

CHAPTER II

THIS simple word 'No' connoted a great deal in the Riseholme vernacular. It was used, of course, as a mere negative, without emphasis, and if you wanted to give weight to your negative you added 'Certainly not.' But when you used the word 'No' with emphasis, as Daisy had used it from her bedroom window to Georgie, it was not a negative at all, and its signification briefly put was "I never heard anything so marvellous, and it thrills me through and through. Please go on at once, and tell me a great deal more, and then let us talk it all over."

On that occasion Georgie did not go on at once, for having made his climax he, with supreme art, shut the window and drew down the blind, leaving Daisy to lie awake half the night and ponder over this remarkable news, and wonder what Pepino and Lucia would do with all that money. She arrived at several conclusions: she guessed that they would buy the meadow beyond the garden, and have a new telescope, but the building of a library did not occur to her. Before she went to sleep an even more important problem presented itself, and she scribbled a note to Georgie to be taken across in the morning early, in which she wrote, "And did she say anything about the house? What's going to happen to it? And you didn't tell me the number;" exactly as she would have continued the conversation if he had

not shut his window so quickly and drawn down the blind, ringing down the curtain on his magnificent climax.

Foljambe brought up this note with Georgie's early morning tea and the glass of very hot water which sometimes he drank instead of it if he suspected an error of diet the night before, and the little glass gallipot of Kruschen salts, which occasionally he added to the hot water or the tea. Georgie was very sleepy, and, only half awake, turned round in bed, so that Foljambe should not see the place where he wore the toupée, and smothered a snore, for he would not like her to think that he snored. But when she said "Telegram for you, sir," Georgie sat up at once in his pink silk pyjamas.

"No!" he said with emphasis.

He tore the envelope open, and a whole sheaf of sheets fell out. The moment he set eyes on the first words, he knew so well from whom it came that he did not even trouble to look at the last sheet where it would be signed.

BELOVED GEORGIE (it ran),

I rang you up till I lost my temper and so send this. Most expensive, but terribly important. I arrived in London yesterday and shall come down for week-end to Riseholme. Shall dine with you Saturday all alone to hear about everything. Come to lunch and dinner Sunday, and ask everybody to one or other, particularly Lucia. Am bringing cook, but order sufficient food for Sunday. Wonderful American and Australian tour, and I'm taking house in London for season. Shall motor down. Bless you.

OLGA.

Georgie sprang out of bed, merely glancing through Daisy's pencilled note and throwing it away. There was nothing to be said to it in any case, since he had been told not to divulge the project with regard to the house in Brompton Square, and he didn't know the number. But in Olga's telegram there was enough to make anybody

busy for the day, for he had to ask all her friends to lunch or dinner on Sunday, order the necessary food, and arrange a little meal for Olga and himself to-morrow night. He scarcely knew what he was drinking, tea or hot water or Kruschen salts, so excited was he. He foresaw too, that there would be call for the most skilled diplomacy with regard to Lucia. She must certainly be asked first, and some urging might be required to make her consent to come at all, either to lunch or dinner, even if due regard was paid to her deep mourning, and the festivity limited to one or two guests of her own selection. Yet somehow Georgie felt that she would stretch a point and be persuaded, for everybody else would be going some time on Sunday to Olga's, and it would be tiresome for her to explain again and again in the days that followed that she had been asked and had not felt up to it. And if she didn't explain carefully every time, Riseholme would be sure to think she hadn't been asked. 'A little diplomacy' thought George, as he trotted across to her house after breakfast with no hat, but a fur tippet round his neck.

He was shown into the music-room, while her maid went to fetch her. The piano was open, so she had evidently been practising, and there was a copy of the Mozart 'quet which she had read so skilfully last night on the music-rest. For the moment Georgie thought he must have forgotten to take his copy away with him, but then looking at it more carefully he saw that there were pencilled marks for the fingering scribbled over the more difficult passages in the treble, which certainly he had never put there.. At the moment he saw Lucia through the window coming up the garden, and he hastily took a chair far away from the piano and buried himself in *The Times*.

They sat close together in front of the fire, and Georgie opened his errand.

"I heard from Olga this morning," he said, "a great long telegram. She is coming down for the week-end."

Lucia gave a wintry smile. She did not care for Olga's coming down. Riseholme was quite silly about Olga.

"That will be nice for you, Georgie," she said.

"She sent you a special message," said he.

"I am grateful for her sympathy," said Lucia. "She might perhaps have written direct to me, but I'm sure she was full of kind intentions. As she sent the message by you verbally, will you verbally thank her? I appreciate it."

Even as she delivered these icy sentiments, Lucia got up rather hastily and passed behind him. Something white on the music-rest of the piano had caught her eye.

"Don't move, Georgie," she said, "sit and warm yourself and light your cigarette. Anything else?"

She walked up the room to the far end where the piano stood, and Georgie, though he was a little deaf, quite distinctly heard the rustle of paper. The most elementary rudiments of politeness forbade him to look round. Besides he knew exactly what was happening. Then there came a second rustle of paper, which he could not interpret.

"Anything else, Georgie?" repeated Lucia, coming back to her chair.

"Yes. But Olga's message wasn't quite that," he said. "She evidently hadn't heard of your bereavement."

"Odd," said Lucia. "I should have thought perhaps that the death of Miss Amy Lucas—however, what was her message then?"

"She wanted you very much—she said 'particularly Lucia'—to go to lunch or dine with her on Sunday. Pepino, too, of course."

"So kind of her, but naturally quite impossible," said Lucia.

"Oh, but you mustn't say that," said Georgie. "She is down for just that day, and she wants to see all her old friends. Particularly Lucia, you know. In fact she asked me to get up two little parties for her at lunch and dinner. So, of course, I came to see you first, to know which you would prefer."

Lucia shook her head.

"A party!" she said. "How do you think I could?"

"But it wouldn't be *that* sort of party," said Georgie. "Just a few of your friends. You and Pepino will have seen nobody to-night and all to-morrow. He will have told you everything by Sunday. And so bad to sit brooding."

The moment Lucia had said it was quite impossible she had been longing for Georgie to urge her, and had indeed been prepared to encourage him to urge her if he didn't do so of his own accord. His last words had given her an admirable opening.

"I wonder!" she said. "Perhaps Pepino might feel inclined to go, if there really was no party. It doesn't do to brood: you are right, I mustn't let him brood. Selfish of me not to think of that. Who would there be, Georgie?"

"That's really for you to settle," he said.

"You?" she asked.

"Yes," said Georgie, thinking it unnecessary to add that Olga was dining with him on Saturday, and that he would be at lunch and dinner on Sunday. "Yes: she asked me to come."

"Well, then, what if you asked poor Daisy and her husband?" said Lucia. "It would be a treat for them. That would make six. I think six would be enough. I will do my best to persuade Pepino."

"Capital," said Georgie. "And would you prefer lunch or dinner?"

Lucia sighed.

"I think dinner," she said. "One feels more capable of making the necessary effort in the evening. But, of course, it is all conditional on Pepino's feeling."

She glanced at the clock.

"He will just be leaving Brompton Square," she said. "And then, afterwards, his lawyer is coming to lunch with him and have a talk. Such a lot of business to see to."

Georgie suddenly remembered that he did not yet know the number of the house.

"Indeed there must be," he said. "Such a delightful Square, but rather noisy, I should think, at the lower end."

"Yes, but deliciously quiet at the top end," said Lucia. "A curve you know, and a *cul de sac*. Number twenty-five is just before the beginning of the curve. And no houses at the back. Just the peaceful old churchyard—though sad for Pepino to look out on this morning—and a footpath only up to Ennismore Gardens. My music-room looks out at the back."

Lucia rose.

"Well, Georgie, you will be very busy this morning," she said, "getting all the guests for Sunday, and I mustn't keep you. But I should like to play you a morsel of Stravinski which I have been trying over. Terribly modern, of course, and it may sound hideous to you at first, and at best it's a mere little tinkle if you compare it with the immortals. But there is something about it, and one mustn't condemn all modern work unheard. There was a time no doubt when even Beethoven's greatest sonatas were thought to be modern and revolutionary."

She led the way to the piano, where on the music-

rest was the morsel of Stravinski, which explained the second and hitherto unintelligible rustle.

"Sit by me, Georgie," she said, "and turn over quick, when I nod. Something like this."

Lucia got through the first page beautifully, but then everything seemed to go wrong. Georgie had expected it all to be odd and aimless, but surely Stravinski hadn't meant quite what Lucia was playing. Then he suddenly saw that the key had been changed, but in a very inconspicuous manner, right in the middle of a bar, and Lucia had not observed this. She went on playing with amazing agility, nodded at the end of the second page, and then luckily the piece changed back again into its original clef. Would it be wise to tell her? He thought not: next time she tried it, or the time after, she would very likely notice the change of key.

A brilliant roulade consisting of chromatic scales in contrary directions, brought this firework to an end, and Lucia gave a little shiver.

"I must work at it," she said, "before I can judge of it. . . ."

Her fingers strayed about the piano, and she paused. Then with the wistful expression Georgie knew so well, she played the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. Georgie set his face also into the Beethoven-expression, and at the end gave the usual little sigh.

"Divine," he said. "You never played it better. Thank you, Lucia."

She rosé.

"You must thank immortal Beethoven," she said.

Georgie's head buzzed with inductive reasoning, as he hurried about on his vicariously hospitable errands. Lucia had certainly determined to make a second home in London, for she had distinctly said 'my music room

when she referred to the house in Brompton Square. Also it was easy to see the significance of her deigning to touch Stravinski with even the tip of one finger. She was visualising herself in the modern world, she was going to be up-to-date: the music-room in Brompton Square was not only to echo with the first movement of the Moonlight. . . . "It's too thrilling," said Georgie, as, warmed with this mental activity, he quite forgot to put on his fur tippet.

His first visit, of course, was to Daisy Quantock, but he meant to stay no longer than just to secure her and her husband for dinner on Sunday with Olga, and tell her the number of the house in Brompton Square. He found that she had dug a large trench round her mulberry tree, and was busily pruning the roots with the wood-axe by the light of Nature: in fact she had cut off all their ends, and there was a great pile of chunks of mulberry root to be transferred in the wheel-barrow, now empty of manure, to the wood-shed.

"Twenty-five, that's easy to remember," she said. "And are they going to sell it?"

"Nothing settled," said Georgie. "My dear, you're being rather drastic, aren't you? Won't it die?"

"Not a bit," said Daisy. "It'll bear twice as many mulberries as before. Last year there was one. You should always prune the roots of a fruit tree that doesn't bear. And the pearls?"

"No news," said Georgie, "except that they come in a portrait of the aunt by Sargent."

"No! By Sargent?" asked Daisy.

"Yes, And Queen Anne furniture and Chinese Chippendale chairs," said Georgie.

"And how many bedrooms?" asked Daisy, wiping her axe on the grass.

"Five spare, so I suppose that means seven," said

Georgie, "and one with a sitting-room and bathroom attached. And a beautiful music-room."

"Georgie, she means to live there," said Daisy, "whether she told you or not. You don't count the bedrooms like that in a house you're going to sell. It isn't done."

"Nothing settled, I tell you," said Georgie. "So you'll dine with Olga on Sunday, and now I must fly and get people to lunch with her."

"No! A lunch-party too?" asked Daisy.

"Yes. She wants to see everybody."

"And five spare rooms, did you say?" asked Daisy, beginning to fill in her trench.

Georgie hurried out of the front gate, and Daisy shovelled the earth back and hurried indoors to impart all this news to her husband. He had a little rheumatism in his shoulder, and she gave him Coué treatment before she counterordered the chicken which she had bespoken for his dinner on Sunday.

Georgie thought it wise to go first to Olga's house, to make sure that she had told her caretaker that she was coming down for the week-end. That was the kind of thing that prima-donnas sometimes forgot. There was a man sitting on the roof of Old Place with a coil of wire, and another sitting on the chimney. Though listening-in had not yet arrived at Riseholme, Georgie at once conjectured that Olga was installing it, and what would Lucia say? It was utterly un-Elizabethan to begin with, and though she countenanced the telephone, she had expressed herself very strongly on the subject of listening-in. She had had an unfortunate experience of it herself, for on a visit to London not long ago, her hostess had switched it on, and the company was regaled with a vivid lecture on pyorrhea by a hospital nurse. . . . Georgie, however, would see Olga before Lucia came to

dinner on Sunday and would explain her abhorrence of the instrument.

Then there was the delightful task of asking everybody to lunch. It was the hour now when Riseholme generally was popping in and out of shops, and finding out the news. It was already known that Georgie had dined with Lucia last night and that Pepino had gone to his aunt's funeral, and everyone was agog to ascertain if anything definite had yet been ascertained about the immense fortune which had certainly come to the Lucases. . . . Mrs. Antrobus spied Georgie going into Olga's house (for the keenness of her eyesight made up for her deafness), and there she was with her ear-trumpet adjusted, looking at the view just outside Old Place when Georgie came out. Already the popular estimate had grown like a gourd.

"A quarter of a million, I'm told, Mr. Georgie," said she, "and a house in Grosvenor Square, eh?"

Before Georgie could reply, Mrs. Antrobus's two daughters, Piggy and Goosey came bounding up hand in hand. Piggy and Goosey never walked like other people: they skipped and gambolled to show how girlish an age is thirty-four and thirty-five.

"Oh stop, Mr. Georgie," said Piggy. "Let us all hear. And are the pearls worth a Queen's ransom?"

"Silly thing," said Goosie. "I don't believe in the pearls."

"Well, I don't believe in Grosvenor Square," said Goosie. "So silly yourself!"

When this ebullition of high spirits had subsided, and Piggy had slapped Goosie on the back of her hands, they both said "Hush!" simultaneously.

"Well, I can't say about the pearls," said Georgie.

"Eh, what can't you say?" said Mrs. Antrobus.

"About the pearls," said Georgie, addressing himself to the end of Mrs. Antrobus's trumpet. It was like the

trunk of a very short elephant, and she waved it about as if asking for a bun.

"About the pearls, mamma," screamed Goosie and Piggy together. "Don't interrupt Mr. Georgie."

"And the house isn't in Grosvenor Square, but in Brompton Square," said Georgie.

"But that's quite in the slums," said Mrs. Antrobus. "I am disappointed."

"Not at all, a charming neighbourhood," said Georgie. This was not at all what he had been looking forward to: he had expected cries of envious surprise at his news. "As for the fortune, about three thousand a year."

"Is that all?" said Piggy with an air of deep disgust.

"A mere pittance to millionaires like Piggy," said Goosie, and they slapped each other again.

"Any more news?" asked Mrs. Antrobus.

"Yes," said Georgie, "Olga Bracely is coming down to-morrow——"

"No!" said all the ladies together

"And her husband?" asked Piggy.

"No," said Georgie without emphasis. "At least she didn't say so. But she wants all her friends to come to lunch on Sunday. So you'll all come, will you? She told me to ask everybody."

"Yes," said Piggy. "Oh, how lovely! I adore Olga. Will she let me sit next her?"

"Eh?" said Mrs. Antrobus.

"Lunch on Sunday, mamma, with Olga Bracely," screamed Goosie.

"But she's not here," said Mrs. Antrobus.

"No, but she's coming, mamma," shouted Piggy. "Come along, Goosie. There's Mrs. Boucher. We'll tell her about poor Mrs. Lucas."

Mrs. Boucher's bath-chair was stationed opposite the butcher's, where her husband was ordering the joint for

Sunday. Piggy and Goosie had poured the tale of Lucia's comparative poverty into her ear, before Georgie got to her. Here, however, it had a different reception, and Georgie found himself the hero of the hour.

"An immense fortune. I call it an immense fortune," said Mrs. Boucher, emphatically, as Georgie approached. "Good morning, Mr. Georgie, I've heard your news, and I hope Mrs. Lucas will use it well. Brompton Square, too! I had an aunt who lived there once, my mother's sister, you understand, not my father's, and she used to say that she would sooner live in Brompton Square than in Buckingham Palace. What will they do with it, do you suppose? It must be worth its weight in gold. What a strange coincidence that Mr. Lucas's aunt and mine should both have lived there! Any more news?"

"Yes," said Georgie. "Olga is coming down to-morrow——"

"Well, that's a bit of news!" said Mrs. Boucher, as her husband came out of the butcher's shop. "Jacob, Olga's coming down to-morrow, so Mr. Georgie says. That'll make you happy! You're madly in love with Olga, Jacob, so don't deny it. You're an old flirt, Jacob, that's what you are. I shan't get much of your attention till Olga goes away again. I should be ashamed at your age, I should. And young enough to be your daughter or mine either. And three thousand a year, Mr. Georgie says. I call it an immense fortune. That's Mrs. Lucas, you know. I thought perhaps two. I'm astounded. Why, when old Mrs. Toppington—not the wife of the young Mr. Toppington who married the niece of the man who invented laughing gas—but of his father, or perhaps his uncle, I can't be quite sure which, but when old Mr. Toppington died, he left his son or nephew, whichever it was, a sum that brought him in just about that, and he was considered a very rich man. He had the house just

beyond the church at Scroby Windham where my father was rector, and he built the new wing with the billiard-room——”

Georgie knew he would never get through his morning's work if he listened to everything that Mrs. Boucher had to say about young Mr. Toppington, and broke in.

“And she wants you and the colonel to lunch with her on Sunday,” he said. “She told me to ask all her old friends.”

“Well, I do call that kind,” said Mrs. Boucher, “and of course we'll go. . . . Jacob, the joint. We shan't want the joint. I was going to give you a veal cutlet in the evening, so what's the good of a joint? Just a bit of steak for the servants, a nice piece. Well, that will be a treat, to lunch with our dear Olga! Quite a party, I daresay.”

Mrs. Quantock's chicken, already countermanded, came in nicely for Georgie's dinner for Olga on Saturday, and by the time all his errands were done the morning was gone, without any practise at his piano, or work in his garden, or a single stitch, in his new piece of embroidery, Fresh amazements awaited him when he made his fatigued return to his house. For Foljambe told him that Lucia, had sent her maid to borrow his manual on Auction Bridge. He was too tired to puzzle over that now, but it was strange that Lucia, who despised any form of cards as only fit for those who had not the intelligence to talk or to listen, should have done that. Cards came next to cross-word puzzles in Lucia's index of inanities. What did it mean?

Neither Lucia nor Pepino were seen in public at all till Sunday morning, though Daisy Quantock had caught sight of Pepino on his arrival on Friday afternoon, walking bowed with grief and with a faltering gait through the little paved garden in front of The Hurst, to his door.

Lucia opened it for him, and they both shook their heads sadly and passed inside. But it was believed that they never came out the whole of Saturday, and their first appearance was at church on Sunday, though indeed, Lucia could hardly be said to have appeared, so impenetrable was her black veil. But that, so to speak, was the end of all mourning (besides, everybody knew that she was dining with Olga that night), and at the end of the service, she put up her veil, and held a sort of little reception standing in the porch, and shaking hands with all her friends as they went out. It was generally felt that this signified her re-entry into Riseholme life.

Hardly less conspicuous a figure was Georgie. Though Robert had been so sarcastic about his Oxford trousers, he had made up his mind to get it over, and after church he walked twice round the green quite slowly and talked to everybody, standing a little away so that they should get a complete view. The odious Peggy, it is true, burst into a squeal of laughter and cried, "Oh, Mr. Georgie, I see you've gone into long frocks," and her mother put up her ear-trumpet as she approached as if to give a greater keenness to her general perceptions. But apart from the jarring incident of Piggy, Georgie was pleased with his trousers' reception. They were beautifully cut too, and fell in charming lines, and the sensation they created was quite a respectful one. But it had been an anxious morning, and he was pleased when it was over.

And such a talk he had had with Olga last night, when she dined alone with him, and sat so long with her elbows on the table that Foljambe looked in three times in order to clear away. Her own adventures, she said, didn't matter: she could tell Georgie about the American tour and the Australian tour, and the coming season in London any time at leisure. What she had to know about with the utmost detail was exactly everything

that had happened at Riseholme since she had left it a year ago.

"Good heavens!" she said. "To think that I once thought that it was a quiet back-watery place where I could rest and do nothing but study. But it's a whirl! There's always something wildly exciting going on. Oh, what fools people are not to take an interest in what they call little things. Now go on about Lucia. It's his aunt, isn't it, and mad?"

"Yes, and Pepino's been left her house in Brompton Square," began Georgie.

"No! That's where I've taken a house for the season. What number?"

"Twenty-five," said Georgie.

"Twenty-five?" said Olga. "Why, that's just where the curve begins. And a big——"

"Music-room built out at the back," said Georgie.

"I'm almost exactly opposite. But mine's a small one. Just room for my husband and me, and one spare room. Go on quickly."

"And about three thousand a year and some pearls," said Georgie. "And the house is full of beautiful furniture."

"And will they sell it?"

"Nothing settled," said Georgie.

"That means you think they won't. Do you think that they'll settle altogether in London?"

"No, I don't think that," said Georgie very carefully.

"You are tactful. Lucia has told you all about it, but has also said firmly that nothing's settled. So I won't pump you. And I met Colonel Boucher on my way here. Why only one bull-dog?"

"Because the other always growled so frightfully at Mrs. Boucher. He gave it away to his brother."

“ And Daisy Quantock ? Is it still spiritualism ? ”

“ No ; that’s over, though I rather think it’s coming back. After that it was sour milk, and now it’s raw vegetables. You’ll see to-morrow at dinner. She brings them in a paper bag. Carrots and turnips and celery. Raw. But perhaps she may not. Every now and then she eats like anybody else.”

“ And Piggie and Goosie ? ”

“ Just the same. But Mrs. Antrobus has got a new ear-trumpet. But what I want to know is, why did Lucia send across for my manual on Auction Bridge ? She thinks all card-games imbecile.”

“ Oh, Georgie, that’s easy ! ” said Olga. “ Why, of course, Brompton Square, though nothing’s settled. Parties, you know, when she wants people who like to play Bridge.”

Georgie became deeply thoughtful.

“ It might be that,” he said. “ But it would be tremendously thorough.”

“ How else can you account for it ? By the way, I’ve had a listening-in put up at Old Place.”

“ I know. I saw them at it yesterday. But don’t turn it on to-morrow night. Lucia hates it. She only heard it once, and that time it was a lecture on pyorrhea. Now tell me about yourself. And shall we go into the drawing-room ? Foljambe’s getting restless.”

Olga allowed herself to be weaned from subjects so much more entrancing to her, and told him of the huge success of the American tour, and spoke of the eight weeks’ season which was to begin at Covent Garden in the middle of May. But it all led back to Riseholme.

“ I’m singing twice a week,” she said. “ Brunnhilde and Lucrezia and Salome. Oh, my dear, how I love it ! But I shall come down here every single week-end. To

go back to Lucia : do you suppose she'll settle in London for the season ? I believe that's the idea. Fresh worlds to conquer."

Georgie was silent a moment.

"I think you may be right about the Auction Bridge," he said at length. "And that would account for Stravinski too."

"What's that ?" said Olga greedily.

"Why, she played me a bit of Stravinski yesterday morning," said Georgie. "And before she never would listen to anything modern. It all fits in."

"Perfect," said Olga.

Georgie and the Quantocks walked up together the next evening to dine with Olga, and Daisy was carrying a little paper parcel. But that proved to be a disappointment, for it did not contain carrots, but only evening shoes. Lucia and Pepino, as usual, were a little late, for it was Lucia's habit to arrive last at any party, as befitted the Queen of Riseholme, and to make her gracious round of the guests. Everyone of course was wondering if she would wear the pearls, but again there was a disappointment, for her only ornaments were two black bangles, and the brooch of entwined sausages of gold containing a lock of Beethoven's hair. (As a matter of fact Beethoven's hair had fallen out some years ago, and she had replaced it with a lock of Pepino's which was the same colour. . . . Pepino had never told anybody.) From the first it was evident that though the habiliments of woe still decked her, she had cast off the numb misery of the bereavement.

"So kind of you to invite us," she said to Olga, "and so good," she added in a whisper, "for my poor Pepino. I've been telling him he must face the world again and not more!" Daisy, dear! Sweet to see you, and Mr.

Robert. Georgie! Well, I do think this is a delicious little party."

Pepino followed her: it was just like the arrival of Royal Personages, and Olga had to stiffen her knees so as not to curtsy.

Having greeted those who had the honour to meet her, Lucia became affable rather than gracious. Robert Quantock was between her and Olga at dinner, but then at dinner, everybody left Robert alone, for if disturbed over that function, he was apt to behave rather like a dog with a bone and growl. But if left alone, he was in an extremely good temper afterwards.

"And you're only here just for two days, Miss Olga," she said, "at least so Georgie tells me, and he usually knows your movements. And then London, I suppose, and you'll be busy rehearsing for the opera. I must certainly manage to be in London for a week or two this year, and come to 'Siegfried,' and The 'Valkyrie,' in which, so I see in the papers, you're singing. Georgie, you must take me up to London when the opera comes on. Or perhaps——"

She paused a moment.

"Pepino, shall I tell all our dear friends our little secret?" she said. "If you say 'no,' I shan't. But, please, Pepino——"

Pepino, however, had been instructed to say 'yes,' and accordingly did so.

"You see, dear Miss Olga," said Lucia, "that a little property has come to us through that grievous tragedy last week. A house has been left to Pepino in Brompton Square, all furnished, and with a beautiful music-room. So we're thinking, as there is no immediate hurry about selling it, of spending a few weeks there this season, very quietly of course, but still perhaps entertaining a few friends. Then we shall have time to look

about us, and as the house is there, why not use it in the interval? We shall go there at the end of the month."

This little speech had been carefully prepared, for Lucia felt that if she announced the full extent of their plan, Riseholme would suffer a terrible blow. It must be broken to Riseholme by degrees: Riseholme must first be told that they were to be up in town for a week or two, pending the sale of the house. Subsequently Riseholme would hear that they were not going to sell the house.

She looked round to see how this section of Riseholme took it. A chorus of the emphatic 'No' burst from Georgie, Mrs. Quantock and Olga, who, of course, had fully discussed this disclosure already; even Robert, very busy with his dinner, said 'No' and went on gobbling.

"So sweet of you all to say 'No,'" said Lucia, who know perfectly well that the emphatic interjection meant only surprise, and the desire to hear more, not the denial that such a thing was possible, "but there it is. Pepino and I have talked it over—*non e vero, carissimo*—and we feel that there is a sort of call to us to go to London. Dearest Aunt Amy, you know, and all her beautiful furniture! She never would have a stick of it sold, and that seems to point to the fact that she expected Pepino and me not to wholly desert the dear old family home. Aunt Amy was born there, eighty-three years ago."

"My dear! How it takes one back!" said Georgie.

"Doesn't it?" said Olga.

Lucia had now, so to speak, developed her full horsepower. Pepino's presence stoked her, Robert was stoking himself and might be disregarded, while Olga and Georgie were hanging on her words.

"But it isn't the past only that we are thinking of," she said, "but the present and the future. Of course our spiritual home is here—like Lord Haldane and Ger-

many—and oh, how much we have learned at Riseholme, its lovely seriousness and its gaiety, its culture, its absorption in all that is worthy in art and literature, its old customs, its simplicity.”

“ Yes,” said Olga. (She had meant long ago to tell Lucia that she had taken a house in Brompton Square exactly opposite Lucia’s, but who could interrupt the splendour that was pouring out on them ?)

Lucia fumbled for a moment at the brooch containing Beethoven’s hair. She had a feeling that the pin had come undone. “ Dear Miss Olga,” she said, “ how good of you to take an interest, you with your great mission of melody in the world, in our little affairs ! I am encouraged. Well, Pepino and I feel—don’t we ? *sposo mio*—that now that this opportunity has come to us, of perhaps having a little salon in London, we ought to take it. There are modern movements in the world we really know nothing about. We want to educate ourselves. We want to know what the cosmopolitan mind is thinking about. Of course we’re old, but it is never too late to learn. How we shall treasure all we are lucky enough to glean, and bring it back to our dear Riseholme.”

There was a slight and muffled thud on the ground, and Lucia’s fingers went back where the brooch should have been.

“ Georgino, my brooch, the Beethoven brooch,” she said ; “ it has fallen.”

Georgie stooped rather stiffly to pick it up : that work with the garden roller had found out his lumbar muscles. Olga rose.

“ Too thrilling, Mrs. Lucas ! ” she said. “ You must tell me much more. Shall we go ? And how lovely for me : I have just taken a house in Brompton Square for the season.”

“ No ! ” said Lucie. “ Which ? ”

"Oh, one of the little ones," said Olga. "Just opposite yours. Forty-two A."

"Such dear little houses!" said Lucia. "I have a music-room. Always yours to practise in."

"Capital good dinner," said Robert, who had not spoken for a long time.

Lucia put an arm round Daisy Quantock's ample waist, and thus tactfully avoided the question of precedence. Daisy, of course, was far, far the elder, but then Lucia was Lucia.

"Delicious indeed," she said. "Georgie, bring the Beethoven with you."

"And don't be long," said Olga.

Georgie had no use for the society of his own sex unless they were young, which made him feel young too, or much older than himself, which had the same result. But Pepino had an unpleasant habit of saying to him

When we come to our age' (which was an unreasonable assumption of juvenility), and Robert of sipping port with the sound of many waters for an indefinite period. So when Georgie had let Robert have two good glasses, he broke up this symposium and trundled them away into the drawing-room, only pausing to snatch up his embroidery tambour, on which he was working at what had been originally intended for a bedspread, but was getting so lovely that he now thought of putting it when finished on the top of his piano. He noticed that Lucia had brought a portfolio of music, and peeping inside saw the morsel of Stravinski. . . .

And then, as he came within range of the conversation of the ladies, he nearly fell down from sheer shock.

"Oh, but I adore it," Lucia was saying. "One of the most marvellous inventions of modern times. Were we not saying so last night, Pepino? And Miss Olga is telling me that everyone in London has a listening-in

apparatus. Pray turn it on, Miss Olga ; it will be a treat to hear it ! Ah, the Beethoven brooch : thank you, Georgie —*mille grazie.*”

Olga turned a handle or a screw or something, and there was a short pause : the next item presumably had already been announced. And then, wonder of wonders, there came from the trumpet the first bars of the Moonlight Sonata.

Now the Moonlight Sonata (especially the first movement of it) had an almost sacred significance in Riseholme. It was Lucia's tune, much as God Save the King is the King's tune. Whatever musical entertainment had been going on, it was certain that if Lucia was present she would sooner or later be easily induced to play the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. Astonished as everybody already was at her not only countenancing but even allowing this mechanism, so lately abhorred by her, to be set to work at all, it was infinitely more amazing that she should permit it to play Her tune. But there she was composing her face to her well-known Beethoven expression, leaning a little forward, with her chin in her hand, and her eyes wearing the far-away look from which the last chord would recall her. At the end of the first movement everybody gave the little sigh which was its due, and the wistful sadness faded from their faces, and Lucia, with a gesture, hushing all attempt at comment or applause, gave a gay little smile to shew she knew what was coming next. The smile broadened, as the Scherzo began, into a little ripple of laughter, the hand which had supported her chin once more sought the Beethoven brooch, and she sat eager and joyful and alert, sometimes just shaking her head in wordless criticism, and once saying “ Tut-tut ” when the clarity of a run did not come up to her standard, till the sonata was finished.

“ A treat,” she said at the end, “ really most enjoy-

able. That dear old tune ! I thought the first movement was a little hurried : Cortot, I remember, took it a little more slowly, and a little more *legato*, but it was very creditably played."

Olga at the machine, was out of sight of Lucia, and during the performance Georgie noticed that she had glanced at the Sunday paper. And now when Lucia referred to Cortot, she hurriedly chucked it into a window-seat and changed the subject.

"I ought to have stopped it," she said, "because we needn't go to the wireless to hear that. Do show us what you mean, Mrs. Lucas, about the first movement."

Lucia glided to the piano.

"Just a bar or two, shall I ?" she said.

Everybody gave a sympathetic murmur, and they had the first movement over again.

"Only just my impression of how Cortot plays it," she said. "It coincides with my own view of it."

"Don't move," said Olga, and everybody murmured 'Don't,' or 'Please.' Robert said 'Please' long after the others, because he was drowsy. But he wanted more music, because he wished to doze a little and not to talk.

"How you all work me !" said Lucia, running her hands up and down the piano with a butterfly touch. "London will be quite a rest after Riseholme. Pepino mio, my portfolio on the top of my cloak ; would you ? . . . Pepino insisted on my bringing some music : he would not let me start without it." (This was a piece of picturesqueness during Pepino's absence : it would have been more accurate to say he was sent back for it, but less picturesque.) "Thank you, *carissimo*. A little morsel of Stravinski ; Miss Olga, I am sure, knows it by heart, and I am terrified. Georgie, would you turn over ?"

The morsel of Stravinski had improved immensely

since Friday: it was still very odd, very modern, but not nearly so odd as when, a few days ago, Lucia had failed to observe the change of key. But it was strange to the true Riseholmite to hear the arch-priestess of Beethoven and the foe of all modern music, which she used to account sheer Bolshevism, producing these scran-nel staccato tinklings that had so often made her wince. And yet it all fitted in with her approbation of the wireless and her borrowing of Georgie's manual on Auction Bridge. It was not the morsel of Stravinski alone that Lucia was practising (the performance though really improved might still be called practice): it was modern life, modern ideas on which she was engaged preparatory to her descent on London. Though still in harbour at Riseholme, so to speak, it was generally felt that Lucia had cast off her cable, and was preparing to put to sea.

"Very pretty: I call that very pretty. Honk!" said Robert when the morsel was finished, "I call that music."

"Dear Mr. Robert, how sweet of you," said Lucia, wheeling round on the music-stool. "Now positively, I will not touch another note. But may we, might we, have another little tune on your wonderful wireless, Miss Olga! Such a treat! I shall certainly have one installed at Brompton Square, and listen to it while Pepino is doing his cross-word puzzles. Pepino can think of nothing else now but Auction Bridge and cross-word puzzles, and interrupts me in the middle of my practice to ask for an Athenian sculptor whose name begins with P and is of ten letters."

"Ah, I've got it," said Pepino, "Praxiteles."

Lucia clapped her hands.

"Bravo," she said. "We shall not sit up till morning again."

There was a splendour in the ruthlessness with which

Lucia bowed over, like ninepins, every article of her own Riseholme creed, which saw Bolshevism in all modern art, inanity in crossword puzzles and Bridge, and aimless vacuity in London. . . . Immediately after the fresh tune on the wireless began, and most unfortunately, they came in for the funeral March of a Marionette. A spasm of pain crossed Lucia's face, and Olga abruptly turned off this sad reminder of unavailing woe.

"Go on: I like that tune!" said the drowsy and thoughtless Robert, and a hurried buzz of conversation covered this melancholy coincidence.

It was already late, and Lucia rose to go.

"Delicious evening!" she said. "And lovely to think that we shall so soon be neighbours in London as well. My music-room always at your disposal. Are you coming, Georgie?"

"Not this minute," said Georgie firmly.

Lucia was not quite accustomed to this, for Georgie usually left any party when she left. She put her head in the air as she swept by him, but then relented again.

"Dine to-morrow, then? We won't have any music after this feast to-night," said she forgetting that the feast had been almost completely of her own providing. "But perhaps little game of cut-throat, you and Pepino and me."

"Delightful," said Georgie.

Olga hurried back after seeing off her other guests.

"Oh, Georgie, what richness," she said. "By the way, of course it *was* Cortot who was playing the Moonlight faster than Cortot plays it."

Georgie put down his tambour.

"I thought it probably would be," he said. "That's the kind of thing that happens to Lucia. And now we know where we are. She's going to make a circle in

London and be its centre. Too thrilling ! It's all as clear as it can be. All we don't know about yet is the pearls."

"I doubt the pearls," said Olga.

"No, I think there are pearls," said Georgie, after a moment's intense concentration. "Otherwise she wouldn't have told me they appeared in the Sargent portrait of the aunt."

Olga suddenly gave a wild hoot of laughter.

"Oh, why does one ever spend a single hour away from Riseholme ?" she said.

"I wish you wouldn't," said Georgie. "But you go off to-morrow ?"

"Yes, to Paris. My excuse is to meet my Georgie——"

"Here he is," said Georgie.

"Yes, bless him. But the one who happens to be my husband. Georgie, I think I'm going to change my name and become what I really am, Mrs. George Shuttleworth. Why should singers and actresses call themselves Madame Macaroni or Signora Semolina ? Yes, that's my excuse, as I said when you interrupted me, and my reason is gowns. I'm going to have lots of new gowns."

"Tell me about them," said Georgie. He loved hearing about dress.

"I don't know about them yet ; I'm going to Paris to find out. Georgie, you'll have to come and stay with me when I'm settled in London. And when I go to practise in Lucia's music-room you shall play my accompaniments. And shall I be shingled ?"

Georgie's face was suddenly immersed in concentration.

"I wouldn't mind betting——" he began.

Olga again shouted with laughter.

"If you'll give me three to one that I don't know what you were going to say, I'll take it," she said.

"But you can't know," said Georgie.

"Yes I do. You wouldn't mind betting that Lucia will be shingled."

"Well, you are quick," said Georgie admiringly.

It was known, of course, next morning, that Lucia and Pepino were intending to spend a few weeks in London before selling the house, and who knew what *that* was going to mean? Already it was time to begin rehearsing for the next May Day revels, and Foljambe, that paragon of all parlour-maids, had been overhauling Georgie's jerkin and hose and dainty little hunting boots with turn-down flaps in order to be ready. But when Georgie, dining at The Hurst next evening, said something about May Day revels (Lucia, of course, would be Queen again) as they played Cut-throat with the Manual on Auction Bridge handy for the settlement of such small disputes as might arise over the value of the different suits, she only said:

"Those dear old customs! So quaint! And fifty to me above, Pepino, or is it a hundred? I will turn it up while you deal, Georgie!"

This complete apathy of Lucia to May Day revels indicated one of two things, that either mourning would prevent her being Queen, or absence. In consequence of which Georgie had his jerkin folded up again and put away, for he was determined that nobody except Lucia should drive him out to partake in such a day of purgatory as had been his last year. . . . Still, there was nothing conclusive about that: it might be mourning. But evidence accumulated that Lucia meant to make a pretty solid stay in London, for she certainly had some cards printed at 'Ye Signe of Ye Daffodille' on the Village Green where Pepino's poems were on sale, with the inscription

Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas
request the pleasure of the company of

at.....on.....

25 Brompton Square.

R.S.V.P.

Daisy Quantock had found that out, for she saw the engraved copper-plate lying on the counter, and while the shopman's back was turned, had very cleverly read it, though it was printed the wrong way round, and was very confusing. Still she managed to do so, and the purport was plain enough: that Lucia contemplated formally asking somebody to something some time at 25 Brompton Square. "And would she," demanded Daisy, with bitter irony, "have had cards printed like that, if they were only meaning to go up for a week or two?" And if that was not enough Georgie saw a postcard on Lucia's writing table with "From Mrs. Philip Lucas, 25 Brompton Square, S.W.3," plainly printed on the top.

It was getting very clear then (and during this week Riseholme naturally thought of nothing else) that Lucia designed a longer residence in the garish metropolis than she had admitted. Since she chose to give no information on the subject, mere pride and scorn of vulgar curiosity forebade anyone to ask her, though of course it was quite proper (indeed a matter of duty) to probe the matter to the bottom by every other means in your power, and as these bits of evidence pieced themselves together, Riseholme began to take a very gloomy view of Lucia's real nature. On the whole it was felt that Mrs. Boucher, when she paused in her bath-chair as it was being wheeled round the green, nodding her head very

emphatically, and bawling into Mrs. Antrobus's ear-trumpet, reflected public opinion.

"She's deserting Riseholme and all her friends," said Mrs. Boucher, "that's what she's doing. She means to cut a dash in London, and lead London by the nose. There'll be fashionable parties, you'll see, there'll be paragraphs, and then when the season's over she'll come back and swagger about them. For my part I shall take no interest in them. Perhaps she'll bring down some of her smart friends for a Saturday till Monday. There'll be Dukes and Duchesses at The Hurst. That's what she's meaning to do, I tell you, and I don't care who hears it."

That was lucky, as anyone within the radius of a quarter of a mile could have heard it.

"Well, never mind, my dear," said Colonel Boucher, who was pushing his wife's chair.

"Mind? I should hope not, Jacob," said Mrs. Boucher. "And now let us go home, or we'll be late for lunch and that would never do, for I expect the Prince of Wales and the Lord Chancellor, and we'll play Bridge and cross-word puzzles all afternoon."

Such fury and withering sarcasm, though possibly excessive, had, it was felt, a certain justification, for had not Lucia for years given little indulgent smiles when anyone referred to the cheap delights and restless apish chatterings of London? She had always come back from her visits to that truly provincial place which thought itself a centre, wearied with its false and foolish activity, its vaneer of culture, its pseudo-Athenian rage for any new thing. They were all busy enough at Riseholme, but busy over worthy objects, over Beethoven and Shakespeare, over high thinking, over study of the true masterpieces. And now, the moment that Aunt Amy's death gave her and Pepino the means to live in the fiddling little ant-hill by the Thames they were turning their

backs on all that hitherto had made existence so splendid and serious a reality, and were training, positively training for frivolity by exercises in Stravinski, Auction Bridge and cross-word puzzles. Only the day before the fatal influx of fortune had come to them, Lucia, dropping in on Colonel and Mrs. Boucher about tea-time, had found them very cosily puzzling out a Children's Cross-word in the evening paper, having given up the adult conundrum as too difficult, had pretended that even this was far beyond her poor wits, and had gone home the moment she had swallowed her tea in order to finish a canto of Dante's Purgatorio. . . . And it was no use Lucia's saying that they intended only to spend a week or two in Brompton Square before the house was sold : Daisy's quickness and cleverness about the copper-plate at 'Ye Signe of Ye Daffodille' had made short work of that. Lucia was evidently the prey of a guilty conscience too : she meant, so Mrs. Boucher was firmly convinced, to steal away, leaving the impression she was soon coming back.

Vigorous reflections like these came in fits and spurts from Mrs. Boucher as her husband wheeled her home for lunch.

"And as for the pearls, Jacob," she said, as she got out, hot with indignation, "if you asked me, actually asked me what I think about the pearls, I should have to tell you that I don't believe in the pearls. There may be half a dozen seed pearls in an old pill-box : I don't say there are not, but that's all the pearls we shall see. Pearls !"