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MAPP & LUCIA



E.F. BENSON

* WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY *

STEVE PEMBERTON

CONTENTS

COVER

ABOUT THE BOOK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TITLE PAGE

INTRODUCTION

QUEEN LUCIA

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Epilogue or Preface

MISS MAPP

Preface

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Epilogue

MAPP AND LUCIA

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

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About the Book

The arrival of the snobbish Mrs Emmeline Lucas (known as Lucia to her friends) in the small seaside town of Tilling causes waves as she threatens the queen bee of Tilling's social circle, Miss Elizabeth Mapp. Against a backdrop of genteel tea parties and bridge evenings, a series of hilarious conflicts ensues between the two power-hungry women, as they battle on the social stage to gain the ultimate place as first lady of Tilling society.

This edition includes all three novels the brand new BBC adaptation is based on: *Queen Lucia*, *Miss Mapp* and *Mapp and Lucia*.

About the Author

Edward Frederick Benson was born on July 24, 1867 in Berkshire, the son of a future Archbishop of Canterbury, and one of six children. He studied at Kings College, Cambridge and at the British School of Archaeology in Athens. Benson's first book, *Dodo*, was published to popular acclaim in 1893 and was followed by over a hundred books, including novels, histories, biographies and ghost stories. In 1920 Benson became a full-time tenant of Lamb House in Rye, which had once been home to the novelist Henry James. Rye provided the setting for the Mapp and Lucia stories and their author served three terms as mayor of Rye in the late 1930s. E.F. Benson died on February 29, 1940.

MAPP & LUCIA

QUEEN LUCIA
MISS MAPP
MAPP AND LUCIA

E. F. Benson

With an introduction by
Steve Pemberton



INTRODUCTION

On the boil! That's what we all ought to be, with a thousand things to do that seem immensely important and which are important because they seem so.

Lucia in London

When my friend Mark [Gatiss] first told me that the BBC were interested in making a new series based on E.F. Benson's wonderful 'Mapp and Lucia' novels I was completely thrilled. 'No!' I exhaled down the telephone in the true Riseholme way. Yet the excitement was tinged with apprehension, for the previous adaptation made for Channel 4 in the mid-80s had been one of my favourite TV shows as a teenager. The performances were pin-sharp and the characters so well defined that when I went out and bought the books I was instantly able to see Geraldine McEwan, Prunella Scales, Nigel Hawthorne *et al* tripping through the streets of Tilling with gay abandon. So it was a difficult decision when I was asked if I wanted to pen the new series, one that I wrestled with for all of five seconds before blurting out 'Alright, as long as I can play Georgie!'

Edward Frederic Benson was a prolific author, biographer, archaeologist and some-time figure skater. He wrote *Queen Lucia* in 1920 and *Miss Mapp* in 1922, but it wasn't until a decade later that he had the delicious idea of pitting these two formidable ladies against each other. Lucia was a glorious snob, a ruthlessly ambitious social climber who ruled the cultural life of Riseholme with an iron fist. She spent an upwardly-mobile season in the capital (*Lucia in London*, 1927) and was seemingly unassailable. Miss Mapp was a scheming spinster who made it her business to rule the roost in her hometown of

Tilling. She spied on her neighbours from her grand Queen Anne house and in spite of having troublesome quarrels and spats, always managed to come out on top. Perhaps Benson thought that they both had it too easy, so he decided to write *Mapp and Lucia* in 1931.

Benson lived in the picturesque town of Rye in East Sussex, and what he saw from the window of his beloved garden room at Lamb House began to shape his writing. The sight of ladies gossiping on the High Street with shopping baskets on their arms and outraged looks on their faces gave him the idea to turn Rye into Tilling. For the filming of the new series we were lucky enough to be given access to Lamb House, as well as many other local properties, and therefore were presenting Tilling pretty much as Benson intended it. From the crooked chimney on West Street sketched by Georgie to the church tower overlooking Mallards garden where Mapp spies Lucia skipping, the *mise en scene* of *Mapp and Lucia* was all available to us and it was a total joy to know that we were literally walking in Benson's footsteps (albeit slightly unsteadily, given the cobbled streets. Much easier to take the Royce).

One of the first things I wrote down in my notebook was 'She's stolen *au reservoir*! She heard it in Riseholme and smuggled it into Tilling!' The idea that Mapp's appropriation of one of Lucia's witty remarks carries the weight of Hitler invading Poland was the key to unlocking Benson's central comic conceit. As Henry Kissinger was fond of quoting, 'Academic politics are so vicious precisely because the stakes are so small.' That goes to heart of every dispute in Tilling: whether someone stole a dress colour, overbid their hand at bridge or failed to reciprocate a dinner invitation, the most trivial slight is elevated to the level of the highest scandal. Mapp and Lucia's battle for social domination isn't a cosy comedy of manners, it is a war story; may the worst-behaved woman win.

Benson uses war metaphors throughout his books, from Georgie's 'I feel like the fourth of August, 1914' (on the occasion of a broken door chain) to Mapp's 'Night marches. Maneuvers' (over the ownership of garden produce). Every use of 'dear' and 'darling' is a weapon, every wide teeth-baring smile a shield. This is war as theatre, where the residents of Tilling have a ringside seat as two heavyweights go head to head over several rounds. Of the two combatants, Lucia would appear at first to have our sympathy as she is more sinned against than sinning, but as I worked on the adaptation I found myself rooting for Miss Mapp, as 'this alien from Riseholme had appeared and had not so much challenged her as just taken her sceptre and her crown and worn them now for a couple of months.' Mapp suffers 'manifold reverses' whereas Lucia is seemingly Teflon-coated; nothing sticks.

The next decision I took was not to limit myself to the events of the *Mapp and Lucia* novel, but to incorporate elements of the earlier stories too. The Guru and Georgie's sisters (Hermy and Ursy) visit Riseholme in *Queen Lucia*, and the dress-wars and the Prince of Wales' visit are from *Miss Mapp* with no Lucia or Georgie in sight. I felt it would be a treat to weave these stories into a loose narrative of Lucia's first summer in Tilling, not only because they are some of my favourites, but also because they haven't been seen on screen before (the Channel 4 version was very much based on the events of *Mapp and Lucia* for its first series.)

I therefore sketched out a through-line which would see Lucia conquer Tilling in episode one, an uneasy truce break out in episode two and Mapp snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in episode three. The first episode was in some ways the easiest as we view Tilling through the eyes of the incomers, Lucia and Georgie. Much as I wanted to begin in Riseholme and revel in the Elizabethan fete (especially Lucia's reaction to being offered the role of Drake's wife by

Daisy Quantock), ultimately I felt it best to begin with the journey into Tilling, intercut with establishing Mapp's social dominance. The opening scenes pose the age-old question: what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object.

The Guru storyline was useful because it shows Lucia on the back foot. Mapp is the one who introduces Tilling to yoga and meditation, and as such Lucia cannot enjoy the game as she didn't bring it to the party. She can't bear not to be involved, but doesn't want to be seen to be making an effort. The other Tillingites, though wonderfully characterised as individuals, move like sheep from Lucia's house to Mapp's. They congratulate themselves for not being faddish, whilst being open to every new fad and novelty the world has to offer them. The transposition of this storyline from Riseholme to Tilling did mean a fair amount of manipulation and invention on my part, but I felt comfortable dishing out some of Daisy Quantock's traits to dear Diva Plaistow, and some to Miss Mapp. I hope I may be forgiven for these contrivances, but it seemed perfectly right that Mapp should somehow annexe Diva's Guru, and Georgie have to visit Major Benjy to discuss golf for his sisters.

Once these battle lines had been drawn and an end point reached (Lucia decides to buy a house in Tilling, much to Mapp's obvious chagrin), the cherry on top was working with the wonderful ensemble of Tilling characters. The strangely proper and unctuous Wyse, thrifty and fretful widow Diva Plaistow, provocative artist and 'disgrace of Tilling' Irene Coles, the Scots-spouting Padre and mousy wife Evie, and the bellicose boozier Major Benjy all have their parts to play, as does Lucia's dapper confidante, the 'not obtrusively masculine' Georgie Pillson. With this cast of colourful characters, waspishly funny set pieces, stunning location and exquisite period detail, I said to Mark as we embarked on filming 'This could be the most *perfect*

summer job ever!’ – and so it proved. Whether the TV series has brought you to these pages, or indeed vice versa, I hope you enjoy reveling in Benson’s wonderful comic creations, and that they bring you as much pleasure over the years as they have brought to me. *Au reservoir!*

Steve Pemberton
Writer of the BBC TV series, 2014

QUEEN LUCIA

CHAPTER ONE

Though the sun was hot on this July morning, Mrs Lucas preferred to cover the half-mile that lay between the station and her house on her own brisk feet, and sent on her maid and her luggage in the fly that her husband had ordered to meet her. After those four hours in the train a short walk would be pleasant, but, though she veiled it from her conscious mind, another motive, subconsciously engineered, prompted her action. It would, of course, be universally known to all her friends in Riseholme that she was arriving today by the twelve twenty-six, and at that hour the village street would be sure to be full of them. They would see the fly with luggage draw up at the door of The Hurst, and nobody except her maid would get out.

That would be an interesting thing for them: it would cause one of those little thrills of pleasant excitement and conjectural exercise which supplied Riseholme with its emotional daily bread. They would all wonder what had happened to her, whether she had been taken ill at the very last moment before leaving town, and with her well-known fortitude and consideration for the feelings of others, had sent her maid on to assure her husband that he need not be anxious. That would clearly be Mrs Quantock's suggestion, for Mrs Quantock's mind, devoted as it was now to the study of Christian Science, and the determination to deny the existence of pain, disease and death as regards herself, was always full of the gloomiest views as regards her

friends, and on the slightest excuse, pictured that they, poor blind things, were suffering from false claims. Indeed, given that the fly had already arrived at The Hurst, and that its arrival had at this moment been seen by or reported to Daisy Quantock, the chances were vastly in favour of that lady's having already started in to give Mrs Lucas absent treatment. Very likely Georgie Pillson had also seen the anticlimax of the fly's arrival, but he would hazard a much more probable though erroneous solution of her absence. He would certainly guess that she had sent on her maid with her luggage to the station in order to take a seat for her, while she herself, oblivious of the passage of time, was spending her last half-hour in contemplation of the Italian masterpieces at the National Gallery, or the Greek bronzes at the British Museum. Certainly she would not be at the Royal Academy, for the culture of Riseholme, led by herself, rejected as valueless all artistic efforts later than the death of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and a great deal of what went before. Her husband with his firm grasp of the obvious, on the other hand, would be disappointingly capable, even before her maid confirmed his conjecture, of concluding that she had merely walked from the station.

The motive, then, that made her send her cab on, though subconsciously generated, soon penetrated into her consciousness, and these guesses at what other people would think when they saw it arrive without her, sprang from the dramatic element that formed so large a part of her mentality, and made her always take, as by right divine, the leading part in the histrionic entertainments with which the cultured of Riseholme beguiled or rather strenuously occupied such moments as could be spared from their studies of art and literature, and their social engagements. Indeed she did not usually stop at taking the leading part, but, if possible, doubled another character with it, as well as being stage manager and adapter, if not designer of scenery. Whatever she did – and really she did an incredible

deal – she did it with all the might of her dramatic perception, did it in fact with such earnestness that she had no time to have an eye to the gallery at all, she simply contemplated herself and her own vigorous accomplishment. When she played the piano as she frequently did (reserving an hour for practice every day), she cared not in the smallest degree for what anybody who passed down the road outside her house might be thinking of the roulades that poured from her open window: she was simply Emmeline Lucas, absorbed in glorious Bach or dainty Scarlatti, or noble Beethoven. The latter perhaps was her favourite composer, and many were the evenings when with lights quenched and only the soft effulgence of the moon pouring in through the uncurtained windows, she sat with her profile, cameo-like (or liker perhaps to the head on a postage stamp) against the dark oak walls of her music room, and entranced herself and her listeners, if there were people to dinner, with the exquisite pathos of the first movement of the ‘Moonlight Sonata’. Devotedly as she worshipped the Master, whose picture hung above her Steinway Grand, she could never bring herself to believe that the two succeeding movements were on the same sublime level as the first, and besides they ‘went’ very much faster. But she had seriously thought, as she came down in the train today and planned her fresh activities at home, of trying to master them, so that she could get through their intricacies with tolerable accuracy. Until then, she would assuredly stop at the end of the first movement in these moonlit séances, and say that the other two were more like morning and afternoon. Then with a sigh she would softly shut the piano lid, and perhaps wiping a little genuine moisture from her eyes, would turn on the electric light and taking up a book from the table, in which a paperknife marked the extent of her penetration, say: ‘Georgie, you must really promise me to read this life of Antonio Caporelli the moment I have finished it. I never

understood the rise of the Venetian School before. As I read I can smell the salt tide creeping up over the lagoon, and see the campanile of dear Torcello.'

And Georgie would put down the tambour on which he was working his copy of an Italian cope and sigh too.

'You are too wonderful!' he would say. 'How do you find time for everything?'

She rejoined with the apophthegm that made the rounds of Riseholme next day.

'My dear, it is just busy people that have time for everything.'

* * *

It might be thought that even such activities as have here been indicated would be enough to occupy anyone so busily that he would positively not have time for more, but such was far from being the case with Mrs Lucas. Just as the painter Rubens amused himself with being the ambassador to the court of St James's – a sufficient career in itself for most busy men – so Mrs Lucas amused herself, in the intervals of her pursuit of art for art's sake, with being not only an ambassador but a monarch. Riseholme might perhaps, according to the crude materialism of maps, be included in the kingdom of Great Britain, but in a more real and inward sense it formed a complete kingdom of its own, and its queen was undoubtedly Mrs Lucas, who ruled it with a secure autocracy pleasant to contemplate at a time when thrones were toppling, and imperial crowns whirling like dead leaves down the autumn winds. The ruler of Riseholme, happier than he of Russia, had no need to fear the finger of Bolshevism writing on the wall, for there was not in the whole of that vat, which seethed so pleasantly with culture, one bubble of revolutionary ferment. Here there was neither poverty nor discontent nor muttered menace of any upheaval: Mrs Lucas, busy and serene,

worked harder than any of her subjects, and exercised an autocratic control over a nominal democracy.

Something of the consciousness of her sovereignty was in her mind, as she turned the last hot corner of the road and came in sight of the village street that constituted her kingdom. Indeed it belonged to her, as treasure trove belongs to the Crown, for it was she who had been the first to begin the transformation of this remote Elizabethan village into the palace of culture that was now reared on the spot where ten years ago an agricultural population had led bovine and unilluminated lives in their cottages of grey stone or brick and timber. Before that, while her husband was amassing a fortune, comfortable in amount and respectable in origin, at the Bar, she had merely held up a small dim lamp of culture in Onslow Gardens. But both her ambition and his had been to bask and be busy in artistic realms of their own when the materialistic needs were provided for by sound investments, and so when there were the requisite thousands of pounds in secure securities she had easily persuaded him to buy three of these cottages that stood together in a low two-storeyed block. Then, by judicious removal of partition walls, she had, with the aid of a sympathetic architect, transmuted them into a most comfortable dwelling, subsequently building on to them a new wing, that ran at right angles at the back, which was, if anything, a shade more inexorably Elizabethan than the stem on to which it was grafted, for here was situated the famous smoking parlour, with rushes on the floor, and a dresser ranged with pewter tankards, and leaded lattice windows of glass so antique that it was practically impossible to see out of them. It had a huge open fireplace framed in oak beams with a seat on each side of the iron-backed hearth within the chimney, and a genuine spit hung over the middle of the fire. Here, though in the rest of the house she had for the sake of convenience allowed the installation of electric light, there was no such

concession made, and sconces on the walls held dim iron lamps, so that only those of the most acute vision were able to read. Even then reading was difficult, for the bookstand on the table contained nothing but a few crabbed black-letter volumes dating from not later than the early seventeenth century, and you had to be in a frantically Elizabethan frame of mind to be at ease there. But Mrs Lucas often spent some of her rare leisure moments in the smoking parlour, playing on the virginal that stood in the window, or kippering herself in the fumes of the wood fire as with streaming eyes she deciphered an Elzevir Horace rather late for inclusion under the rule, but an undoubted bargain.

The house stood at the end of the village that was nearest the station, and thus, when the panorama of her kingdom opened before her, she had but a few steps further to go. A yew hedge, bought entire from a neighbouring farm, and transplanted with solid lumps of earth and indignant snails around its roots, separated the small oblong of garden from the road, and cast monstrous shadows of the shapes into which it was cut, across the little lawns inside. Here, as was only right and proper, there was not a flower to be found save such as were mentioned in the plays of Shakespeare; indeed it was called Shakespeare's garden, and the bed that ran below the windows of the dining room was Ophelia's border, for it consisted solely of those flowers which that distraught maiden distributed to her friends when she should have been in a lunatic asylum. Mrs Lucas often reflected how lucky it was that such institutions were unknown in Elizabeth's day, or that, if known, Shakespeare artistically ignored their existence. Pansies, naturally, formed the chief decoration – though there were some very flourishing plants of rue. Mrs Lucas always wore a little bunch of them when in flower, to inspire her thoughts, and found them wonderfully efficacious. Round the sundial, which was set in the middle of one of the squares of grass

between which a path of broken paving stones led to the front door, was a circular border, now, in July, sadly vacant, for it harboured only the spring flowers enumerated by Perdita. But the first day every year when Perdita's border put forth its earliest blossom was a delicious anniversary, and the news of it spread like wildfire through Mrs Lucas's kingdom, and her subjects were very joyful, and came to salute the violet or daffodil, or whatever it was.

The three cottages dexterously transformed into The Hurst presented a charmingly irregular and picturesque front. Two were of the grey stone of the district and the middle one, to the door of which led the paved path, of brick and timber; latticed windows with stone mullions gave little light to the room within, and certain new windows had been added; these could be detected by the observant eye, for they had a markedly older appearance than the rest. The front door, similarly, seemed as if it must have been made years before the house, the fact being that the one which Mrs Lucas had found there was too dilapidated to be of the slightest service in keeping out wind or wet or undesired callers. She had therefore caused to be constructed an even older one made from the oak planks of a dismantled barn, and had it studded with large iron nails of antique pattern made by the village blacksmith. He had arranged some of them to look as if they spelt AD 1603. Over the door hung an inn sign, and into the space where once the sign had swung was now inserted a lantern, in which was ensconced, well hidden from view by its patinated glass sides, an electric light. This was one of the necessary concessions to modern convenience, for no lamp nurtured on oil would pierce those genuinely opaque panes, and illuminate the path to the gate. Better to have an electric light than cause your guests to plunge into Perdita's border. By the side of this fortress door hung a heavy iron bell pull, ending in a mermaid. When first Mrs Lucas had that installed, it was a

bell pull in the sense that an extremely athletic man could, if he used both hands and planted his feet firmly, cause it to move, so that a huge bronze bell swung in the servants' passage and eventually gave tongue (if the athlete continued pulling) with vibrations so sonorous that the whitewash from the ceiling fell down in flakes. She had therefore made another concession to the frailty of the present generation and the inconveniences of having whitewash falling into salads and puddings on their way to the dining room, and now at the back of the mermaid's tail was a potent little bone button, coloured black and practically invisible, and thus the bell pull had been converted into an electric bell push. In this way visitors could make their advent known without violent exertion, the mermaid lost no visible whit of her Elizabethan virginity, and the spirit of Shakespeare wandering in his garden would not notice any anachronism. He could not in fact, for there was none to notice.

Though Mrs Lucas's parents had bestowed the name of Emmeline on her, it was not to be wondered at that she was always known among the more intimate of her subjects as Lucia, pronounced, of course, in the Italian mode – La Lucia, the wife of Lucas; and it was as '*Lucia mia*' that her husband hailed her as he met her at the door of The Hurst.

He had been watching for her arrival from the panes of the parlour while he meditated upon one of the little prose poems which formed so delectable a contribution to the culture of Riseholme, for though, as has been hinted, he had in practical life a firm grasp of the obvious, there were windows in his soul which looked out on to vague and ethereal prospects which so far from being obvious were only dimly intelligible. In form these odes were cast in the loose rhythms of Walt Whitman, but their smooth suavity and their contents bore no resemblance whatever to the productions of that barbaric bard, whose works were quite unknown in Riseholme. Already a couple of volumes of

these prose poems had been published, not of course in the hard businesslike establishment of London, but at Ye Sign of Ye Daffodil, on the village green, where type was set up by hand, and very little, but that of the best, was printed. The press had only been recently started at Mr Lucas's expense, but it had put forth a reprint of Shakespeare's sonnets already, as well as his own poems. They were printed in blunt type on thick yellowish paper, the edges of which seemed as if they had been cut by the forefinger of an impatient reader, so ragged and irregular were they, and they were bound in vellum. The titles of these two slim flowers of poetry, *Flotsam* and *Jetsam*, were printed in black letter type and the covers were further adorned with a sort of embossed seal and with antique-looking tapes so that when you had finished with Mr Lucas's *Flotsam* you could tie it up with two bows before you turned to untie *Jetsam*.

Today the prose poem of 'Loneliness' had not been getting on very well, and Philip Lucas was glad to hear the click of the garden gate, which showed that his loneliness was over for the present, and looking up he saw his wife's figure waveringly presented to his eyes through the twisted and knotty glass of the parlour window, which had taken so long to collect, but which now completely replaced the plain, commonplace unrefracting stuff which was there before. He jumped up with an alacrity remarkable in so solid and well-furnished a person, and had thrown open the nail-studded front door before Lucia had traversed the path of broken paving-stones, for she had lingered for a sad moment at Perdita's empty border.

'*Lucia mia!*' he exclaimed. '*Ben arrivata!* So you walked from the station?'

'*Si, Peppino, mio caro,*' she said. '*Sta bene?*'

He kissed her and relapsed into Shakespeare's tongue, for their Italian, though firm and perfect as far as it went, could not be considered as going far, and was useless for

conversational purposes, unless they merely wanted to greet each other, or to know the time. But it was interesting to talk Italian, however little way it went.

‘Molto bene,’ said he, ‘and it’s delightful to have you home again. And how was London?’ he asked in the sort of tone in which he might have enquired after the health of a poor relation, who was not likely to recover. She smiled rather sadly.

‘Terrifically busy about nothing,’ she said. ‘All this fortnight I have scarcely had a moment to myself. Lunches, dinners, parties of all kinds; I could not go to half the gatherings I was bidden to. Dear good South Kensington! Chelsea too!’

‘Carissima, when London does manage to catch you, it is no wonder it makes the most of you,’ he said. ‘You mustn’t blame London for that.’

‘No, dear, I don’t. Everyone was tremendously kind and hospitable; they all did their best. If I blame anyone, I blame myself. But I think this Riseholme life with its finish and its exquisiteness spoils one for other places. London is like a railway junction: it has no true life of its own. There is no delicacy, no appreciation of fine shades. Individualism has no existence there; everyone gabbles together, gabbles and gobbles: am not I naughty? If there is a concert in a private house – you know my views about music and the impossibility of hearing music at all if you are stuck in the middle of a row of people – even then, the moment it is over you are whisked away to supper, or somebody wants to have a few words. There is always a crowd, there is always food, you cannot be alone, and it is only in loneliness, as Goethe says, that your perceptions put forth their flowers. No one in London has time to listen: they are all thinking about who is there and who isn’t there, and what is the next thing. The exquisite present, as you put it in one of your poems, has no existence there: it is always the feverish future.’

‘Delicious phrase! I should have stolen that gem for my poor poems, if you had discovered it before.’

She was too much used to this incense to do more than sniff it in unconsciously, and she went on with her tremendous indictment.

‘It isn’t that I find fault with London for being so busy,’ she said with strict impartiality, ‘for if being busy was a crime, I am sure there are few of us here who would escape hanging. But take my life here, or yours for that matter. Well, mine if you like. Often and often I am alone from breakfast till lunchtime, but in those hours I get through more that is worth doing than London gets through in a day and a night. I have an hour at my music, not looking about and wondering who my neighbours are, but learning, studying, drinking in divine melody. Then I have my letters to write, and you know what that means, and I still have time for an hour’s reading so that when you come to tell me lunch is ready, you will find that I have been wandering through Venetian churches or sitting in that little dark room at Weimar, or was it Leipzig? How would those same hours have passed in London?’

‘Sitting perhaps for half an hour in the park, with dearest Aggie pointing out to me, with thrills of breathless excitement, a woman who was in the divorce court, or a coroneted bankrupt. Then she would drag me off to some terrible private view full of the same people all staring at and gabbling to each other, or looking at pictures that made poor me gasp and shudder. No, I am thankful to be back at my own sweet Riseholme again. I can work and think here.’

She looked round the panelled entrance hall with a glow of warm content at being at home again that quite eclipsed the mere physical heat produced by her walk from the station. Wherever her eyes fell, those sharp dark eyes that resembled buttons covered with shiny American cloth, they saw nothing that jarred, as so much in London jarred.

There were bright brass jugs on the window sill, a bowl of potpourri on the black table in the centre, an oak settee by the open fireplace, a couple of Persian rugs on the polished floor. The room had its quaintness, too, such as she had alluded to in her memorable essay read before the Riseholme Literary Society, called 'Humour in Furniture', and a brass milk can served as a receptacle for sticks and umbrellas. Equally quaint was the dish of highly realistic stone fruit that stood beside the potpourri and the furry Japanese spider that sprawled in a silk web over the window.

Such was the fearful verisimilitude of this that Lucia's new housemaid had once fled from her duties in the early morning, to seek the assistance of the gardener in killing it. The dish of stone fruit had scored a similar success, for once she had said to Georgie Pillson, 'Ah, my gardener has sent in some early apples and pears, won't you take one home with you?' It was not till the weight of the pear (he swiftly selected the largest) betrayed the joke that he had any notion that they were not real ones. But then Georgie had had his revenge, for waiting his opportunity he had inserted a real pear among those stony specimens and again passing through with Lucia, he picked it out, and with lips drawn back had snapped at it with all the force of his jaws. For the moment she had felt quite faint at the thought of his teeth crashing into fragments ... These humorous touches were altered from time to time; the spider for instance might be taken down and replaced by a china canary in a Chippendale cage, and the selection of the entrance hall for those whimsicalities was intentional, for guests found something to smile at, as they took off their cloaks and entered the drawing room with a topic on their lips, something light, something amusing about what they had seen. For the gong similarly was sometimes substituted a set of bells that had once decked the collar of the leading horse in a waggoner's team somewhere in

Flanders; in fact when Lucia was at home there was often a new little quaintness for quite a sequence of days, and she had held out hopes to the Literary Society that perhaps some day, when she was not so rushed, she would jot down material for a sequel to her essay, or write another covering a rather larger field on 'The Gambits of Conversation Derived from Furniture'.

On the table there was a pile of letters waiting for Mrs Lucas, for yesterday's post had not been forwarded her, for fear of its missing her - London postmen were probably very careless and untrustworthy - and she gave a little cry of dismay as she saw the volume of her correspondence.

'But I shall be very naughty,' she said, 'and not look at one of them till after lunch. Take them away, *caro*, and promise me to lock them up till then, and not give them me however much I beg. Then I will get into the saddle again, such a dear saddle, too, and tackle them. I shall have a stroll in the garden till the bell rings. What is it that Nietzsche says about the necessity to *Mediterraniser* yourself every now and then? I must *Riseholmer* myself.'

Peppino remembered the quotation, which had occurred in a review of some work of that celebrated author, where Lucia had also seen it, and went back, with the force of contrast to aid him, to his prose poem of 'Loneliness', while his wife went through the smoking parlour into the garden, in order to soak herself once more in the cultured atmosphere.

In this garden behind the house there was no attempt to construct a Shakespearian plot, for, as she so rightly observed, Shakespeare, who loved flowers so well, would wish her to enjoy every conceivable horticultural treasure. But furniture played a prominent part in the place, and there were statues and sundials and stone-seats scattered about with almost too profuse a hand. Mottos also were in great evidence, and while a sundial reminded you that '*Tempos fugit*', an enticing resting place somewhat

bewilderingly bade you to 'Bide a wee'. But then again the rustic seat in the pleached alley of laburnums had carved on its back, 'Much have I travelled in the realms of gold', so that, meditating on Keats, you could bide a wee with a clear conscience. Indeed so copious was the wealth of familiar and stimulating quotations that one of her subjects had once said that to stroll in Lucia's garden was not only to enjoy her lovely flowers, but to spend a simultaneous half-hour with the best authors. There was a dovecote of course, but since the cats always killed the doves, Mrs Lucas had put up round the desecrated home several pigeons of Copenhagen china, which were both imperishable as regards cats, and also carried on the suggestion of humour in furniture. The humour had attained the highest point of felicity when Peppino concealed a mechanical nightingale in a bush, which sang 'Jug-jug' in the most realistic manner when you pulled a string. Georgie had not yet seen the Copenhagen pigeons, or being rather short-sighted thought they were real. Then, oh then, Peppino pulled the string, and for quite a long time Georgie listened entranced to their melodious cooings. That served him out for his 'trap' about the real pear introduced among the stone specimens. For in spite of the rarefied atmosphere of culture at Riseholme, Riseholme knew how to '*desipere in loco*', and its strenuous culture was often refreshed by these light refined touches.

Mrs Lucas walked quickly and decisively up and down the paths as she waited for the summons to lunch, for the activity of her mind reacted on her body, making her brisk in movement. On each side of her forehead were hard neat undulations of black hair that concealed the tips of her ears. She had laid aside her London hat, and carried a red cotton Contadina's umbrella, which threw a rosy glow on to the oval of her thin face and its colourless complexion. She bore the weight of her forty years extremely lightly, and but for the droop of skin at the corners of her mouth, she might

have passed as a much younger woman. Her face was otherwise unlined and bore no trace of the ravages of emotional living, which both ages and softens. Certainly there was nothing soft about her, and very little of the signs of age, and it would have been reasonable to conjecture that twenty years later she would look but little older than she did today. For such emotions as she was victim of were the sterile and ageless ecstasies of art; such desires as beset her were not connected with her affections, but her ambitions. Dynasty she had none, for she was childless, and thus her ambitions were limited to the permanence and security of her own throne as queen of Riseholme. She really asked nothing more of life than the continuance of such harvests as she had so plenteously reaped for these last ten years. As long as she directed the life of Riseholme, took the lead in its culture and entertainment, and was the undisputed fountainhead of all its inspirations, and from time to time refreshed her memory as to the utter inferiority of London, she wanted nothing more. But to secure that she dedicated all that she had of ease, leisure and income. Being practically indefatigable the loss of ease and leisure troubled her but little, and being in extremely comfortable circumstances, she had no need to economize in her hospitalities. She might easily look forward to enjoying an unchanging middle-aged activity, while generations of youth withered round her, and no star, remotely rising, had as yet threatened to dim her unrivalled effulgence. Though essentially autocratic, her subjects were allowed and even encouraged to develop their own minds on their own lines, provided always that those lines met at the junction where she was station master. With regard to religion finally, it may be briefly said that she believed in God in much the same way as she believed in Australia, for she had no doubt whatever as to the existence of either, and she went to church on Sunday in

much the same spirit as she would look at a kangaroo in the Zoological Gardens, for kangaroos come from Australia.

A low wall separated the far end of her garden from the meadow outside; beyond that lay the stream which flowed into the Avon, and it often seemed wonderful to her that the water which wimpled by would (unless a cow happened to drink it) soon be stealing along past the church at Stratford where Shakespeare lay. Peppino had written a very moving little prose poem about it, for she had royally presented him with the idea, and had suggested a beautiful analogy between the earthly dew that refreshed the grasses, and was drawn up into the fire of the sun, and Thought, the spiritual dew that refreshed the mind and thereafter, rather vaguely, was drawn up into the Full-Orbed Soul of the World.

At that moment Lucia's eye was attracted by an apparition on the road which lay adjacent to the further side of the happy stream which flowed into the Avon. There was no mistaking the identity of the stout figure of Mrs Quantock with its short steps and its gesticulations, but why in the name of wonder should that Christian Scientist be walking with the draped and turbaned figure of a man with a tropical complexion and a black beard? His robe of saffron yellow with a violently green girdle was hitched up for ease in walking, and unless he had chocolate-coloured stockings on, Mrs Lucas saw human legs of the same shade. Next moment that debatable point was set at rest for she caught sight of short pink socks in red slippers. Even as she looked Mrs Quantock saw her (for owing to Christian Science she had recaptured the quick vision of youth) and wagged her hand and kissed it, and evidently called her companion's attention, for the next moment he was salaaming to her in some stately Oriental manner. There was nothing to be done for the moment except return these salutations, as she could not yell an aside to Mrs Quantock, screaming out 'Who is that Indian?' for if

Mrs Quantock heard the Indian would hear too, but as soon as she could, she turned back towards the house again, and when once the lilac bushes were between her and the road she walked with more than her usual speed, in order to learn with the shortest possible delay from Peppino who this fresh subject of hers could be. She knew there were some Indian princes in London; perhaps it was one of them, in which case it would be necessary to read up Benares or Delhi in the encyclopaedia without loss of time.