

## CHAPTER VIII

A FEW minutes before Lucia and Pepino drove off next morning from Brompton Square, Marcia observed Lucia's announcement in the *Morning Post*. She was a good-natured woman, but she had been goaded, and now that Lucia could goad her no more for the present, she saw no objection to asking her to her ball. She thought of telephoning, but there was the chance that Lucia had not yet started, so she sent her a card instead, directing it to 25 Brompton Square, saying that she was At Home, dancing, to have the honour to meet a string of exalted personages. If she had telephoned, no one knows what would have happened, whether Daisy would have had any lunch that day or Georgie any dinner that night, and what excuse Lucia would have made to them. . . . Adele and Tony Limpsfield, the most adept of all the Luciaphils, subsequently argued the matter out with much heat, but never arrived at a solution that they felt was satisfactory. But then Marcia did not telephone. . . .

The news that the two were coming down was, of course, all over Riseholme a few minutes after Lucia had rung Georgie up. He was in his study when the telephone bell rang, in the fawn-coloured Oxford trousers, which had been cut down from their monstrous proportions and fitted quite nicely, though there had been a sad waste of stuff. Robert Quantock, the wag who had danced a

hornpipe when Georgie had appeared in the original voluminousness, was waggish again, when he saw the abbreviated garments, and *à propos* of nothing in particular had said "Home is the sailor, home from sea," and that was the epitaph on the Oxford trousers.

Georgie had been busy indoors this afternoon, for he had been attending to his hair, and it was not quite dry yet, and the smell of the auburn mixture still clung to it. But the telephone was a trunk-call, and, whether his hair was dry or not, it must be attended to. Since Lucia had disappeared after that week-end party, he had had a line from her once or twice, saying that they must really settle when he would come and spend a few days in London, but she had never descended to the sordid mention of dates.

A trunk-call, as far as he knew, could only be Lucia or Olga, and one would be interesting and the other delightful. It proved to be the interesting one, and though rather difficult to understand because of the aforesaid mixture of baby-talk and Italian, it certainly conveyed the gist of the originator's intention.

"Me so tired," Lucia said, "and it will be divine to get to Riseholme again. So come to 'ickle quiet din-din with me and Pepino to-morrow, Georgino. Shall want to hear all novelle——"

"What?" said Georgie.

"All the news," said Lucia.

Georgie sat in the draught—it was very hot to-day—until the auburn mixture dried. He knew that Daisy Quantock and Robert were playing clock-golf on the other side of his garden paling, for their voices had been very audible. Daisy had not been weeding much lately but had taken to golf, and since all the authorities said that matches were entirely won or lost on the putting-green, she with her usual wisdom devoted herself to the

winning factor in the game. Presently she would learn to drive and approach and niblick and that sort of thing, and then they would see. . . . She wondered how good Miss Wethered really was.

Georgie, now dry, tripped out into the garden and shouted "May I come in?" That meant, of course, might he look over the garden-paling and talk.

Daisy missed a very short putt, owing to the interruption.

"Yes, do," she said icily. "I supposed you would give me that, Robert."

"You supposed wrong," said Robert, who was now two up.

Georgie stepped on a beautiful pansy.

"Lucia's coming down to-morrow," he said.

Daisy dropped her putter.

"No!" she exclaimed.

"And Pepino," went on Georgie. "She says she's very tired.

"All those duchesses," said Daisy. Robert Alton's cartoon had been reproduced in an illustrated weekly, but Riseholme up to this moment had been absolutely silent about it. It was beneath notice.

"And she's asked me to dinner to-morrow," said Georgie.

"So she's not bringing down a party?" said Daisy.

"I don't know," remarked Robert, "if you are going on putting, or if you give me the match."

"Pouf!" said Daisy, just like that. "But tired, Georgie? What does that mean?"

"I don't know," said Georgie, "but that's what she said."

"It means something else," said Daisy, "I can't tell you what, but it doesn't mean that. I suppose you've said you're engaged."

"No I haven't," said Georgie.

De Vere came out from the house. In this dry weather her heels made no indentations on the lawn.

"Trunk-call, ma'am," she said to Daisy.

"These tiresome interruptions," said Daisy, hurrying indoors with great alacrity.

Georgie lingered. He longed to know what the trunk-call was, and was determined to remain with his head on the top of the paling till Daisy came back. So he made conversation.

"Your lawn is better than mine," he said pleasantly to Robert.

Robert was cross at this delay.

"That's not saying much," he observed.

"I can't say any more," said Georgie, rather nettled. "And there's the leather-jacket grub I see has begun on yours. I daresay there won't be a blade of grass left presently."

Robert changed the conversation: there were bare patches. "The Museum insurance," he said. "I got the fire-policy this morning. The contents are the property of the four trustees, me and you and Daisy and Mrs. Boucher. The building is Colonel Boucher's, and that's insured separately. If you had a spark of enterprise about you, you would take a match, set light to the mittens, and hope for the best."

"You're very tarsome and cross," said Georgie. "I should like to take a match and set light to you."

Georgie hated rude conversations like this, but when Robert was in such a mood, it was best to be playful. He did not mean, in any case, to cease leaning over the garden paling till Daisy came back from her trunk-call.

"Beyond the mittens," began Robert, "and, of course, those three sketches of yours, which I daresay are masterpieces——"

Daisy bowled out of the dining-room and came with such speed down the steps that she nearly fell into the circular bed where the broccoli had been. (The mignonette there was poorish.)

"At half-past one or two," said she, bursting with the news and at the same time unable to suppress her gift for withering sarcasm. "Lunch to-morrow. Just a picnic, you know, as soon as she happens to arrive. So kind of her. More notice than she took of me last time."

"Lucia?" asked Georgie.

"Yes. Let me see, I was putting, wasn't I?"

"If you call it putting," said Robert. He was not often two up and he made the most of it.

"So I suppose you said you were engaged," said Georgie.

Daisy did not trouble to reply at all. She merely went on putting. That was the way to deal with inquisitive questions.

This news, therefore, was very soon all over Riseholme, and next morning it was supplemented by the amazing announcement in *The Times*, *Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* that Mrs. Philip Lucas had left London for two or three days' complete rest. It sounded incredible to Riseholme, but of course it might be true and, as Daisy had said, that the duchesses had been too much for her. (This was nearer the mark than the sarcastic Daisy had known, for it was absolutely and literally true that one Duchess had been too much for her. . . .) In any case, Lucia was coming back to them again, and though Riseholme was still a little dignified and reticent, Georgie's acceptance of his dinner-invitation, and Daisy's of her lunch invitation, were symptomatic of Riseholme's feelings. Lucia had foully deserted them, she had been down here only once since that fatal accession to fortune, and on that occasion had evidently intended to

see nothing of her old friends while that Yahoo party ("Yahoo" was the only word for Mrs. Alingsby) was with her; she had laughed at their Museum, she had courted the vulgar publicity of the press to record her movements in London, but Riseholme was really perfectly willing to forget and forgive if she behaved properly now. For, though no one would have confessed it, they missed her more and more. In spite of all her bullying monarchical ways, she had initiative, and though the excitement of the Museum and the Sagas from Abfou had kept them going for a while, it was really in relation to Lucia that these enterprises had been interesting. Since then, too, Abfou had been full of vain repetitions, and no one could go on being excited by his denunciation of Lucia as a snob, indefinitely. Lucia had personality, and if she had been here and had taken to golf Riseholme would have been thrilled at her skill, and have exulted over her want of it, whereas Daisy's wonderful scores at clock-golf (she was off her game to-day) produced no real interest. Degrading, too, as were the records of Lucia's movements in the columns of Hermione, Riseholme had been thrilled (though disgusted) by them, because they were about Lucia, and though she was coming down now for complete rest (whatever that might mean), the mere fact of her being here would make things hum. This time too she had behaved properly (perhaps she had learned wisdom)\* and had announced her coming, and asked old friends in.

Forgiveness, therefore, and excitement were the prevalent emotions in the morning parliament on the Green next day. Mrs. Boucher alone expressed grave doubts on the situation.

"I don't believe she's ill," she said. "If she's ill, I shall be very sorry, but I don't believe it. If she is, Mr. 'Georgie, I'm all for accepting her gift of the spit to

the Museum, for it would be unkind not to. You can write and say that the Committee have reconsidered it and would be very glad to have it. But let's wait to see if she's ill first. In fact, wait to see if she's coming at all, first."

Piggy came whizzing up with news, while Goosie shouted it into her mother's ear-trumpet. Before Piggy could come out with it, Goosie's announcement was audible everywhere.

"A cab from the station has arrived at The Hurst, Mamma," she yelled, "with the cook and the housemaid, and a quantity of luggage."

"O, Mrs. Boucher, have you heard the news?" panted Piggie.

"Yes, my dear, I've just heard it," said Mrs. Boucher, "and it looks as if they were coming. That's all I can say. And if the cook's come by half-past eleven, I don't see why you shouldn't get a proper lunch, Daisy. No need for a cup of strong soup or a sandwich which I should have recommended if there had been no further news since you were asked to a picnic lunch. But if the cook's here now. . . ."

Daisy was too excited to go home and have any serious putting and went off to the Museum. Mr. Rushbold, the Vicar, had just presented his unique collection of walking-sticks to it, and though the Committee felt it would be unkind not to accept them, it was difficult to know how to deal with them. They could not all be stacked together in one immense stick-stand, for then they could not be appreciated. The handles of many were curiously carved, some with gargoyle-heads of monsters putting out their tongues and leering, some with images of birds and fish, and there was one rather indelicate one, of a young man and a girl passionately embracing. . . . On the other hand, if they were

spaced and leaned against the wall, some slight disturbance upset the equilibrium of one and it fell against the next, and the whole lot went down like ninepins. In fact, the boy at the turnstile said his entire time was occupied with picking them up. Daisy had a scheme of stretching an old lawn-tennis net against the wall, and tastefully entangling them in its meshes. . . .

Riseholme lingered on the Green that morning long after one o'clock, which was its usual lunch-time, and at precisely twenty five minutes past they were rewarded. Out of the motor stepped Pepino in a very thick coat and a large muffler. He sneezed twice as he held out his arm to assist Lucia to alight. She clung to it, and leaning heavily on it went with faltering steps past Perdita's garden into the house. So she was ill.

Ten minutes later, Daisy and Robert Quantock were seated at lunch with them. Lucia certainly looked very well and she ate her lunch very properly, but she spoke in a slightly faded voice, as befitted one who had come here for complete rest. "But Riseholme, dear Riseholme will soon put me all right again," she said. "Such a joy to be here! Any news, Daisy?"

Really there was very little. Daisy ran through such topics as had interested Riseholme during those last weeks, and felt that the only thing which had attracted true, feverish, Riseholme-attention was the record of Lucia's own movements. Apart from this there was only her own putting, and the embarrassing gift of walking-sticks to the Museum. . . . But then she remembered that the Committee had authorised the acceptance of the Elizabethan spit, if Lucia seemed ill, and she rather precipitately decided that she was 'ill enough.

"Well, we've been busy over the Museum," she began.

"Ah, the dear Museum," said Lucia wistfully.



That quite settled it.

"We should so like to accept the Elizabethan spit, if we may," said Daisy. "It would be a great acquisition."

"Of course; delighted," said Lucia. "I will have it sent over. Any other gifts?"

Daisy went on to the walking-sticks, omitting all mention of the indelicate one in the presence of gentlemen, and described the difficulty of placing them satisfactorily. They were eighty-one (including the indelicacy) and a lawn-tennis net would barely hold them. The invalid took but a wan interest in this, and Daisy's putting did not rouse much keener enthusiasm. But soon she recovered a greater animation and was more herself. Indeed, before the end of lunch it had struck Daisy that Pepino was really the invalid of the two. He certainly had a prodigious cold, and spoke in a throaty wheeze that was scarcely audible. She wondered if she had been a little hasty about accepting the spit, for that gave Lucia a sort of footing in the Museum.

Lucia recovered still further when her guests had gone, and her habitual energy began to assert itself. She had made her impressive invalid entry into Riseholme, which justified the announcement in the papers, and now, quietly, she must be on the move again. She might begin by getting rid, without delay, of that tiresome spit.

"I think I shall go out for a little drive, Pepino," she said, "though if I were you I would nurse my cold and get it all right before Saturday when we go to Adele's. The gardener, I think, could take the spit out of the chimney for me, and put it in the motor, and I would drop it at the Museum. I thought they would want it before long. . . . And that clock-golf of Daisy's; it sounds amusing; the sort of thing for Sunday afternoon if we have guests with us. I think she said that you could

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get the apparatus at the Stores. Little tournaments might be rather fun."

The spit was easily removed, and Lucia, having written to the Stores for a set of clock-golf, had it loaded up on the motor, and conveyed to the Museum. So that was done. She waved and fluttered a hand of greeting to Piggy and Goosey who were gambolling on the Green, and set forth into the country, satisfied that she had behaved wisely in leaving London rather than being left out in London. Apart from that, too, it had been politic to come down to Riseholme again like this, to give them a taste of her quality before she resumed, in August, as she entirely meant to do, her ancient sway. She guessed from the paucity of news which that arch-gossip, dear Daisy, had to give, that things had been remarkably dull in her absence, and though she had made a sad mistake over her week-end party, a little propitiation would soon put that right. And Daisy had had nothing to say about Abfou: they seemed to have got a little tired of Abfou. But Abfou might be revived: clock-golf and a revival of ouija would start August very pleasantly. She would have liked Aix better, but Pepino was quite clear about that. . . .

Georgie was agreeably surprised to find her so much herself when he came over for dinner. Pepino, whose cold was still extremely heavy, went to bed very soon after, and he and Lucia settled themselves in the music room.

"First a little chat, Georgie," she said, "and then I insist on our having some music. I've played nothing lately, you will find me terribly out of practice, but you mustn't scold me. Yes, the spit has gone: dear Daisy said the Museum was most anxious to get it, and I took it across myself this afternoon. I must see what else I can find worthy of it."

This was all rather splendid. Lucia had a glorious way of completely disregarding the past, and pushing on ahead into the future.

"And have you been playing much lately?" she asked.

"Hardly a note," said Georgie, "there is nobody to play with. Piggy wanted to do some duets, but I said 'No, thanks.'"

"Georgie, you've been lazy," she said, "there's been nobody to keep you up to the mark. And Olga? Has Olga been down?"

"Not since—not since that Sunday when you were both down together," said he.

"Very wrong of her to have deserted Riseholme. But just as wrong of me, you will say. But now we must put our heads together and make great plans for August. I shall be here to bully you all August. Just one visit, which Pepino and I are paying to dear Adele Brixton on Saturday, and then you will have me here solidly. London? Yes, it has been great fun, though you and I never managed to arrange a date for your stay with us. That must come in the autumn when we go up in November. But, oh, how tired I was when we settled to leave town yesterday. Not a kick left in me. Lots of engagements, too, and I just scrapped them. But people must be kind to me and forgive me. And sometimes I feel that I've been wasting time terribly. I've done nothing but see people, people, people. All sorts, from Alf Watson the pugilist——"

"No!" said Georgie, beginning to feel the thrill of Lucia again.

"Yes, he came to dine with me, such a little duck, and brought his flute. There was a great deal of talk about my party for Alf, and how the women buzzed round him!"

"Who else?" said Georgie greedily.

"My dear, who *not* else? Marcelle—Marcelle Periscope came another night, Adele, Sophy Alingsby, Bertie Alton, Aggie—I must ask dear Aggie down here; Tony—Tony Limpsfield; a thousand others. And then of course dear Marcia Whitby often. She is giving a ball to-morrow night. I should like to have been there, but I was just *finito*. Ah, and your friend Princess Isabel. Very bad influenza. You should ring up her house, Georgie, and ask how she is. I called there yesterday. So sad! But let us talk of more cheerful things. Daisy's clock-golf: I must pop in and see her at it to-morrow. She is wonderful, I suppose. I have ordered a set from the Stores, and we will have great games."

"She's been doing nothing else for weeks," said Georgie. "I daresay she's very good, but nobody takes any interest in it. She's rather a bore about it——"

"Georgie, don't be unkind about poor Daisy," said Lucia. "We must start little competitions, with prizes. Do you have partners? You and I will be partners at mixed putting. And what about Abfou?"

It seemed to Georgie that this was just the old Lucia, and so no doubt it was. She was intending to bag any employments that happened to be going about and claim them as her own. It was larceny, intellectual and physical larceny, no doubt, but Lucia breathed life into those dead bones and made them interesting. It was weary work to watch Daisy dabbing away with her putter and then trying to beat her score without caring the least whether you beat it or not. And Daisy even telephoned her more marvellous feats, and nobody cared how marvellous they were. But it would be altogether different if Lucia was the goddess of putting. . . .

"I haven't Abfou'd for ages," said Georgie. "I fancy she has dropped it."

“ Well, we must pick everything up again,” said Lucia briskly, “ and you shan’t be lazy any more, Georgie. Come and play duets. My dear piano ! What shall we do ? ”

They did quantities of things, and then Lucia played the slow movement of the Moonlight Sonata, and Georgie sighed as usual, and eventually Lucia let him out and walked with him to the garden gate. There were quantities of stars, and as usual she quoted ‘ See how the floor of heaven is thick inlaid . . . ’ and said she must ring him up in the morning, after a good night’s rest.

There was a light in Daisy’s drawing-room, and just as he came opposite it she heard his step, for which she had long been listening, and looked out.

“ Is it Georgie ? ” she said, knowing perfectly well that it must be.

“ Yes,” said Georgie. “ How late you are.”

“ And how is Lucia ? ” asked Daisy.

Georgie quite forgot for the moment that Lucia was having complete rest.

“ Excellent form,” he said. “ Such a talk, and such a music.”

“ There you are, then ! ” said Daisy. “ There’s nothing the matter with her. She doesn’t want rest any more—than the moon. What does it mean, Georgie ? Mark my words : it means something.”

Lucia, indeed, seemed in no need whatever of complete rest the next day. She popped into Daisy’s very soon after breakfast, and asked to be taught how to put. Daisy gave her a demonstration, and told her how to hold the putter and where to place her feet, and said it was absolutely essential to stand like a rock and to concentrate. Nobody could put if anyone spoke. Eventually Lucia was allowed to try, and she stood all wrong

and grasped her putter like an umbrella, and holed out of the longest of puts in the middle of an uninterrupted sentence. Then they had a match, Daisy proposing to give her four strokes in the round, which Lucia refused, and Daisy, dithering with excitement and superiority, couldn't put at all. Lucia won easily, with Robert looking on, and she praised Daisy's putter, and said it was beautifully balanced, though where she picked that up Daisy couldn't imagine.

"And now I must fly," said Lucia, "and we must have a return match sometime. So amusing! I have sent for a set, and you will have to give me lessons. Good-bye, dear Daisy, I'm away for the Sunday at dear Adele Brixton's, but after that how lovely to settle down at Riseholme again! You must show me your ouija-board too. I feel quite rested this morning. Shall I help you with the walking-sticks later on?"

Daisy went uneasily back to her putting: it was too awful that Lucia in that amateurish manner should have beaten a serious exponent of the art, and already, in dark anticipation, she saw Lucia as the impresario of clock-golf, popularising it in Riseholme. She herself would have to learn to drive and approach without delay, and make Riseholme take up real golf, instead of merely putting.

Lucia visited the Museum next, and arranged the spit in an empty and prominent place between Daisy's fossils and Colonel Boucher's fragments of Samian ware. She attended the morning parliament on the Green, and walked beside Mrs. Boucher's bath-chair. She shouted into Mrs. Antrobus's ear-trumpet, she dallied with Piggy and Goosie, and never so much as mentioned a duchess. All her thoughts seemed wrapped up in Riseholme; just one tiresome visit lay in front of her, and then, oh, the joy of settling down here again! Even

Mrs. Boucher felt disarmed ; little as she would have thought it, there was something in Lucia beyond mere snobbery.

Georgie popped in that afternoon about teatime. The afternoon was rather chilly, and Lucia had a fire lit in the grate of the music-room, which, now that the spit had been removed, burned beautifully. Pepino, drowsy with his cold, sat by it, while the other two played duets. Already Lucia had taken down Sigismund's portrait and installed Georgie's water-colours again by the piano. They had had a fine tussle over the Mozart duet, and Georgie had promised to practise it, and Lucia had promised to practise it, and she had called him an idle boy, and he had called her a lazy girl, quite in the old style, while Pepino dozed. Just then the evening post came in, with the evening paper, and Lucia picked up the latter to see what Hermione had said about her departure from London. Even as she turned back the page her eye fell on two or three letters which had been forwarded from Brompton Square. The top one was a large square envelope, the sort of fine thick envelope that contained a rich card of invitation, and she opened it. Next moment she sprang from her seat.

"Pepino, dear," she cried. "Marcia! Her ball. Marcia's ball to-night!"

Pepino roused himself a little.

"Ball? What ball?" he said. "No ball. Riseholme."

Lucia pushed by Georgie on the treble music stool, without seeming to notice that he was there.

"No dear, of course you won't go," she said. "But do you know, I think I shall go up and pop in for an hour. Georgie will come to dine with you, won't you, Georgie, and you'll go to bed early. Half past six! Yes, I can be in town by ten. That will be heaps of

time. I shall dress at Brompton Square. Just a sandwich to take with me and eat it in the car."

She wheeled round to Georgie, pressing the bell in her circumvolution.

"Marcia Whitby," she said. "Winding up the season. So easy to pop up there, and dear Marcia would be hurt if I didn't come. Let me see, shall I come back to-morrow, Pepino? Perhaps it would be simpler if I stayed up there and sent the car back. Then you could come up in comfort next day, and we would go on to Adele's together. I have a host of things to do in London to-morrow. That party at Aggie's. I will telephone to Aggie to say that I can come after all. My maid, my chauffeur," she said to the butler, rather in the style of Shylock. "I want my maid and my chauffeur and my car. Let him have his dinner quickly—no, he can get his dinner at Brompton Square. Tell him to come round at once."

Georgie sat positively aghast, for Lucia ran on like a thing demented. Mozart, ouija, putting, the Elizabethan spit, all the simple joys of Riseholme fizzled out like damp fireworks. Gone, too, utterly gone was her need of complete rest; she had never been so full of raw, blatant, savage vitality.

"Dear Marcia," she said. "I felt it must be an oversight from the first, but naturally, Georgie, though she and I are such friends, I could not dream of reminding her. What a blessing that my delicious day at Riseholme has so rested me: I feel I could go to fifty balls without fatigue. Such a wonderful house, Georgie; when you come up to stay with us in the autumn, I must take you there. Pepino, is it not lucky that I only brought down here just enough for a couple of nights, and left everything in London to pick up as we came through to go to Adele's? What a sight it will be, all the Royal



Family almost I believe, and the whole of the Diplomatic corps : my Gioconda, I know, is going. Not a large ball though at all : not one of those great promiscuous affairs, which I hate so. How dear Marcia was besieged for invitations ! how vulgar people are and how pushing ! Goody-bye, mind you practise your Mozart, Georgie. Oh, and tell Daisy that I shan't be able to have another of those delicious puttings with her to-morrow. Back on Tuesday after the week-end at Adele's, and then weeks and weeks of dear Riseholme. How long they are ! I will just go and hurry my maid up."

Georgie tripped off, as soon as she had gone, to see Daisy, and narrated to her open-mouthed disgust this amazing scene.

"And the question is," he said, "about the complete rest that was ordered her. I don't believe she was ordered any rest at all. I believe——"

Daisy gave a triumphant crow : inductive reasoning had led her to precisely the same point at precisely the same moment.

"Why, of course !" she said. "I always felt there was something behind that complete rest. I told you it meant something different. She wasn't asked, and so——"

"And so she came down here for rest," said Georgie in a loud voice. He was determined to bring that out first. "Because she wasn't asked——"

"And the moment she was asked she flew," said Daisy. "Nothing could be plainer. No more rest, thank you."

"She's wonderful," said Georgie. "Too interesting !"

Lucia sped through the summer evening on this errand of her own reprieve, too excited to eat, and too happy to wonder how it had happened like this. How wise, too, she had been to hold her tongue and give way to no passionate laments at her exclusion from the

paradise towards which she was now hastening. Not one word of abuse had she uttered against Marcia : she had asked nobody to intercede : she had joined in all the talk about the ball as if she was going, and finally had made it impossible for herself to go by announcing that she had been ordered a few days of complete rest. She could (and would) explain her appearance perfectly : she had felt much better—doctors were such fussers—and at the last moment had made just a little effort, and here she was.

A loud explosion interrupted these agreeable reflections and the car drew up. A tyre had burst, but they carried an extra wheel, and though the delay seemed terribly long they were soon on their way again. They traversed another ten miles, and now in the north-east the smouldering glow of London reddened the toneless hue of the summer night. The stars burned bright, and she pictured Pepino at his telescope—no, Pepino had a really bad cold, and would not be at his telescope. Then there came another explosion—was it those disgusting stars in their courses that were fighting against her?—and again the car drew up by the side of the empty road.

“What has happened?” asked Lucia in a strangled voice.

“Another tyre gone, ma’am,” said the chauffeur. “Never knew such a thing.”

Lucia looked at her clock. It was ten already, and she ought now to be in Brompton Square. There was no further wheel that could be put on, and the tyre had to be taken off and mended. The minutes passed like seconds. . . . Lucia, outwardly composed, sat on a rug at the edge of the road, and tried unsuccessfully not to curse Almighty Providence. The moon rose, like a gelatine lozenge.

She began to count the hours that intervened between the tragic present and, say, four o'clock in the morning, and she determined that whatever further disasters might befall, she would go to Whitby House, even if it was in a dustman's cart, so long as there was a chance of a single guest being left there. She would go. . . .

And all the time, if she had only known it, the stars were fighting not against her but for her. The tyre was mended, and she got to Brompton Square at exactly a quarter past eleven. Cupboards were torn open, drawers ransacked, her goaded maid burst into tears. Aunt Amy's pearls were clasped round her neck, Pepino's hair in the shrine of gold sausage that had once been Beethoven's was pinned on, and at five minutes past twelve she hurried up the great stairs at Whitby House. Precisely as she came to the door of the ballroom there emerged the head of the procession going down to supper. Marcia for a moment stared at her as if she was a ghost, but Lucia was so busy curtseying that she gave no thought to that. Seven times in rapid succession did she curtsey. It almost became a habit, and she nearly curtsied to Adele who (so like Adele) followed immediately after.

"Just up from Riseholme, dearest Adele," she said. "I felt quite rested—How are you, Lord Tony?—and so I made a little effort. Pepino urged me to come. How nice to see your Excellency! Millie! Dearest Olga! What a lot of friends! How is poor Princess Isabel? Marcia looked so handsome. Brilliant! Such a delicious drive: I felt I had to pop in. . . ."