

CHAPTER III

GEORGIE had only just come down to breakfast and had not yet opened his *Times*, one morning at the end of this hectic week, when the telephone bell rang. Lucia had not been seen at all the day before and he had a distinct premonition, though he had not time to write it down, that this was she. It was: and her voice sounded very brisk and playful.

"Is that Georgino?" she said. "Zat oo, Georgie?"

Georgie had another premonition, stronger than the first.

"Yes, it's me," he said.

"Georgie, is oo coming round to say Ta-ta to poor Lucia and Pepino?" she said.

('I knew it,' thought Georgie.)

"What, are you going away?" he asked.

"Yes; I told you the other night," said Lucia in a great hurry, "when you were doing cross-words, you and Pepino. Sure I did. Perhaps you weren't attending. But——"

"No, you never told me," said Georgie firmly.

"How cwoss oo sounds. But come round, Georgie, about eleven and have 'ickle chat. We're going to be very stravy and motor up, and perhaps keep the motor for a day or two."

"And when are you coming back?" asked Georgie.

"Not quite settled," said Lucia brightly. "There's

a lot of bizz-bizz for poor Pepino. Can't quite tell how long it will take. Eveyen, then ? ”

Georgie had hardly replaced the receiver when there came a series of bangs and rings at his front door, and Foljambe coming from the kitchen with his dish of bacon in one hand, turned to open it. It was only de Vere with a copy of the *Times* in her hand.

“ With Mrs. Quantock's compliments,” said de Vere, “ and would Mr. Pillson look at the paragraph she has marked, and send it back ? Mrs. Quantock will see him whenever he comes round.”

“ That all ? ” said Foljambe rather crossly. “ What did you want to knock the house down for then ? ”

De Vere vouchsafed no reply, but turned slowly in her high-heeled shoes and regarded the prospect.

Georgie also had come into the hall at this battering summons, and Foljambe gave him the paper. There were a large blue pencil mark and several notes of exclamation opposite a short paragraph.

“ Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas will arrive to-day from The Hurst, Riseholme, at 25 Brompton Square.”

“ No ! ” said Georgie. “ Tell Mrs. Quantock I'll look in after breakfast,” and he hurried back, and opened his copy of the *Times* to see if it were the same there. It was: there was no misprint, nor could any other interpretation be attached to it. Though he knew the fact already, print seemed to bring it home. Print also disclosed the further fact that Lucia must have settled everything at least before the morning post yesterday, or this paragraph could never have appeared to-day. He gobbled up his breakfast, burning his tongue terribly with his tea. . . .

“ It isn't only deception,” said Daisy the moment he appeared without even greeting him, “ for that we knew already, but it's funk as well. She didn't dare tell us.”

"She's going to motor up," said Georgie, "starting soon after eleven. She's just asked me to come and say goodbye."

"That's more deception then," said Daisy, "for naturally, having read that, we should have imagined she was going up by the afternoon train, and gone round to say goodbye after lunch, and found her gone. If I were you, I shouldn't dream of going to say goodbye to her after this. She's shaking the dust of Riseholme off her London shoes. . . . But we'll have no May Day revels if I've got anything to do with it."

"Nor me," said Georgie. "But it's no use being cross with her. Besides, it's so terribly interesting. I shouldn't wonder if she was writing some invitations on the cards you saw——"

"No, I never saw the cards," said Daisy, scrupulously. "Only the plate."

"It's the same thing. She may be writing invitations now, to post in London."

"Go a little before eleven then, and see," said Daisy. "Even if she's not writing them then, there'll be envelopes lying about perhaps."

"Come too," said Georgie.

"Certainly not," said Daisy. "If Lucia doesn't choose to tell me she's going away, the only dignified thing to do is to behave as if I knew nothing whatever about it. I'm sure I hope she'll have a very pleasant drive. That's all I can say about it; I take no further interest in her movements. Besides, I'm very busy: I've got to finish weeding my garden, for I've not been able to touch it these last days, and then my Planchette arrived this morning. And a Ouija board."

"What's that?" said Georgie.

"A sort of Planchette, but much more—much more powerful. Only it takes longer, as it points at letters

instead of writing," said Daisy. "I shall begin with Planchette and take it up seriously, because I know I'm very psychic, and there'll be a little time for it now that we shan't be trapesing round all day in ruffs and stomachers over those May-Day revels. Perhaps there'll be May-Day revels in Brompton Square for a change. I shouldn't wonder: nothing would surprise me about Lucia now. And it's my opinion we shall get on very well without her."

Georgie felt he must stick up for her: she was catching it so frightfully hot all round.

"After all, it isn't criminal to spend a few weeks in London," he observed.

"Whoever said it was?" said Daisy. "I'm all for everybody doing exactly as they like. I just shrug my shoulders."

She heaved up her round little shoulders with an effort.

"Georgie, how do you think she'll begin up there?" she said. "There's that cousin of hers with whom she stayed sometimes, Aggie Sandeman, and then, of course, there's Olga Bracely. Will she just pick up acquaintances, and pick up more from them, like one of those charity snowballs? Will she be presented? Not that I take the slightest interest in it."

Georgie looked at his watch and rose.

"I do," he said. "I'm thrilled about it. I expect she'll manage. After all, we none of us wanted to have May Day revels last year but she got us to. She's got drive."

"I should call it push," said Daisy. "Come back and tell me exactly what's happened."

"Any message?" asked Georgie.

"Certainly not," said Daisy again, and began untying the string of the parcel that held the instruments of divination.

Georgie went quickly down the road (for he saw Lucia's motor already at the door) and up the paved walk that led past the sundial, round which was the circular flower-border known as Perdita's border, for it contained only the flowers that Perdita gathered. To-day it was all a-bloom with daffodils and violets and primroses, and it was strange to think that Lucia would not go gassing on about Perdita's border, as she always did at this time of the year, but would have to be content with whatever flowers there happened to be in Brompton Square: a few sooty crocuses perhaps and a periwinkle. . . . She was waiting for him, kissed her hand through the window, and opened the door.

"Now for little chat," she said, adjusting a very smart hat, which Georgie was sure he had never seen before. There was no trace of mourning about it: it looked in the highest spirits. So, too, did Lucia.

"Sit down, Georgie," she said, "and cheer me up. Poor Lucia feels ever so sad at going away."

"It is rather sudden," he said. "Nobody dreamed you were off to-day, at least until they saw *The Times* this morning."

Lucia gave a little sigh.

"I know," she said, "but Pepino thought that was the best plan. He said that if Riseholme knew when I was going, you'd all have had little dinners and lunches for us, and I should have been completely worn out with your kindness and hospitality. And there was so much to do, and we weren't feeling much like gaiety. Seen anybody this morning? Any news?"

"I saw Daisy," said Georgie.

"And told her?"

"No, it was she who saw it in *The Times* first, and sent it round to me," said Georgie. "She's got a Ouija board, by the way. It came this morning."

"That's nice," said Lucia. "I shall think of Riseholme as being ever so busy. And everybody must come up and stay with me, and you first of all. When will you be able to come?"

"Whenever you ask me," said Georgie.

"Then you must give me a day or two to settle down, and I'll write to you. You'll be popping across though every moment of the day to see Olga."

"She's in Paris," said Georgie.

"No! What a disappointment! I had already written her a card, asking her to dine with us the day after tomorrow, which I was taking up to London to post there."

"She may be back by then," said Georgie.

Lucia rose and went to her writing table, on which, as Georgie was thrilled to observe, was a whole pile of stamped and directed envelopes.

"I think I won't chance it," said Lucia, "for I had enclosed another card for Signor Cortese which I wanted her to forward, asking him for the same night. He composed 'Lucrezia' you know, which I see is coming out in London in the first week of the Opera Season, with her, of course, in the name-part. But it will be safer to ask them when I know she is back."

Georgie longed to know to whom all the other invitations were addressed. He saw that the top one was directed to an M.P., and guessed that it was for the member for the Riseholme district, who had lunched at The Hurst during the last election.

"And what are you going to do to-night?" he asked.

"Dining with dear Aggie Sandeman. I threw myself on her mercy, for the servants won't have settled in, and I hoped we should have just a little quiet evening with her. But it seems that she's got a large dinner-party on. Not what I should have chosen, but there's no

help for it now. Oh, Georgie, to think of you in dear old quiet Riseholme and poor Pepino and me gabbling and gobbling at a huge dinner-party."

She looked wistfully round the room.

"Good-bye, dear music-room," she said, kissing her hand in all directions. "How glad I shall be to get back! Oh, Georgie, your Manual on Auction Bridge got packed by mistake. So sorry. I'll send it back. Come in and play the piano sometimes, and then it won't feel lonely. We must be off, or Pepino will get fussing. Say goodbye to everyone for us, and explain. And Perdita's border! Will sweet Perdita forgive me for leaving all her lovely flowers and running away to London? After all, Georgie, Shakespeare wrote 'The Winter's Tale' in London, did he not? Lovely daffies! And violets dim. Let me give you 'ickle violet, Georgie, to remind you of poor Lucia tramping about in long unlovely streets, as Tennyson said."

Lucia, so Georgie felt, wanted no more comments or questions about her departure, and went on drivelling like this till she was safely in the motor. She had expected Pepino to be waiting for her and beginning to fuss, but so far from his fussing he was not there at all. So she got in a fuss instead.

"Georgino, will you run back and shout for Pepino?" she said. "We shall be so late, and tell him that I am sitting in the motor waiting. Ah, there he is! Pepino, where have you been? Do get in and let us start, for there are Piggie and Goosie running across the green, and we shall never get off if we have to begin kissing everybody. Give them my love, Georgie, and say how sorry we were just to miss them. Shut the door quickly, Pepino, and tell him to drive on."

The motor purred and started. Lucia was gone. "She had a bad conscience too," thought Georgie, as

Piggy and Goosie gambolled up rather out of breath with pretty playful cries, "and I'm sure I don't wonder."

The news that she had gone of course now spread rapidly, and by lunch time Riseholme had made up its mind what to do, and that was hermetically to close its lips for ever on the subject of Lucia. You might think what you pleased, for it was a free country, but silence was best. But this counsel of perfection was not easy to practice next day when the evening paper came. There, for all the world to read were two quite long paragraphs, in "Five o'clock Chit-Chat," over the renowned signature of Hermione, entirely about Lucia and 25 Brompton Square, and there for all the world to see was the reproduction of one of her most elegant photographs, in which she gazed dreamily outwards and a little upwards, with her fingers still pressed on the last chord of (probably) the Moonlight Sonata. . . . She had come up, so Hermione told countless readers, from her Elizabethan country seat at Riseholme (where she was a neighbour of Miss Olga Bracely) and was settling for the season in the beautiful little house in Brompton Square, which was the freehold property of her husband, and had just come to him on the death of his aunt. It was a veritable treasure house of exquisite furniture, with a charming music-room where Lucia had given Hermione a cup of tea from her marvellous Worcester tea service. . . . (At this point Daisy, whose hands were trembling with passion, exclaimed in a loud and injured voice, "The very day she arrived!") Mrs. Lucas (one of the Warwickshire Smythes by birth) was, as all the world knew, a most accomplished musician and Shakespearean scholar, and had made Riseholme a centre of culture and art. But nobody would suspect the blue stocking in the brilliant, beautiful and witty hostess whose presence would lend an added gaiety to the London season.

Daisy was beginning to feel physically unwell. She

hurried over the few remaining lines, and then ejaculating "Witty! Beautiful!" sent de Vere across to Georgie's with the paper, bidding him to return it, as she hadn't finished with it. But she thought he ought to know. . . . Georgie read it through, and with admirable self-restraint, sent Foljambe back with it and a message of thanks—nothing more—to Mrs. Quantock for the loan of it. Daisy, by this time feeling better, memorised the whole of it.

Life under the new conditions was not easy, for a mere glance at the paper might send any true Riseholmite into a paroxysm of chattering rage or a deep disgusted melancholy. *The Times* again recorded the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas had arrived at 25 Brompton Square, there was another terrible paragraph headed 'Dinner,' stating that Mrs. Sandeman entertained the following to dinner. There was an Ambassador, a Marquis, a Countess (dowager), two Viscounts with wives, a Baronet, a quantity of Honourables and Knights, and Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas. Every single person except Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas had a title. The list was too much for Mrs. Boucher, who, reading it at breakfast, suddenly exclaimed:

"I didn't think it of them. And it's a poor consolation to know that they must have gone in last."

Then she hermetically sealed her lips again on this painful subject, and when she had finished her breakfast (her appetite had quite gone) she looked up every member of that degrading party in Colonel Boucher's "Who's Who."

The announcement that Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas had arrived at 25 Brompton Square was repeated once more, in case anybody had missed it (Riseholme had not), and Robert Quantock observed that at this rate the three thousand pounds a year would soon be gone, with nothing

to show for it except a few press-cuttings. That was very clever and very withering, but anyone could be withering over such a subject. It roused, it is true, a faint and unexpressed hope that the arrival of Lucia in London had not spontaneously produced the desired effect, or why should she cause it to be repeated so often? But that brought no real comfort, and a few days afterwards, there fell a further staggering blow. There was a Court, and Mrs. Agnes Sandeman presented Mrs. Philip Lucas. Worse yet, her gown was minutely described, and her ornaments were diamonds and pearls.

The vow of silence could no longer be observed: human nature was human nature, and Riseholme would have burst unless it had spoken, Georgie sitting in his little back parlour overlooking the garden, and lost in exasperated meditation, was roused by his name being loudly called from Daisy's garden next door, and looking out, saw the unprecedented sight of Mrs. Boucher's bath-chair planted on Daisy's lawn.

"She must have come in along the gravel path by the back-door," he thought to himself. "I shouldn't have thought it was wide enough." He looked to see if his tie was straight, and then leaned out to answer.

"Georgie, come round a minute," called Daisy. "Have you seen it?"

"Yes," said Georgie, "I have. And I'll come."

Mrs. Boucher was talking in her loud emphatic voice, when he arrived.

"As for pearls," she said, "I can't say anything about them, not having seen them. But as for diamonds, the only diamonds she ever had was two or three little chips on the back of her wrist-watch. That I'll swear to."

The two ladies took no notice of him: Daisy referred to the description of Lucia's dress again.

“ I believe it was her last dinner-gown with a train added,” she said. “ It was a sort of brocade.”

“ Yes, and plush is a sort of velvet,” said Mrs. Boucher. “ I’ve a good mind to write to *The Times*, and say they’re mistaken. Brocade ! Bunkum ! It’s pushing and shoving instead of diamonds and pearls. But I’ve had my say, and that’s all. I shouldn’t a bit wonder if we saw that the King and Queen had gone to lunch quite quietly at Brompton Square.”

“ That’s all very well,” said Daisy, “ but what are we to do ? ”

“ Do ? ” said Mrs. Boucher. “ There’s plenty to do in Riseholme, isn’t there ? I’m sure I never suffered from lack of employment, and I should be sorry to think that I had less interests now than I had before last Wednesday week. Wednesday, or was it Thursday, when they slipped away like that ? Whichever it was, it makes no difference to me, and if you’re both disengaged this evening, you and Mr. Georgie, the Colonel and I would be very glad if you would come and take your bit of dinner with us. And Mr. Quantock too, of course. But as for diamonds and pearls, well, let’s leave that alone. I shall wear my emerald tiara to-night and my ruby necklace. My sapphires have gone to be cleaned.”

But though Riseholme was justifiably incensed over Lucia’s worldliness and all this pushing and shoving and this self-advertising publicity, it had seldom been so wildly interested. Also, after the first pangs of shame had lost their fierceness, a very different sort of emotion began to soothe the wounded hearts : it was possible to see Lucia in another light. She had stepped straight from the sheltered and cultured life of Riseholme into the great busy feverish world, and already she was making her splendid mark there. Though it might have been she who had told Hermione what to say in those fashionable

paragraphs of hers (and those who knew Lucia best were surely best competent to form just conclusions about that) still Hermione had said it, and the public now knew how witty and beautiful Lucia was, and what a wonderful house she had. Then on the very night of her arrival she had been a guest at an obviously superb dinner-party, and had since been presented at Court. All this, to look at it fairly, reflected glory on Riseholme, and if it was impossible in one mood not to be ashamed of her, it was even more impossible in other moods not to be proud of her. She had come, and almost before she had seen, she was conquering. She could be viewed as a sort of ambassadress, and her conquests in that light were Riseholme's conquests. But pride did not oust shame, nor shame pride, and shuddering anticipations as to what new enormity the daily papers might reveal were mingled with secret and delighted conjectures as to what Riseholme's next triumph would be.

It was not till the day after her presentation that any news came to Riseholme direct from the ambassadress's headquarters. Every day Georgie had been expecting to hear, and in anticipation of her summons to come up and stay in the bedroom with the bathroom and sitting-room attached, had been carefully through his wardrobe, and was satisfied that he would present a creditable appearance. His small portmanteau, Foljambe declared, would be ample to hold all that he wanted, including the suit with the Oxford trousers, and his cloth-topped boots. When the long expected letter came, he therefore felt prepared to start that very afternoon, and tore it open with the most eager haste and propped it against his teapot.

GEORGINO MIO,

Such a whirl ever since we left, that I haven't had a moment. But to-night (Oh such a relief) Pepino and I have dined alone, quite à la Riseholme, and for the first time I have had

half an hour's quiet practice in my music-room, and now sit down to write to you. (You'd have scolded me if you'd heard me play, so stiff and rusty have I become.)

Well, now for my little chronicles. The very first evening we were here, we went out to a big dinner at dearest Aggie's. Some interesting people: I enjoyed a pleasant talk with the Italian Ambassador, and called on them the day after, but I had no long conversation with anyone, for Aggie kept bringing up fresh people to introduce me to, and your poor Lucia got quite confused with so many, till Pepino and I sorted them out afterwards. Everyone seemed to have heard of our coming up to town, and I assure you that ever since the tiresome telephone has been a perfect nuisance, though all so kind. Would we go to lunch one day, or would we go to dinner another, and there was a private view here, and a little music in the afternoon there: I assure you I have never been so petted and made so much of.

We have done a little entertaining too, already, just a few old friends like our member of Parliament, Mr. Garroby-Ashton. ("She met him once," thought Georgie in parenthesis.) He insisted also on our going to tea with him at the House of Commons. I knew that would interest Pepino, for he's becoming quite a politician, and so we went. Tea on the terrace, and a pleasant little chat with the Prime Minister who came and sat at our table for ever so long. How I wanted you to be there and make a sketch of the Thames: just the sort of view you do so beautifully! Wonderful river, and I repeated to myself 'Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.' Then such a scurry to get back to dine somewhere or other and go to a play. Then dearest Aggie (such a good soul) had set her heart on presenting me and I couldn't disappoint her. Did you see the description of my dress? How annoyed I was that it appeared in the papers! So vulgar all that sort of thing, and you know how I hate publicity, but they tell me I must just put up with it and not mind.

The house is getting into order, but there are lots of little changes and furbishings up to be done before I venture to show it to anyone as critical as you, Georgino. How you would scream at the carpet in the dining-room! I know it would give you indigestion. But when I get the house straight, I shall insist on your coming, whatever your engagements are, and staying a long, long time. We will fix a date when I come down for some week-end.

Your beloved Olga is back, but I haven't seen her yet. I

asked Signor Cortese to dine and meet her one night, and I asked her to meet him. I thought that would make a pleasant little party, but they were both engaged. I hope they have not quarrelled. Her house, just opposite mine, looks very tiny, but I daresay it is quite large enough for her and her husband. She sings at the opening night of the Opera next week, in "Lucrezia." I must manage to go even if I can only look in for an act or two. Pepino (so extravagant of him) has taken a box for two nights in the week. It is his birthday present to me, so I couldn't scold the dear! And after all, we shall give a great deal of pleasure to friends, by letting them have it when we do not want it ourselves.

Love to everybody at dear Riseholme. I feel quite like an exile, and sometimes I long for its sweet peace and quietness. But there is no doubt that London suits Pepino very well, and I must make the best of this incessant hustle. I had hoped to get down for next Sunday, but Mrs. Garroby-Ashton (I hear he will certainly be raised to the peerage when the birthday honours come out) has made a point of our spending it with them. . . . Good-night, dear Georgino. Me so so sleepy.

LUCIA.

Georgie swallowed this letter at a gulp, and then, beginning again, took it in sips. At first it gave him an impression of someone wholly unlike her, but when sipped, every sentence seemed wonderfully characteristic. She was not adapting herself to new circumstances, she was adapting new circumstances to herself with all her old ingenuity and success, and with all her invincible energy. True, you had sometimes to read between the lines, and divide everything by about three in order to allow for exaggerations, and when Lucia spoke of not disappointing dearest Aggie, who had set her heart on presenting her at Court, or of Mrs. Garroby-Ashton making a point of her going down for the week-end which she had intended to spend at Riseholme, Georgie only had to remember how she had been forced (so she said) to be Queen at those May Day revels. By sheer power of will she had made each of them become a Robin Hood or a

Maid Marian, or whatever it was, and then, when she had got them all at work she said it was she who was being worked to death over *their* May Day revels. They had forced her to organise them, they had insisted that she should be Queen, and lead the dances and sing louder than anybody, and be crowned and curtsied to. They had been wax in her hands, and now in new circumstances, Georgie felt sure that dearest Aggie had been positively forced to present her, and no doubt Mrs. Garroby-Ashton, cornered on that terrace of the House of Commons, while sweet Thames flowed softly, had had no choice but to ask her down for a Sunday. Will-power, indomitable perseverance now, as always, was getting her just precisely what she had wanted: by it she had become Queen of Riseholme, and by it she was firmly climbing away in London, and already she was saying that everybody was insisting on her dining and lunching with them, whereas it was her moral force that made them powerless in her grip. Riseholme she had no use for now: she was busy with something else; she did not care to be bothered with Georgie, and so she said it was the dining-room carpet.

"Very well," said Georgie bitterly. "And if she doesn't want me, I won't want her. So that's that."

He briskly put the letter away, and began to consider what he should do with himself all day. It was warm enough to sit out and paint: in fact, he had already begun a sketch of the front of his house from the Green opposite; there was his piano if he settled to have a morning of music; there was the paper to read, there was news to collect, there was Daisy Quantock next door who would be delighted to have a sitting with the planchette, which was really beginning to write whole words instead of making meaningless dashes and scribbles, and yet none of these things which, together with plenty of conversation

and a little housekeeping and manicuring, had long made life such a busy and strenuous performance, seemed to offer an adequate stimulus. And he knew well enough what rendered them devoid of tonic: it was that Lucia was not here, and however much he told himself he did not want her, he like all the rest of Riseholme was beginning to miss her dreadfully. She aggravated and exasperated them: she was a hypocrite (all that pretence of not having read the Mozart duet, and desolation at Auntie's death), a poseuse, a sham and a snob, but there was something about her that stirred you into violent though protesting activity, and though she might infuriate you, she prevented your being dull. Georgie enjoyed painting, but he knew that the fact that he would show his sketch to Lucia gave spice to his enjoyment, and that she, though knowing no more about it than a rhinoceros, would hold it at arm's length with her head a little on one side and her eyes slightly closed, and say:

"Yes, Georgie, very nice, very nice. But have you got the value of your middle-distance quite right? And a little more depth in your distance, do you think?"

Or if he played his piano, he knew that what inspired his nimbleness would be the prospect of playing his piece to her, and if he was practising on the sly a duet for performance with her, the knowledge that he was stealing a march on her and would astonish her (though she might suspect the cause of his facility). And as for conversation, it was useless to deny that conversation languished in Riseholme if the subject of Lucia, her feats and her frailties was tabooed.

"We've got to pull ourselves together," thought Georgie, "and start again. We must get going and learn to do without her, as she's getting on so nicely without us. I shall go and see how the planchette is progressing."

Daisy was already at it, and the pencil was getting

up steam. A day or two ago it had written not once only but many times a strange sort of hieroglyphic, which might easily be interpreted to be the mystic word Abfou. Daisy had therefore settled (what could be more obvious ?) that the name of the control who guided these strange gyrations was Abfou, which sounded very Egyptian and antique. Therefore, she powerfully reasoned, the scribbles which could not be made to fit any known configuration of English letters might easily be Arabic. Why Abfou should write his name in English characters and his communications in Arabic was not Daisy's concern, for who knew what were the conditions on the other side ? A sheet was finished just as Georgie came in, and though it presented nothing but Arabic script, the movements of the planchette had been so swift and eager that Daisy quite forgot to ask if there was any news.

"Abfou is getting in more direct touch with me every time I sit," said Daisy. "I feel sure we shall have something of great importance before long. Put your hand on the planchette too, Georgie, for I have always believed that you have mediumistic powers. Concentrate first : that means you must put everything else out of your head. Let us sit for a minute or two with our eyes shut. Breathe deeply. Relax. Sometimes slight hypnosis comes on, so the book says, which means you get very drowsy."

There was silence for a few moments : Georgie wanted to tell Daisy about Lucia's letter, but that would certainly interrupt Abfou, so he drew up a chair, and after laying his hand on Daisy's closed his eyes and breathed deeply. And then suddenly the most extraordinary things began to happen.

The planchette trembled : it vibrated like a kettle on the boil, and began to skate about the paper. He had no idea what its antic motions meant : he only knew that it was writing something, Arabic perhaps, but something

firm and decided. It seemed to him that so far from aiding its movement, he almost, to be on the safe side, checked it. He opened his eyes, for it was impossible not to want to watch this manifestation of psychic force, and also he wished to be sure (though he had no real suspicions on the subject) that his collaborator was not, to put it coarsely, pushing. Exactly the same train of thought was passing in Daisy's mind, and she opened her eyes too.

"Georgie, my hand is positively being dragged about," she said excitedly. "If anything, I try to resist."

"Mine too; so do I," said Georgie. "It's too wonderful. Do you suppose it's Arabic still?"

The pencil gave a great dash, and stopped.

"It isn't Arabic," said Daisy as she examined the message, "at least, there's heaps of English too."

"No!" said Georgie, putting on his spectacles in his excitement, and not caring whether Daisy knew he wore them or not. "I can see it looks like English, but what a difficult handwriting! Look, that's 'Abfou', isn't it? And that is 'Abfou' again there."

They bent their heads over the script.

"There's an 'L,'" cried Daisy, "and there it is again. And then there's 'L from L.' And then there's 'Dead' repeated twice. It can't mean that Abfou is dead, because this is positive proof that he's alive. And then I can see 'Mouse'?"

"Where?" said Georgie eagerly. "And what would 'dead mouse' mean?"

"There!" said Daisy pointing. "No: it isn't 'dead mouse.' It's 'dead' and then a lot of Arabic, and then 'mouse.'"

"I don't believe it is 'Mouse,'" said Georgie, "though of course, you know Abfou's handwriting much better than I do. It looks to me far more like 'Museum.'"

"Perhaps he wants me to send all the Arabic he's

written up to the British Museum," said Daisy with a flash of genius, "so that they can read it and say what it means."

"But then there's 'Museum' or 'Mouse' again there," said Georgie, "and surely that word in front of it—It is! It's Riseholme! Riseholme Mouse or Riseholme Museum! I don't know what either would mean."

"You may depend upon it that it means something," said Daisy, "and there's another capital 'L.' Does it mean Lucia, do you think? But 'dead' . . ."

"No: dead's got nothing to do with the 'L,'" said Georgie. "Museum comes in between, and quantities of Arabic."

"I think I'll just record the exact time; it would be more scientific," said Daisy. "A quarter to eleven. No, that clock's three minutes fast by the church time."

"No, the church time is slow," said Georgie.

Suddenly he jumped up.

"I've got it," he said. "Look! 'L from L.' That means a letter from Lucia. And it's quite true. I heard this morning, and it's in my pocket now."

"No!" said Daisy, "that's just a sign Abfou is giving us, that he really is with us, and knows what is going on. Very evidential."

The absorption of them both in this script may be faintly appreciated by the fact that neither Daisy evinced the slightest curiosity as to what Lucia said, nor Georgie the least desire to communicate it.

"And then there's 'dead'," said Georgie, looking out of the window. "I wonder what that means."

"I'm sure I hope it's not Lucia," said Daisy with stoical calmness, "but I can't think of anybody else."

Georgie's eyes wandered over the Green; Mrs. Boucher was speeding round in her bath-chair, pushed by her husband, and there was the Vicar walking very fast, and

Mrs. Antrobus and Piggy and Goosey . . . nobody else seemed to be dead. Then his eye came back to the foreground of Daisy's front garden.

"What has happened to your mulberry-tree?" he said parenthetically. "Its leaves are all drooping. You ought never to have pruned its roots without knowing how to do it."

Daisy jumped up.

"Georgie, you've got it!" she said. "It's the mulberry-tree that's dead. Isn't that wonderful?"

Georgie was suitably impressed.

"That's very curious: very curious indeed," he said. "Letter from Lucia, and the dead mulberry tree. I do believe there's something in it. But let's go on studying the script. Now I look at it again I feel certain it is Riseholme Museum, not Riseholme Mouse. The only difficulty is that there isn't a Museum in Riseholme."

"There are plenty of mice," observed Daisy, who had had some trouble with these little creatures. "Abfou may be wanting to give me advice about some kind of ancient Egyptian trap. . . . But if you aren't very busy this morning, Georgie, we might have another sitting and see if we get anything more definite. Let us attain collectedness as the directions advise."

"What's collectedness?" asked Georgie.

Daisy gave him the directions. Collectedness seemed to be a sort of mixture of intense concentration and complete vacuity of mind.

"You seem to have to concentrate your mind upon nothing at all," said he after reading it.

"That's just it," said Daisy. "You put all thoughts out of your head, and then focus your mind. We have to be only the instrument through which Abfou functions."

They sat down again after a little deep breathing and relaxation, and almost immediately the planchette began

to move across the paper with a firm and steady progression. It stopped sometimes for a few minutes, which was proof of the authenticity of the controlling force, for in spite of all efforts at collectedness, both Daisy's and Georgie's minds were full of things which they longed for Abfou to communicate, and if either of them was consciously directing those movements, there could have been no pause at all. When finally it gave that great dash across the paper again, indicating that the communication was finished, they found the most remarkable results.

Abfou had written two pages of foolscap in a tall upright hand, which was quite unlike either Daisy's or Georgie's ordinary script, and this was another proof (if proof were wanted) of authenticity. It was comparatively easy to read, and, except for a long passage at the end in Arabic, was written almost entirely in English.

"Look, there's Lucia written out in full four times," said Daisy eagerly. "And 'Pepper.' What's Pepper?"

Georgie gasped.

"Why Pepino, of course," he said. "I do call that odd. And see how it goes on—'Muck company', no 'Much company, much grand company, higher and higher.'"

"Poor Lucia!" said Daisy. "How sarcastic! That's what Abfou thinks about it all. By the way, you haven't told me what she says yet; never mind, this is far more interesting. . . . Then there's a little Arabic, at least I think it's Arabic, for I can't make anything out of it, and then—why, I believe those next words are 'From Olga.' Have you heard from Olga?"

"No," said Georgie, "but there's something about her in Lucia's letter. Perhaps that's it."

"Very likely. And then I can make out Riseholme,

and it isn't 'mouse,' it's quite clearly 'Museum,' and then—I can't read that, but it looks English, and then 'opera,' that's Olga again, and 'dead,' which is the mulberry tree. And then 'It is better to work than to be idle. Think not——' something——"

"Bark," said Georgie. "No, 'hard.'"

"Yes. 'Think not hard thoughts of any, but turn thy mind to improving work.'—Georgie, isn't that wonderful?—and then it goes off into Arabic, what a pity! It might have been more about the museum. I shall certainly send all the first Arabic scripts to the British Museum."

Georgie considered this.

"Somehow I don't believe that is what Abfou means," said he. "He says Riseholme Museum, not British Museum. You can't possibly get 'British' out of that word."

Georgie left Daisy still attempting to detect more English among Arabic passages and engaged himself to come in again after tea for fresh investigation. Within a minute of his departure Daisy's telephone rang.

"How tiresome these interruptions are," said Daisy to herself, as she hurried to the instrument. "Yes, yes. Who is it?"

Georgie's voice had the composure of terrific excitement.

"It's me," he said. "The second post has just come in, and a letter from Olga. 'From Olga,' you remember."

"No!" said Daisy. "Do tell me if she says anything about——"

But Georgie had already rung off. He wanted to read his letter from Olga, and Daisy sat down again quite awestruck at this further revelation. The future clearly was known to Abfou as well as the past, for Georgie knew nothing about Olga's letter when the words 'From Olga'

occurred in the script. And if in it she said anything about 'opera' (which really was on the cards) it would be more wonderful still.

The morning was nearly over, so Daisy observed to her prodigious surprise, for it had really gone like a flash (a flash of the highest illuminative power), and she hurried out with a trowel and a rake to get half an hour in the garden before lunch. It was rather disconcerting to find that though she spent the entire day in the garden, often not sitting down to her planchette till dusk rendered it impossible to see the mazes of cotton threads she had stretched over newly-sown beds, to keep off sparrows (she had on one occasion shattered with a couple of hasty steps the whole of those defensive fortifications) she seemed, in spite of blistered hands and aching back, to be falling more and more into arrears over her horticulture. Whereas that ruffian Simkinson, whom she had dismissed for laziness when she found him smoking a pipe in the potting-shed and doing a cross-word puzzle when he ought to have been working, really kept her garden in very good order by slouching about it for three half-days in the week. To be sure, she had pruned the roots of the mulberry tree, which had taken a whole day (and so incidentally had killed the mulberry tree) and though the death of that antique vegetable had given Abfou a fine opportunity for proving himself, evidence now was getting so abundant that Daisy almost wished it hadn't happened. Then; too, she was beginning to have secret qualms that she had torn up as weeds a quantity of seedlings which the indolent Simkinson had just pricked out, for though the bed§ were now certainly weedless, there was no sign of any other growth there. And either Daisy's little wooden labels had got mixed, or she had sown Brussels sprouts in the circular bed just outside the dining-room window instead of Phlox Drummondii. She thought

she had attached the appropriate label to the seed she had sown, but it was very dark at the time, and in the morning the label certainly said 'Brussels sprouts.' In which case there would be a bed of Phlox at the far end of the little strip of kitchen garden. The seeds in both places were sprouting now, so she would know the worst or the best before long.

Then, again, there was the rockery she had told Simkinson to build, which he had neglected for cross-word puzzles, and though Daisy had been working six or eight hours a day in her garden ever since, she had not found time to touch a stone of it, and the fragments lying like a moraine on the path by the potting-shed still rendered any approach to the latter a mountaineering feat. They consisted of fragments of mediæval masonry, from the site of the ancient abbey, finials and crockets and pieces of mullioned windows which had been turned up when a new siding of the railway had been made, and everyone almost had got some with the exception of Mrs. Boucher, who called them rubbish. Then there were some fossils, ammonites and spar and curious flints with holes in them and bits of talc, for Lucia one year had commandeered them all into the study of geology and they had got hammers and whacked away at the face of an old quarry, detaching these petrified relics and hitting themselves over the fingers in the process. It was that year that the Roman camp outside the village had been put under the plough and Kiseholme had followed it like a bevy of rooks, and Georgie had got several trays full of fragments of iridescent glass, and Colonel Boucher had collected bits of Samian ware, and Mrs. Antrobus had found a bronze fibula or safety-pin. Daisy had got some chunks of Roman brickwork, and a section of Roman drainpipe, which now figured among the materials for her rockery; and she had bought, for

about their weight in gold, quite a dozen bronze coins. These, of course, would not be placed in the rockery, but she had put them somewhere very carefully, and had subsequently forgotten where that was. Now as these archæological associations came into her mind from the contemplation of the materials for the rockery, she suddenly thought she remembered that she had put them at the back of the drawer in her card-table.

The sight of these antique fragments disgusted Daisy ; they littered the path, and she could not imagine them built up into a rockery that should have the smallest claim to be an attractive object. How could the juxtaposition of a stone mullion, a drain-pipe and an ammonite present a pleasant appearance ? Besides, who was to juxtapose them ? She could not keep pace with the other needs of the garden, let alone a rockery, and where, after all, was the rockery to stand ? The asparagus-bed seemed the only place, and she preferred asparagus.

Robert was bawling out from the dining-room window that lunch was ready, and as she retraced her steps to the house, she thought that perhaps it would be better to eat humble pie and get Simkinson to return. It was clear to Daisy that if she was to do her duty as medium between ancient Egypt and the world of to-day, the garden would deteriorate even more rapidly than it was doing already, and no doubt Robert would consent to eat the humble pie for her, and tell Simkinson that they couldn't get on without him, and that when she had said he was lazy, she had meant industrious, or whatever else was necessary.

Robert was in a very good temper that day because Roumanian oils which were the main source of his fortunes had announced a higher dividend than usual, and he promised to seek out Simkinson and explain what lazy meant, and if he didn't understand to soothe his injured feelings with a small tip.

“And tell him he needn't make a rockery at all,” said Daisy “He always hated the idea of a rockery. He can dig a pit and bury the fossils and the architectural fragments and everything. That will be the easiest way of disposing of them.”

“And what is he to do with the earth he takes out of the pit, my dear?” asked Robert.

“Put it back, I suppose,” said Daisy rather sharply. Robert was so pleased at having ‘caught’ her, that he did not even explain that she had been caught. . . .

After lunch Daisy found the coins; it was odd that, having forgotten where she had put them for so long, she should suddenly remember, and she was inclined to attribute this inspiration to Abfou. The difficulty was to know what, having found them, to do with them next. Some of them obviously bore signs of once having had profiles of Roman emperors stamped on them, and she was sure she had heard that some Roman coins were of great value, and probably these were the ones. Perhaps when she sent the Arabic script to the British Museum she might send these too for identification. . . . And then she dropped them all on the floor as the great idea struck her.

She flew into the garden, calling to Georgie, who was putting up croquet-hoops.

“Georgie, I've got it!” she cried. “It's as plain as plain. What Abfou wants us to do is to start a Riseholme Museum. He wrote Riseholme Museum quite distinctly. Think how it would pay too, when we're overrun with American tourists in the summer! They would all come to see it. A shilling admission. I should put it at, and sixpence for the catalogue.”

“I wonder if Abfou meant that,” said Georgie.

“He said it,” said Daisy. “You can't deny that!”

"But what should we put in the Museum?" asked he.

"My dear, we should fill it with antiquities and things which none of us want in our houses. There are those beautiful fragments of the Abbey which I've got, and which are simply wasted in my garden with no one to see them, and my drainpipe. I would present them all to the Museum, and the fossils, and perhaps some of my coins. And my Roman brick-work."

Georgie paused with a hoop in his hand.

"That is an idea," he said. "And I've got all those lovely pieces of iridescent glass, which are always tumbling about. I would give them."

"And Colonel Boucher's Samian ware," cried Daisy. "He was saying only the other day how he hated it, but didn't quite want to throw it away. It will be a question of what we leave out, not of what we put in. Besides, I'm sure that's what Abfou meant. We must form a committee at once. You and Mrs. Boucher and I, I should think, would be enough. Large committees are a great mistake."

"Not Lucia?" asked Georgie, with lingering loyalty.

"No. Certainly not," said Daisy. "She would only send us orders from London, as to what we were to do and want us to undo all we had done when she came back, besides saying she had thought of it, and making herself President!"

"There's something in that," said Georgie.

"Of course there is, there's sense," said Daisy. "Now I shall go straight and see Mrs. Boucher."

Georgie dealt a few smart blows with his mallet to the hoop he was putting in place.

"I shall come too," he said. "Riseholme Museum! I believe Abfou did mean that. We *shall* be busy again."