and as many new clothes as she chose. She did not spend much on them because her lofty mind despised clothes, but Georgie permitted himself to indulge cynical reflections that the pearls might make her dressier. Then she already entertained as much as she felt disposed; and more money would not make her wish to give more dinners. And she went up to London whenever there was anything in the way of pictures or plays or music which she felt held the seed of culture. Society (so-called) she despised as thoroughly as she despised clothes, and always said she came back to Riseholme feeling intellectually starved. Perhaps she would endow a permanent fund for holding May-day revels on the village green, for Lucia had said she meant to have May-day revels every year. They had been a great success last year, though fatiguing, for everybody dressed up in sixteenth century costume, and danced Morris dances

till they all hobbled home dead lame at the merciful sunset. It had all been wonderfully Elizabethan, and Georgie's jerkin had hurt him very much.

Lucia was a wonderful character, thought Georgie, and she would find a way to spend two or three thousand a year more in an edifying and cultured manner. (Were Oxford trousers meant to turn up at the bottom? He thought not: and how small these voluminous folds made your feet look.) Georgie knew what he himself would do with two or three thousand a year more: indeed he had often considered whether he would not try to do it without. He wanted, ever so much, to have a little flat in London (or a couple of rooms would serve), just for a dip every now and then in the life which Lucia found so rapid. But he knew he wasn't a strong, serious character like Lucia, whose only frivolities were artistic or Elizabethan.

His eye fell on a large photograph on the table by his bedside in a silver frame, representing Brunnhilde. It was signed "Olga to beloved Georgie," and his waistcoat felt quite tight as, drawing in a long breath, he recalled that wonderful six months when Olga Bracely, the prima donna, had bought Old Place, and lived here, and had altered all the values of everything. Georgie believed himself to have been desperately in love with her, but it had been a very exciting time for more reasons than that. Old values had gone: she had thought Riseholme the most splendid joke that had ever been made; she loved them all, and laughed at them all, and nobody minded a bit, but followed her whims as if she had been a Pied Piper. All but Lucia, that is to say, whose throne had, quite unintentionally on Olga's part, been pulled smartly from under her, and her sceptre flew in one direction, and her crown in another. Then Olga had gone off for an operatic tour in America, and, after six' triumphant

months there, had gone on to Australia. But she would be back in England by now, for she was singing in London this season, and her house at Riseholme, so long closed, would be open again. . . . And the coat buttoned beautifully, just the last button, leaving the rest negligently wide and a little loose. Georgie put an amethyst tie-pin in his grey tie, which gave a pretty touch of colour, brushed his hair back from his forehead, so that the toupée was quite indistinguishable from his own hair, and hurried downstairs to go out to tea with Daisy Quantock.

Daisy was seated at her writing-table when he entered, very busy with a pencil and piece of paper and counting something up on her fingers. Her gardening-fork lay in the grate with the fire-irons, on the carpet there were one or two little sausages of garden-mould, which no doubt had peeled off from her boots, and her gardening gloves were on the floor by her side. Georgie instantly registered the conclusion that something important must have occurred, and that she had come indoors in a great hurry, because the carpet was nearly new, and she always made a great fuss if the smallest atom of cigarette ash dropped on it.

“Thirty-seven, forty-seven, fifty-two, and carry five,” she muttered, as Georgie stood in front of the fire, so that the entire new suit should be seen at once. “Wait a moment, Georgie—and seventeen and five’s twenty-three—no, twenty-two, and that’s put me out: I must begin again. That can’t be right. Help yourself, if de Vere has brought in tea, and if not ring—Oh, I left out the four, and altogether it’s two thousand five hundred pounds.”

Georgie had thought at first that Daisy was merely doing some belated household accounts, but the moment she said two thousand five hundred pounds he guessed,

and did not even go through the formality of asking what was two thousand five hundred pounds.

"I made it two thousand six hundred," he said. "But we're pretty well agreed."

Naturally Daisy understood that he understood.

"Perhaps you reckoned the pearls as capital," she said, "and added the interest."

"No I didn't," he said. "How could I tell how much they were worth? I didn't reckon them in at all."

"Well, it's a lot of money," said Daisy. "Let's have tea. What will she do with it?"

She seemed quite blind to the Oxford trousers, and Georgie wondered whether that was from mere feebleness of vision. Daisy was short-sighted, though she steadily refused to recognise that, and would never wear spectacles. In fact, Lucia had made an unkind little epigram about it at a time when there was a slight coolness between the two, and had said "Dear Daisy is too short-sighted to see how short-sighted she is." Of course it was unkind, but very brilliant, and Georgie had read through "The Importance of Being Earnest" which Lucia had gone up to town to see, in the hopes of discovering it. . . . Or was Daisy's unconsciousness of his trousers merely due to her preoccupation with Lucia's probable income? . . . Or were the trousers, after all, not so daring as he had thought them?

He sat down with one leg thrown carelessly over the arm of his chair, so that Daisy could hardly fail to see it. Then he took a piece of tea-cake.

"Yes, do tell me what you think she will do with it?" he asked. "I've been puzzling over it too."

"I can't imagine," said Daisy. "She's got everything she wants now. Perhaps they'll just hoard it, in order that when Pepino dies we may all see how much

richer he was than we ever imagined. That's too posthumous for me. Give me what I want now, and a pauper's funeral afterwards."

"Me too," said Georgie, waving his leg. "But I don't think Lucia will do that. It did occur to me——"

"The house in London, you mean," said Daisy, swiftly interrupting. "Of course if they kept both houses open, with a staff in each, so that they could run up and down as they chose, that would make a big hole in it. Lucia has always said that she couldn't live in London, but she may manage it if she's got a house there."

"I'm dining with her to-night," said Georgie. "Perhaps she'll say something."

Mrs. Quantock was very thirsty with her gardening, and the tea was very hot. She poured it into her saucer and blew on it.

"Lucia would be wise not to waste any time," she said, "if she intends to have any fun out of it, for, you know, Georgie, we're beginning to get old. I'm fifty-two. How old are you?"

Georgie disliked that barbarous sort of question. He had been the young man of Riseholme so long that the habit was ingrained, and he hardly believed that he was forty-eight.

"Forty-three," he said, "but what does it matter how old we are, as long as we're busy and amused? And I'm sure Lucia has got all the energy and life she ever had. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she made a start in London, and went in for all that. Then, of course, there's Pepino, but he only cares for writing his poetry and looking through his telescope."

"I hate that telescope," said Daisy. "He took me up on to the roof the other night and showed me what he said was Mars, and I'll take my oath he said that the same

one was Venus only a week before. But as I couldn't see anything either time, it didn't make much difference."

The door opened, and Mr. Quantock came in. Robert was like a little round brown sarcastic beetle. Georgie got up to greet him, and stood in the full blaze of the light. Robert certainly saw his trousers, for his eyes seemed unable to quit the spreading folds that lay round Georgie's ankles: he looked at them as if he was Cortez and they some new planet. Then without a word he folded his arms and danced a few steps of what was clearly meant to be a sailor's hornpipe.

"Heave-ho, Georgie," he said. "Belay there and avast."

"What is he talking about?" said Daisy.

Georgie, quite apart from his general good-nature, always strove to propitiate Mr. Quantock. He was far the most sarcastic person in Riseholme and could say sharp things straight off, whereas Georgie had to think a long time before he got a nasty edge to any remark, and then his good-nature generally forbade him to slash with it.

"He's talking about my new clothes," he said, "and he's being very naughty. Any news?"

"Any news?" was the general gambit of conversation in Riseholme. It could not have been bettered, for there always was news. And there was now.

"Yes, Pepino's gone to the station," said Mr. Quantock. "Just like a large black crow. Waved a black hand. Bah! Why not call a release a release and have done with it? And if you don't know—why, I'll tell you. It's because they're rolling in riches. Why, I've calculated——"

"Yes?" said Daisy and Georgie simultaneously.

"So you've been calculating too?" said Mr. Quantock.

“ Might have a sweepstake for the one who gets nearest. I say three thousand a year.”

“ Not so much,” said Georgie and Daisy again simultaneously.

“ All right. But that’s no reason why I shouldn’t have a lump of sugar in my tea.”

“ Dear me, no,” said Daisy genially. “ But how do you make it up to three thousand ? ”

“ By addition,” said this annoying man. “ There’ll be every penny of that. I was at the lending library after lunch, and those who could add made it all that.”

Daisy turned to Georgie.

“ You’ll be alone with Lucia then to-night,” she said.

“ Oh, I knew that,” said Georgie. “ She told me Pepino had gone. I expect he’s sleeping in that house to-night.”

Mr. Quantock produced his calculations, and the argument waxed hot. It was still raging when Georgie left in order to get a little rest before going on to dinner, and to practise the Mozart duet. He and Lucia hadn’t tried it before, so it was as well to practise both parts, and let her choose which she liked. Foljambe had come back from her afternoon out, and told him that there had been a trunk call for him while he was at tea, but she could make nothing of it.

“ Somebody in a great hurry, sir,” she said, “ and kept asking if I was—excuse me, sir, if I was Georgie—I kept saying I wasn’t, but I’d fetch you. That wouldn’t do, and she said she’d telegraph.”

“ But who was it ? ” asked Georgie.

“ Couldn’t say, sir. She never gave a name, but only kept asking.”

“ She ? ” asked Georgie.

“ Sounded like one ! ” said Foljambe.

“ Most mysterious,” said Georgie. It couldn’t be



either of his sisters, for they sounded not like a she but a he. So he lay down on his sofa to rest a little before he took a turn at the Mozart.

The evening had turned chilly, and he put on his blue cape with the velvet collar to trot across to Lucia's house. The parlour-maid received him with a faint haggard smile of recognition, and then grew funereal again, and preceding him, not at her usual brisk pace, but sadly and slowly, opened the door of the music-room and pronounced his name in a mournful whisper. It was a gay cheerful room, in the ordinary way; now only one light was burning, and from the deepest of the shadows, there came a rustling, and Lucia rose to meet him.

"Georgie, dear," she said. "Good of you."

Georgie held her hand a moment longer than was usual, and gave it a little extra pressure for the conveyance of sympathy. Lucia, to acknowledge that, pressed a little more, and Georgie tightened his grip again to show that he understood, until their respective finger-nails grew white with the conveyance and reception of sympathy. It was rather agonising, because a bit of skin on his little finger had got caught between two of the rings on his third finger, and he was glad when they quite understood each other.

Of course it was not to be expected that in these first moments Lucia should notice his trousers. She herself was dressed in deep mourning, and Georgie thought he recognised the little cap she wore as being that which had faintly expressed her grief over the death of Queen Victoria. But black suited her, and she certainly looked very well. Dinner was announced immediately, and she took Georgie's arm, and with faltering steps they went into the dining-room.

Georgie had determined that his rôle was to be

sympathetic, but bracing. Lucia must rally from this blow, and her suggestion that he should bring the Mozart duet was hopeful. And though her voice was low and unsteady, she did say, 'as they sat down,

"Any news?"

"I've hardly been outside my house and garden all day," said Georgie. "Rolling the lawn. And Daisy Quantock—did you know?—has had a row with her gardener, and is going to do it all herself. So there she was next door with a fork and a wheelbarrow full of manure."

Lucia gave a wan smile.

"Dear Daisy!" she said. "What a garden it will be! Anything else?"

"Yes, I had tea with them, and while I was out, there was a trunk-call for me. So tarsome. Whoever it was couldn't make any way, and she's going to telegraph. I can't imagine who it was."

"I wonder!" said Lucia in an interested voice. Then she recollected herself again. "I had a sort of presentiment, Georgie, when I saw that telegram for Pepino on the table, two days ago, that it was bad news."

"Curious," said Georgie. "And what delicious fish! How do you always manage to get better things than any of us? It tastes of the sea. And I am so hungry after all my work."

Lucia went firmly on.

"I took it to poor Pepino," she said, "and he got quite white. And then—so like him—he thought of me. 'It's bad news, darling,' he said, 'and we've got to help each other to bear it!'"

"So like Pepino," said Georgie. "Mr. Quantock saw him going to the station. Where is he going to sleep to-night?"

Lucia took a little more fish.

"In Auntie's house in Brompton Square," she said.

"So *that's* where it is!" thought Georgie. If there was a light anywhere in Daisy's house, except in the attics, he would have to go in for a minute, on his return home, and communicate the news.

"Oh, she had a house there, had she?" he said.

"Yes, a charming house," said Lucia, "and full, of course, of dear old memories to Pepino. It will be very trying for him, for he used to go there when he was a boy to see Auntie."

"And has she left it him?" asked Georgie, trying to make his voice sound unconcerned.

"Yes, and it's a freehold," said Lucia. "That makes it easier to dispose of if Pepino settles to sell it. And beautiful Queen Anne furniture."

"My dear, how delicious!" said Georgie. "Probably worth a fortune."

Lucia was certainly rallying from the terrible blow, but she did not allow herself to rally too far, and shook her head sadly.

"Pepino would hate to have to part with Auntie's things," she said. "So many memories. He can recollect her sitting at the walnut bureau (one of those tall ones, you know, which let down in front, and the handles of the drawers all original), doing her accounts in the morning. And a picture of her with her pearls over the fireplace by Sargent; quite an early one. Some fine Chinese Chippendale chairs in the dining-room. We must try to keep some of the things."

Georgie longed to ask a hundred questions, but it would not be wise, for Lucia was so evidently enjoying letting these sumptuous details leak out mingled with memories. He was beginning to feel sure that Daisy's cynical suggestion was correct, and that the stricken desolation of Pepino and Lucia cloked a very sub-

stantial inheritance. Bits of exultation kept peeping out, and Lucia kept poking them back.

"But where will you put all those lovely things, if you sell the house?" he asked. "Your house here is so perfect already."

"Nothing is settled yet," said Lucia. "Neither he nor I can think of anything but dear Auntie. Such a keen intelligent mind she had when Pepino first remembered her. Very good-looking still in the Sargent picture. And it was all so sudden, when Pepino saw her last she was so full of vigour."

("That was the time she bit him," thought Georgie.)  
Aloud he said :

"Of course you must feel it dreadfully. What is the Sargent? A kit-cat or a full length?"

"Full length, I believe," said Lucia. "I don't know where we could put it here. And a William III what-not. But of course it is not possible to think about that yet. A glass of port?"

"I'm going to give you one," said Georgie, "it's just what you want after all your worries and griefs."

Lucia pushed her glass towards him.

"Just half a glass," she said. "You are so dear and understanding, Georgie; I couldn't talk to anyone but you, and perhaps it does me good to talk. There is some wonderful port in Auntie's cellar, Pepino says."

She rose.

"Let us go into the music-room," she said. "We will talk a little more, and then play our Mozart if I feel up to it."

"That'll do you good too," said Georgie.

Lucia felt equal to having more illumination than there had been when she rose out of the shadows before dinner, and they established themselves quite cosily by the fire. -

"There will be a terrible lot of business for Pepino," she said. "Luckily his lawyer is the same firm as Auntie's, and quite a family friend. Whatever Auntie had, so he told us, goes to Pepino, though we haven't really any idea what it is. But with death duties and succession duties, I know we shall have to be prepared to be very poor until they are paid off, and the duties increase so iniquitously in proportion to the inheritance. Then everything in Brompton Square has to be valued, and we have to pay on the entire contents, the very carpets and rugs are priced, and some are beautiful Persians. And then there's the valuer to pay, and all the lawyer's charges. And when all that has been paid and finished, there is the higher super-tax."

"But there's a bigger income," said Georgie.

"Yes, that's one way of looking at it," said Lucia. "But Pepino says that the charges will be enormous. And there's a beautiful music-room."

Lucia gave him one of her rather gimlet-like looks.

"Georgino, I suppose everybody in Riseholme is all agog to know what Pepino has been left. That is so dreadfully vulgar, but I suppose it's natural. Is everybody talking about it?"

"Well, I have heard it mentioned," said Georgie. "But I don't see why it's vulgar. I'm interested in it myself. It concerns you and Pepino, and what concerns one's friends must be of interest to one."

"*Caro*, I know that," said Lucia. "But so much more than the actual money is the responsibility it brings. Pepino and I have all we want for our quiet little needs, and now this great increase of wealth is coming to us—great, that is, compared to our modest little income now—and, as I say, it brings its responsibilities. We shall have to use wisely and without extravagance whatever is left after all these immense expenses have

been paid. That meadow at the bottom of the garden, of course, we shall buy at once, so that there will no longer be any fear of its being built over and spoiling the garden. And then perhaps a new telescope for Pepino. But what do I want in Riseholme beyond what I've got? Music and friends, and the power to entertain them, my books and my flowers. Perhaps a library, built on at the end of the wing, where Pepino can be undisturbed, and perhaps every now and then a string quartette down from London. That will give a great deal of pleasure, and music is more than pleasure, isn't it?"

Again she turned the gimlet-look onto Georgie.

"And then there's the house in Brompton Square," she said, "where Auntie was born. Are we to sell that?"

Georgie guessed exactly what was in her mind. It had been in his too, ever since Lucia had alluded to the beautiful music-room. Her voice had lingered over the beautiful music-room: she had seemed to underline it, to caress it, to appropriate it.

"I believe you are thinking of keeping the house and partly living there," he said.

Lucia looked round, as if a hundred eavesdroppers had entered unaware.

"Hush, Georgie," she said, "not a word must be said about that. But it has occurred to both Pepino and me."

"But I thought you hated London," he said. "You're always so glad to get back, you find it so common and garish."

"It is, compared to the exquisite peace and seriousness of our Riseholme," she said, "where there never is a jarring note, at least hardly ever. But there is in London a certain stir and movement which we lack here. In the swim, Georgie, in the middle of things! Perhaps

we get too sensitive here where everything is full of harmony and culture, perhaps we are too much sheltered. If I followed my inclination I would never leave our dear Riseholme for a single day. Oh! how easy everything would be if one only followed one's inclination! A morning with my books, an afternoon in my garden, my piano after tea, and a friend like you to come in to dine with my Pepino and me and scold me well, as you'll soon be doing for being so bungling over Mozartino."

Lucia twirled round the Elizabethan spit that hung in the wide chimney, and again fixed him rather in the style of the Ancient Mariner. Georgie could not choose but hear . . . Lucia's eloquent well-ordered sentences had nothing impromptu about them; what she said was evidently all thought out and probably talked out. If she and Pepino had been talking of nothing else since the terrible blow had shattered them, she could not have been more lucid and crystal-clear.

"Georgie, I feel like a leisurely old horse who has been turned out to grass being suddenly bridled and harnessed again. But there is work and energy in me yet, though I thought that I should be permitted to grow old in the delicious peace and leisure of our dear quiet humdrum Riseholme. But I feel that perhaps that is not to be. My conscience is cracking the whip at me, and saying 'You've got to trot again, you lazy old thing.' And I've got to think of Pepino. Dear, contented Pepino would never complain if I refused to budge. He would read his paper, and potter in the garden, and write his dear little poems—such a sweet one, 'Bereavement,' he began it yesterday, a sonnet—and look at the stars. But is it a life for a man?"

Georgie made an uneasy movement in his chair, and Lucia hastened to correct the implied criticism.

"You're different, my dear," she said. "You've

got that wonderful power of being interested in everything. Everything. But think what London would give Pepino! His club: the Astronomer-Royal is a member, his other club, political, and politics have lately been quite an obsession with him. The reading-room at the British Museum. No, I should be very selfish if I did not see all that. I must and I do think of Pepino. I mustn't be selfish, Georgie."

This idea of Lucia's leaving Riseholme was a live bomb. At the moment of its explosion, Georgie seemed to see Riseholme fly into a thousand disintegrated fragments. And then, faintly, through the smoke he seemed to see Riseholme still intact. Somebody, of course, would have to fill the vacant throne and direct its affairs. And the thought of Beau Nash at Bath flitted across the distant horizon of his mind. It was a naughty thought, but its vagueness absolved it from treason. He shook it off.

"But how on earth are we to get on without you?" he asked.

"Sweet of you to say that, Georgie," said she, giving another twirl to the spit. (There had been a leg of mutton roasted on it last May-day, while they all sat round in jerkins and stomachers and hose, and all the perfumes of Arabia had hardly sufficed to quell the odour of roasted meat which had pervaded the room for weeks afterwards.) "Sweet of you to say that, but you mustn't think that I am deserting Riseholme. We should be in London perhaps (though, as I say, nothing is settled) for two or three months in the summer, and always come here for weekends, and perhaps from November till Christmas, and a little while in the spring. And then Riseholmè would always be coming up to us. Five spare bedrooms, I believe, and one of them quite a little suite with a bathroom and sitting-room attached. No, dear Georgie, I



would never desert my dear Riseholme. If it was a choice between London and Riseholme, I should not hesitate in my choice."

"Then would you keep both'houses open?" asked Georgie, thrilled to the marrow.

"Pepino thought we could manage it," she said, utterly erasing the impression of the shattered nephew. "He was calculating it out last night, and with board wages at the other house, if you understand, and vegetables from the country, he thought that with care we could live well within our means. He got quite excited about it, and I heard him walking about long after I had gone to bed. Pepino has such a head for detail. He intends to keep a complete set of things, clothes and sponge and everything in London, so that he will have no luggage. Such a saving of tips and small expenses, in which as he so truly says, money leaks away. Then there will be no garage expenses in London: we shall leave the motor here, and rough it with tubes and taxis in town."

Georgie was fully as excited as Pepino, and could not be discreet any longer.

"Tell me," he said, "how much do you think it will all come to? The money he'll come into, I mean."

Lucia also threw discretion to the winds, and forgot all about the fact that they were to be so terribly poor for a long time.

"About three thousand a year, Pepino imagines, when everything is paid. Our income will be doubled, in fact."

Georgie gave a sigh of pure satisfaction. So much was revealed, not only of the future, but of the past, for no one hitherto had known what their income was. And how clever of Robert Quantock to have made so accurate a guess!

"It's too wonderful for you," he said. "And I know you'll spend it beautifully. I had been thinking

over it this afternoon, but I never thought it would be as much as that. And then there are the pearls. I do congratulate you."

Lucia suddenly felt that she had shown too much of the silver (or was it gold?) lining to the cloud of affliction that had overshadowed her.

"Poor Auntie!" she said. "We don't forget her through it all. We hoped she might have been spared us a little longer."

That came out of her note to Daisy Quantock (and perhaps to others as well), but Lucia could not have known that Georgie had already been told about that.

"Now, I've come here to take your mind off these sad things," he said. "You mustn't dwell on them any longer."

She rose briskly.

"You've been ever so good to me," she said. "I should just have moped if I had been alone."

She lapsed into the baby-language which they sometimes spoke, varying it with easy Italian.

"Ickle music, Georgie?" she said. "And you must be kindly-kindly to me. No practice all these days. You brought Mozart? Which part is easiest? Lucia wants to take easiest part."

"Lucia shall take which ever part she likes," said Georgie who had had a good practise at both.

"Treble then," said Lucia. "But oh, how diffy it looks! Hundreds of ickle notes. And me so stupid at reading! Come on then. You begin, Uno, due, tre."

The light by the piano was not very good, but Georgie did not want to put on his spectacles unless he was obliged, for he did not think Lucia knew that he wore them, and somehow spectacles did not seem to 'go' with Oxford trousers. But it was no good, and after

having made a miserable hash of the first page, he surrendered.

"Me must put on speckies," he said. "Me a blind old man."

Then he had an immense surprise.

"And me a blind old woman," said Lucia. "I've just got speckies too. Oh, Georgie, aren't we getting vecchio? Now we'll start again. Uno, due——"

The Mozart went beautifully after that, and each of them inwardly wondered at the accuracy of the other's reading. Lucia suspected that Georgie had been having a try at it. but then, after all, she had had the choice of which part she would take, and if Georgie had practised already, he would have been almost certain to have practised the treble; it never entered her head that he had been so thorough as to practise both. Then they played it through again, changing parts, and again it went excellently. It was late now, and soon Georgie rose to go.

"And what shall I say if anybody who knows I've been dining with you, asks, if you've told me anything?" he asked.

Lucia closed the piano and concentrated.

"Say nothing of our plans about the house in Brompton Square," she said, "but there's no reason why people shouldn't know that there is a house there. I hate secretiveness, and after all, when the will comes out, everyone will know. So say there is a house there, full of beautiful things. And similarly they will know about the money. So say what Pepino thinks it will come to."

"I see," said Georgie.

She came with him to the door, and strolled out into the little garden in front where the daffodils were in flower. The night was clear, but moonless, and the company of stars burned brightly.

“Aldebaran!” said Lucia, pointing inclusively to the spangled arch of the sky. “That bright one. Oh, Georgie, how restful it is to look at Aldebaran if one is worried and sad. It lifts one’s mind above petty cares and personal sorrows. The patens of bright gold! Wonderful Shakespeare! Look in to-morrow afternoon, won’t you, and tell me if there is any news. Naturally, I shan’t go out.”

“Oh, come and have lunch,” said Georgie.

“No, dear Georgie: the funeral is at two. Putney Vale. *Buona notte.*”

“*Buona notte*, dear Lucia,” he said.

Georgie hurried back to his house, and was disappointed to see that there were no lights in Daisy’s drawing-room nor in Robert Quantock’s study. But when he got up to his bedroom, where Foljambe had forgotten to pull down the blinds, he saw a light in Daisy’s bedroom. Even as he looked the curtains there were drawn back, and he saw her amply clad in a dressing-gown, opening windows at top and bottom, for just now the first principle of health consisted in sleeping in a gale. She too must have seen his room was lit, and his face at the window, for she made violent signs to him, and he threw open the casement.

“Well?” she said.

“In Brompton Square,” said George. “And three thousand a year!”

“No!” said Daisy.