

Lucia waited for Elizabeth's au reservoir and the sound of her receding footsteps before standing up. She was a bit sore, but it was quite bearable.

The afternoon which found her and Georgie writing out the invitations was a mentally stimulating one. She asked quite casually if Mr. Frost had already been officially engaged regarding his participation in the upcoming festivities. Georgie explained that he and Mr. Frost had discussed it and had not come to a specific understanding, but he was certain that the man's genial nature was such that he would agree to just about anything asked of him.

"Good," Lucia had replied. Then: "Perhaps you would like to deliver these invitations by hand, caro. That way you can drop a hint or two about the motorcar racing."

Georgie glowed with anticipation. He was about to suggest that very thing to Lucia. Not only did he enjoy dispensing such gossip, but it also showed him that Lucia had faith in her husband's ability to stir up interest in a topic without giving too much away.

"I would love to," he replied. Then added, "Are you going to visit Mr. Frost to firm up our plans? And are you planning to give all your town councillors rides as well? That's quite a bit of petrol, you know."

Lucia leaned back in her chair. "Quite right. Twelve councillors is a bit much. And somehow I fail to see the Lord Bishop with his cope and mitre being driven about by Mr. Frost." Georgie giggled but Lucia took no notice. "Perhaps if I have my pavilion opening about noontime, then ask Mr. Frost to appear at two o'clock... I shall indicate on the invitations to our intime circle that they should remain afterward for a special event. What do you think?"

Georgie thought it was a marvellous idea, and hurried upstairs to select a hat for his upcoming errand. Privately, he was elated. Here was his old Lucia back, with all her foibles and strengths so clearly delineated. He was thankful and relieved: he had worried that Mrs. Blanchard's effect on Lucia would somehow be more permanent (the decision to put Mapp back on the Town Council notwithstanding). But the shrill, nasty aspects of Lucia's personality which Hattie had brought to the forefront had just as quickly receded from view along with that woman's departure. He smiled. It was moments like these in which Georgie enjoyed standing back and watching his wife at work.

Lucia lost no time in putting her personal agenda into action. She found Mr. Frost more than amiable as they discussed the upcoming festivities, and it was dear that he would enjoy showing off his motor as much as Lucia would enjoy the novelty of the event.

She chatted endlessly with regard to the sidecar until Mr. Frost felt compelled to ask, "Would you care

to take a ride, Mrs. Pillson?"

She did her best to appear startled by the invitation. "Oh! Why, that would be a treat. Yes, certainly." She watched as he again attached the now-familiar dilapidated sidecar to the motor and, offering her a set of goggles and scarf, bade her to sit. They proceeded out to the street, where Mr. Frost paused to close the coach house door, and they were off.

The drive was exhilarating. The enormous speed at which they travelled was breathtaking, and Lucia drank in the excitement. They were travelling much faster than Cadman ever dared with her Royce, which was just as well. Her chauffeur's skills, although quite competent, would surely not be capable of overcoming the inherent impossibility of navigating a Royce around a hairpin turn at fifty miles an hour. Lucia watched the trees pass by in a blur, and breathed a sigh of contentment. The speed and power were more than she had imagined, and she felt a thrill of happiness to think that it was she who would soon introduce this new adventure to her friends. Ten minutes later found Lucia sitting idly on the grass by the side of the road as Mr. Frost mended a flat tyre. It was instantly evident to Lucia that to have the motor break down like this during her party would be disastrous. She had noted the worn appearance of the motor the first time she had laid eyes on it, and this only confirmed her suspicions that the entire vehicle was greatly in need of repair. She decided to play out the remainder of her agenda, and stood.

"Mr. Frost, we have yet to discuss payment for your kindness."

Mr. Frost raised an eyebrow. "Well, Mrs. Pillson. This is something I enjoy doing. If 11 be quite a treat to bring some fun to you and Mr. George's friends."

"I am glad you feel that way," Lucia mused, "But it would be improper of me not to offer you some sort of recompense for your time and effort. Not to mention the cost of petrol" Lucia had not the slightest idea what petrol cost, but that did not invalidate her premise.

Mr. Frost paused in his labours. "You've a point there, Mrs. Pillson. All right, then. Enough to cover the expenditure of petrol, and we shall call it even."

"Actually, I was hoping to persuade you to purchase whatever you feel needs fixing. These tyres, surely, should all be replaced."

Mr. Frost gave his vehicle an appraising once-over, beginning to sense the direction in which Lucia was heading the conversation. "I admit they are a bit worn in places." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "Well, she could do with a bit of work on the hydraulic brakes, that's certain. And I wouldn't mind replacing the gearbox altogether. Per'aps you're right, Mrs. Pillson. Though it hardly seems a fair trade, me doing what I enjoy anyway."

Lucia wisely did not push the issue any further and,

satisfied that everything was proceeding as she had planned, instead bade him to send her the bills for any work he felt necessary to have done. She would have preferred him to also give the motorcar a new coat of paint, but she held off. It would not be wise to insult someone who had become the main attraction of her party. She changed the subject, and decided to risk playing her last card, for she had no idea if it was rare for Mr. Frost to be in this accommodating mood.

"How diffy is it to learn how to drive?" she asked, trying to appear nonchalant.

Mr. Frost wiped his hands on a rag and bounded into the sidecar. "Let's see, shall we? We're in nobody's way out here. Try it."

Lucia had hoped, but not actually expected, such an immediate response, but rose gracefully to the occasion. She slid smoothly into the driver's seat and surveyed the controls.

"But, there are three foot pedals, and I have only two feet?" she cried out, mystified.

Mr. Frost carefully explained the controls, and it took only three or four hours of experimentation for Lucia to grasp the fundamentals. Two new dings on the motorcar's finish and another flat tyre later found her nevertheless quite pleased with her progress, and a thought suddenly struck her. She diffidently asked, when he arrives for the party, if she might surprise everyone by first taking Georgie out for a spin before her guests got their turn — the real rides — from him.

Mr. Frost thought that an amusing idea, and drove home. He had offered to take her to Mallards, but Lucia was worried that someone might spot them and, coupled with Georgie's hints, figure it all out before the pavilion event. That would never do. Instead, they returned to Mr. Frost's house, where he gave Lucia a late tea.

Invitations had been sent out to the members of the Town Council, all of whom accepted, as well as invitations to her circle of friends which included mention of a "special event" to follow.

The christening of Lucia's pavilion followed the general sketch of the event as she had planned and had hoped for. The divisions which had erupted about Tilling like the weeds growing in their gardens had torn asunder the last vestiges of civility among Lucia's companions. Christian forbearance could only be availed of to a certain point, and Tilling had passed that point during Mrs. Blanchard's ill-fated dinner party.

This celebration was designed, then, to be a cleansing — a healing. Lucia knew she needn't worry about Elizabeth's cooperation. If nothing else, pocketing the bribe of a seat on the Town Council would put her in a favourable mood for quite some time. Indeed, the only person Lucia was concerned for was quaint Irene, who would undoubtedly have a

bilious attack upon hearing the news and would unquestionably dream up some scheme to humiliate Elizabeth unless Lucia took steps to stop her.

The actual ceremony went rather well, with Lucia reading several lengthy selections from the great ancients. Many of the quotations she had previously prepared, for she had secretly decided on a send-off for Diva when that worthy woman was on death's door — despite her own public posture that it was all a mistake. (She had long-ago learned the importance of being prepared for any eventuality.) Fortunately, most of the selections Lucia had chosen were from the classical age, and thus she could still avail herself of them when it finally came out that Diva was not going to expire. She did, however, feel compelled out of respect for Diva's recent contretemps to omit the quote she had chosen from *The Lives of the Caesars*, "Strike so that he may feel he is dying."

In all other ways, however, Lucia gave her celebration a respectable try out. Her white surplice with stockings to protect her modesty, and laurel wreath headdress reinforced the Ancients theme she had chosen, as did her decoration of the garden with alabaster nymphs and other statuary loaned from the local stonemason's (the candelabras not being available).

Following her lecture, she and Georgie played out a tableau of the return of Agamemnon with Cassandra after the Trojan wars, with Lucia doubling the parts of Cassandra and Clytemnestra. She had long wished to present this particular piece, and her expectations were amply fulfilled, for it was received quite favourably.

Once the orchestrated presentations had been celebrated, severe inroads had been made with regard to the refreshments, and after the Bishop and all the councillors except Elizabeth had dispersed, Lucia led the way inside to the garden room. She put aside her laurel wreath and glanced at the dock on the chimneypiece. It was already after two o'clock. Where could Mr. Frost be? There would be no doubt about his arrival, the sound of the motorcar would certainly rattle all the windows of Mallards. Yet Lucia heard nothing. Nervously, she asked Georgie to play a duet with her on the piano while they waited. He was as anxious as she, the strain translating into so many wrong notes that the Mozart duet sounded more like a primary school recital. "Just what special event is this supposed to be?" Elizabeth whispered to Diva during the third piano piece. "Are we here simply to listen to Mr. Georgie and Lucia practice? They should have learned the music before inflicting it upon their friends."

Diva nodded. "Doesn't seem terribly special to me, either, Elizabeth. And I'd have preferred to remain outdoors. It's getting stuffy in here."

Even Mr. Wyse, who had been known to go to great lengths to stifle any distraction during such recitals,

such as a sneeze or a cough, found himself discussing the situation with his wife in grave undertones. "It would appear that Mrs. Pillson is quite agitated. Perhaps the surprise she had planned did not go through."

"No," Susan countered. "All this mystery about staying behind. Clearly Lucia thought we'd not come unless she had a surprise for us. Slogging through Beethoven is no treat, Algernon. It is time we departed for home."

Major Benjy and Irene were sitting next to each other in the back, she to enjoy the breeze from the open door, he to surreptitiously avail himself of the whisky on the sideboard. He dispensed with the soda for once, as the noise of dispensing it would have alerted Elizabeth to his activities.

"Not quite what I was expecting, eh Miss Coles?"

"No," whispered Irene, sitting cross-legged and quite bored. "It looks as if my beloved has made an error of some kind. Surely she didn't plan this?"

"Not so sure, not so sure," the Major replied. "Looks like this is it, though. Never mind. I'll finish this glass and I'm off."

"Yes. This is no fun at all," Irene said, wincing as Georgie made several errors in a row, the piano sounding like a squawking flock of birds instead of a Handel concerto.

It was now a quarter to three, and the Padre and Evie rose.

"Ach, we'd love to remain here an' listen to the remainder of your recital, but I'm a'feared I must be away, Mistress Pillson. Duty calls, you know."

"Yes," agreed Evie. "So kind of you to invite us to your unveiling. We look forward to having tea there with you someday." She evidently thought she had told a joke, for she covered her mouth with her hand and squeaked merrily.

"So soon?" Lucia asked, rising. "Georgie," she almost commanded in her frantic state, "Do check and see if our little enticement is ready."

Mrs. Wyse was the next to rise. "Pray do not trouble yourself on our account, Mr. Pillson. I am afraid that Algernon and I must also depart. We had a lovely time. Your portrayal of Cassandra was quite exquisite, Lucia. Perhaps we could impose upon you to include it for a hospital fund-raising tableaux Algernon and I were considering for next summer."

One by one, all her guests rose as if partaking in some prearranged play, each voicing their disappointment over matters which required their attention elsewhere. By the time it came to Irene and the Major, they didn't even bother with excuses, but instead simply said their au reservoirs.

Lucia followed the group out into the house and to the front door, gabbling all the way. This was not how her party was supposed to conclude, and she was afraid this anti-climactic ending would only serve to

resurrect all the old hostilities. It seemed Mr. Frost had failed her, and it was quite likely that tomorrow morning's marketing hour would be quite painful. Her friends would find the events of today all quite amusing, and would doubtless be unconscious of her presence should she attempt to join them in conversation. The thought that they would all at least be talking to each other once again was hardly a comfort.

Lucia watched the retreating forms of her guests, and surveyed the Wyses' Royce as it navigated the few hundred yards to Porpoise Street and home, when she heard an unmistakable roar, a roar which gladdened her heart. The noise reverberated off the buildings all around her, the panes in the windows rattling, just as she had predicted. Her guests all froze in their tracks, with the sole exception of Diva, who had been in the midst of crossing the street and had to leap off the roadway onto the pavement to avoid getting run over. Mr. Frost pulled up to the still-open door of Mallards and revved the engine.

"Sorry I'm so tardy, Lucia. Had a leaky gasket that needed attention. Hope I'm not too late."

His timing was impeccable. He could hardly have chosen a more dramatic entrance. Lucia smiled joyfully and stepped outside. Mr. Frost had decided on a new paint job after all: British green.

"Not at all, not at all," Lucia called out, ignoring her departed guests. She did not need to look up to know that they were all returning — except perhaps the Wyses, who may not have noticed the racing car.

But in the end, even they came back, feigning a cancelled visit to the dentist. It was not in Lucia's nature to publicly gloat, and her high principles remained intact. Instead, she merely accepted the goggles and scarf from Mr. Frost, and bade Georgie to climb into the sidecar.

"You are going to drive?" Georgie asked incredulously.

"Certainly, caro Now get in." She waved to her returning guests and called out, "We shall be back in just a few minutes, and then Mr. Frost will gladly give rides to anyone who would like one."

Georgie steadfastly fixed his thoughts upon pleasant things: his bibelots, his petit point, his sketching... He watched Lucia gun the engine and grind the gears and they were suddenly thrown violently forward. There was a gasp from the assembled Tillingites as Lucia narrowly missed backing up into the garden room. But she managed to stop in time and, grinding gears once again, roared off down West Street, with Georgie holding one hand onto the newly-painted sidecar, and the other onto his toupee.

That afternoon's display of derring-do had quite an impact on the residents. Until now, their version of racing was confined to spirited contests surrounding who could spread gossip faster than the others. But the

exhilarating rides in the motorcar — and Lucia's daring solo excursion (as no one for an instant considered that Georgie would have been any help had something gone awry) fuelled a new interest.

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The petty squabbles and ignoble disagreements faded into the background for a time, just as Lucia had hoped and anticipated. This was evident in the acceptance of the Mapp-Flints, the Pillsons, and the Bartletts to dinner and bridge at the Wyse's two days later.

"Maxwell Park," Georgie announced, crossing his legs so that no one but a blind man could miss his new canvas shoes. He had been forced to remove his soft kid driving gloves when they went in to dinner, a fashion statement commented upon by his fellow guests. "It is south of Derby. That's the racecourse which Mr. Frost is going to race in at the end of the month. My turn?"

Mr. Wyse fussed with his new fawn and white racing scarf and spoke. "I understand from the Hastings Chronicle that a Mercedes won last year's Monaco Grand Prix. Yes, Mr. Pillson, it is your turn."

"Those German cars," the Major piped in, "Don't trust 'em an inch. Just like that nasty bloke they've got running the place. And that Goering fellow —"

"Now, now, Major," Elizabeth reprimanded, availing herself of every opportunity to nag her estranged husband.

"I quite agree. No politics tonight," piped in Mrs. Wyse. "It is my understanding that they offered the Vanderbilt Cup at the American Roosevelt Speedway this year."

"For the very first time," agreed Mr. Wyse, absentmindedly trumping his partner's best card.

Elizabeth, his partner, grimaced, but held her tongue. It was obvious to her that racing cars were all the rage at the moment, and despite her complete disinterest in the subject, she had — out of necessity — managed to glean a few tidbits of information from some current magazines out of the lending library. "A Mercedes won this year at Carthage, at the Tunis Grand Prix."

"Tunis?" asked Georgie. "Where is that?"

"Africa," the Major announced authoritatively. He leaned back in his chair and addressed the other table. "So, Mrs. Pillson, are you planning on making a career out of racing? You did rather well the other day, by Jove!"

Luck smiled distantly, attempting to concentrate on her game. "No, Major. But Georgie and I have decided we are going to Maxwell Park with Mr. Frost at the end of the month and watch him race."

Elizabeth pricked up her ears. Could this be the opportunity for which she had been lying in wait? So

soon? She tried to keep the edge of eagerness off her voice as she quizzed Lucia. "Dear Worship, are you actually going to leave us? For how long?"

"Some three or four days, I believe. I hope I can count on my councillors while I am away. Such a rare chance to see racing in action, and as the municipal burden seems to be somewhat eased lately, Georgie has convinced me that my taking a short holiday would not be too grievous a burden upon the Town Council." Elizabeth, knowing full well that the Town Council's last two meetings lasted precisely five minutes (and they took that long only because Lucia demanded the minutes be read off from the previous meeting), nevertheless objected to the idea. "How on earth are we on the Council to function without you for so long, dear Worship? Why, it's almost criminal." She paused and sighed. "Still, you know what is best, and I suppose the burden of public office weighs rather heavily upon you at times. I know that it would were I to be Mayor." Elizabeth managed to say that last remark without betraying the fact that she much fancied the idea of being burdened.

"Certainly not, my dear Mayoress. Demanding yes, but I like to believe I am up to the task. I would not have considered going at all, if Georgie obviously did not need a respite."

Elizabeth gave Georgie an incredulous glance. With his hair not needing the least bit of touch-up, and with his ruddy cheeks, it was difficult to conceive of him needing any sort of a holiday.

Evie squeaked rather loudly, and changed the subject to cover the gaffe. "I hear Irene has painted a series of obscure pictures, which she says are her impressions of the countryside as it flashed by during her turn with Mr. Frost."

"Ah, yes," Lucia sighed. "Dear quaint one. Always on the cutting edge of style. I must pop by and see her work before I go. So invigorating. Oh dear, did I just play that?"

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Later that week, Georgie was sitting in the Mayor's chair in the upstairs council chamber of the Town Hall. It was from here over which Lucia had presided for the last three years. Happy, productive years. While it was true that she had made the task as tedious as possible (and not only tedious for herself), it was also true that Georgie knew she was going to miss the weekly meetings and debates over planting trees, illuminating dark alleys, and renovating the town's sewage system. It was true that she could still fill her time with the Tilling Opera Company, the Church Council, the meetings of the Board of Governors of the Hospital, visits to the workhouse, the Tilling Cricket Club, and other numerous and sundry organisations. Indeed, anyone who petitioned her for financial aid or a

donation of her time and energy never left disappointed. Still, the prestige of the office of Mayor was unique in its visibility and status, and Georgie wished that he could conceive of some method for immortalising her tenure in a way that might impress even Lucia. True, her name would go on the wall along with all the other Mayors, but that was hardly a unique honour. He turned and sought inspiration in the panels on the south and east walls where the last six hundred and thirty-five Mayors were listed. As he did, the morning sun streaming through one of the large windows hit him squarely in the face, and for a moment he wished the windows would perhaps have the light-muting property which leaded antique glass would have provided (the expensive kind, with stone mullions), or even be heavily draped.

As he squinted into the light, an image struck him. Yes, indeed. Perhaps if he asked for Irene's help... He would be adamant about one thing: there was to be no improper displays of the human figure. Other than that, he was prepared to give her free reign. From outside it would perhaps be a bit uneven, as there were a total of five windows on that side of the building, but it couldn't be helped. The place for it was clearly the centre window of the three in the council chambers.

There was no time to waste if this marvellous project was to be completed in time for Lucia's abdication (for that was how he thought of it). He jumped out of the chair, grabbed his hat and left the building, hurrying down the steps and past the town clerk's office.

If he had paused to look into that noble office, he might have spied the back of Elizabeth Mapp-Flint's head as she sat amid a pile of pages. But he did not see her, so intent was he on his new errand, and was thus unable to warn Lucia about Elizabeth's impending assault.

Elizabeth sat reviewing the past few month's worth of council meetings. Surely there was something in the minutes which might suggest something to her. She had been at it for over two hours, and was beginning to despair, when her eyes lit upon a discussion (which had been tabled) about tearing down some old buildings out by the railroad bridge, to make room for a road widening. She smiled involuntarily as a diabolical idea struck her. The entire plan flashed before her eyes: from beginning to end it was wrapped up perfectly, as if it were an exquisite picnic lunch tied up with string.

If she could get Mrs. Bellwether on her side she might stand a chance of pushing her vision through — almost a fait accompli, as that worthy woman still objected to anything Lucia proposed, based upon vague moral grounds. She noted in the minutes that Lucia had been in favour of attempting to move the buildings, not demolish them. She had supposedly

said, "I have looked into the matter rather thoroughly, and have concluded that it would be more economical to move and rehabilitate, rather than tear down and replace the dwellings." Dear Worship at her most pompous.

Elizabeth was convinced the buildings were hovels of the most desperate sort, but should they turn out to be even marginally habitable, she hoped Lucia's latest antics would enable her to convince the Council of their inhabitation, and that they might take action on them during Lucia's absence. This plan required the utmost skill and diplomacy, traits which Elizabeth was convinced she possessed in abundance.

She suddenly gave pause at the enormity of her scheme, and had momentary qualms regarding the possible consequences of it. Could she actually go through with it — could she actually orchestrate this deception? She thought back, contrasting her uneasy apprehensions with reflections upon the Tilling which existed before Lucia's arrival, when she herself was the sole ruler of social life. She had quite sincerely welcomed Lucia into her bosom (at least as sincerely as she had ever welcomed anyone) and that woman, instead of coming quietly into the fold, had snatched Mapp's sceptre and crown (and had yet to return it). Yes, the years had hardened the fight. But perhaps — no, the more she considered it, the more certain was her resolve — it vms time to take the war to a new level. She had grown weary of always being forced to retreat behind her defensive fortifications. Now was the moment to launch a counterattack. It was time to risk everything: Aut Caesar aut nihil — "Either a Caesar or nothing."

If all went well, and she could switch forms at the right moment, then Lucia and Georgie would have quite a surprise when they returned from Maxwell Park. Elizabeth grinned malevolently. To be sure, the plan would not be successful without a significant amount of personal agony, but she was willing to see the destruction of her beloved garden room, the adjoining Mallard's Cottage, and the house with the crooked chimney (no longer owned by anyone of importance) if it meant the complete discomfiture of Lucia.

She cornered the town clerk, and began quizzing him about the paperwork needed to enact such a measure: tearing down those slums by the railway to widen the road was such a noble endeavour, didn't he agree?

With the example of a similar measure in her marketing basket, Elizabeth hurried along the High Street to finish her morning errands. Once she had completed this ritual — which on this particular day was comparatively onerous instead of exciting — she would hurry home to set up her typewriter and prepare two sets of forms. One would authorise the destruction of those slums, and was the one which would be

submitted to the Council; the other would detail the widening of the top of West Street and the destruction of her garden room. This was the form she would accidentally hand to the clerk for his seal.

She spotted Diva knitting at something in her window and, basking in her secret plan, felt the need to stop.

"Hello, dear one. Time for a chat?" she called up.

"Pop in, Elizabeth," Diva said. Her hands had begun to ache at their unaccustomed task, and she was grateful for the interruption, even if it was only Elizabeth. "Any news?"

"Gracious me, I don't think so," Elizabeth said in a tone far too jovially for Diva's taste. "Taking up petit point, dear one?"

"Quite. Finally got tired of seeing all those lovely things Mr. Georgie manages, and thought I'd try my hand at it. But I'm becoming quite sore, and I've only been at it for three days."

"Three days?" Elizabeth asked, frowning at Diva's progress. "No doubt your technique will become more adequate — and faster — the more you work at it."

"No doubt," Diva said, needled at Elizabeth's caustic commentary. "But you didn't come all the way up here just to comment on my embroidery, now did you?"

"How astute, Diva dear. Well, as poor Worship shall be leaving the town in my hands when she goes off on holiday —"

"Your hands? I thought the Council was in charge. The Deputy Mayor, and so on."

Elizabeth laughed and assumed the tone one projects when talking to a simpleton. "Diva, dear, of course the Council is ostensibly in charge. And I shall be Acting Deputy Mayor in Lucia's absence, you can be certain of that. After all, you haven't seen them in action. They need a leader. I, of course, am the logical choice."

"Yes," Diva mused, half to herself. "They do need someone with a bit of push."

"Thank you dear," Elizabeth said sharply.

Diva put down the tambour upon which a fanciful person might imagine a barnyard cow. "So have you decided what your agenda will be while she's gone?"

Elizabeth smiled. "Now that you mention it, yes. I would like to present Lucia with some form of completed public works project when she returns."

"Hmm," Diva considered, "To show her how little Tilling needs her. Not very kind, Elizabeth."

"No, no, dear one!" Elizabeth exclaimed, throwing up her hands as if warding off the thought. "You misinterpret my motives entirely. I wish to show Lucia that she has chosen her councillors wisely: the town will not wither and die without her firm guidance, so that she may adjourn her position as Mayor with no qualms."

"And what, exactly, are you going to propose?"

Dredging the harbour so that larger ships can reach port? Paving over the cobblestones in the High Street so that huge lorries can fill our avenues with their fumes? Widening our quaint roads? No thank you, Elizabeth. If you want my opinion, Tilling is fine just the way it is."

"I don't recall asking your opinion, dear, but since you volunteered your thoughts, I have no choice but to consider your suggestions at the next council meeting."

Diva was taken quite aback. "Really? I never thought to petition the Council for anything. Hmm. Quite different to have a friend like you on the Council. An 'in' as they say. Have to think more on this. Staying for lunch?"

"Alas, no. I'm afraid Cook has no doubt prepared a sumptuous meal for me, and Withers will scold me when I arrive. I'm surely late as it is."

Elizabeth walked home, eager to share her latest brilliant strategy with the Major, and suddenly recalled that he would not be there when she arrived. He had, indeed, been forced by her to remain at the Cottage when she returned to Grebe, despite his ridiculous pleas that nothing had occurred between him and that woman. Although the heat from Elizabeth's rage had been diminishing the longer the woman was gone, Elizabeth was still hurt enough not to allow him the satisfaction of accepting an apology. She missed him, that much was certain — although was likely in the manner of a boil, long harboured, which is finally lanced: the irritant is missing, and in some queer way, missed.

If her plan was to succeed, he obviously could not remain in the Cottage once it was demolished. So despite her firm resolve to never again allow him to set foot in Grebe, it looked as if she needed to do just that. Would these sacrifices never end?

The idea of petitioning Elizabeth with proposals for the benefit of Tilling was an idea which had never occurred to the residents with Lucia in charge. Perhaps it was Lucia's aloofness which precluded any serious proposals. No matter the cause, Elizabeth found herself pleasantly bombarded with requests, all framed rather casually, and usually discussed in the High Street during the next morning's marketing.

Mrs. Wyse wished for better lighting of the streets, as she had originally said to Lucia, several years ago when all the women of Tilling were vying for the position of Mayoress, and attempted to impress Lucia with their civic-mindedness.

Mr. Wyse suggested that scheduled refuse pick-ups should be augmented. What with the ever-increasing bank holidays already impinging upon such visits, without increased removal they might soon have to install more dustbins to handle all their refuse. Privately, Elizabeth commented to Diva that if the Wysees entertained themselves a little less opulently, perhaps there would not be so much refuse to haul

away, but publicly she assured the Wyse that she would add their suggestions to her list.

Quaint Irene offered to cover over the High Street by stretching huge tarps from rooftop to rooftop, and was even willing to paint them all for a nominal fee. This scheme would keep everyone dry, and not incidentally allow her to paint outdoors in all sorts of inclement weather. Naturally, Elizabeth had to draw the line somewhere and countered with the unfortunate fact that the canvases would render the streets perpetually gloomy, with an associated increase in expenditure of electric light. Thus she could not in good conscience entertain the notion, but thanks all the same.

The Padre and wee wifie both agreed that the paving about the Gun Garden could use some attention. The tourists who descend into that area after visiting the church occasionally stumble over the uneven pavement. Now Elizabeth was secretly convinced that was due to the tourists sampling traditional British hospitality at one of the local pubs before visiting God's house, but was more than happy to assure the Bartletts that their request would be on her list.

After careful consideration. Diva was unsure exactly what to wish for. She had come up with several ideas, and had just as swiftly come up with justifications for why each was a bad idea. The actual paving over of the roads which she had suggested out of humour was abhorrent to her, and she doubted the deepening of the harbour would actually increase commerce. No, in the end, Diva decided that she enjoyed Tilling too much just the way it was, and asked Elizabeth to refuse everyone else's schemes. Elizabeth took this as jealousy over everyone else's remarkable ideas, and said as much. Diva was in an oddly conciliatory mood, and retorted with the comment that you can't shake hands with a clenched fist. To this, Elizabeth made no reply, instead walking away with her fist held high.

Everyone was reticent to speak to Georgie or Lucia of Elizabeth's plans, especially when Elizabeth told each of them it was to be a surprise for Lucia upon her return from the races. The Padre wiped his eyes upon being informed of that fact, convinced that finally, somehow, Lucia and Elizabeth had finally settled their differences. Evie was not so prosaic, and wondered just what Elizabeth was up to; a sentiment shared by Diva. Mrs. Plaistow knew Elizabeth better than anyone, and remained unconvinced of her sincerity. But, there was little to do but wait and see. Elizabeth would show her hand at some point, and if Diva were alert enough, she might just be in a position to trump her friends' best card.

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The morning of Lucia and Georgie's departure finally dawned, and her friends assembled in the High Street earlier than usual, to be certain of seeing the exodus.

Evie, popping out of Hopkins', ran full-tilt into Diva. "Oh! Excuse me!", Evie squeaked. She looked around to be sure she wasn't overheard and dropped her voice into a conspiratorial tone. "Do you think Lucia will drive all the way to Maxwell Park? I don't see how she could allow such an exciting opportunity to pass her by. It would be just like her, you know."

Diva, ever practical, replied, "Wouldn't it be rather silly to employ Cadman only to have him sit in the back with Mr. Georgie?"

"Why not?" Evie said. Then, after a moment's pause: "But why bring Cadman along at all?"

Diva frowned. "Suppose a tyre went flat en route? Or they had trouble with the engine? Neither she nor Mr. Georgie, I am certain, knows the first thing about mending such things."

Evie, her firmly-held opinion now seen lacking when held up to the harsh light of day, had no reply. She was turning to finish her rather meagre errands (the highlight of which was purchasing some cakes of blacking for Kenneth's shoes) when the Wyse's Royce lurched up from Porpoise Street and pulled up to the kerb. Susan's fat face appeared at the open window, and she took for granted the subject of the morning's discourse, launching into it without preamble. "Good morning. We were debating whether or not Lucia would drive to Maxwell Park herself. Both Algernon and I agree that it would be so like her."

Evie's face brightened, "True," Mr. Wyse added, leaning toward the window. "But there is where my wife and I diverge. I feel that it would be far too fatiguing for Mrs. Pillson to attempt such a feat, even considering her zest for life and indefatigable nature."

Evie's face fell. She looked over the roof of the car and spotted Lucia herself walking briskly toward them, marketing basket in hand. "Here's Lucia!" cried Evie, hopeful that her minority point of view might be corroborated by no less a person than Lucia herself.

"Certainly not," Lucia laughed merrily, when the idea was suggested. "Of course, Georgie had urged me to consider driving the Royce. Naturally, I would have done so if I was to be alone. But with Georgie in the car, along with Foljambe, well, I dare not risk their well being if something should happen."

Diva asked, "Isn't Mr. Frost going with you?"

"No dear. He felt that I had advanced enough in my training that further practice was unnecessary. He offered to stay behind for my benefit, but I told him to get there early and so he left yesterday. I convinced him that he should arrive there early to select a prime spot for his mechanic's van if he hopes to compete successfully against the Alfas, Mercedes-Benz, and

Auto Unions."

Diva nearly rolled her eyes at this swank pronouncement. It was dear to her that Mr. Frost was the one to convince Lucia, not vice versa. But it would be pointless to argue with her. Diva had baked a half-dozen scones for their trip, and handed to Lucia the cloth containing them. Lucia thanked her warmly, and the group dispersed to begin the traditional morning marketing.

Diva spotted Elizabeth emerging from the Fruiterer and was determined to be the first to disseminate the news of Mr. Frost's early departure.

"Hullo, Elizabeth. Nice morning."

"Yes, dear. Whatever's in your basket smells delicious!"

"Was scones. For Lucia and Georgie's trip today."

"That reminds me," Elizabeth said, falling right into Diva's lap, "I haven't heard Mr. Frost's car yet. I hope there hasn't been a falling out? It would be a tragedy if Worship has to cancel her trip." (It would be a major tragedy for Elizabeth if Lucia did have to cancel, but just how much of a tragedy Diva must never know.)

Diva smiled condescendingly. "Didn't you hear? Mr. Frost left yesterday to get a good place for his mechanic's truck. I'm surprised you aren't up on this sort of thing. Your knowledge of the Tunis Grand Prix at Carthage, and so on, led me to believe that you knew all about racing. Au reservoir."

Despite this savage treatment at the hands of Diva, Elizabeth finished up her marketing and was cordial to her when they happened to meet while walking up West Street toward Mallards. Elizabeth tolerated Mrs. Plaistow's presence only because she was determined to view Lucia's departure with her own eyes, and was not about to miss it for anything. Besides, retribution against Diva's rudeness could easily wait for another time.

There they met the Bartletts who had bicycled over from the Vicarage. The Wyses had dismounted from their Royce and Susan directed the chauffeur to back down into Porpoise Street in order to leave West Street open for the departing racing enthusiasts.

As Cadman stowed the last of the luggage, Lucia appeared in a racing scarf and large, white sunhat. She waved at her assembled friends in the manner of a queen on a tour of her subjects.

Elizabeth smiled. "Don't forget us, now dear Worship. Drop us a postcard now and again."

"Yes, indeed," Lucia said diplomatically. "I shall let you all know how the races go. Come, Georgie, we shall be late. Major Benjy, I am certain, is at his golfing, but I wonder where quaint Irene is? Surely she knows we are leaving?"

Irene's inexplicable absence was all-too reasonable from Georgie's perspective. He knew that at the moment of their departure Irene had an appointment

with a tradesman who had promised quick and accurate work, at a price, of course. Georgie himself had donated fifty pounds to the cause, and Irene had vowed to cover the remaining expenses. The only remaining matter was to put forth the proposition to the Town Council. He was hopeful that the presentation would be a mere formality, considering how well beloved Lucia was by the majority of that august body.

But regardless of how that petition was to turn out, now was the beginning of their holiday. The Pillsons left in a cloud of petrol vapours and waving handkerchiefs, leaving the residents standing about in the warm October morning.