

CHAPTER VII

THIS delicious little luncheon-party had violently excited Adele Brixton : she was thrilled to the marrow at Lucia's curtsey to the telephone.

" My dear, she's marvellous," she said to Aggie. " She's a study. She's cosmic. The telephone, the curtsey ! I've never seen the like. But why in the name of wonder didn't she tell us who the Highness was ? She wasn't shy of talking about the other folk she'd met. Alf and Marcelle and Marcia and Bertie. But she made a mistake over Bertie. She shouldn't have said ' Bertie.' I've known Herbert Alton for years, and never has anybody called him anything but Herbert. ' Bertie ' was a mistake, but don't tell her. I adore your Lucia. She'll go far, mark my words, and I bet you she's talking of me as Adele this moment. Don't you see how wonderful she is ? I've been a climber myself and I know. But I was a snail compared to her."

Aggie Sandeman was rather vexed at not being asked to the Alf party

" You needn't tell me how wonderful she is," she observed with some asperity. " It's not two months since she came to London first, and she didn't know a soul. She dined with me the first night she came up, and since then she has annexed every single person she met at my house."

"She would," said Adele appreciatively. "And who was the man who looked as if he had been labelled 'Man' by mistake when he was born, and ought to have been labelled 'Lady'? I never saw such a perfect lady, though I only know him as Stephen at present. She just said, 'Stephen, do you know Lady Brixton?'"

"Stephen Merriall," said Aggie. "Just one of the men who go out to tea every day—one of the unattached."

"Well then, she's going to attach him," said Adele. "Dear me, aren't I poisonous, when I'm going to her house to meet Alf next week! But I don't feel poisonous; I feel wildly interested: I adore her. Here we are at the theatre: what a bore! And there's Tony Limpsfield. Tony, come and help me out. We've been lunching with the most marvellous——"

"I expect you mean Lucia," said Tony. "I spent Sunday with her at Riseholme."

"She curtsied to the telephone," began Adele.

"Who was at the other end?" asked Tony eagerly.

"That's what she didn't say," said Adele.

"Why not?" asked Tony.

Adele stepped briskly out of her car, followed by Aggie.

"I can't make out," she said. "Oh, do you know Mrs. Sandeman?"

"Yes, of course," said Tony. "And it couldn't have been Princess Isabel."

"Why not? She met her at Marcia's last night."

"Yes, but the Princess fled from her. She fled from her at Riseholme too, and said she would never go to her house. It can't have been she. But she got hold of that boxer ——"

"Alf Watson," said Adele. "She called him Alf, and I'm going to meet him at her house on Thursday."

"Then it's very unkind of you to crab her, Adele," said Tony.

"I'm not: I'm simply wildly interested. Anyhow, what about you? You spent a Sunday with her at Riseholme."

"And she calls you Tony," said Aggie vituperatively, still thinking about the Alf party.

"No, does she really?" said Tony. "But after all, I call her Lucia when she's not there. The bell's gone, by the way: the curtain will be up."

Adele hurried in.

"Come to my box, Tony," she said, "after the first act. I haven't been so interested in anything for years."

Adele paid no attention whatever to the gloomy play of Tchekov's. Her whole mind was concentrated on Lucia, and soon she leaned across to Aggie, and whispered:

"I believe it was Pepino who rang her up."

Aggie knitted her brows for a moment.

"Couldn't have been," she said. "He rang her up directly afterwards."

Adele's face fell. Not being able to think as far ahead as Lucia she didn't see the answer to that, and relapsed into Lucian meditation, till the moment the curtain fell, when Tony Limpsfield slid into their box.

"I don't know what the play has been about," he said, "but I must tell you why she was at Marcia's last night. Some women chucked Marcia during the afternoon and made her thirteen——"

"Marcia would like that," said Aggie.

Tony took no notice of this silly joke.

"So she rang up everybody in town——" he continued.

"Except me," said Aggie bitterly.

"Oh, never mind that," said Tony. "She rang up

everybody, and couldn't get hold of anyone. Then she rang up Lucia."

"Who instantly said she was disengaged, and rang me up to go to the theatre with Pepino," said Aggie. "I suspected something of the sort, but I wanted to see the play, and I wasn't going to cut off my nose to spite Lucia's face."

"Besides, she would have got someone else, or sent Pepino to the play alone," said Tony. "And you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick, Aggie. Nobody wants to spite Lucia. We all want her to have the most glorious time."

"Aggie's vexed because she thinks she invented Lucia," observed Adele. "That's the wrong attitude altogether. Tell me about Pep."

"Simply nothing to say about him," said Tony. "He has trousers and a hat, and a telescope on the roof at Riseholme, and when you talk to him you see he remembers what the leading articles in *The Times* said that morning. Don't introduce irrelevant matters, Adele."

"But husbands are relevant—all but mine," said Adele. "Part of the picture. And what about Stephen?"

"Oh, you always see him handing buns at tea-parties. He's irrelevant too."

"He might not be if her husband is," said Adele.

Tony exploded with laughter.

"You are off the track," he said. "You'll get nowhere if you attempt to smirch Lucia's character. How could she have time for a lover to begin with? And you misunderstand her altogether, if you think that."

"It would be frightfully picturesque," said Adele.

"No, it would spoil it altogether. . . . Oh, there's this stupid play beginning again. . . . Gracious heavens look there!"

They followed his finger, and saw Lucia followed by

Stephen coming up the central aisle of the stalls to two places in the front row. Just as she reached her place she turned round to survey the house, and caught sight of them. Then the lights were lowered, and her face slid into darkness.

This little colloquy in Adele's box was really the foundation of the secret society of the Luciaphils, and the membership of the Luciaphils began swiftly to increase. Aggie Sandeman was scarcely eligible, for complete goodwill towards Lucia was a *sine qua non* of membership, and there was in her mind a certain asperity when she thought that it was she who had given Lucia her gambit, and that already she was beginning to be relegated to second circles in Lucia's scale of social precedence. It was true that she had been asked to dine to meet Marcelle Periscope, but the party to meet Alf and his flute was clearly the smarter of the two. Adele, however, and Tony Limpsfield were real members, so too, when she came up a few days later, was Olga. Marcia Whitby was another who greedily followed her career, and such as these, whenever they met, gave eager news to each other about it. There was, of course, another camp, consisting of those whom Lucia bombarded with pleasant invitations, but who (at present) firmly refused them. They professed not to know her and not to take the slightest interest in her, which showed, as Adele said, a deplorable narrowness of mind. Types and striking characters like Lucia, who pursued undaunted and indefatigable their aim in life, were rare, and when they occurred should be studied with reverent affection. . . . Sometimes one of the old and original members of the Luciaphils discovered others, and if when Lucia's name was mentioned an eager and a kindly light shone in their eyes, and they said in a hushed whisper "Did you hear

who was there on Thursday?" they thus disclosed themselves as Luciaphils. . . . All this was gradual, but the movement went steadily on, keeping pace with her astonishing career, for the days were few on which some gratifying achievement was not recorded in the veracious columns of *Hermione*.

Lucia was driving home one afternoon after a day passed in the Divorce Court. She had made the acquaintance of the President not long ago, and had asked him to dinner on the evening before this trial, which was the talk of the town, was to begin, and at the third attempt had got him to give her a seat in the Court. The trial had already lasted three days, and really no one seemed to think about anything else, and the papers had been full of soulful and surprising evidence. Certainly, Babs Shyton, the lady whose husband wanted to get rid of her, had written very odd letters to Woof-dog, otherwise known as Lord Middlesex, and he to her: Lucia could not imagine writing to anybody like that, and she would have been very much surprised if anyone had written to her as Woof-dog wrote to Babs. But as the trial went on, Lucia found herself growing warm with sympathy for Babs. Her husband, Colonel Shyton, must have been an impossible person to live with, for sometimes he would lie in bed all day, get up in the evening, have breakfast at 8 p.m., lunch a little after midnight, and dine heavily at 8.30 in the morning. Surely with a husband like that, any woman would want some sort of a Woof-dog to take care of her. Both Babs and he, in the extracts from the remarkable correspondence between them which were read out in court, alluded to Colonel Shyton as the S.P., which Babs (amid loud laughter) frankly confessed meant Stinkpot; and Babs had certainly written to Woof-dog to say that she was in

bed and very sleepy and cross, but wished that Woof-dog was thumping his tail on the hearth-rug. That was indiscreet, but there was nothing incriminating about it, and as for the row of crosses which followed Babs's signature, she explained quite frankly that they indicated that she was cross. There were roars of laughter again at this, and even the Judge wore a broad grin as he said that if there was any more disturbance he should clear the court. Babs had produced an excellent impression, in fact: she had looked so pretty and had answered so gaily, and the Woof-dog had been just as admirable, for he was a strong silent Englishman, and when he was asked whether he had ever kissed Bab she said "That's a lie" in such a loud fierce voice that you felt that the jury had better believe him unless they all wanted to be knocked down. The verdict was expected next day, and Lucia meant to lose no time in asking Babs to dinner if it was in her favour.

The court had been very hot and airless, and Lucia directed her chauffeur to drive round the park before going home. She had asked one or two people to tea at five, and one or two more at half-past, but there was time for a turn first, and, diverting her mind from the special features of the case to the general features of such cases, she thought what an amazing and incomparable publicity they gave any woman. Of course, if the verdict went against her, such publicity would be extremely disagreeable, but, given that the jury decided that there was nothing against her, Lucia could imagine being almost envious of her. She did not actually want to be placed in such a situation herself, but certainly it would convey a notoriety that could scarcely be accomplished by years of patient effort. Babs would feel that there was not a single person in any gathering who did not know who she was, and all about her, and,

if she was innocent, that would be a wholly delightful result. Naturally, Lucia only envied the outcome of such an experience, not the experience itself, for it would entail a miserable life with Pepino, and she felt sure that dinner at 8.30 in the morning would be highly indigestible, but it would be wonderful to be as well-known as Babs.

Another point that had struck her, both in the trial itself and in the torrents of talk that for the last few days had been poured out over the case, was the warm sympathy of the world in general with Babs, whether guilty or innocent. "The world always loves a lover," thought Lucia, and Woof-dog thumping his tail on the rug by her bedroom fire was a beautiful image.

Her thoughts took a more personal turn. The idea of having a real lover was, of course, absolutely abhorrent to her whole nature, and besides, she did not know whom she could get. But the reputation of having a lover was a wholly different matter, presenting no such objections or difficulties, and most decidedly it gave a woman a certain *cachet*, if a man was always seen about with her and was supposed to be deeply devoted to her. The idea had occurred to her vaguely before, but now it took more definite shape, and as to her choice of this sort of lover, there was no difficulty about that. Hitherto, she had done nothing to encourage the notion, beyond having Stephen at the house a good deal, but now she saw herself assuming an air of devoted proprietorship of him; she could see herself talking to him in a corner, and even laying her hand on his sleeve, arriving with him at an evening party, and going away with him, for Pepino hated going out after dinner. . . .

But caution was necessary in the first steps, for it would be hard to explain to Stephen what the proposed relationship was, and she could not imagine herself saying "We are going to

pretend to be lovers, but we aren't." It would be quite dreadful if he misunderstood, and unexpectedly imprinted on her lips or even her hand a hot lascivious kiss, but up till now he certainly had not shewn the smallest desire to do anything of the sort. She would never be able to see him again if he did that, and the world would probably say that he had dropped her. But she knew she couldn't explain the proposed position to him and he would have to guess: she could only give him a lead and must trust to his intelligence, and to the absence in him of any unsuspected amorous proclivities. She would begin gently, anyhow, and have him to dinner every day that she was at home. And really it would be very pleasant for him, for she was entertaining a great deal during this next week or two, and if he only did not yield to one of those rash and turbulent impulses of the male, all would be well. Georgie, until (so Lucia put it to herself) Olga had come between them, had done it beautifully, and Stephen was rather like Georgie. As for herself, she knew she could trust her firm slow pulses never to beat wild measures for anybody.

She reached home to find that Adele had already arrived, and pausing only to tell her servant to ring up Stephen and ask him to come round at once, she went upstairs.

"Dearest Adele," she said, "a million pardons. I have been in the Divorce Court all day. Too thrilled. Babs, dear Babs Shyton, was wonderful. They got nothing out of her at all——"

"No: Lord Middlesex has got everything out of her already," observed Adele.

"Ah, how can you say that?" said Lucia. "Lord Middlesex—Woof-dog, you know—was just as wonderful.

I feel sure the jury will believe them. Dear Babs! I must get her to come here some night soon and have a friendly little party for her. Think of that horrid old man who had lunch in the middle of the night! How terrible for her to have to go back to him. Dear me, what is her address?"

"She may not have to go back to him," said Adele. "If so, 'care of Woof-dog' would probably find her."

Adele had been feeling rather cross. Her husband had announced his intention of visiting his friends and relations in England, and she did not feel inclined to make a corresponding journey to America. But as Lucia went on, she forgot these minor troubles, and became enthralled. Though she was still talking about Babs and Woof-dog, Adele felt sure these were only symbols, like the dreams of psycho-analysts.

"My sympathy is entirely with dear Babs," she said. "Think of her position with that dreadful old wretch. A woman surely may be pardoned, even if the jury don't believe her for——"

"Of course she may," said Adele with a final spurt of ill-temper. "What she's not pardoned for is being found out."

"Now you're talking as everybody talked in that dreadful play I went to last night," said Lucia. "Dear Olga was there: she is singing to-morrow, is she not? And you are assuming that Babs is guilty. How glad I am, Adele, that you are not on the jury! I take quite the other view: a woman with a wretched home like that must have a man with whom she is friends. I think it was a pure and beautiful affection between Babs and Woof-dog, such as any woman, even if she was happily married, might be proud to enjoy. There can be no doubt of Lord Middlesex's devotion to her, and really—I hope this does not shock you—what their relations were

concerns nobody but them. George Sands and Chopin, you know. Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Sir Andrew Moss—he was the Judge, you know—dined here the other night; I'm sure he is broad-minded. He gave me an admission card to the court. . . . Ah, Stephen, there you are. Come in, my dear. You know Lady Brixton, don't you? We were talking of Babs Shyton. Bring up your chair. Let me see, no sugar, isn't it? How you scolded me when I put sugar into your tea by mistake the other day!"

She held Stephen's hand for as long as anybody might, or, as Browning says, "so very little longer," and Adele saw a look of faint surprise on his face. It was not alarm, it was not rapture, it was just surprise.

"Were you there?" he said. "No verdict yet, I suppose."

"Not till to-morrow, but then you will see. Adele has been horrid about her, quite horrid, and I have been preaching to her. I shall certainly ask Babs to dine some night soon, and you shall come, if you can spare an evening, but we won't ask Adele. Tell me the news, Stephen. I've been in Court all day."

"Lucia's quite misunderstood me," said Adele. "My sympathy is entirely with Babs: all I blame her for is being found out. If you and I had an affair, Mr. Merriall, we should receive the envious sympathy of everybody, until we were officially brought to book. But then we should acquiesce in even our darling Lucia's cutting us. And if you had an affair with anybody else—I'm sure you've got hundreds—I and everybody else would be ever so pleased and interested, until—Mark that word 'until.' Now I must go, and leave you two to talk me well over."

Lucia rose, making affectionate but rather half-hearted murmurs to induce her to stop.

"Must you really be going, Adele?" she said. "Let

me see, what am I doing to-morrow—Stephen, what is to-morrow, and what am I doing? Ah yes, Bertie Alton's private view in the morning. We shall be sure to meet there, Adele. The wretch has done two caricatures of Pepino and me. I feel as if I was to be flayed in the sight of all London. Au revoir, then, dear Adele, if you're so tired of us. And then the opera in the evening: I shall hardly dare to show my face. Your motor's here, is it? Ring, Stephen, will you. Such a short visit, and I expect Olga will pop in presently. All sorts of messages to her, I suppose. Look in again, Adele: propose yourself."

On the doorstep Adele met Tony Limpsfield. She hurried him into her motor, and told the chauffeur not to drive on.

"News!" she said. "Lucia's going to have a lover."

"No!" said Tony in the Riseholme manner

"But I tell you she is. He's with her now."

"They won't want me then," said Tony. "And yet she asked me to come at half-past five."

"Nonsense, my dear. They will want you, both of them. . . . Oh Tony, don't you see? It's a stunt."

Tony assumed the rapt expression of Luciaphils receiving intelligence.

"Tell me all about it," he said.

"I'm sure I'm right," said she. "Her poppet came in just now, and she held his hand as women do, and made him draw his chair up to her, and said he scolded her. I'm not sure that he knows yet. But I saw that he guessed something was up. I wonder if he's clever enough to do it properly. . . . I wish she had chosen you, Tony, you'd have done it perfectly. They have got—don't you understand?—to have the appearance of being

lovers, everyone must think they are lovers, while all the time there's nothing at all of any sort in it. It's a stunt : it's a play : it's a glory."

"But perhaps there is something in it," said Tony. "I really think I had better not go in."

"Tony, trust me. Lucia has no more idea of keeping a real lover than of keeping a chimpanzee. She's as chaste as snow, a kiss would scorch her. Besides, she hasn't time. She asked Stephen there in order to show him to me, and to show him to you. It's the most wonderful plan ; and it's wonderful of me to have understood it so quickly. You must go in : there's nothing private of any kind : indeed, she thirsts for publicity."

Her confidence inspired confidence, and Tony was naturally consumed with curiosity. He got out, told Adele's chauffeur to drive on, and went upstairs. Stephen was no longer sitting in the chair next to Lucia, but on the sofa at the other side of the tea-table. This rather looked as if Adele was right : it was consistent anyhow with their being lovers in public, but certainly not lovers in private.

"Dear Lord Tony," said Lucia—this appellation was a halfway house between Lord Limpsfield and Tony, and she left out the "Lord" except to him—"how nice of you to drop in. You have just missed Adele. Stephen, you know Lord Limpsfield?"

Lucia gave him his tea, and presently getting up, reseated herself negligently on the sofa beside Stephen. She was a shade too close at first, and edged slightly away.

"Wonderful play of Tchekov's the other day," she said. "Such a strange, unhappy atmosphere. We came out, didn't we, Stephen, feeling as if we had been in some remote dream. I saw you there, Lord Tony, with Adele who had been lunching with me."

Tony knew that : was not that the birthday of the Luciaphils ?

"It was a dream I wasn't sorry to wake from," he said. "I found it a boring dream."

"Ah, how can you say so? Such an experience! I felt as if the woe of a thousand years had come upon me, some old anguish which I had forgotten. With the effect, too, that I wanted to live more fully and vividly than ever, till the dusk closed round."

Stephen waved his hands, as he edged a little further away from Lucia. There was something strange about Lucia to-day. In those few minutes when they had been alone she had been quite normal, but both before, when Adele was here, and now after Lord Limpfield's entry, she seemed to be implying a certain intimacy, to which he felt he ought to respond.

"Morbid fancies, Lucia," he said, "I shan't let you go to a Tchekov play again."

"Horrid boy," said Lucia daringly. "But that's the way with all you men. You want women to be gay and bright and thoughtless, and have no other ideas except to amuse you. I shan't ever talk to either of you again about my real feelings. We will talk about the trial to-day. My entire sympathies are with Babs, Lord Tony. I'm sure yours are too."

Lord Limpfield left Stephen there when he took his leave, after a quarter of an hour's lighter conversation, and as nobody else dropped in, Lucia only asked her lover to dine on two or three nights the next week, to meet her at the private view of Herbert Alton's Exhibition next morning, and let him go in a slightly bewildered frame of mind.

Stephen walked slowly up the Brompton Road, looking into the shop windows, and puzzling this out. She had

held his hand oddly, she had sat close to him on the sofa, she had waved a dozen of those little signals of intimacy which gave colour to a supposition which, though it did not actually make his blood run cold, certainly did not make it run hot. . . . He and Lucia were excellent friends, they had many tastes in common, but Stephen knew that he would sooner never see her again than have an intrigue with her. He was no hand, to begin with, at amorous adventures, and even if he had been he could not conceive a woman more ill-adapted to dally with than Lucia. "Galahad and Artemis would make a better job of it than Lucia and me," he muttered to himself, turning hastily away from a window full of dainty under-clothing for ladies. In vain he searched the blameless records of his intercourse with Lucia: he could not accuse himself of thought, word or deed which could possibly have given rise to any disordered fancy of hers that he observed her with a lascivious eye.

"God knows I am innocent," he said to himself, and froze with horror at the sudden sight of a large news-board on which was printed in large capitals "Babs wants Woof-dog on the hearthrug."

He knew he had no taste for gallantry, and he felt morally certain that Lucia hadn't either. . . . What then could she mean by those little tweaks and pressures? Conning them over for the second time, it struck him more forcibly than before that she had only indulged in these little licentiousnesses when there was someone else present. Little as he knew of the ways of lovers, he always imagined that they exchanged such tokens chiefly in private, and in public only when their passions had to find a small safety-valve. Again, if she had had designs on his virtue, she would surely, having got him alone, have given a message to her servants that she was out and not have had Lord Limpsfield admitted. . .

He felt sure she was up to something, but to his dull male sense, it was at present wrapped in mystery. He did not want to give up all those charming hospitalities of hers, but he must needs be very circumspect.

It was, however, without much misgiving that he awaited her next morning at the doors of the little Rutland Gallery, for he felt safe in so public a place as a private view. Only a few early visitors had come in when Lucia arrived, and as she passed the turnstile shewing the two cards of invitation for herself and Pepino, impersonated by Stephen, she asked for hers back, saying that she was only going to make a short visit now and would return later. She had not yet seen the caricature of herself and Pepino, for which Bertie Alton (she still stuck to this little mistake) had accepted a commission, and she made her way at once to Numbers 39 and 40, which her catalogue told her were of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas. Subjoined to their names were the captions, and she read with excitement that Pepino was supposed to be saying "At whatever personal inconvenience I must live up to Lucia," while below Number 40 was the enticing little legend "Oh, these duchesses! They give one no peace!" . . . And there was Pepino, in the knee-breeches of levee dress, tripping over his sword which had got entangled with his legs, and a cocked-hat on the back of his head, with his eyes very much apart, and no nose, and a small agonized hole in his face for a mouth. . . . And there was she with a pile of opened letters on the floor, and a pile of unopened letters on the table. There was not much of her face to be seen, for she was talking into a telephone, but her skirt was very short, and so was her hair, and there was a wealth of weary resignation in the limpness of her carriage.

Lucia examined them both carefully, and then gave a long sigh of perfect happiness. That was her irres-

sible comment : she could not have imagined anything more ideal. Then she gave a little peal of laughter.

"Look, Stephen," she said. "Bobbie—I mean Bertie—really is too wicked for anything! Really, outrageous! I am furious with him, and yet I can't help laughing. Poor Pepino, and poor me! Marcia will adore it. She always says she can never get hold of me nowadays."

Lucia gave a swift scrutiny to the rest of the collection, so as to be able to recognise them all without reference to her catalogue, when she came back, as she intended to do later in the morning. There was hardly anyone here at present, but the place would certainly be crowded an hour before lunch time, and she proposed to make a *soi-disant* first visit then, and know at once whom all the caricatures represented (for Bertie in his enthusiasm for caricature sometimes omitted likenesses), and go into peals of laughter at those of herself and Pepino, and say she must buy them, which of course she had already done. Stephen remained behind, for Hermione was going to say a good deal about the exhibition, but promised to wait till Lucia came back. She had not shewn the smallest sign of amorousness this morning. His apprehensions were considerably relieved, and it looked as if no storm of emotion was likely to be required of him.

"Hundreds of things to do!" she said. "Let me see, half-past eleven, twelve—yes, I shall be back soon after twelve, and we'll have a real look at them. And you'll lunch? Just a few people coming."

Before Lucia got back, the gallery had got thick with visitors, and Hermione was busy noting those whom he saw chatting with friends or looking lovely, or being very pleased with the new house in Park Lane, or receiving congratulations on the engagement of a daughter. There was no doubt which of the pictures excited most

interest, and soon there was a regular *queue* waiting to look at Numbers 39 and 40. People stood in front of them regarding them gravely and consulting their catalogues and then bursting into loud cracks of laughter and looking again till the growing weight of the *queue* dislodged them. One of those who lingered longest and stood her ground best was Adele, who, when she was eventually shoved on, ran round to the tail of the *queue* and herself shoved till she got opposite again. She saw Stephen.

"Ah, then Lucia won't be far off," she observed archly. "Doesn't she adore it? Where is Lucia?"

"She's been, but she's coming back," he said. "I expect her every minute. Ah! there she is."

This was rather stupid of Stephen. He ought to have guessed that Lucia's second appearance was officially intended to be her first. He grasped that when she squeezed her way through the crowd and greeted him as if they had not met before that morning.

"And dearest Adele," she said. "What a crush! Tell me quickly, where are the caricatures of Pepino and me? I'm dying to see them; and when I see them no doubt I shall wish I was dead."

The light of Luciaphilism came into Adele's intelligent eyes.

"We'll look for them together," she said. "Ah thirty-nine and forty. They must be somewhere just ahead."

Lucia exerted a steady indefatigable pressure on those in front, and presently came into range.

"Well, I never!" she said. "Oh, but so like Pepino! How could Bertie have told he got his sword entangled just like that? And look what he says. . . . Oh, and then Me! Just because I met him at Marcia's party and people were wanting to know when I had an evening

free ! Of all the impertinences ! How I shall scold him ! ”

Lucia did it quite admirably in blissful unconsciousness that Adele knew she had been here before. She laughed, she looked again and laughed again (Mrs. Lucas and Lady Brixton in fits of merriment over the cartoon of Mr. Lucas and herself,” thought Hermione.)

“ Ah, and there’s Lord Hurtacombe,” she said. “ I’m sure that’s Lord Hurtacombe, though you can’t see much of him, and, look, Olga surely, is it not ? How does he do it ? ”

That was a very clever identification for one who had not previously studied the catalogue, for Olga’s face consisted entirely of a large open mouth and the tip of a chin, it might have been the face of anybody yawning. Her arms were stretched wide, and she towered above a small man in shorts.

“ The last scene in Siegfried, I’m sure,” said Lucia. “ What does the catalogue say, Stephen ? Yes, I am right. ‘ Siegfried ! Brunnhilde ! ’ How wicked, is it not ? But killing ! Who could be cross with him ? ”

This was all splendid stuff for Luciaphils ; it was amazing how at a first glance she recognised everybody. The gallery, too, was full of dears and darlings of a few weeks’ standing, and she completed a little dinner-party for next Tuesday long before she had made the circuit. All the time she kept Stephen by her side, looked over his catalogue, put a hand on his arm to direct his attention to some picture, took a speck of alien material off his sleeve, and all the time the entranced Adele felt increasingly certain that she had plumbed the depth of the adorable situation. Her sole anxiety was as to whether Stephen would plumb it too. He might—though he didn’t look like it—welcome these little tokens of intimacy as indicating something more, and when they were alone attempt to kiss her, and that would ruin the whole

exquisite design. Luckily his demeanour was not that of a favoured swain ; it was, on the other hand, more the demeanour of a swain who feared to be favoured, and if that shy thing took fright, the situation would be equally ruined. . . . To think that the most perfect piece of Luciaphilism was dependent on the just perceptions of Stephen ! As the three made their slow progress, listening to Lucia's brilliant identifications, Adele willed Stephen to understand ; she projected a perfect torrent of suggestion towards his mind. He must, he should understand. . . .

Fervent desire, so every psychist affirms, is never barren. It conveys something of its yearning to the consciousness to which it is directed, and there began to break on the dull male mind what had been so obvious to the finer feminine sense of Adele. Once again, and in the blaze of publicity, Lucia was full of touches and tweaks, and the significance of them dawned, like some pale, austere sunrise, on his darkened senses. The situation was revealed, and he saw it was one with which he could easily deal. His gloomy apprehensions brightened, and he perceived that there would be no need, when he went to stay at Riseholme next, to lock his bedroom-door, a practice which was abhorrent to him, for fear of fire suddenly breaking out in the house. Last night he had had a miserable dream about what had happened when he failed to lock his door at The Hurst, but now he dismissed its haunting. These little intimacies of Lucia's were purely a public performance.

" Lucia, we must be off," he said loudly and confidently. " Pepino will wonder where we are."

Lucia sighed.

" He always bullies me like that, Adele," she said. " I must go : *au revoir*, dear. Tuesday next : just a few intimes."

Lucia's relief was hardly less than Stephen's. He would surely not have said anything so indiscreet if he had been contemplating an indiscretion, and she had no fear that his hurry to be off was due to any passionate desire to embrace her in the privacy of her car. She believed he understood, and her belief felt justified when he proposed that the car should be opened.

Riseholme, in the last three weeks of social progress, had not occupied the front row of Lucia's thoughts, but the second row, so to speak, had been entirely filled with it, for, as far as the future dimly outlined itself behind the present, the plan was to go down there early in August, and remain there, with a few brilliant excursions till autumn peopled London again. She had hoped for a dash to Aix, where there would be many pleasant people, but Pepino had told her summarily that the treasury would not stand it. Lucia had accepted that with the frankest good-nature: she had made quite a gay little lament about it, when she was asked what she was going to do in August. "Ah, all you lucky rich people with money to throw about; we've got to go and live quietly at home," she used to say. "But I shall love it, though I shall miss you all dreadfully. Riseholme, dear Riseholme, you know, adorable, and all the delicious funny friends down there who spoil me so dreadfully. I shall have lovely tranquil days, with a trot across the Green to order fish, and a chat on the way, and my books and my piano, and a chair in the garden, and an early bed-time instead of all these late hours. An anchorite life, but if you have a week-end to spare between your Aix and your yacht and your Scotland, ah, how nice it would be if you just sent a postcard!"

Before they became anchorites, however, there was a long week-end for her and Pepino over the August

bank-holiday, and Lucia looked forward to that with unusual excitement. Adele was the hostess, and the scene that immense country-house of hers in Essex. The whole world, apparently, was to be there, for Adele had said the house would be full; and it was to be a final réunion of the choicest spirits before the annual dispersion. Mrs. Garroby-Ashton had longed to be bidden, but was not, and though Lucia was sorry for dear Millicent's disappointment, she could not but look down on it, as a sort of perch far below her that showed how dizzily she herself had gone upwards. But she had no intention of dropping good kind Millie who was hopping about below: she must certainly come to The Hurst for a Sunday: that would be nice for her, and she would learn all about Adele's party.

There were yet ten days before that, and the morning after the triumphant affair at the Rutland Gallery, Lucia heard a faint rumour, coming from nowhere in particular, that Marcia Whitby was going to give a very small and very wonderful dance to wind up the season. She had not seen much of Marcia lately, in other words she had seen nothing at all, and Lucia's last three invitations to her had been declined, one through a secretary, and two through a telephone. Lucia continued, however, to talk about her with unabated familiarity and affection. The next day the rumour became slightly more solid: Adele let slip some allusion to Marcia's ball, and hurriedly covered it up with talk of her own week-end. Lucia fixed her with a penetrating eye for a moment, but the eye failed apparently to penetrate: Adele went on gabbling about her own party, and took not the slightest notice of it.

But in truth Adele's gabble was a frenzied and feverish manœuvre to get away from the subject of Marcia's ball. Marcia was no true Luciaphil; instead

of feeling entranced pleasure in Lucia's successes and failures, her schemes and attainments and ambitions, she had lately been taking a high severe line about her.

"She's beyond a joke, Adele," she said. "I hear she's got a scrap-book, and puts in picture post-cards and photographs of country-houses, with dates below them to indicate she has been there——"

"No!" said Adele. "How heavenly of her. I must see it, or did you make it up?"

"Indeed I didn't," said the injured Marcia. "And she's got in it a picture post-card of the moat-garden at Whitby with the date of the Sunday before last, when I had a party there and didn't ask her. Besides, she was in London at the time. And there's one of Buckingham Palace Garden, with the date of the last garden-party. Was she asked?"

"I haven't heard she was," said Adele.

"Then you may be sure she wasn't. She's beyond a joke, I tell you, and I'm not going to ask her to my dance. I won't, I won't—I will not. And she asked me to dine three times last week. It isn't fair: it's bullying. A weak-minded person would have submitted, but I'm not weak-minded, and I won't be bullied. I won't be forcibly fed, and I won't ask her to my dance. There!"

"Don't be so unkind," said Adele. "Besides, you'll meet her down at my house only a few days afterwards, and it will be awkward. Everybody else will have been."

"Well, then she can pretend she has been exclusive," said Marcia snappily, "and she'll like that. . . ."

The rumours solidified into fact, and soon Lucia was forced to the dreadful conclusion that Marcia's ball was to take place without her. That was an intolerable thought, and she gave Marcia one more chance by ringing her up and inviting her to dinner on that night (so as to remind her she knew nothing about the ball), but

Marcia's stony voice replied that most unfortunately she had a few people to dinner herself. Wherever she went (and where now did Lucia not go ?) she heard talk of the ball, and the plethora of Princes and Princesses that were to attend it.

For a moment the thought of Princesses lightened the depression of this topic. Princess Isabel was rather seriously ill with influenza, so Lucia, driving down Park Lane, thought it would not be amiss to call and enquire how she was, for she had noticed that sometimes the papers recorded the names of enquirers. She did not any longer care in the least how Princess Isabel was ; whether she died or recovered was a matter of complete indifference to her in her present embittered frame of mind, for the Princess had not taken the smallest notice of her all these weeks. However, there was the front-door open, for there were other enquirers on the threshold, and Lucia joined them. She presented her card, and asked in a trembling voice what news there was, and was told that the Princess was no better. Lucia bowed her head in resignation, and then, after faltering a moment in her walk, pulled herself together, and with a firmer step went back to her motor.

After this interlude her mind returned to the terrible topic. She was due at a drawing-room meeting at Sophy Alingsby's house to hear a lecture on psycho-analysis, and she really hardly felt up to it. But there would certainly be a quantity of interesting people there, and the lecture itself might possibly be of interest, and so before long she found herself in the black dining-room, which had been cleared for the purpose. With the self-effacing instincts of the English the audience had left the front row chairs completely unoccupied, and she got a very good place. The lecture had just begun, and so her entry was not unmarked. Stephen was there, and

as she seated herself, she nodded to him, and patted the empty chair by her side with a beckoning gesture. Her lover, therefore, sidled up to her and took it.

Lucia whistled her thoughts away from such ephemeral and frivolous subjects as dances, and tried to give Professor Bonstetter her attention. She felt that she had been living a very hectic life lately; the world and its empty vanities had been too much with her, and she needed some intellectual tonic. She had seen no pictures lately, except Bobbie (or was it Bertie?) Alton's, she had heard no music, she had not touched the piano herself for weeks, she had read no books, and at the most had skimmed the reviews of such as had lately appeared in order to be up to date and be able to reproduce a short but striking criticism or two if the talk became literary. She must not let the mere froth of living entirely conceal by its winking headiness of foam the true beverage below it. There was Sophy, with her hair over her eyes and her chin in her hand, dressed in a faded rainbow, weird beyond description, but rapt in concentration, while she herself was letting the notion of a dance to which she had not been asked and was clearly not to be asked, drive like a mist between her and these cosmic facts about dreams and the unconscious self. How curious that if you dreamed about boiled rabbit, it meant that sometime in early childhood you had been kissed by a poacher in a railway-carriage, and had forgotten all about it! What a magnificent subject for excited research psycho-analysis would have been in those keen intellectual days at Riseholme. . . . She thought of them now with a vague yearning for their simplicity and absorbing earnestness; of the hours she had spent with Georgie over piano-duets, of Daisy Quantock's ouija-board and planchette, of the museum with its mittens. Riseholme presented itself now as an abode of sweet peace, where

there were no disappointments or heart-burnings, for sooner or later she had always managed to assert her will and constitute herself priestess of the current interests. . . . Suddenly the solution of her present difficulty flashed upon her. Riseholme. She would go to Riseholme.: that would explain her absence from Marcia's stupid ball.

The lecture came to an end, and with others she buzzed for a little while round Professor Bonstetter, and had a few words with her hostess.

"Too interesting: marvellous, was it not, dear Sophy? Boiled rabbit! How curious! And the outcropping of the unconscious in dreams. Explains so much about phobias: people who can't go in the tube. So pleased to have heard it. Ah, there's Aggie. Aggie darling! What a treat, wasn't it? Such a refreshment from our bustlings and runnings-about to get back into origins. I've got to fly, but I couldn't miss this. Dreadful overlapping all this afternoon, and poor Princess Isabel is no better. I just called on my way here, but I wasn't allowed to see her. Stephen, where is Stephen? See if my motor is there, dear. Au revoir! dear Sophy. We must meet again very soon. Are you going to Adele's next week? No? How tiresome! Wonderful lecture! Calming!"

Lucia edged herself out of the room with these very hurried greetings, for she was really eager to get home. She found Pepino there, having tea peacefully all by himself, and sank exhausted in a chair.

"Give me a cup of tea, strong tea, Pepino," she said. "I've been racketing about all day, and I feel done for. How I shall get through these next two or three days I really don't know. And London is stifling. You look worn out too, my dear."

Pepino acknowledged the truth of this. He had hardly had time even to go to his club this last day or two, and

had been reflecting on the enormous strength of the weaker sex. But for Lucia to confess herself done for was a portentous thing: he could not remember such a thing happening before.

"Well, there are not many more days of it," he said. "Three more this week, and then Lady Brixton's party."

He gave several loud sneezes.

"Not a cold?" asked Lucia.

"Something extraordinarily like one," said he.

Lucia became suddenly alert again. She was sorry for Pepino's cold, but it gave her an admirable gambit for what she had made up her mind to do.

"My dear, that's enough," she said. "I won't have you flying about London with a bad cold coming on. I shall take you down to Riseholme to-morrow."

"Oh, but you can't, my dear," said he. "You've got your engagement-book full for the next three days."

"Oh, a lot of stupid things," said she. "And really, I tell you quite honestly, I'm fairly worn out. It'll do us both good to have a rest for a day or two. Now don't make objections. Let us see what I've got to do."

The days were pretty full (though, alas, Thursday evening was deplorably empty) and Lucia had a brisk half-hour at the telephone. To those who had been bidden here, and to those to whom she had been bidden, she gave the same excuse, namely, that she had been advised (by herself) two or three days complete rest.

She rang up The Hurst, to say that they were coming down to-morrow, and would bring the necessary attendants, she rang up Georgie (for she was not going to fall into *that* error again) and in a mixture of baby language and Italian, which he found very hard to understand, asked him to dine to-morrow night, and finally she scribbled a short paragraph to the leading morning papers to

say that Mrs. Philip Lucas had been ordered to leave London for two or three days' complete rest. She had hesitated a moment over the wording of that, for it was Pepino who was much more in need of rest than she, but it would have been rather ludicrous to say that Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lucas were in need of a complete rest. . . . These announcements she sent by hand so that there might be no miscarriage in their appearance to-morrow morning. And then, as an afterthought, she rang up Daisy Quantock and asked her and Robert to lunch to-morrow.

She felt much happier. She would not be at the fell Marcia's ball, because she was resting in the country.