

CHAPTER IV

THE committee met that very afternoon, and the next morning and the next afternoon, and the scheme quickly took shape. Robert, rolling in golden billows of Roumanian oil, was called in as financial adviser, and after calculation, the scheme strongly recommended itself to him. All the summer the town was thronged with visitors, and inquiring American minds would hardly leave unvisited the Museum at so Elizabethan a place.

“I don’t know what you’ll have in your Museum,” he said, “but I expect they’ll go to look, and even if they don’t find much they’ll have paid their shillings. And if Mrs. Boucher thinks her husband will let you have that big tithe-barn of his, at a small rent, I daresay you’ll have a paying proposition.”

The question of funds therefore in order to convert the tithe barn into a museum was instantly gone into. Robert professed himself perfectly ready to equip the tithe-barn with all necessary furniture and decoration, if he might collar the whole of the receipts, but his willingness to take all financial responsibilities made the committee think that they would like to have a share in them, since so shrewd a business man clearly saw the probability of making something out of it. Up till then, the sordid question of money had not really occurred to them : there

was to be a museum which would make them busy again, and the committee was to run it. They were quite willing to devote practically the whole of their time to it, for Riseholme was one of those happy places where the proverb that Time is money was a flat fallacy, for nobody had ever earned a penny with it. But since Robert's financial judgment argued that the museum would be a profitable investment, the committee naturally wished to have a hand in it, and the three members each subscribed fifty pounds, and co-opted Robert to join the board and supply the rest. Profits (if any) would be divided up between the members of the committee in proportion to their subscriptions. The financial Robert would see to all that, and the rest of them could turn their attention to the provision of curiosities.

There was evidently to be no lack of them, for everyone in Riseholme had stores of miscellaneous antiquities and "specimens" of various kinds which encumbered their houses and required a deal of dusting, but which couldn't quite be thrown away. A very few striking objects were only lent: among these were Daisy's box of coins, and Mrs. Antrobus's fibula, but the most of them, like Georgie's glass and Colonel Boucher's pieces of Samian ware, were fervently bestowed. Objects of all sorts poured in, the greater portion of a spinning-wheel, an Elizabethan pestle and mortar, no end of Roman tiles, a large wooden post unhesitatingly called a whipping-post, some indecipherable documents on parchment with seals attached, belonging to the vicar, an ordnance map of the district, numerous collections of fossils and of carved stones from the site of the abbey, ancient quilts, a baby's cradle, worm-eaten enough to be Anglo-Saxon, queer-shaped bottles, a tiger-ware jug, fire-irons too ponderous for use, and (by special vote of the Parish Council) the stocks which had hitherto stood at the edge of the pond on

the green. All Riseholme was busy again, for fossils had to be sorted out (it was early realised that even a museum could have too many ammonites), curtains had to be stitched for the windows, labels to be written, Samian ware to be pieced together, cases arranged, a catalogue prepared. The period of flatness consequent on Lucia's desertion had passed off, and what had certainly added zest to industry was the thought that Lucia had nothing to do with the museum. When next she deigned to visit her discarded kingdom, she would find how busily and successfully and originally they had got on without her, and that there was no place for her on the committee, and probably none in the museum for the Elizabethan turnspit which so often made the chimney of her music-room to smoke.

Riseholme, indeed, was busier than ever, for not only had it the museum feverishly to occupy it so that it might be open for the tourist season this year, and, if possible, before Lucia came down for one of her promised weekends, but it was immersed in a wave of psychical experiments. Daisy Quantock had been perfectly honest in acknowledging that the idea of the museum was not hers at all, but Abfou's, her Egyptian guide. She had, it is true, been as ingenious as Joseph in interpreting Abfou's directions, but it was Abfou to whom all credit was due, and who evidently took such a deep interest in the affairs of Riseholme. She even offered to present the museum with the sheet of foolscap on which the words 'Riseholme Museum' (not mouse) were written, but the general feeling of the committee, while thanking her for her munificence, was that it would not be tactful to display it, since the same Sibylline sheet contained those sarcastic remarks about Lucia. It was proved also that Abfou had meant the Museum to be started, for subsequently he several times said, "Much pleased with your plans for the Museum. Abfou approves." So everybody

else wanted to get into touch with Abfou too, and no less than four planchettes or ouija-boards were immediately ordered by various members of Riseholme society. At present Abfou did not manifest himself to any of them, except in what was possibly Arabic script (for it certainly bore a strong resemblance to his earlier efforts of communication with Daisy), and while she encouraged the scribes to persevere in the hope that he might soon regale them with English, she was not really very anxious that he should. With her he was getting Englisher and Englisher every day, and had not Simkinson, after having had the true meaning of the word 'lazy' carefully explained to him, consented to manage her garden again, it certainly would have degenerated into primeval jungle, for she absolutely had not a minute to attend to it.

Simkinson, however, was quite genial.

"Oh yes, ma'am, very pleased to come back," he said. "I knew you wouldn't be able to get on long without me, and I want no explanations. Now let's have a look round and see what you've been doing. Why, whatever's happened to my mulberry tree?"

That was Simkinson's way: he always talked of 'my flowers' and 'my asparagus' when he meant hers.

"I've been pruning its roots," she said.

"Well, ma'am, you've done your best to do it in," said Simkinson. "I don't think it's dead though, I daresay it'll pull round."

Abfou had been understood to say it was dead, but perhaps he meant something else, thought Daisy, and they went on to the small circular bed below the dining-room windows.

"Phlox," said Daisy hopefully.

"Broccoli," said Simkinson examining the young green sprouts. "And the long bed there. I sowed a

lot of annuals there, and I don't see a sign of anything coming up."

He fixed her with a merry eye.

"I believe you've been weeding, ma'am," he said. "I shall have to get you a lot of young plants if you want a bit of colour there. It's too late for me to put my seeds in again."

Daisy rather wished she hadn't come out with him, and changed the subject to something more cheerful.

"Well, I shan't want the rockery," she said. "You needn't bother about that. All these stones will be carted away in a day or two."

"Glad of that, ma'am. I'll be able to get to my potting-shed again. Well, I'll try to put you to rights. I'd best pull up the broccoli first, you won't want it under your windows, will you? You stick to rolling the lawn, ma'am, if you want to garden. You won't do any harm then."

It was rather dreadful being put in one's place like this, but Daisy did not dare risk a second quarrel, and the sight of Georgie at the dining-room window (he had come across to 'weedj,' as the psychical processes, whether ouija or planchette, were now called) was rather a relief. Weeding, after all, was unimportant compared with weedjing.

"And I don't believe I ever told you what Olga wrote about," said Georgie, as soon as she was within range. "We've talked of nothing but museum. Oh, and Mrs. Boucher's planchette has come. But it broke in the post, and she's gumming it together."

"I doubt if it will act," said Daisy. "But what did Olga say? It quite went out of my head to ask you."

"It's too heavenly of her," said he. "She's asked me to go up and stay with her for the first night of the opera. She's singing Lucrezia, and has got a stall for me."

"No!" said Daisy, making a trial trip over the blotting-paper to see if the pencil was sharp. "That will be an event! I suppose you're going."

"Just about," said Georgie. "It's going to be broadcasted, too, and I shall be listening to the original."

"How interesting!" said Daisy. "And there you'll be in Brompton Square, just opposite Lucia. Oh, you heard from her? What did she say?"

"Apparently she's getting on marvellously," said Georgie. "Not a moment to spare. Just what she likes."

Daisy pushed the planchette aside. There would be time for that when she had had a little talk about Lucia.

"And are you going to stay with her too?" she asked.

Georgie was quite determined not to be ill-natured. He had taken no part (or very little) in this trampling on Lucia's majesty, which had been so merrily going on.

"I should love to, if she would ask me," he observed. "She only says she's going to. Of course, I shall go to see her."

"I wouldn't," said Daisy savagely. "If she asked me fifty times I should say 'no' fifty times. What's happened is that she's dropped us. I wouldn't have her on our museum committee if—if she gave her pearls to it and said they belonged to Queen Elizabeth. I wonder you haven't got more spirit."

"I've got plenty of spirit," said Georgie, "and I allow I did feel rather hurt at her letter. But then, after all, what does it matter?"

"Of course it doesn't if you're going to stay with Olga," said Daisy. "How she'll hate you for that!"

"Well, I can't help it," he said. "Lucia hasn't asked me and Olga has. She's twice reminded Olga that she may use her music-room to practise in whenever she likes. Isn't that kind? She would love to be able

to say that Olga's always practising in her music-room
But aren't we ill-natured? Let's weedj instead."

Georgie found, when he arrived next afternoon in Brompton Square, that Olga had already had her early dinner, and that he was to dine alone at seven and follow her to the opera house.

"I'm on the point of collapse from sheer nerves," she said. "I always am before I sing, and then out of desperation I pull myself together. If—I say 'if'—I survive till midnight, we're going to have a little party here. Cortese is coming, and Princess Isabel, and one or two other people. Georgie, it's very daring of you to come here, you know, because my husband's away, and I'm an unprotected female alone with Don Juan. How's Riseholme? Talk to me about Riseholme. Are you engaged to Piggy yet? And is it broccoli or phlox in Daisy's round bed? Your letter was so mysterious too. I know nothing about the Museum yet. What Museum? Are you going to kill and stuff Lucia and put her in the hall? You simply alluded to the Museum as if I knew all about it. If you don't talk to me, I shall scream."

Georgie flung himself into the task, delighted to be thought capable of doing anything for Olga. He described at great length and with much emphasis the whole of the history of Riseholme from the first epiphany of Arabic and Abfou on the planchette-board down to the return of Simkinson. Olga lost herself in these chronicles, and when her maid came in to tell her it was time to start, she got up quite cheerfully.

"And so it was broccoli," she said. "I was afraid it was going to be phlox after all. You're an angel, Georgie, for getting me through my bad hour. I'll give you anything you like for the Museum. Wait for me afterwards at the stage door. We'll drive back together."

From the moment Olga appeared, the success of the opera was secure. Cortese, who was conducting, had made his music well; it thoroughly suited her, and she was singing and looking and acting her best. Again and again after the first act the curtain had to go up, and not until the house was satisfied could Georgie turn his glances this way and that to observe the audience. Then in the twilight of a small box on the second tier he espied a woman who was kissing her hand somewhere in his direction, and a man waving a programme, and then he suddenly focussed them and saw who they were. He ran upstairs to visit them, and there was Lucia in an extraordinarily short skirt with her hair shingled, and round her neck three short rows of seed pearls.

"Georgino mio!" she cried. "This is a surprise! You came up to see our dear Olga's triumph. I do call that loyalty. Why did you not tell me you were coming?"

"I thought I would call to-morrow," said Georgie, with his eyes still going backwards and forwards between the shingle and the pearls and the legs.

"Ah, you are staying the night in town?" she asked. "Not going back by the midnight train? The dear old midnight train, and waking in Riseholme! At your club?"

"No, I'm staying with Olga," said Georgie.

Lucia seemed to become slightly cataleptic for a moment, but recovered.

"No! Are you really?" she said. "I think that is unkind of you, Georgie. You might have told me you were coming."

"But you said that the house wasn't ready," said he. "And she asked me."

Lucia put on a bright smile.

"Well, you're forgiven," she said. "We're all at sixes and sevens yet. And we've seen nothing of dearest Olga—or Mrs. Shuttleworth, I should say, for that's on

the bills. Of course we'll drive you home, and you must come in for a chat, before Mrs. Shuttleworth gets home, and then no doubt she will be very tired and want to go to bed."

Lucia as she spoke had been surveying the house with occasional little smiles and waggings of her hand in vague directions.

"Ah, there's Elsie Garroby-Ashton," she said, "and who is that with her, Pepino? Lord Shrivenham, surely. So come back with me and have 'ickle talk, Georgie. Oh, there's the Italian Ambassadors. Dearest Gioconda! Such a sweet. And look at the Royal box; What a gathering! That's the Royal Box, Georgie, away to the left—that large one—in the tier below. Too near the stage for my taste: so little illusion——"

Lucia suddenly rose and made a profound curtsy.

"I think she saw us, Pepino," she said, "perhaps you had better bow. No, she's looking somewhere else now: you did not bow quick enough. And what a party in dearest Aggie's box. Who can that be? Oh yes, it's Toby Limpfield. We met him at Aggie's, do you remember, on the first night we were up. So join us at the grand entrance, Georgie, and drive back with us. We shall be giving a lift to somebody else, I'll be bound, but if you have your motor, it is so ill-natured not to pick up friends. I always do it: they will be calling us the 'Lifts of London,' as Marcia Whitby said."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Georgie. "I'm waiting for Olga, and she's having a little party, I believe."

"No! Is she really?" asked Lucia, with all the old Riseholme vivacity. "Who is coming?"

"Cortese, I believe," said Georgie, thinking it might be too much for Lucia if he mentioned a princess, "and one or two of the singers."

Lucia's mouth watered, and she swallowed rapidly. That was the kind of party she longed to be asked to, for it would be so wonderful and glorious to be able casually to allude to Olga's tiny, tiny little party after the first night of the opera, not a party at all really, just a few *intimes*, herself and Cortese and so on. How could she manage it, she wondered? Could she pretend not to know that there was a party, and just drop in for a moment in neighbourly fashion with enthusiastic congratulations? Or should she pretend her motor had not come, and hang about the stage-door with Georgie—Pepino could go home in the motor—and get a lift? Or should she hint very violently to Georgie how she would like to come in just for a minute, Or should she, now that she knew there was to be a party, merely assert that she had been to it? Perhaps a hint to Georgie was the best plan. . . .

Her momentary indecision was put an end to by the appearance of Cortese threading his way among the orchestra, and the lowering of the lights. Georgie, without giving her any further opportunity, hurried back to his stall, feeling that he had had an escape, for Lucia's beady eye had been fixing him, just in the way it always used to do when she wanted something and, in consequence, meant to get it. He felt he had been quite wrong in ever supposing that Lucia had changed. She was just precisely the same, translated into a larger sphere. She had expanded: strange though it seemed, she had only been in bud at Riseholme. "I wonder what she'll do?" thought Georgie as he settled himself into his stall. "She wants dreadfully to come."

The opera came to an end in a blaze of bouquets and triumph and recalls, and curtseys. It was something of an occasion, for it was the first night of the opera, and the first performance of "Lucrezia" in London,

and it was late when Olga came florally out. The party, which was originally meant to be no party at all, but just a little supper with Cortese and one or two of the singers, had marvellously increased during the evening, for friends had sent round messages and congratulations, and Olga had asked them to drop in, and when she and Georgie arrived at Brompton Square, the whole of the curve at the top was packed with motors.

"Heavens, what a lot of people I seem to have asked," she said, "but it will be great fun. There won't be nearly enough chairs, but we'll sit on the floor, and there won't be nearly enough supper, but I know there's a ham, and what can be better than a ham? Oh, Georgie, I am happy."

Now from opposite, across the narrow space of the square, Lucia had seen the arrival of all these cars. In order to see them better she had gone on to the balcony of her drawing-room, and noted their occupants with her opera-glasses. There was Lord Limpsfield, and the Italian Ambassador, and Mr. Garroby-Ashton, and Cortese, and some woman to whom Mr. Garroby-Ashton bowed and Mrs. Garroby-Ashton curtsied. Up they streamed. And there was the Duchess of Whitby, (Marcia, for Lucia had heard her called that) coming up the steps, and curtsying too, but as yet Olga and Georgie quite certainly had not come. It seemed strange that so many brilliant guests should arrive before their hostess, but Lucia saw at once that this was the most *chic* informality that it was possible to conceive. No doubt Mr. Shuttleworth was there to receive them, but how wonderful it all was! . . . And then the thought occurred to her that Olga would arrive, and with her would be Georgie, and she felt herself turning bright green all over with impotent jealousy. Georgie in that crowd! It was impossible that Georgie should be there, and not she, but

that was certainly what would happen unless she thought of something. Georgie would go back to Riseholme and describe this gathering, and he would say that Lucia was not there: he supposed she had not been asked.

Lucia thought of something; she hurried downstairs and let herself out. Motors were still arriving, but perhaps she was not too late. She took up her stand in the central shadow of a gas-lamp close to Olga's door and waited.

Up the square came yet another car, and she could see it was full of flowers. Olga stepped out, and she darted forward.

"O Mrs. Shuttleworth," she said. "Splendid! Glorious! Marvellous! If only Beethoven was alive! I could not think of going to bed, without just popping across to thank you for a revelation! Georgie, dear! Just to shake your hand: that is all. All! I won't detain you. I see you have a party! You wonderful Queen of Song."

Olga at all times was good-natured. Her eye met Georgie's for a moment.

"O, but come in," she said. "Do come in. It isn't a party: it's just anybody. Georgie, be a dear, and help to carry all those flowers in. How nice of you to come across, Mrs. Lucas! I know you'll excuse my running on ahead, because all—at least I hope all—my guests have come, and there's no one to look after them."

Lucia, following closely in her wake, and taking no further notice of Georgie, slipped into the little front drawing-room behind her. It was crammed, and it was such a little room. Why had she not foreseen this, why had she not sent a note across to Olga earlier in the day, asking her to treat Lucia's house precisely as her own, and have her party in the spacious music-room? It would have been only neighbourly. But the bitterness of such

regrets soon vanished in the extraordinary sweetness of the present, and she was soon in conversation with Mrs. Garroby-Ashton, and distributing little smiles and nods to all the folk with whom she had the slightest acquaintance. By the fireplace was standing the Royal lady, and that for the moment was the only chagrin, for Lucia had not the vaguest idea who she was. Then Georgie came in, looking like a flower-stall, and then came a slight second chagrin, for Olga led him up to the Royal lady, and introduced him. But that would be all right, for she could easily get Georgie to tell her who she was, without exactly asking him, and then poor Georgie made a very awkward sort of bow, and dropped a large quantity of flowers, and said 'tarsome.'

Lucia glided away from Mrs. Garroby-Ashton and stood near the Duchess of Whitby. Marcia did not seem to recognise her at first, but that was quickly remedied, and after a little pleasant talk, Lucia asked her to lunch to meet Olga, and fixed in her mind that she must ask Olga to lunch on the same day to meet the Duchess of Whitby. Then edging a little nearer to the centre of attraction, she secured Lord Limpsfield by angling for him with the bait of dearest Aggie, to whom she must remember to telephone early next morning, to ask her to come and meet Lord Limpsfield.

That would do for the present, and Lucia abandoned herself to the joys of the moment. A move was made downstairs to supper, and Lucia, sticking like a limpet to Lord Limpsfield, was wafted in azure to Olga's little tiny dining-room, and saw at once that there were not nearly enough seats for everybody. There were two small round tables, and that was absolutely all: the rest would have to stand and forage at the narrow buffet which ran along the wall.

"It's musical chairs," said Olga cheerfully, "those

who are quick get seats, and the others don't. Tony, go and sit next the Princess, and Cortese, you go the other side. We shall all get something to eat sometime. Georgie, go and stand by the buffet, there's a dear, and make yourself wonderfully useful, and oh, rush upstairs first, and bring the cigarettes; they stay the pangs of hunger. Now we're getting on beautifully. Darling Marcia, there's just one chair let. Slip into it."

Lucia had lingered for a moment at the door to ask Olga to lunch the day after to-morrow, and Olga said she would be delighted, so there was a wonderful little party arranged for. To complete her content it was only needful to be presented to the hitherto anonymous Princess and learn her name. By dexterously picking up her fan for her and much admiring it, as she made a low curtsy, she secured a few precious words with her, but the name was still denied her. To ask anybody what it was would faintly indicate that she didn't know it, and that was not to be thought of.

Georgie popped in, as they all said at Riseholme, to see Lucia next morning when Olga had gone to a rehearsal at Covent Garden, and found her in her music-room, busy over Stravinski. Olga's party had not been in *The Times*, which was annoying, and Lucia was still unaware what the Princess's name was. Though the previous evening had been far the most rewarding she had yet spent, it was wiser to let Georgie suppose that such an affair was a very ordinary occurrence, and not to allude to it for some time.

"Ah, Georgino!" she said. "How nice of you to pop in! By *buona fortuna* I have got a spare hour this morning, before Sophy Alingsby—dear Sophy; such a brain—fetches me to go to some private view or other, so we can have a good chat. Yes, this is the music-room,

and before you go, I must trot you round to see the rest of our little establishment. Not a bad room—those are the famous Chippendale chairs—as soon as we get a little more settled, I shall give an evening party or two with some music. You must come.”

“Should love to,” said Georgie.

“Such a whirl it has been, and it gets worse every day,” went on Lucia. “Sometimes Pepino and I go out together, but often he dines at one house and I at another—they do that in London, you know—and sometimes I hardly set eyes on him all day. I haven’t seen him this morning, but just now they told me he had gone out. He enjoys it so much that I do not mind how tired I get. Ah! that telephone, it never ceases ringing. Sometimes I think I will have it taken out of the house altogether, for I get no peace. Somebody always seems to be wanting Pepino or me.”

She hurried, all the same, with considerable alacrity to the machine, and really there was no thought in her mind of having the telephone taken out, for it had only just been installed. The call, however, was rather a disappointment, for it only concerned a pair of walking shoes. There was no need, however, to tell Georgie that, and pressing her finger to her forehead she said, “Yes, I can manage 3.30,” (which meant nothing) and quickly rang off.

“Not a moment’s peace,” said Lucia. “Ting-a-ting-a-ting from morning till night. Now tell me all about Riseholme, Georgie; that will give me such a delicious feeling of tranquillity. Dear me, who is this coming to interrupt us now?”

It was only Pepino. He seemed leisurely enough, and rather unnecessarily explained that he had only been out to get a tooth-brush from the chemist’s in Brompton Road. This he carried in a small paper parcel.

"And there's the man coming about the telephone this morning, Lucia," he said. "You want the extension to your bedroom, don't you?"

"Yes, dear, as we have got it in the house we may as well have it conveniently placed," she said. "I'm sure the miles I walk up and down stairs, as I was telling Georgie——"

Pepino chuckled.

"She woke them up, Georgie," he said. "None of their leisurely London ways for Lucia. She had the telephone put into the house in record time. Gave them no peace till she got it done."

"Very wise," said Georgie tactfully. "That's the way to get things. Well, about Riseholme. We've really been very busy indeed."

"Dear old place!" said Lucia. "Tell me all about it."

Georgie rapidly considered with himself whether he should mention the Museum. He decided against it, for, put it as you might, the museum, apart from the convenience of getting rid of interesting rubbish, was of a conspiratorial nature, a policy of revenge against Lucia for her desertion, and a demonstration of how wonderfully well and truly they all got on without her. It was then, the mark of a highly injudicious conspirator to give information to her against whom this plot was directed.

"Well, Daisy has been having some most remarkable experiences," he said. "She got a ouija board and a planchette—we use the planchette most—and very soon it was quite clear that messages were coming through from a guide."

Lucia laughed with a shrill metallic note of rather hostile timbre.

"Dear Daisy," she said. "If only she would take

commonsense as her guide. I suppose the guide is a Chaldean astrologer or King Nebuchadnezzar."

"Not at all," said Georgie. "It's an Egyptian called Abfou."

A momentary pang of envy shot through Lucia. She could well imagine the quality of excitement which thrilled Riseholme, how Georgie would have popped in to tell her about it, and how she would have got a ouija-board too, and obtained twice as many messages as Daisy. She hated the thought of Daisy having Abfou all her own way, and gave another little shrill laugh.

"Daisy is priceless," she said. "And what has Abfou told her?"

"Well, it was very odd," said Georgie. "The morning I got your letter Abfou wrote 'L from L,' and if that doesn't mean 'Letter from Lucia,' I don't know what else it could be."

"It might just as well mean 'Lozenges from Leamington,'" said Lucia witheringly. "And what else?"

Georgie felt the conversation was beginning to border rather dangerously on the Museum, and tried a light-hearted sortie into another subject.

"Oh, just things of that sort," he said. "And then she had a terrible time over her garden. She dismissed Simkinson for doing cross-word puzzles instead of the lawn, and determined to do it all herself. She sowed sprouts in that round bed under the dining-room window."

"No!" said Pepino, who was listening with qualms of home-sickness to these chronicles.

"Yes, and the phlox in the kitchen garden," said Georgie.

He looked at Lucia, and became aware that her gimlet-eye was on him, and was afraid he had made the transition from Abfou to horticulture rather too eagerly. He went volubly on.

“ And she dug up all the seeds that Simkinson had planted, and pruned the roots of her mulberry tree and probably killed it,” he said. “ Then in that warm weather last week, no, the week before, I got out my painting things again, and am doing a sketch of my house from the green. Foljambe is very well, and, and . . . ” he could think of nothing else except the Museum.”

Lucia waited till he had quite run down.

“ And what more did Abfou say ? ” she asked. “ His message of ‘ L to L ’ would not have made you busy for very long.”

Georgie had to reconsider the wisdom of silence. Lucia clearly suspected something, and when she came down for her week-end, and found the affairs of the Museum entirely engrossing the whole of Riseholme, his reticence, if he persisted in it, would wear a very suspicious aspect.

“ Oh yes, the museum,” he said with feigned lightness. “ Abfou told us to start a museum, and it’s getting on splendidly. That tithe-barn of Colonel Boucher’s. And Daisy’s given all the things she was going to make into a rockery, and I’m giving my Roman glass and two sketches, and Colonel Boucher his Samian ware and an ordnance map, and there are lots of fossils and some coins.”

“ And a committee ? ” asked Lucia.

“ Yes. Daisy and Mrs. Boucher and I, and we co-opted Robert,” he said with affected carelessness.

Again some nameless pang shot through Lucia. Absent or present, she ought to have been the chairman of the committee and told them exactly what to do, and how to do it. But she felt no doubt that she could remedy all that when she came down to Riseholme for a week-end. In the meantime, it was sufficient to have pulled his secret out of Georgie, like a cork, with a loud pop, and an effusion of contents.

"Most interesting," she said. "I must think what I can give you for your museum. Well, that's a nice little gossip."

Georgie could not bring himself to tell her that the stocks had already been moved from the village green to the tithe-barn, for he seemed to remember that Lucia and Pepino had presented them to the Parish Council. Now the Parish Council had presented them to the Museum, but that was a reason the more why the Parish Council and not he should face the donors.

"A nice little gossip," said Lucia. "And what a pleasant party last night. I just popped over, to congratulate dear Olga on the favourable, indeed the very favourable reception of 'Lucrezia,' for I thought she would be hurt—artists are so sensitive—if I did not add my little tribute, and then you saw how she refused to let me go, but insisted that I should come in. And I found it all most pleasant: one met many friends, and I was very glad to be able to look in."

This expressed very properly what Lucia meant to convey. She did not in the least want to put Olga in her place, but to put herself, in Georgie's eyes, in her own place. She had just, out of kindness, stepped across to congratulate Olga, and then had been dragged in. Unfortunately Georgie did not believe a single word of it: he had already made up his mind that Lucia had laid an ambush for Olga, so swiftly and punctually had she come out of the shadow of the gas-lamp on her arrival. He answered her therefore precisely in the spirit in which she had spoken. Lucia would know very well. . . .

"It was good of you," he said enthusiastically. "I'm sure Olga appreciated your coming immensely. How forgetful of her not to have asked you at first! And as for 'Lucrezia' just having a favourable reception, I thought it was the most brilliant success it is possible to imagine."

Lucia felt that her attitude hadn't quite produced the impression she had intended. Though she did not want Georgie (and Riseholme) to think *she* joined in the uncritical adulation of Olga, she certainly did not want Géorgie to tell Olga that she didn't. And she still wanted to hear the Princess's name.

"No doubt, dear Georgie," she said, "it was a great success. And she was in wonderful voice, and looked most charming. As you know, I am terribly critical, but I can certainly say that. Yes. And her party delicious. So many pleasant people. I saw you having great jokes with the Princess."

Pepino having been asleep when Lucia came back last night, and not having seen her this morning, had not heard about the Princess.

"Indeed, who was that?" he asked Lucia.

Very tiresome of Pepino. But Lucia's guide (better than poor Daisy's Abfou) must have been very attentive to her needs that morning, for Pepino had hardly uttered these awkward words, when the telephone rang. She could easily therefore trip across to it, protesting at these tiresome interruptions, and leave Georgie to answer.

"Yes, Mrs. Lucas," said Lucia. "Covent Garden? Yes. Then please put me through. . . . Dearest Olga is ringing up. No doubt about 'The Valkyrie' next week. . . ."

Georgie had a brain wave. He felt sure Lucia would have answered Pepino's question instantly if she had known what the Princess's name was. He had noticed that Lucia in spite of her hangings about had not been presented to the illustrious lady last night, and the brain-wave that she did not know the illustrious lady's name swept over him. He also saw that Lucia was anxiously listening not to the telephone only, but to him. If Lucia (and there could be no doubt about that) wanted to know, she must eat her humble pie and ask him. . . .

"Yes, dear Diva, it's me," said Lucia. "Couldn't sleep a wink: 'Lucrezia' running in my head all night. Marvellous. You rang me up?"

Her face fell.

"Oh, I am disappointed you can't come," she said. "You are naughty. I shall have to give you a little engagement book to put things down in. . . ."

Lucia's guide befriended her again, and her face brightened. It grew almost to an unearthly brightness as she listened to Olga's apologies and a further proposal.

"Sunday evening?" she said. "Now let me think a moment: yes, I am free on Sunday. So glad you said Sunday, because all other nights are full. Delightful. And how nice to see Princess Isabel again. Good-bye."

She snapped the receiver back in triumph.

"What was it you asked me, Pepino?" she said.

"Oh, yes: it was Princess Isabel. Dear Olga insists on my dining with her on Sunday to meet her again. Such a nice woman."

"I thought we were going down to Riseholme for the Sunday," said Pepino.

Lucia made a little despairing gesture.

"My poor head!" she said. "It is I who ought to have an engagement book chained to me. What am I to do? I hardly like to disappoint dear Olga. But you go down, Pepino, just the same. I know you are longing to get a breath of country air. Georgie will give you dinner one night, I am sure, and the other he will dine with you. Won't you, Georgie? So dear of you. Now who shall I get to fill my Olga's place at lunch to-morrow? Mrs. Garroby-Ashton, I think. Dear me, it is close on twelve, and Sophy will scold me if I keep her waiting. How the morning flashes by! I had hardly begun my practise, when Georgie came, and I've hardly had a word with him before it is time to go out. What will happen

to my morning's post I'm sure I don't know. But I insist on your getting your breath of country-air on Sunday, Pepino. I shall have plenty to do here, with all my arrears."

"There was one note Lucia found she had to write before she went out, and she sent Pepino to show Georgie the house while she scribbled it, and addressing it to Mr. Stephen Merriall at the office of the *Evening Gazette*, sent it off by hand. This was hardly done when Mrs. Alingsby arrived, and they went off together to the private view of the Post-Cubists, and revelled in the works of those remarkable artists. Some were portraits and some landscapes, and it was usually easy to tell which was which, because a careful scrutiny revealed an eye or a stray mouth in some, and a tree or a house in others. Lucia was specially enthusiastic over a picture of Waterloo Bridge, but she had mistaken the number in the catalogue, and it proved to be a portrait of the artist's wife. Luckily she had not actually read out to Sophy that it was Waterloo Bridge, though she had said something about the river, but this was easily covered up in appreciation.

"Too wonderful!" she said. "How they get to the very soul of things! What is it that Wordsworth says? 'The very pulse of the machine.' Pulsating, is it not?"

Mrs. Alingsby was tall and weird and intense, dressed rather like a bird-of-paradise that had been out in a high gale, but very well connected. She had long straight hair which fell over her forehead, and sometimes got in her eyes, and she wore on her head a scarlet jockey-cap with an immense cameo in front of it. She hated all art that was earlier than 1923, and a considerable lot of what was later. In music, on the other hand, she was primitive, and thought Bach decadent: in literature her taste was for stories without a story, and poems without metre or meaning. But she had collected round her a group of

interesting outlaws, of whom the men looked like women, and the women like nothing at all, and though nobody ever knew what they were talking about, they themselves were talked about. Lucai had been to a party of hers, where they all sat in a room with black walls, and listened to early Italian music on a spinet while a charcoal brazier on a blue hearth was fed with incense. . . . Lucia's general opinion of her was that she might be useful up to a point, for she certainly excited interest.

"Wordsworth?" she asked. "Oh, yes, I remember who you mean. About the Westmoreland Lakes. Such a kill-joy."

She put on her large horn spectacles to look at the picture of the artist's wife, and her body began to sway with a lithe circular motion.

"Marvellous! What a rhythm!" she said. "Sigismund is the most rhythmical of them all. You ought to be painted by him. He would make something wonderful of you. Something *andante*, *adagio* almost. He's coming to see me on Sunday. Come and meet him. Breakfast about half-past twelve. Vegetarian with cocktails."

Lucia accepted this remarkable invitation with avidity: it would be an interesting and progressive meal. In these first weeks, she was designedly experimental; she intended to sweep into her net all there was which could conceivably harbour distinction, and sort it out by degrees. She was no snob in the narrow sense of the word; she would have been very discontented if she had only the high-born on her visiting list. The high-born, of course, were safe—you could not make a mistake in having a duchess to tea, because in her own line a duchess had distinction—but it would not have been enough to have all the duchesses there were: it might even have been a disappointing tea-party if the whole

room was packed with them. What she wanted was the foam of the wave, the topmost, the most sunlit of the billows that rode the sea. Anything that had proved itself billowish was her game, and anything which showed signs of being a billow, even if it entailed a vegetarian lunch with cocktails and the possible necessity of being painted like the artist's wife with an eyebrow in one corner of the picture and a substance like desiccated cauliflower in the centre. That had always been her way: whatever those dear funny folk at Riseholme had thought of, a juggler, a professor of Yoga, a geologist, a psycho-analyst had been snapped up by her and exploited till he exploded.

But Pepino was not as nimble as she. The incense at Sophy's had made him sneeze, and the primitive tunes on the spinet had made him snore; that had been all the uplift they had held for him. Thus, though she did not mind tiring herself to death, because Pepino was having such an interesting time, she didn't mind his going down to Riseholme for the Sunday to rest, while she had a vegetarian lunch with post-cubists, and a dinner with a princess. Literally, she could scarcely tell which of the two she looked forward to most; the princess was safe, but the post-cubists might prove more perilously paying. It was impossible to make a corner in princesses for they were too independent, but already, in case of post-cubism turning out to be the rage, she could visualise her music-room, and even the famous Chippendale chairs being painted black, and the Sargent picture of Auntie being banished to the attic. She could not make them the rage, for she was not (as yet) the supreme arbiter here that she had been at Riseholme, but should they become the rage, there was no one surely more capable than herself of giving the impression that she had discovered them.

Lucia spent a strenuous afternoon with correspondence and telephonings, and dropped into Mrs. Sandeman's for a cup of tea, of which she stood sorely in need. She found there was no need to tell dearest Aggie about the party last night at Olga's, for the *Evening Gazette* had come in, and there was an account of it, described in Hermione's matchless style. Hermione had found the bijou residence of the prima-donna in Brompton Square full of friends—très intimes—who had been invited to celebrate the huge success of "Lucrezia" and to congratulate Mrs. Shuttleworth. There was Princess Isabel, wearing her wonderful turquoises, chatting with the composer, Signor Cortese (Princess Isabel spoke Italian perfectly), and among other friends Hermione had noticed the Duchess of Whitby, Lord Limpsfield, Mrs. Garroby-Ashton, and Mrs. Philip Lucas