

CHAPTER X

TO-DAY, the last of August, Pepino had been allowed for the first time to go out and have a half-hour's quiet strolling in the garden and sit in the sun. His illness which had caused Lucia to recall herself had been serious, and for a few days he had been dangerously ill with pneumonia. After turning a bad corner he had made satisfactory progress.

Lucia, who for these weeks had been wholly admirable, would have gone out with him now, but the doctor, after his visit, had said he wanted to have a talk with her, and for twenty minutes or so they had held colloquy in the music-room. Then, on his departure, she sat there a few minutes more, arranged her ideas, and went out to join Pepino.

"Such a good cheering talk, *caro*," she said. "There never was such a perfect convalescer—my dear, what a word—is you. You're a prize-patient. All you've got to do is to go on exactly as you're going, doing a little more, and a little more every day, and in a month's time you'll be ever so strong again. Such a good constitution."

"And no sea-voyage?" asked Pepino. The dread prospect had been dangled before him at one time.

"Not unless they think a month or two on the Riviera in the winter might be advisable. Then the sea-voyage from Dover to Calais, but no more than that. Now I know what you're thinking about. You told me

that we couldn't manage Aix this August because of expense, so how are we to manage two months of Cannes?"

Lucia paused a moment.

"That delicious story of dear Marcia's," she said, "about those cousins of hers who had to retrench. After talking everything over they decided that all the retrenchment they could possibly make was to have no coffee after lunch. But we can manage better than that. . . ."

Lucia paused again. Pepino had had enough of movement under his own steam, and they had seated themselves in the sunny little arbour by the sundial, which had so many appropriate mottoes carved on it.

"The doctor told me too that it would be most unwise of you to attempt to live in London for any solid period," she said. "Fogs, sunlessness, damp darkness: all bad. And I know again what's in your kind head. You think I adore London, and can spend a month or two there in the autumn, and in the spring, coming down here for week-ends. But I haven't the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind. I'm not going to be up there alone. Besides, where are the dibs, as that sweet little Alf said, where are the dibs to come from for our Riviera?"

"Let the house for the winter then?" said Pepino.

"Excellent idea, if we could be certain of letting it. But we can't be certain of letting it, and all the time a stream of rates and taxes, and caretakers. It would be wretched to be always anxious about it, and always counting the dibs. I've been going into what we spent there this summer, *caro*, and it staggered me. What I vote for, is to sell it. I'm not going to use it without you, and you're not going to use it at all. You know how I looked forward to being there for your sake, your club, the Reading Room at the British Museum, the Astronomer

Royal, but now that's all kaput, as Tony says. We'll bring down here anything that's particularly connected with dear Auntie : her portrait by Sargent, of course, though Sargents are fetching immense prices ; or the walnut bureau, or the Chippendale chairs or that little worsted rug in her bedroom ; but I vote for selling it all, freehold, furniture, everything. As if I couldn't go up to Claridge's now and then, when I want to have a luncheon-party or two of all our friends ! And then we shall have no more anxieties, and if they say you must get away from the cold and the damp, we shall know we're doing nothing on the margin of our means. That would be hateful : we mustn't do that."

" But you'll never be able to be content with Riseholme again," said Pepino. " After your balls and your parties and all that, what will you find to do here ? "

Lucia turned her gimlet-eye on him.

" I shall be a great fool if I don't find something to do," she said. " Was I so idle and unoccupied before we went to London ? Good gracious, I was always worked to death here. Don't you bother your head about that, Pepino, for if you do it will show you don't understand me at all. And our dear Riseholme, let me tell you, has got very slack and inert in our absence, and I feel very guilty about that. There's nothing going on : there's none of the old fizz and bubble and Excelsior there used to be. They're vegetating, they're dry-rotting, and Georgie's getting fat. There's never any news. All that happens is that Daisy slashes a golf-ball about the Green for practice in the morning, and then goes down to the links in the afternoon, and positively the only news next day is whether she has been round under a thousand strokes, whatever that means."

Lucia gave a little indulgent sigh.

"Dear Daisy has ideas sometimes," she said, "and I don't deny that. She had the idea of ouija, she had the idea of the Museum, and though she said that came from Abfou, she had the idea of Abfou. Also she had the idea of golf. But she doesn't carry her ideas out in a vivid manner that excites interest and keeps people on the boil. On the boil! That's what we all ought to be, with a thousand things to do that seem immensely important and which are important because they seem so. You want a certain touch to give importance to things, which dear Daisy hasn't got. Whatever poor Daisy does seems trivial. But they shall see that I've come home. What does it matter to me whether it's Marcia's ball, or playing Alf's accompaniments, or playing golf with Daisy, or playing duets with poor dear Georgie, whose fingers have all become thumbs, so long as I find it thrilling? If I find it dull, *caro*, I shall be, as Adele once said, a bloody fool. Dear Adele, she has always that little vein of coarseness."

Lucia encountered more opposition from Pepino than she anticipated, for he had taken a huge pride in her triumphant summer campaign in London, and though at times he had felt bewildered and buffeted in this high gale of social activity, and had, so to speak, to close his streaming eyes and hold his hat on, he gloried in the incessant and tireless blowing of it, which stripped the choicest fruits from the trees. He thought they could manage, without encroaching on financial margins, to keep the house open for another year yet, anyhow; he acknowledged that he had been unduly pessimistic about going to Aix, he even alluded to the memories of Aunt Amy which were twined about 25 Brompton Square, and which he would be so sorry to sever. But Lucia, in that talk with his doctor, had made up her mind: she rejected at once the idea of pursuing her

victorious career in London if all the time she would have to be careful and thrifty, and if, far more importantly, she would be leaving Pepino down at Riseholme. That was not to be thought of: affection no less than decency made it impossible, and so having made up her mind, she set about the attainment of her object with all her usual energy. She knew, too, the value of incessant attack: smash little Alf, for instance, when he had landed a useful blow on his opponent's face, did not wait for him to recover, but instantly followed it up with another and yet another till his victim collapsed and was counted out. Lucia behaved in precisely the same way with Pepino: she produced rows of figures to show they were living beyond their means: she quoted (or invented) something the Prime Minister had said about the probability of an increase in income-tax: she assumed that they would go to the Riviera for certain, and was appalled at the price of tickets in the Blue Train, and of the tariff at hotels.

"And with all our friends in London, Pepino," she said in the decisive round of these combats, "who are longing to come down to Riseholme and spend a week with us, our expenses here will go up. You mustn't forget that. We shall be having a succession of visitors in October, and indeed till we go south. Then there's the meadow at the bottom of the garden: you've not bought that yet, and on that I really have set my heart. A spring garden there. A profusion of daffodils, and a paved walk. You promised me that. I described what it would be like to Tony, and he is wildly jealous. I'm sure I don't wonder. Your new telescope too. I insist on that telescope, and I'm sure I don't know where the money's to come from. My dear old piano also: it's on its very last legs, and won't last much longer,

and I know you don't expect me to live, literally keep alive, without a good piano in the house."

Pepino, was weakening. Even when he was perfectly well and strong he was no match for her, and this rain of blows was visibly staggering him.

"I don't want to urge you, *caro*," she continued. "You know I never urge you to do what you don't feel is best."

"But you are urging me," said Pepino.

"Only to do what you feel is best. As for the memories of Aunt Amy in Brompton Square, you must not allow false sentiment to come in. You never saw her there since you were a boy, and if you brought down here her portrait, and the wool-work rug which you remember her putting over her knees, I should say, without urging you, mind, that that was ample. . . . What a sweet morning! Come to the end of the garden and imagine what the meadow will look like with a paved walk and a blaze of daffodils. . . The Chippendale chairs, I think I should sell."

Lucia did not really want Aunt Amy's portrait either, for she was aware she had said a good deal from time to time about Aunt Amy's pearls, which were there, a little collar of very little seeds, faultlessly portrayed. But then Georgie had seen them on that night at the Opera, and Lucia felt that she knew Riseholme very poorly if it was not perfectly acquainted by now with the nature and minuteness of Aunt Amy's pearls. The pearls had better be sold too, and also, she thought, her own portrait by Sigismund, for the post-cubists were not making much of a mark.

The determining factor in her mind, over this abandonment of her London career, to which in a few days, by incessant battering, she had got Pepino to consent, was Pepino himself. He could not be with her in London,

and she could not leave him week after week (for nothing less than that, if you were to make any solid progress in London, was any good) alone in Riseholme. But a large factor, also, was the discovery of how little at present she counted for in Riseholme, and that could not be tolerated. Riseholme had deposed her, Riseholme was not intending to be managed by her from Brompton Square. The throne was vacant, for poor Daisy, and for the matter of that poor Georgie were not the sort of people who could occupy thrones at all. She longed to queen it there again, and though she was aware that her utmost energies would be required, what were energies for except to get you what you wanted?

Just now she was nothing in Riseholme: they had been sorry for her because Pepino had been so ill, but as his steady convalescence proceeded, and she began to ring people up, and pop in, and make plans for them, she became aware that she mattered no more than Piggie and Goosie. . . . There on the Green, as she saw from the window of her hall, was Daisy, whirling her arms madly, and hitting a ball with a stick which had a steel blade at the end, and Georgie, she was rather horrified to observe, was there too, trying to do the same. Was Daisy reaping the reward of her persistence, and getting somebody interested in golf? And, good heavens, there were Piggie and Goosie also smacking away. Riseholme was clearly devoting itself to golf.

"I shall have to take to golf," thought Lucia. "What a bore! Such a foolish game."

At this moment a small white ball bounded over her yew-hedge, and tapped smartly against the front door.

"What an immense distance to have hit a ball," she thought, "I wonder which of them did that?"

It was soon clear, for Daisy came tripping through the garden after it, and Lucia, all smiles, went out to meet her.

"Good morning, dear Daisy," she said. "Did you hit that ball that immense distance? How wonderful! No harm done at all. But what a splendid player you must be!"

"So sorry," panted Daisy, "but I thought I would have a hit with a driver. Very wrong of me; I had no idea it would go so far or so crooked."

"A marvellous shot," said Lucia. "I remember how beautifully you putted. And this is all part of golf too? Do let me see you do it again."

Daisy could not reproduce that particular masterpiece, but she sent the ball high in the air, or skimming along the ground, and explained that one was a lofted shot, and the other a wind-cheater.

"I like the wind-cheater best," said Lucia. "Do let me see if I can do that."

She missed the ball once or twice, and then made a lovely wind-cheater, only this time Daisy called it a top. Daisy had three clubs, two of which she put down when she used the third, and then forgot about them, so that they had to go back for them. . . . And up came Georgie, who was making wind-cheaters too.

"Good-morning, Lucia," he said. "It's so tarsome not to be able to hit the ball, but it's great fun if you do. Have you put down your clock-golf yet? There, didn't that go?"

Lucia had forgotten all about the clock-golf. It was somewhere in what was called the "game-cupboard," which contained bowls (as being Elizabethan) and some old tennis rackets, and a cricket bat Pepino had used at school.

"I'll put it down this afternoon," she said. "Come in after lunch, Georgie, and play a game with me. You too, Daisy."

"Thanks, but Georgie and I were going to have a

real round on the links," said Daisy, in a rather superior manner.

, "What fun!" said Lucia sycophantically. "I shall walk down and look at you. I think I must learn. I never saw anything so interesting as golf."

This was gratifying: Daisy was by no means reluctant to show Lucia the way to do anything, but behind that, she was not quite sure whether she liked this sudden interest in golf. Now that practically the whole of Riseholme was taking to it, and she herself could beat them all, having had a good start, she was hoping that Lucia would despise it, and find herself left quite alone on these lovely afternoons. Everybody went down to the little nine-hole course now after lunch, the Vicar (Mr. Rushbold) and his wife, the curate, Colonel Boucher, Georgie, Mrs. Antrobus (who discarded her ear-trumpet for these athletics and never could hear you call "Fore") and Piggie and Goosie, and often Mrs. Boucher was wheeled down in her bath-chair, and applauded the beautiful putts made on the last green. Indeed, Daisy had started instruction classes in her garden, and Riseholme stood in rows and practised swinging and keeping its eye on a particular blade of grass: golf in fact promised to make Riseholme busy and happy again just as the establishment of the Museum had done. Of course, if Lucia was waiting to learn (and not learn too much) Daisy would be very happy to instruct her, but at the back of Daisy's mind was a strange uneasiness. She consoled herself, however, by supposing that Lucia would go back to London again in the autumn, and by giving Georgie an awful drubbing.

Lucia did not accompany them far on their round, but turned back to the little shed of a club-house, where she gathered information about the club. It was quite new, having been started only last spring by the tradesmen

and townspeople of Riseholme and the neighbouring little town of Blitton. She then entered into pleasant conversation with the landlord of the Ambermere Arms, who had just finished his round and said how pleased they all were that the gentry had taken to golf.

"There's Mrs. Quantock, m<sup>a</sup>'am," said he. "She comes down every afternoon and practises on the Green every morning. Walking over the Green now of a morning, is to take your life in your hand. Such keenness I never saw, and she'll never be able to hit the ball at all."

"Oh, but you mustn't discourage us, Mr. Stratton," said Lucia. "I'm going to devote myself to golf this autumn."

"You'll make a better hand at it, I'll be bound," said Mr. Stratton obsequiously. "They say Mrs. Quantock putts very nicely when she gets near the hole, but it takes her so many strokes to get there. She's lost the hole, in a manner of speaking, before she has a chance of winning it."

Lucia thought hard for a minute.

"I must see about joining at once," she said. "Who—who are the Committee?"

"Well, we are going to reconstitute it next October," he said, "seeing that the ladies and gentlemen of Riseholme are joining. We should like to have one of you ladies as President, and one of the gentlemen on the Committee."

Lucia made no hesitation about this.

"I should be delighted," she said, "if the present Committee did me the honour to ask me. And how about Mr. Pillson? I would sound him if you like. But we must say nothing about it, till your Committee meets."

That was beautifully settled then; Mr. Stratton knew how gratified the Committee would be, and Lucia,

long before Georgie and Daisy returned, had bought four clubs, and was having a lesson from a small wiry caddie.

Every morning while Daisy was swanking away on the Green, teaching Georgie and Piggie and Goosie how to play, Lucia went surreptitiously down the hill and learned, while after tea she humbly took her place in Daisy's class and observed Daisy doing everything all wrong. She putted away at her clock-golf, she bought a beautiful book with pictures and studied them, and all the time she said nothing whatever about it. In her heart she utterly despised golf, but golf just now was the stunt, and she had to get hold of Riseholme again. . . .

Georgie popped in one morning after she had come back from her lesson, and found her in the act of holing out from the very longest of the stations.

"My dear, what a beautiful putt!" he said. "I believe you're getting quite keen on it."

"Indeed I am," said she. "It's great fun. I go down sometimes to the links and knock the ball about. Be very kind to me this afternoon and come round with me."

Georgie readily promised to do so.

"Of course I will," he said, "and I should be delighted to give you a hint or two, if I can. I won two holes from Daisy yesterday."

"How clever of you, Georgie! Any news?"

Georgie said the sound that is spelt "Tut."

"I quite forgot," he said. "I came round to tell you. Neither Mrs. Boucher nor Daisy nor I know *what to do.*"

("That's the Museum Committee," thought Lucia.)

"What is it, Georgie?" she said. "See if poor Lucia can help."

"Well," said Georgie, "You know Pug?"

"That mangy little thing of Lady Ambermere's?" asked Lucia.

"Yes. Pug died, I don't know what of——"

"Cream, I should think," said Lucia. "And cake."

"Well, it may have been. Anyhow, Lady Ambermere had him stuffed, and while I was out this morning, she left him in a glass case at my house, as a present for the Museum. There he is lying on a blue cushion, with one ear cocked, and a great watery eye, and the end of his horrid tongue between his lips."

"No!" said Lucia.

"I assure you. And we don't know what to do. We can't put him in the Museum, can we? And we're afraid she'll take the mittens away if we don't. But, how can we refuse? She wrote me a note about 'her precious Pug.'"

Lucia remembered how they had refused an Elizabethan spit, though they had subsequently accepted it. But she was not going to remind Georgie of that. She wanted to get a better footing in the Museum than an Elizabethan spit had given her.

"What a dreadful thing!" she said. "And so you came to see if your poor old Lucia could help you."

"Well, we all wondered if you might be able to think of something," said he.

Lucia enjoyed this: the Museum was wanting her. . . . She fixed Georgie with her eye.

"Perhaps I can get you out of your hole," she said. "What I imagine is, Georgie, that you want *me* to take that awful Pug back to her. I see what's happened. She had him stuffed, and then found he was too dreadful an object to keep, and so thought she'd be generous to the Museum. We—I should say 'you', for I've got nothing to do with it—you don't care about the Museum

being made a dump for all the rubbish that people don't want in their houses. Do you?"

"No, certainly not," said Georgie. (Did Lucia mean anything by that? Apparently she did.) She became brisk and voluble.

"Of course, if you asked my opinion," said Lucia, "I should say that there has been a little too much dumping done already. But that is not the point, is it? And it's not my business either. Anyhow, you don't want any more rubbish to be dumped. As for withdrawing the mittens—only lent, are they?—she won't do anything of the kind. She likes taking people over and shewing them. Yes, Georgie, I'll help you: tell Mrs. Boucher and Daisy that I'll help you. I'll drive over this afternoon—no, I won't, for I'm going to have a lovely game of golf with you—I'll drive over to-morrow and take Pug back, with the Committee's regrets that they are not taxidermists. Or, if you like, I'll do it on my own authority. How odd to be afraid of poor old Lady Ambermere! Never mind: I'm not. How all you people bully me into doing just what you want! I always was Riseholme's slave. Put Pug's case in a nice piece of brown paper, Georgie, for I don't want to see the horrid little abortion, and don't think anything more about it. Now let's have a good little putting match till lunch-time."

Georgie was nowhere in the good little putting-match, and he was even less anywhere when it came to their game in the afternoon. Lucia made magnificent swipes from the tee, the least of which, if she happened to hit it, must have gone well over a hundred yards, whereas Daisy considered eighty yards from the tee a most respectable shot, and was positively pleased if she went into a bunker at a greater distance than that, and said the bunker ought to be put further off

for the sake of the longer hitters. And when Lucia came near the green, she gave a smart little dig with her mashie, and, when this remarkable stroke came off, though she certainly hit the ground, the ball went beautifully, whereas when Daisy hit the ground the ball didn't go at all. All the time she was light-hearted and talkative, and even up to the moment of striking, would be saying "Now oo naughty ickle ball : Lucia's going to give you such a spank !" whereas when Daisy was playing, her opponent and the caddies had all to be dumb and turned to stone, while she drew a long breath and waved her club with a pendulum-like movement over the ball.

"But you're marvellous," said Georgie as, three down, he stood on the fourth tee, and watched Lucia's ball sail away over a sheep that looked quite small in the distance. "It's only three weeks or so since you began to play at all. You are clever ! I believe you'd nearly beat Daisy."

"Georgie, I'm afraid you're a flatterer," said Lucia. "Now give your ball a good bang, and then there's something I want to talk to you about."

"Let's see ; it's slow back, isn't it ?" said Georgie. "Or is it quick back ? I believe Daisy says sometimes one and sometimes the other."

Daisy and Piggie, starting before them, were playing in a parallel and opposite direction. Daisy had no luck with her first shot, and very little with her second. Lucia just got out of the way of her third and Daisy hurried by them.

"Such a slice !" she said. "How are you getting on, Lucia ? How many have you played to get there ?"

"One at present, dear," said Lucia. "But isn't it difficult ?"

Daisy's face fell.

"One?" she said.

Lucia kissed her hand.

"That's all," she said. "And has Georgie told you that I'll manage about Pug for you?"

Daisy looked round severely. She had begun to address her ball and nobody must talk.

Lucia watched Daisy do it again, and rejoined Georgie who was in a 'tarsome' place, and tufts of grass flew in the air.

"Georgie, I had a little talk with Mr. Stratton the other day," she said. "There's a new golf-committee being elected in October, and they would so like to have you on it. Now be good-natured and say you will."

Georgie had no intention of saying anything else.

"And they want poor little me to be President," said Lucia. "So shall I send Mr. Stratton a line and say we will? It would be kind, Georgie. Oh, by the way, do come and dine to-night. Pepino—so much better, thanks—Pepino told me to ask you. He would enjoy it. Just one of our dear little evenings again."

Lucia, in fact, was bringing her batteries into action, and Georgie was the immediate though not the ultimate objective. He longed to be on the golf-committee, he was intensely grateful for the promised removal of Pug, and it was much more amusing to play golf with Lucia than to be dragooned round by Daisy who told him after every stroke what he ought to have done and could never do it herself. A game should not be a lecture.

Lucia thought it was time to confide in him about the abandoning of Brompton Square. Georgie would love knowing what nobody else knew yet. She waited till he had failed to hole a short putt, and gave him the subsequent one, which Daisy never did.

"I hope we shall have many of our little evenings,

Georgie," she said. "We shall be here till Christmas. No, no more London for us, though it's a secret at present."

"What?" said Georgie.

"Wait a moment," said Lucia, teeing up for the last hole. "Now ickle ballie, fly away home. There! . . ." and ickle ballie flew at about right-angles to home, but ever such a long way.

She walked with him to cover-point, where he had gone too.

"Pepino must never live in London again," she said. "All going to be sold, Georgie. The house and the furniture and the pearls. You must put up with your poor old Lucia at Riseholme again. Nobody knows yet but you, but now it is all settled. Am I sorry? Yes, Georgie, course I am. So many dear friends in London. But then there are dear friends in Riseholme. Oh, what a beautiful bang, Georgie. You nearly hit Daisy. Call 'Five!' isn't that what they do?"

Lucia was feeling much surer of her ground. Georgie, bribed by a place on the golf-committee and by her admiration of his golf, and by her nobility with regard to Pug, was trotting back quick to her, and that was something. Next morning she had a hectic interview with Lady Ambermere. . . .

Lady Ambermere was said to be not at home, though Lucia had seen her majestic face at the window of the pink saloon. So she asked for Miss Lyail, the down-trodden companion, and waited in the hall. Her chauffeur had deposited the large brown-paper parcel with Pug inside on the much-admired tessellated pavement.

"Oh, Miss Lyall," said Lucia. "So sad that dear Lady Ambermere is out, for I wanted to convey the grateful thanks of the Museum Committee to her for her beautiful gift of poor Pug. But they feel they can't . . .

Yes, that's Pug in the brown-paper parcel. So sweet. But will you, on Lady Ambermere's return, make it quite clear?"

Miss Lyall, looking like a mouse, considered what her duty was in this difficult situation. She felt that Lady Ambermere ought to know Lucia's mission and deal with it in person.

"I'll see if Lady Ambermere has come in, Mrs. Lucas," she said. "She may have come in. Just out in the garden, you know. Might like to know what you've brought. O dear me!"

Poor Miss Lyall scuttled away, and presently the door of the pink saloon was thrown open. After an impressive pause Lady Ambermere appeared, looking vexed. The purport of this astounding mission had evidently been conveyed to her.

"Mrs. Lucas, I believe," she said, just as if she wasn't sure.

Now Lucia after all her Duchesses was not going to stand that. Lady Ambermere might have a Roman nose, but she hadn't any manners.

"Lady Ambermere, I presume," she retorted. So there they were.

Lady Ambermere glared at her in a way that should have turned her to stone. It made no impression.

"You have come, I believe, with a message from the Committee of your little Museum at Riseholme, which I may have misunderstood."

Lucia knew she was doing what neither Mrs. Boucher nor Daisy in their most courageous moments would have dared to do. As for Georgie . . .

"No, Lady Ambermere," she said. "I don't think you've misunderstood it. A stuffed dog on a cushion. They felt that the Museum was not quite the place for it. I have brought it back to you with their thanks and

regrets. So kind of you and—and so sorry of them. This is the parcel. That is all, I think.”

It wasn't quite all. . . .

“Are you aware, Mrs. Lucas,” said Lady Ambermere, “that the mittens of the late Queen Charlotte are my loan to your little Museum?”

Lucia put her finger to her forehead.

“Mittens?” she said. “Yes, I believe there are some mittens. I think I have seen them. No doubt those are the ones. Yes?”

That was brilliant: it implied complete indifference on the part of the Committee (to which Lucia felt sure she would presently belong) as to what Lady Ambermere might think fit to do about mittens.

“The Committee shall hear from me,” said Lady Ambermere, and walked majestically back to the pink saloon.

Lucia felt sorry for Miss Lyall: Miss Lyall would probably not have a very pleasant day, but she had no real apprehensions, so she explained to the Committee, who were anxiously awaiting her return on the Green, about the withdrawal of these worsted relics.

“Bluff, just bluff,” she said. “And even if it wasn't— Surely, dear Daisy, it's better to have no mittens and no Pug than both. Pug—I caught a peep of him through a hole in the brown paper—Pug would have made your Museum a laughing-stock.”

“Was she very dreadful?” asked Georgie.

Lucia gave a little silvery laugh.

“Yes, dear Georgie, quite dreadful. You would have collapsed if she had said to you ‘Mr. Pillson, I believe.’ Wouldn't you, Georgie? Don't pretend to be braver than you are.”

“Well, I think we ought all to be much obliged to you, Mrs. Lucas,” said Mrs. Boucher. “And I'm sure we

are. I should never have stood up to her like that ! And if she takes the mittens away, I should be much inclined to put another pair in the case, for the case belongs to us and not to her, with just the label ' These Mittens did not belong to Queen Charlotte, and were not presented by Lady Ambermere.' That would serve her out."

Lucia laughed gaily again.

" So glad to have been of use," she said. " And now, dear Daisy, will you be as kind to me as Georgie was yesterday and give me a little game of golf this afternoon ? Not much fun for you, but so good for me."

Daisy had observed some of Lucia's powerful strokes yesterday, and she was rather dreading this invitation for fear it should not be, as Lucia said, much fun for her. Luckily, she and Georgie had already arranged to play to-day, and she had, in anticipation of the dread event, engaged Piggy, Goosie, Mrs. Antrobus and Colonel Boucher to play with her on all the remaining days of that week. She meant to practise like anything in the interval. And then, like a raven croaking disaster, the infamous Georgie let her down.

" I'd sooner not play this afternoon," he said. " I'd sooner just stroll out with you."

" Sure, Georgie ? " said Lucia. " That will be nice then. ' Oh, how nervous I shall be.' "

Daisy made one final effort to avert her downfall, by offering, as they went out that afternoon, to give Lucia a stroke a hole. Lucia said she knew she could do it, but might they, just for fun, play level ? And as the round proceeded, Lucia's kindness was almost intolerable. She could see, she said, that Daisy was completely off her game, when Daisy wasn't in the least off her game : she said, ' Oh, that was bad luck ! ' when Daisy missed short putts : she begged her to pick her ball out of bushes and

not count it. . . . At half past four Riseholme knew that Daisy had halved four holes and lost the other five. Her short reign as Queen of Golf had come to an end.

The Museum Committee met after tea at Mrs. Boucher's (Daisy did not hold her golfing-class in the garden that day) and tact, Georgie felt, seemed to indicate that Lucia's name should not be suggested as a new member of the Committee so swiftly on the heels of Daisy's disaster. Mrs. Boucher, privately consulted, concurred, though with some rather stinging remarks as to Daisy's having deceived them all about her golf, and the business of the meeting was chiefly concerned with the proposed closing down of the Museum for the winter. The tourist season was over, no char-a-bancs came any more with visitors, and for three days not a soul had passed the turnstile.

"So where's the use," asked Mrs. Boucher, "of paying a boy to let people into the Museum when nobody wants to be let in? I call it throwing money away. Far better close it till the spring, and have no more expense, except to pay him a shilling a week to open the windows and air it, say on Tuesday and Friday, or Wednesday and Saturday."

"I should suggest Monday and Thursday," said Daisy, very decisively. If she couldn't have it all her own way on the links, she could make herself felt on committees.

"Very well, Monday and Thursday," said Mrs. Boucher. "And then there's another thing. It's getting so damp in there, that if you wanted a cold bath, you might undress and stand there. The water's pouring off the walls. A couple of oil-stoves, I suggest, every day except when it's being aired: The boy will attend to them, and make it half a crown instead of a shilling.

I'm going to Blitton to-morrow, and if that's your wish I'll order them. No : I'll bring them back with me, and I'll have them lit to-morrow morning. But unless you want to have nothing to show next spring but mildew, don't let us delay about it. A crop of mildew won't be sufficient attraction to visitors, and there'll be nothing else."

Georgie rapped the table.

"And I vote we take the manuscript of 'Lucrezia' out, and that one of us keeps it till we open again," he said.

"I should be happy to keep it," said Daisy.

Georgie wanted it himself, but it was better not to thwart Daisy to-day. Besides, he was in a hurry, as Lucia had asked him to bring round his planchette and see if Abfou would not like a little attention. Nobody had talked to Abfou for weeks.

"Very well," he said, "and if that's all——"

"I'm not sure I shouldn't feel happier if it was at the bank," said Mrs. Boucher. "Supposing it was stolen."

Georgie magnanimously took Daisy's side : he knew how Daisy was feeling. Mrs. Boucher was outvoted, and he got up.

"If that's all then, I'll be off," he said.

Daisy had a sort of conviction that he was going to do something with Lucia, perhaps have a lesson at golf.

"Come in presently?" she said.

"I can't, I'm afraid," he said. "I'm busy till dinner."

And of course, on her way home, she saw him hurrying across to The Hurst with his planchette.