VISITORS TO HUGO

By

ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

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VISITORS TO HUGO

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ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

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TO MRS. E. A. WOOD

Dear Gladys,

Hugo was a lad of two great preoccupations, the villainy of elders and the obligations of a friend. Though his views on the former were changed by experience, as a friend he did not change. Therefore how could I give him any godmother but you?

Yours affectionately,
A. G. R.

London, 1929.

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EPILOGUE

VISITORS TO HUGO

(*As he sees them.*)

LADY DONALDSON, *his mother and a Lady of Grace*.

PORTAL, *letting in the morning*.

TRIGHT, *who is bland*.

LADY ELEANOR WISE, *a great aunt and great gossip on his mother's side, who goes everywhere, knows everyone and says everything*.

BUNNY MOLYNEUX, *and she's no rabbit*.

THE HOUND, *disguised as a terrier*.

SIR JOHN WINDE, *not such a liar as the rest of them*.

MRS. HALLETT, *a very private secretary*.

TESSIE ANSTRUTHER, *who doesn't believe in love or parents*.

ROBIN, *Bunny's dragon*.

ROLAND WISE, *his cousin and an ass*.

SIR RICHARD DONALDSON K. C., *his father*.

PAUL, *his friend*.

VISITORS TO HUGO

CHAPTER I

i

"NOW, that's dashed funny," said Hugo in the middle of the night. "Perhaps he's dead."

He spoke aloud, yet softly, lest he should awaken Tright who slept in the next room with the door cunningly ajar between them. Hugo could not see the door, but he knew all about it and was not in the least deceived by the gentle bang Tright gave it every night on retiring. They had taken the latch off, of course. How easy, for a door without a latch never really shuts, and they had not imagined the invalid would think of that. But Hugo, lying there through the age long days and nights, had learned to match their cunning with his own. He knew.

Tright made it a point of honour to be a light sleeper but there was nothing else in the least light about him. He was not a fellow of whom you could make a confidant, and Hugo's midnight conversations with himself were inclined to be very confidential indeed.

They all revolved about one central theme, and sometimes he argued as a defendant and sometimes as a plaintiff, but always he finished with the same puzzled question:

"Why the devil don't you come and see me, father?"

“It isn’t as if I were the only fellow who had ever got sent down from Oxford,” Hugo the defendant would begin. “Of course I started the rag, but I never thought those silly asses would go so far, and when they nabbed me for being at the bottom of it I couldn’t go and push the blame on to somebody else.”

The weakness of this argument was that it could never actually be used, for though true in fact, it was altogether too smug and self-righteous when put into words; and Hugo, wistfully remembering that, would become the plaintiff instead and argue with indignation:

“If you knew anything whatever about me you’d know I wasn’t just rioting and wasting my time and your money. I’d been swotting jolly hard as a matter of fact, because I had a scheme. . . .”

His scheme and Jimmy Webster’s! Always the glamour of it came rushing back upon him like a tide that must presently ebb again, leaving him empty and forlorn.

He had hardly known Webster until that memorable night when he had heard an old fossil named Archer was to address the Union on some Syrian excavation or other.

Hugo had never aspired to be one of the ornaments of the Union. Those chaps who grew hot over politics and other causes and rivalled each other in being too clever for words, filled him with a mild wonder; but he liked the sound of Syria, for places had a charm for him where causes left him cold. And as it turned out, Archer had proved less a fossil than a flame. He was a tall man with very bright blue eyes and an ardour that seemed to bring old dynasties before

Hugo's eager gaze, carrying him out of the dead present into the living past.

Odd that Webster sitting beside him, owl-like behind his thick glasses and to Hugo's fastidious view almost unkempt, should have felt it too. The two fellows, a short hour ago such worlds apart, were suddenly "gazing at each other with a wild surmise."

Webster had had the start of Hugo. He was a studious chap already up in his subject, and talking late into the night he had given the new devoté a list of books to read and the address of a tutor for Arabic. Archer had room for keen young men on his job but he had made it clear that he did not want them in the raw; and Hugo had seen the force of getting in the ground work as a proof to his father that archæology was his real love and his true destiny.

He was quick at languages and by the time he was sent down he was so deeply entranced by his subject as to consider that event rather as a mild nuisance than a catastrophe. If he had intended to produce his new enthusiasm as a palliative to his father's wrath, however, he had had no opportunity.

Hugo had gone jauntily to the interview, for he knew no other way. He had come from it shaken and cold, convinced that he had never known his father, yet still vaguely and comfortingly aware of the palliative behind.

He'd been a silly ass; he hadn't been able to get in a word, but then he had been taken by surprise. Having been told to get out of his father's sight he had driven off through the winter dusk in his little two-seater, feverishly planning

the defence which he would put up when the first fury of parental rage had passed.

But the steering of the car had been giving trouble . . . ought to have been seen to long before . . . and next morning he had been brought back broken to his father's house.

Hugo knew little of the weeks that followed. They were a dark horror against which he closed his mind; but at last, conscious and sane again, he had awakened in this room his mother had prepared for him—a lovely stage for the last long act he had to face.

Presently he was allowed a few visitors, but his father never came. Hugo, at first too eager and too shy to ask for him, was soon too angry, and at last utterly unable to voice the question.

"Damn it, if he doesn't want to come, I'm not going to trade on his pity," he cried furiously to the empty air.

But why didn't he come? This question became Hugo's great preoccupation, the one real thing in a world that had become unreal. It hung suspended in his mind all day, but at night when Tright had banged the dividing door, it began revolving round and round his mind and in and out of his troubled dreams.

It was so utterly incomprehensible.

"You have disgraced your name," his father had said, but that was nonsense, and anyway he might have made a few enquiries and given a fellow the benefit of the doubt.

Hugo had never been intimate with his father, but that had not seemed strange to him. Intimacies were his mother's province, and Hugo, ungregarious and inarticulate by nature, had found them embarrassing—something from which his father stood rather gloriously apart.

He had always supposed, though subconsciously, for it had never been his habit to think about such things, that his father was aware of this secret alliance between them.

"Hang it all, I'm his son," he thought.

"Or perhaps not," said a suddenly cynical Hugo, pleasantly conscious of saying something that would raise the wind. He played with the idea but he knew there was nothing in it, for apart from everything else, what about the likeness? Both were tall; both had the same lean, dark face, the same square chin.

"So like his dear father." A procession of elders had cried it aloud in his presence down the years, and the child and the boy to whom personalities had always seemed vaguely indecent, had never minded that one.

"But why the devil doesn't he come to see me then?" cried Hugo. And later, as a great inspiration, "That's dashed funny. Perhaps he's dead."

It was such a wonderful idea that he held his breath, fearful of having shouted it, but there was no stir from the next room, and close beside him he could hear the little clock ticking busily on. Like everything else in this perfect room it was so deftly placed for his convenience that he could see the time, day or night, and that was funny to Hugo, for whom Time had no meaning any more. Yet he liked its friendly,

luminous face in the darkness and now he said to it confidentially:

"Of course if he's dead, that would explain everything."

A great heaviness was lifted from him at the thought; he grew excited and almost felt he could get up and walk.

His father must be dead. So many things pointed to it, for why otherwise had none of the visitors ever mentioned his name? Oh yes, Hugo had noticed that, all right. With the terrible awareness of the invalid he noticed everything, and knew that Life—that strange thing which he had left behind him in the winter dusk—came to him now through a sieve made by many careful hands.

His father was dead and they were keeping it dark. They hadn't dared to break it to him.

"Everybody comes to see darling Hugo," was his mother's invariable introduction of a new visitor to the perfect room. And "What an awful cram", was Hugo's secret answer to this. He'd have said: "What a dam' lie", if it hadn't been his mother. But perhaps it was not a lie.

He would ask Tright in the morning . . . not straight out, of course, because you had to be cunning. Hugo had discovered that. He would say: "Any deaths in the family since you've been with us, Tright?" And old Tright would deny it, no doubt, but his face would give him away. Nearly everybody's face had begun to do that to Hugo. Or he could put it more cunningly still and give the fellow a shock. Yes, that was the way to do it. He would say nonchalantly and as though he knew all about it: "Where did they bury my father, Tright?"

“I hope he’s dead,” said Hugo, eagerly to the little clock.

If he were dead he would know all about it, or perhaps he wouldn’t know anything at all. Hugo had no views about Death. That was another thing he had shut away, because if he thought of it, he might want it too much. He wasn’t going to die. He knew that well enough.

“Escaped death by a miracle,” Dr. Hissop had said in his hearty way. Hugo, not so sure of the miracle, had answered with spurious enthusiasm: “My word!”

Funny thing, Death, but not half so dam’ funny as Life. Hugo laughed, and a wind coming over the park in the dawn blew in his curtains as though some giant force outside laughed with him.

“Why the devil don’t you come and see me, father?” said the refrain in Hugo’s head.

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It was morning at last. The whisper of Portal’s footsteps in the corridor outside his door proclaimed it, and the little clock, ticking its head off, said five to seven to Hugo’s incurious gaze. Portal’s every movement was a Hush and he wanted to shout to her: “Hang it all, Portal, do make a row. I am so tired of hushing.”

Yet he was grateful to Portal because every morning she came as a signal that the long agony of the night was past. Presently she would come in, in her blue starched frock, carrying her little tray of blue china; she would put down the tray gently and pull the curtains back so that the morning

light revealed the plain blue carpet, fitting so snugly to the base of the pale primrose walls. No patterns here to fret the nerves of an invalid, and this tone of blue was such a cheerful colour. Hugo could almost hear his mother saying so as she set his stage. She couldn't know that the blue carpet made him think of those far seas that he could never travel now.

Every piece of furniture that the morning light would reveal was perfect too; the little desk which could be rolled to his bedside in a moment; the carved oak table, black with age and polished with generations of elbow grease; the bookcase, full of bright-backed volumes ("Never mind their innards," said Hugo in his savage moments); even the wireless cabinet. None of the homely bedroom things were here; no dressing-table or washstand, no heap of clothes tossed down by someone eager for sleep, with all the bright hurry of the day just over to colour his dreams. The bed, running on pneumatic wheels, so that Hugo could be moved without pain to Tright's room for the daily business of massage and toilet, or on to the balcony, looked like an invader in a strange country. Only the three deep leather chairs and the rack of pipes and tobacco at his hand gave Hugo comfort, for they at least were masculine.

The shabby treasures from his old room downstairs had not been moved up here . . . even the school groups, that one of the eleven when they had whacked Harrow at Lord's and Paul Mostyn was the captain; and last year's eight, when he had rowed three and his college was Head of the River.

"I can't see that I've been such an awful failure," said Hugo, recalling his part in these great occasions. He would

have liked the groups to look at sometimes, but he felt he couldn't spoil his mother's setting. They would be so incongruous with those long lovely pictures of sunlit woods and gardens she had hung about him.

"It's like a dam' drawing-room," mourned Hugo. And then the door opened and Portal came in.

"I hope I see you better, Mr. Hugo," said Portal, producing the morning like a conjurer with one sweep of her blue arm.

"Splendid," lied Hugo. "I think I'll get up."

"Now don't you be in too much of a hurry," advised Portal, taking him literally, though well she knew he would never get up any more, for so the doctors said and they ought to know. "You have a good rest and grow strong."

"Is that what you advise?" asked Hugo, wondering whether he could spring his momentous question upon Portal. She was pouring out his morning tea, fresh made on a gas ring in the improvised kitchen beyond, to save its stewing all the way upstairs.

"Yes indeed," said Portal, "my brother-in-law's nephew was in a motor accident, just like you, Mr. Hugo. Fair cut about he was. He's chauffeur to a gentleman at Woking. But now he's about again as well as well, all through resting himself proper and taking things quiet."

"There now," said Hugo with becoming admiration.

"Yes," said Portal, to whom all motor accidents were evidently the same motor accident. "So you mind. And

there's your tea. Brightens you up something wonderful, a nice cup of tea in the morning."

"What, primroses?" exclaimed Hugo, suddenly.

They were in a little round jar on Portal's tray and he saw her smile with delight because he had noticed them.

"I picked them for you in the wood down home with my own hands," said Portal shyly. "Her ladyship gave me the day off yesterday because my mother was bad. They are the first flowers of spring, Mr. Hugo. You wish."

But Hugo couldn't wish. He was suddenly desperately afraid to wish, and his mind flew instead to the picture of Portal's bad mother . . . a wicked old woman in a wood. He smiled and Portal departed happily, leaving her flowers of spring.

After all, he hadn't been able to ask her. She was such a nice old thing, letting in the morning. You couldn't be cunning with Portal as you could with Tright.

Hugo hated Tright, with the terrible hatred of an utter and humiliating dependence, but Tright didn't know it. He wouldn't believe it or care. Hating Tright was like banging your head on a feather pillow. Tright had a round, clean, rather flat face. He was bland.

Hugo played with the word, pleased and a little excited because it fitted so exactly. He wondered what it felt like to be bland, but how absurd! It couldn't feel like anything. There were no feelings behind Tright's round face, he was sure, only layers and layers of blandness. Yet somebody had married him, "or very nearly," said Hugo the cynical; that

was the funny thing, for there was “the young man my daughter’s walking out with.”

“What, you haven’t a daughter, Tright,” Hugo had exclaimed, when he first heard of this wonder.

“That’s right,” said Tright.

“That’s right” was the fellow’s invariable formula. Hugo suspected that he had built a reputation on it. It marked him to the unseeing eyes of people who had invalids in the family as being so cheerful, so exactly right for the sick room. Hugo was convinced that if he said suddenly to Tright one morning: “I believe you’ve committed a murder,” he could still get the same answer: “That’s right!”

Yet Tright had clever hands that could bring you ease after hours of agonising pain, a strange gift which he wielded casually, and stranger still, never withheld. Hugo didn’t believe he could possibly be aware of his power. Well, he wouldn’t let him get wind of it. He must be very cunning about that, concealing his rapture when the pain had gone.

“Good morning, sir,” said Tright. “You’ve had a real good night, now haven’t you? That’s right.”

Tright never asked questions of his patient, except to answer them himself. He knew, in his own estimation, all about Hugo’s nights and days. He told the doctor of them on the other side of the dividing door in long conversations, while the boy, lying helpless, with the sea of blue carpet round him in his perfect room, fought to shut out the hum of their voices and the dreadful thought of what Tright might imagine he knew. They were full of secrets about him, Tright

and the doctor, but they were all the wrong secrets. That was the only comfort Hugo had.

"They can't know what I think or what I really feel," said Hugo with defiance, and wickedly determined to mislead the lot of them. The world of people who walked upright were in league against him. They had become his enemies.

"You've had a nice cup of tea. That's right, and now we'll get you freshened up," said Tright.

Hugo had known exactly what was coming. He had been waiting for it, and as the clever hands began very deftly moving his bed to the other room, he closed his eyes and shut his teeth hard, and all the misery of his helplessness came down upon him like a dark curtain that smothered even the great secret about his father.

Hugo dared not think during the process of being freshened up. He could not speak, but he listened for the soft hum of the vacuum cleaner next door and to Portal in there, opening the French windows on to the balcony to let in the morning air and the scent of the trees and grasses of Hyde Park, and the far faint noises of the world. He listened for the crackle of wood as she built up his fire; he pictured her stooping down to it in her blue dress, and getting up again and looking so pleased because she had picked him some primroses with her own hands. He tried to believe he could smell Portal's flowers of spring, instead of all the hospital stinks of this diabolical world over which Tright presided. . . . Tright looking idiotic in his white overall, yet so damnably sure of himself and so unconscious of the soothing gentleness of his hands.

Portal had finished at last. She was going away; he could hear her closing the door of his room but he couldn't picture what she would do next . . . go down to her own breakfast perhaps with a lot of strange people he didn't know, except old Leeder.

Leeder, as one privileged by long acquaintance, would creep in to see him now and then, saying in a stage whisper:

"I hope you're feeling better, Mr. Hugo. Now there's a horse I've heard of for the three thirty, if you'd like a bit on."

And Hugo, for whom money could buy nothing worth having any more, would answer:

"My word, we'll make our fortunes yet." And for the sake of the old days, when these flutters with Leeder had been a secret rich delight, would give him half a crown. And generally he would lose it, to Leeder's distress, and sometimes he would win a few shillings, which Leeder would bring up to him as though the fortune were already made.

"I dread to think what her ladyship would say to me," was always Leeder's rather gleeful cry when he had spotted a winner; for Leeder was in it with the rest of them. He never wondered what the master would say, at least in Hugo's hearing.

"But then of course he's dead," thought Hugo.

The freshening up was nearly completed; he could think again, looking without malevolence at Tright's absurdly night-gowned figure and his rows and rows of bottles. Eagerly he began planning his momentous question, but

Tright was too quick for him. He was aware of the gentlest, unhurried movement of the bed, and:

"That's right," said Tright, wheeling him back to the blue sea, and was off to see about his own breakfast and Hugo's.

Shaved, freshened indeed and oh, so strangely eased and comfortable for the moment, the boy lay back on his pillows, the soft silk of his pyjamas cool on his long arms. Nothing wrong with the pyjamas. They were blue with a thin stripe of pale yellow, and Hugo knew that in the incredibly long-ago days when he was a Blood, he would have thought them distinctly nobby. But now they were just part of the setting, and sometimes in his bitter moments, he would say to himself viciously:

"I wonder they don't get Tright to curl my hair."

These protests were never spoken aloud, however. He was his mother's prize piece and she must do what she would with him.

The young morning looked in at the window. The stage was set for another day.

CHAPTER II

BREAKFAST was over and Tright had gone away, but the great question was still unasked. It was almost as though Tright knew, he was in such a hurry this morning, and of course you had to approach the thing cunningly and carefully. You couldn't just shout it at him.

"Awfully hard to say things, somehow," mused Hugo, "things you really want to say."

The calendar standing on his desk told him it was Tuesday, March 19th, but Tuesdays had lost their savour and March seemed merely a useless label since it couldn't mean the boat race for him any more. It came to Hugo that all the things that had punctuated his life in the past were swept away. Once the year had been round, to him, beautifully round, with Christmas at the bottom and summer on top, with Easter on the right hand side and autumn on the left. The months had been squarish and the weeks short, rather jolly tracks along which one dashed backwards and forwards. All this had gone, and only a long, straight, monotonous road remained.

"Now that's funny," said Hugo, who had never been conscious of the shape of the year before. "I'm dead certain it used to be round."

He began to hate the calendar, for what was the good of Tuesday, March 19th, to him, when there was nothing to count the days for any more? He turned the nineteen upside down in his mind and made it sixty-one, and somehow he

liked it better that way. The 61st of March! Yes, now that would be something like a day. He tried turning over the March too. Rather difficult. It would look like . . . like a sort of inscription. Suddenly he thought of a tall man with very blue eyes and little Webster in his glasses and the tombs of Assyrian kings.

"I wish the carpet wasn't so dam' blue," said Hugo miserably.

Someone was coming and his heart gave a jump, but he knew it couldn't really be his father.

"Because he's dead," whispered Hugo.

It was his mother, and she didn't hush like Portal, but opened the door cheerfully, as cheerfully as you can open a door that is muffled all round with baize. She came in smiling, with a bright colour in her cheeks and a lovely sheen on her brown shingled hair. Her morning suit of some creamy stuff with a touch of Lincoln green about it, suited her slim figure; her creamy shoes were pointed and small. She could dance well. Hugo knew.

"Such a lovely day, darling. Spring at last," said Lady Donaldson, as though she had personally arranged it. "And Tright tells me you have had a splendid night. Won't the doctor be pleased?"

She kissed him, and her long, lovely hand with its beautiful rings played with his unresponsive fingers.

"Oh, rather," said Hugo, noncommittally. What did he care for the spring or the doctor's pleasure either? Little the doctor knew.

“Aren’t there any letters for me?” he demanded in an injured voice.

He wasn’t really expecting any and knew he wouldn’t like them if they came, but he felt there ought to be letters and perhaps the world in league against him was holding them back.

“Not this morning, dear, but there’s an invitation for us all for Roland’s wedding to Tessie Anstruther; so you must think up what sort of present you would like to send them and I’ll go and choose it for you.”

“Roland’s an ass,” said Hugo. “I can’t think of anything suitable for an ass except a bale of hay. Let’s get him one.”

“Oh, Hugo darling, you are better this morning. You are in one of your wicked moods,” declared his mother, lively and reproachful. “Poor Roland would be most dreadfully hurt.”

“And when they are being married,” proceeded Hugo, “if the parson has any sense at all, he’ll say ‘Let us bray.’”

“Hugo, you are positively irreverent, and in Lent too. Besides,” said Lady Donaldson triumphantly, “they are to be married by the Bishop.”

“No?” said Hugo with polite incredulity.

“Yes, darling, of course, because you remember he’s her uncle.”

“Roland is?”

“No, no. How could he marry his niece? It wouldn’t be legal. The Bishop is Tessie Anstruther’s uncle,” explained

Lady Donaldson.

"And he is going to marry her?" enquired Hugo, innocently.

"Yes darling. That's what I'm telling you."

"How scandalous!" said Hugo.

At sight of his mother's bewildered face he laughed and patted her hand.

"It's all right, mother, I'm only pulling your leg," he said.

And Lady Donaldson exclaimed: "Oh, Hugo, dearest boy, you're just like. . . . You're dreadful. You are, really."

She had broken off, catching her breath and glancing at him in a frightened way, but Hugo knew.

"Who am I just like?" he demanded, with a dark look.

"Exactly like Aunt Eleanor," cried his mother, clutching at the inspiration. "And that reminds me, she's in town and coming to see you to-day. Now, what do you think of that?"

Hugo felt it would be better not to tell her what he thought of that.

"All the antiques, eh?" he said, grinning. "Uncle William yesterday and Aunt Eleanor to-day."

"Darling boy, you will be nice to her, won't you? Because after all she is very important," said his mother anxiously.

"Why is she?" enquired Hugo in an obstinate tone.

“Well, she’s quite the most important member of the family, Hugo. What is it, Tright? . . . The doctor? Come along, doctor, your patient is a perfect rascal this morning and I can do nothing with him.”

“Ah, you leave him to me, Lady Donaldson,” said Dr. Hissop jovially. “I know the young scoundrel. I’ll soon settle him.”

It was a hint to his mother to go and she took it, smiling that intimate smile which had always vaguely embarrassed her son. It was as though, he thought suddenly, she carried all her affections in her face, and they might brim over at any moment. He felt it was somehow mean of him to notice this and to mind.

“So you’ve had a good night?” said the doctor, “and you’re full of beans this morning? Let’s have a look at you.”

The doctor’s hands were not as clever as Tright’s and the boy held hard to his endurance, a furrow of pain between his dark eyes.

Seeking frantically for some subject to steady his mind, he remembered the great secret, and as Dr. Hissop straightened himself at last, he blurted out: “Ever attend any deaths in our family, doctor?”

“What’s that?” thundered the doctor with pretended indignation. “You think I kill my patients, do you? Not a bit of it, my boy. They’ve got to stay alive and support me in my old age.”

Hugo scowled, for it seemed to him a pretty poor evasion, and the doctor’s quick look had not been lost upon him.

“Well, you ought to be jolly grateful to me,” said Hugo. “I’m a stayer, I am. You won’t get rid of this patient in a hurry.”

“I should think not, indeed,” snorted the doctor. “Why, you’re a better life than half the fellows walking about London at this very moment. A nice sort of conversation for a bright spring morning, I must say. Let me see, now. How old are you again?”

“Twenty-one,” said Hugo, and then at something in the other man’s face, something so near to pity that it hurt, he forced a grin and added: “I’ll do you down yet, doctor. One of these fine mornings you’ll come round and find me up and about.”

“And I wouldn’t put it past you either,” said the doctor with a beam of satisfaction. “Defy your medical adviser, would you? You’ll get up when I tell you and not before, my bright lad.”

On this cheerful note, entirely insincere on both sides, the doctor went away and Hugo closed his eyes, black misery engulfing him.

The doctor had dodged the question. Would they never tell him whether his father was dead?

“Of course he’s dead,” said Hugo to himself. “That just shows.”

He could hear voices in the next room, the doctor talking and talking to Tright. He was warning him of course that Hugo was beginning to suspect about his father. No use trying to spring his question on Tright after that, for the fellow would be prepared. And it was such a jolly good

question too. “Where did they bury my father, Tright?” What an ass he had been to say anything about it to the doctor.

And his mother had said he was just like . . . and then had broken off in a horrified way. Didn’t that prove it? She was always jolly and cheerful and so pretty, his mother, and yet, could she be so cheerful if his father were dead? The thought pulled Hugo up short. But then perhaps it was just put on for his benefit, like all the lies they told about his being better and having had a splendid night. Or perhaps she hadn’t really liked his father very much. Hugo had always imagined she did, but how could he know, after all?

In the busy carefree past he had taken such things for granted and he had never thought about people very much, but now they were all that was left in the world and he was finding them new and strange . . . he was finding them out.

“They’re awful liars,” said Hugo confidentially to himself. But he wasn’t going to be taken in by them. He *would* find out about his father. If he couldn’t do it any other way, he’d write to one of the newspapers that have Answers to Correspondents, asking whether Sir Richard Donaldson, K.C., were dead or alive, signing himself Wm. Smith or something.

But then they would see the letter going out and wonder what he was writing about, and perhaps they wouldn’t send it. You never knew.

“I’ve got it,” said Hugo excitedly. “I’ll look him up in ‘Who’s Who.’ Tright. . . . I say, Tright.”

Tright came at once with an air of knowing all about it, but as usual he was wrong.

“I want a ‘Who’s Who’, Tright. Just nip downstairs and see if you can pinch it for me. There’s a good chap. In the library. You needn’t bother anyone.”

“That’s right,” said Tright.

He was away a long time. Perhaps the doctor hadn’t left the house yet and Tright had run down to tell him Hugo wanted ‘Who’s Who’. He could picture them wondering why he wanted it, and calling his mother, and the three of them putting their heads together and suddenly suspecting, and plotting to keep it from him.

But no. Tright had come back, the fat red book in his arms, and Hugo hid his eagerness and said: “Thanks awfully. Just put it on the bed, will you?”

“It’s heavy,” said Tright. “I think we’d better have the bed-rest.”

“No, no,” cried Hugo frantically. He loathed the bed-rest. It made him feel clamped down, imprisoned, desperate, and although he knew he couldn’t move and was just as inevitably clamped down without it, his secret terror of it still persisted.

“I’ll manage. Don’t you worry,” he said placatingly to Tright.

He wasn’t going to look at the book while Tright was hanging about, and he watched him out of a corner of his eye as he pulled the curtains a little so that the light should be better, turned the bed ever so slightly, and pushed the round table close enough for the fat red book to rest against it.

“That’s a clever dodge. Thanks,” said Hugo, and at last Tright was gone.

But Hugo’s trembling fingers, turning the pages of his treasure, had not found the place when there was a sound at the door and he knew it was his mother coming. He hid the red book under the eiderdown just as he heard the inevitable introduction.

“Everybody comes to see darling Hugo, but you are his first visitor to-day, Aunt Eleanor. I am so glad.”

Lady Eleanor Wise was a great aunt and a great gossip, on his mother’s side. Somebody had once declared that she knew everybody, went everywhere and said everything, and that directly you had a skeleton in your family cupboard she labelled you indelibly. You became “poor So-and-So” to her for ever after.

Hugo had always considered her an amusing old bird and now, as she came sailing into his room, it struck him that bird was the exact expression. She was like a parrot, and her hat, boat-shaped and close to her head at the sides and going up from the front in a sort of crest, increased the likeness. Her silken plumage rustled as she walked.

She looked Hugo and his setting over, nodding her head at Lady Donaldson.

“You be thankful you have him safe under your eyes, Amy,” she said significantly. “Not like poor Mary Mostyn.”

Hugo’s mother looked suddenly distressed.

“It’s too dreadful, isn’t it?” she said. “Have you seen Mary?”

“Yes indeed. ‘Dear Lady Eleanor,’ she said to me with the tears streaming down her cheeks, ‘I shall never be able to look the world in the face again.’”

This seemed so utterly unlike anything Mrs. Mostyn could have said in any circumstances, that Hugo wanted to laugh, but he restrained the impulse because the conversation was beyond him at the moment and he wished to know what it was all about.

“I said to Mary, ‘Charm is to blame for it, my dear. You mark my words. I’m surprised that a clever woman like you shouldn’t have seen that danger long ago.’ And poor Mary just bowed her head, too moved to speak. Look at the cases on every side of us,” proceeded Aunt Eleanor. “There was that young Tony Rockington. Charm again, and what happens? He marries a chorus girl and goes completely to the dogs.”

“Oh, but did he?” protested Hugo’s mother. “You know, the Rockingtons hear from them quite regularly, and he and his wife are in America.”

“Well, there you are. Why?” said Lady Eleanor significantly. “Nobody, my dear Amy, lives in America . . . except of course the poor creatures who are born there . . . without a sufficient reason. Then there was the Andrew Matlocks’ second girl. She ran off with goodness knows whom, some scoundrel, only to find he had at least two other wives. Charm again. I could quote you a dozen cases.”

“But who is the charming villain who has led Mrs. Mostyn astray?” enquired Hugo at this point.

"Hugo *darling*!"

"Well, isn't that what Aunt Eleanor said?"

"You'd put words into my mouth, would you, young man?" said Aunt Eleanor magisterially. "Then let me tell you that you should thank Providence you are in a comfortable bed with a devoted mother to look after you instead of beside your friend Paul Mostyn. I know you young people of the present day . . . all alike, everyone of you."

"Oh, Aunt Eleanor, not Hugo."

"Paul?" said Hugo quickly. "What is the matter with Paul? He isn't . . . he isn't dead, is he?"

"Dead? Better if he were," said Lady Eleanor. "As poor Mary said, 'I'd rather see him lying dead at my feet.' Paul is in one of His Majesty's prisons, Hugo."

"Paul in prison? Why . . . where . . . what has he done?" cried Hugo, so white that his mother hurried to his side.

"Hugo darling, I thought you knew. It was in all the papers and I haven't talked about it to you because I knew you were so fond of Paul."

"Ah!" said Aunt Eleanor to that.

"Everybody is fond of Paul," said Hugo in quick defence. "Reading the papers makes me so tired, mother, and I didn't know a thing. I've been wondering why I hadn't heard of Paul, and you know at Christmas when I went round to see him they said he was away."

"Yes, I know, dear, but now it turns out he had got himself entangled with this wretched girl and they were

hoping to persuade him to give her up."

"What wretched girl?" asked Hugo, utterly bewildered.

"The one he married. Some girl no one knows anything about, out of a shop or office or some such place. It was a shock to me, for I always thought he was going to marry Bunny Molyneux."

"And so did everybody else, including Bunny Molyneux," declared Lady Eleanor. "Poor Mary says Bunny cried like a child and said, 'Oh, Mrs. Mostyn, if he wanted money so badly, why didn't he forge my name instead of stealing from strangers in a night club.'"

Hugo scowled at his aunt. He was furious. Bunny Molyneux crying like a child indeed! Bunny had never cried like a child in her life, and Paul stealing from strangers in a night club . . . Paul in jail?

"I don't believe a word of it," shouted Hugo, angrily.

In his excitement he tried to move, and a dreadful wave of agony shut out the world. Somewhere at an immense distance he could hear his mother's voice calling "Tright . . . Tright!"

Then he fainted.

CHAPTER III

i

HUGO opened his eyes drowsily and stared at a picture of a garden full of summer flowers. It annoyed him and he wondered vaguely why. Pretty, that was it.

"Damn it. I wish I could chuck something at the beastly thing," thought Hugo.

Something heavy was on the bed under the eiderdown. He moved an exploring hand and felt the thick edges of the "Who's Who", but the movement brought Tright who had been sitting in one of the chairs out of the patient's view, and Hugo stilled his hand instinctively.

"Had a little doze?" said Tright. "That's right."

What was the fellow hanging about for? Hugo, looking up into the round, flat face, found an expression there that surprised him. It was almost solicitous and one-man-to-anotherish.

"The ladies, they will talk and it's wearing. I thought I'd sit here a bit and keep them off," said Tright, and went back to his chair.

Tright actually explaining himself and regarding Hugo for a moment as a person and not a case; Tright appointing himself an ally instead of an enemy . . . a warder!

A warder? Hugo's mind, struggling back from the effect of the drug which Tright could now be persuaded to give him

only when the need was desperate and the pain past bearing, caught at the word, and comprehension and full remembrance came at last.

Paul in prison? Paul stealing from strangers in a night club, and Bunny Molyneux crying like a child!

No, it was all wrong. It was perfectly idiotic. Hugo wouldn't believe it.

He had always liked Paul, but then everybody had liked Paul and Paul had liked everybody, grinning all over his face and full of beans. There was that year he had captained the school eleven at Lord's and beaten Harrow. Talk of thrills! Hugo had been certain old Paul would play for England some day, but later Paul had given up cricket . . . a dashed pity, Hugo thought it, but Mr. Mostyn considered games a waste of time. He was like that, and Paul was always so ready to agree that other people were probably right.

Paul in jail . . . Paul with his hair, that never would lie down and look sleek, cropped close; Paul, always a bit fastidious about his clothes, wearing sloppy bags and a beastly coat with broad arrows! It was ghastly.

And Bunny Molyneux crying like a child? No, no, Hugo wasn't going to believe a lie like that. It put the lid on the whole thing. What was that silly rhyme they used to chant about her . . . "She's a Bunny but no rabbit."

Hugo couldn't remember the rest of it at the moment, but he remembered the occasion perfectly, . . . one summer at the seaside, ages and ages ago when they were all mere kids. The War was still on and their parents busy all over the place; and governesses and people had taken them down, Paul and

Alison Mostyn, and Roland and Muriel Wise, and the three Anstruthers and Hugo. And then little Bunny Molyneux and her dragon had somehow joined on, Bunny a thin, spindly-legged, sallow child, not pretty like the other girls, but fierce as a boy and fighting with her fists. Bunny cry? The very idea made Hugo laugh.

They had had a row about her name, he remembered, which Roland, being older and an ass, said ought to be pronounced "Molly-knew."

"Funny Bunny Molyneux" . . . Hugo had got the first line now. Alison had composed it, for she was older too, fair like Paul and clever. Alison had married Bill Anstruther and gone to India, and Hugo had always supposed Bunny would marry Paul. She was an orphan and an heiress and the Mostyns had taken her up; and ever since that summer holiday she had been about among the crowd that Hugo knew, and always by divine right she had seemed to belong to Paul.

"I'd like to see Bunny," said Hugo restlessly. "I must see Bunny."

She'd tell him. Bunny wouldn't lie.

His mother came in softly, her usually cheerful face veiled by an anxious look.

"Mother, I want to see Bunny Molyneux," said Hugo eagerly.

"Hugo, darling, not any more visitors to-day," pleaded Lady Donaldson, with a quick glance for help in Tright's direction. (But Tright was an ally now, not a warder.) "I don't think he ought to, Tright. People are so stupid and . . . and upsetting."

“Bunny won’t upset me,” urged Hugo. “You could ring her up and perhaps she would come round while Tright goes out.”

“Well, now, I wasn’t thinking of going out, not to-day,” hedged Tright. “Didn’t feel much like it, to tell you the truth, Mr. Donaldson.”

“But you must go out for your two hours off,” cried Hugo. “I never heard of such a thing.”

“Now fancy you noticing that,” said Tright in a pleased tone. He was proud, but not vainglorious about it. His patient was coming on. Hugo saw suddenly that Tright believed he never noticed anything . . . he who noticed so much.

“I must see Bunny, mother, please,” said Hugo, restlessly. “You needn’t be afraid. I’ve simply got to see her.”

“Very well, dear, I’ll telephone,” agreed his mother at the shadow of a nod from Tright.

Hugo knew that she was going off to prime up Bunny about all the things she mustn’t say to him, but he didn’t mind.

“Though a Bunny, she’s no rabbit,” thought Hugo, grinning to himself.

ii

“Miss Molyneux to see you, sir,” said Leeder’s voice at the door. Tright slipped away as the visitor came in.

“Hullo, Hugo. Any admission for the Hound?” asked Bunny. “Leeder wasn’t sure.”

“Rather!” said Hugo. Then, as the black and white tousled head of a wire-haired terrier came into view, he added with a note of pleased surprise: “My God, Bunny, he’s a blinking bloodhound.”

The bloodhound sniffed one of the leather chairs, then sat in it, and Bunny perched herself on the arm, her slim, cinnamon-coloured legs crossed and her small, piquant face turned to the invalid with critical approval.

“Look all right,” said Bunny, “but then of course I’ve never seen you in pyjamas before. Very chic.”

“I have some even chic-er than this,” said Hugo eagerly, to hide the thought that no one would ever see him in anything else any more. “Whole sets of ’em. You wouldn’t believe.”

“Any red ones?” asked Bunny with interest. “I have, flaming scarlet with a gold dragon spitting fire and brimstone down the front. One of these days I think I’ll wear them in the park.”

“Good egg! Under my window,” encouraged Hugo, delighted. And then the lines that had been haunting him came back at last and he began to chant:

> “Funny Bunny Molyneux
> Says her name should rhyme with dux;
> If you call her Molly-knew
> She will chuck a brick at you.
> That is Bunny’s funny habit,
> Though a Bunny, she’s no rabbit.”

Bunny gave a shout of laughter and the sound in that room of hushes was like a tonic to the young man watching her. The Hound turned over sleepily and wagged an applauding tail.

"Brings things back, doesn't it?" said Bunny. "That ass Roland. He and Tessie are going to be married next month."

"I know. I want mother to buy me a bale of hay to send him. She won't."

Bunny appreciated the bale of hay and, even more, Lady Donaldson's reaction to it.

"Paul would like that," said Bunny, and added in a casual tone: "Doesn't seem to be our lucky year, does it? We're all more or less in the soup, we three."

"My word!" said Hugo.

A sense of comfort stole over him at being thus bracketed in disaster with Bunny and Paul. It made him feel less desperately set apart, and something of stability came back to his tottering world at sight of the thin little figure perched carelessly on the arm of the chair, her coat with its furry collar thrown back and a scarlet flower stuck in it. Bunny was just a girl he knew who had dropped in for a yarn. She was real. She wasn't a visitor stocked with lies to deceive and cheer an invalid. Her sallow face wore a becoming flush in these days; her lips were bright red (but Hugo knew all about that). She was still not pretty like the other girls, but she had learned to carry her plainness as a banner that she was holding for a lark, and somehow you wanted to be in the joke with Bunny.

“What’s it all about, Bunny?” asked Hugo eagerly. “I didn’t know a thing until Aunt Eleanor came in this morning, spouting a lot of lies. I can tell you I was in a rage. . . . frightened the old bird off the premises. But I knew you’d tell me.”

“Old she-devil,” said Bunny.

She took off her little soft hat, jammed it into the shape of a boat and perched it over one eye. She endeavoured to rearrange her turned-up nose, pushed out her upper jaw and became Aunt Eleanor.

“Lady Eleanor Unwise speaking,” said Bunny. “And as poor Amy Donaldson said to me in her sad, spartan way, ‘I thank God every morning on my knees, Aunt Eleanor, that my son flirted with a telegraph pole instead of some dreadful hussy who would bring him to the dock. For see how he raves at us. Alas, he has charm.’”

Bunny tossed off the hat, became vacuous and, seizing a pencil from Hugo’s desk, blew imaginary smoke rings from it in the manner of Roland.

“The Aunt is so witty, what?” said Bunny-Roland, affectedly.

“Shut up, Roland,” said the gruff voice of Tessie Anstruther, Roland’s bride-to-be. “And don’t call her *the* Aunt as if she were the only one in the world.”

“Bunny courteously: ‘I wish she were. She’s one too many for any world.’ This, ladies and gentlemen, concludes our entertainment for the afternoon.”

“I say, Hugo,” added Bunny in her normal voice. “You were a mug to go and get smashed up like that. You could have been no end of help to Paul.”

“Well, thanks for your sympathy,” said Hugo. “But how could I? I wish to God I knew.”

“Oh, lots of ways. There’s the girl, and of course I can’t do anything, not directly at least. It would look too dam’ forgiving and all that and you couldn’t expect her to stand it. But you’re a friend of Paul’s. He has always thought a lot of you.”

“Rats,” said Hugo, unbelievingly, yet strangely pleased at the tribute. “Paul has a million friends.”

“Yes, but what’s the good of that? You’re different. I’d have gone to George Anstruther, but he has the social germ so badly, and now he’s connected with the Mostyns through Alison and going to be connected with the Wises through Tessie, I couldn’t be sure he wouldn’t talk. But you are sort of all alone, always have been, and as Paul often says, you’re a close old fish. A person could trust you.”

“But I’m so awfully in the dark about the whole thing,” said the close old fish. “Did Paul really marry some girl?”

“Yes, he married her all right and that did it, as far as the Mostyns were concerned,” said Bunny scornfully. “You know what they are. Paul’s father only thinks of money. He’s simply among those absent unless somebody is discussing how to get a bit more, and Mrs. Mostyn has two ideas, social importance and extreme youth. She never ought to have had any children. She hasn’t really liked them since they grew up and it got about. She married Alison to Bill Anstruther and

pushed her off to India out of the way, and if she could have married Paul to me she would have been quite pleased and treated him like a sister when she had to meet him anywhere. You know how he always calls her Molly? She made him, and she tried to make me, but I wouldn't. I was too shy," grinned Bunny.

"I never liked her, either," declared Hugo, "but I always thought it was going to be you and Paul, Bunny."

Bunny nodded.

"Might have been, I daresay, if they hadn't made such a song and dance about my money to Paul. You know . . . always rubbing it in. And then I was away. That was a piece of rotten luck if you like."

"You sent me a card from Nice or somewhere," Hugo remembered.

"Yes, I had bronchitis in the autumn and the doctor shooed me off there. Awful rot really, but I couldn't get rid of the cough and Robin got fussing and thought I ought to go. Paul came to see me off and all that and I had a letter and a couple of post-cards from him, but he's not much of a correspondent and neither am I, so I didn't think anything of it when I heard no more. Fact was he'd met this girl, fallen gaily in love with her and rushed home to tell Molly all about it. That's just the sort of break Paul would make, now isn't it?" said Bunny. "He never could see through other people. And of course if I had been about at the time, I'd have told him to keep it dark for a bit. I'd have adopted the girl as a bosom pal I'd known at school, taken her to the Mostyns' and flung her at Paul's head, and produced a violent love

affair of my own to show Molly there was no hope in this quarter. I'm sure she'd have given in and brought his father round if only to get Paul married so that she might be twenty-five again.

"However, there I was at Nice, and here was Paul chattily telling Molly all about the little girl. There was the most frightful bust-up and Paul was dramatically cast off by the family to bring him to his senses. But he took them at their word . . . he would, you know . . . cleared out and married the girl. The Mostyns knew nothing about it and they were quite sure he would come round when he got hard up, so they weren't greatly worried when he didn't appear at his father's office as usual.

"But Paul had got a job in the firm where the girl was a shorthand typist and the next thing anybody knew was that he had been arrested. It seems that part of his work was to bring in new business to the firm on a commission basis, and that would be rather in Paul's line. He has a persuasive way about him. And there were two men hovering round who seemed likely; so Paul took them to dinner to try and clinch the matter. After dinner they suggested a night club. Well, night clubs are all right, but this seems to have been a shady spot. Another man joined them and they had something to drink, and he suddenly said his pocketbook was gone and accused Paul of taking it. Paul naturally knocked him down and there was an awful scene. People came running from all directions and some clever person brought the police. Well, the long and short of it was they found the pocketbook on Paul."

"God," said Hugo. "I'll bet he never took it."

"Of course, but then we know him," nodded Bunny wisely. "I have a theory about it myself. I think the man, or perhaps all three, planted the pocketbook on Paul, not really intending to have a public row in the place, but to do it all nice and privately and then blackmail him ever afterwards, knowing that he had a rich father. Sounds all right, doesn't it? Just like the films, but it didn't work out like that, and I don't suppose you could prove it. Anyway, that wasn't the attitude the Mostyns took. They assumed he had been led away by his wicked wife," added Bunny with fine scorn. "First thing I knew was a line in the paper saying Paul had been remanded on a charge of theft; so of course I dashed home from Nice at once straight to the Mostyns', and there I heard a wild tale . . . Paul lured into the clutches of a vampire and sent galloping down hill. As I said to Molly, it seemed pretty quick work, but she wouldn't listen. She was full of the slight to me and I found afterwards she had been telling everyone. Paul according to her was an innocent angel, wrapped up in me, and this dreadful woman had seized him, married him and ruined him in my absence. Nice for me! As for Paul, he was never an angel," finished Bunny, indignantly.

"I never thought him one," said Hugo to whom the idea of Paul as an angel was simply revolting. "People are such liars, you wouldn't believe."

"They're such dam' fools," cried Bunny. "I soon saw I should get no sense or information from Molly, so I thought of you. I was just going to telegraph to you at Oxford when I met Roland and he began braying his condolences. You can guess I nearly brained him on the spot, but in the nick of time he told me of your accident, and I seized a passing taxi, left

Roland gaping and came here. But you, poor old Hugo, weren't conscious, or when you were, you were fighting everybody in sight, they said."

"Me? Was I really?" enquired Hugo, much astonished.

"Yes, didn't you know? Oh, I say, I've been told not to upset you," exclaimed Bunny in alarm. "Do tell me if I am upsetting you, Hugo. Hullo, here's tea. Interval for tea, eh, Leeder?"

The Hound sat up expectantly and Bunny took charge of the tea-table as a natural right, and began to pour out.

"What's going to win the Grand National, Leeder?" said Bunny.

"Now that's a race, Miss, I wouldn't never have a flutter on," said Leeder. "It's no more nor less than a gamble, the Grand National isn't."

"That's right, Leeder, never gamble, as the rich stockbroker said, bursting into tears when he found he'd made a million. I knew you'd never dream of *gambling*," said Bunny piously.

Leeder permitted himself a fatherly smile, as he handed Hugo his tea, poked the fire into a blaze and departed.

"Nice old thing, isn't he?" said Bunny. "Friend of yours too. Leeder and I have grown quite chummy over the telephone lately."

"Have you been telephoning?" asked Hugo in surprise. "About me? Jolly decent of you."

“Well, what do you take me for? Do you mean to say they didn’t tell you?”

“They never tell me anything,” declared the invalid in an exasperated voice. Bunny telephoning and they’d kept it up their sleeve and never said a word! All at once it became the most important thing in the world that Bunny had been telephoning to ask for him. “I do think it’s the limit,” said Hugo.

“Oh, well, after all, if they told you everybody who asked for you they’d need a fleet of secretaries to write them down,” said Bunny, “and you have to be kept quiet, you have. I’m keeping you beautifully quiet, aren’t I?”

“My word! But go ahead about Paul, if you don’t mind awfully, Bunny.”

“Right. Where was I now?” Bunny came for Hugo’s cup and poured him out some more tea to show she was perfectly calm about it. “I know. I had arrived here and heard you were fighting everybody. It consoled me rather, because that was just what I wanted to do myself . . . only *I* was conscious,” said Bunny.

“When I found I couldn’t get any help from you, I was properly stumped, so I decided to go and have my eyebrows plucked.”

“Whatever for?” asked Hugo in bewilderment.

“To improve my face, of course. It’s uplifting to the mind.” Bunny waggled the eyebrows in question. “Like ’em?” she enquired.

“Thin and tidy like that? Yes, jolly fine. You have a nice colour too,” said Hugo, considering her.

“Pretty good rouge that,” agreed Bunny.

“Not really? Of course I knew your mouth was,” observed the invalid in quick excuse for such unseemly innocence.

“Well, you silly donkey, anyone would. Don’t you like it?”

“I don’t mind it,” said Hugo, “but I’ve often wondered about girls. Doesn’t it come off? . . . I mean . . . well, if you . . . kiss anyone for instance?”

Bunny laughed aloud.

“Do you dare to look me in the eye and tell me you never had a shot to find out?” she demanded.

“Not on your life. I hadn’t the pluck,” grinned Hugo. “Nice I’d look all over red smudges like a comic picture.”

“You’re not the kissing sort, are you?” said Bunny casually. “Neither am I, so I’ve never bothered to consider it.”

“But suppose you wanted to, some time?”

“Oh, well, I’d probably leave it off then. How do I know?” said Bunny, and as though grateful to Hugo, who had not only failed to condole with her, but was even suggesting probably love affairs ahead, she returned to the question of Paul.

“When I’d finished with my eyebrows I went and bought a new suit,” she said. “And next morning when the case

came up for hearing I wore it in court."

"No!" cried Hugo.

"Rather! Looking bright and jolly. I had to, you know, when Molly was going about telling everyone I was jilted and blighted and all the rest of it. I wonder the newspapers didn't get hold of it . . . Inset Miss Bunny Molyneux jilted by the defendant. . . . Besides, no one would tell me the truth, and I had to find it out for myself, and I thought Paul would like to see me there and know I hadn't gone back on him. I hope he saw me, but I can't be sure, because I didn't think of saying I was a friend of the bridegroom and wanted a front pew. It was just as well as it turned out, because I forgot where I was and applauded once and there was very nearly a riot. Shouts of 'Silence in the Court.' Thrilling, I can tell you."

"Why, whatever had they said?"

"It was the girl," explained Bunny. "Directly she came on I knew they were all wrong and idiots into the bargain. A wife can't give evidence against her husband, I believe, but Paul's side put her into the witness box and having heard Molly's tale, I knew at once what they were up to. Your . . ."

Bunny broke off suddenly and stroked the Hound's nose and then when she went on again, she had rearranged her sentence.

"The Mostyns had evidently worked out their idea and impressed it on Paul's counsel that he was an innocent babe, led astray by a designing woman, and you could tell they were trying to make the court see it in that light too. But Molly had never set eyes on the girl and wasn't in court.

Catch her. And Mr. Mostyn is short-sighted, and I suppose lawyers are suspicious of everybody by nature. I could have told them she was no vampire," declared Bunny. "Quiet sort of girl she was, decently dressed and cleverish I should say. Plucky too, with an attractive voice. I quite liked her, Hugo."

Bunny's tone was all at once confidential, and Hugo nodded, understanding and believing her. This wasn't just bravado. She had been glad to be able to like Paul's girl, he knew, but she wouldn't have told everyone.

"They asked her all sorts of questions," proceeded Bunny. "Was it true she had married Paul, knowing it was against his parents' wishes? Yes, it was. And was she aware that he was practically engaged to somebody else at the time? She just looked them in the eye and said: 'No, I didn't know that and I don't believe it.' Loud applause from me, and 'Silence in the Court' from the starter or whatever they call him."

"Good old Bunny," shouted Hugo, delighted. "Oh, lord, I wish I'd been there."

"So do I. However, that's how it went on, but they couldn't prove anything against her, and they couldn't prove anything against the three men, though I simply hated them on sight," said Bunny, "and that's when I worked out my little theory. Paul, of course, denied everything and various people gave evidence that his character was positively spotless, but it was proved he was hard up for the first time in his life and the judge talked a lot about moments of temptation and night clubs and the ways of modern youth . . . Still, he was old, and old people always seem to

think it is decadent to be young. The end of it was he gave Paul six months."

"The old brute!"

"Yes, I know, but after all they did find the money on him, Hugo, and if they had let him off there would have been howls about one law for the rich and another for the poor. It was bad luck for Paul, but the thing that I think was so despicable was the Mostyns' attitude. They pretended to stand by him, but all they really did was to libel and try to betray the girl he'd married. What must she think of his friends, and how must he feel, knowing she is alone and probably out of a job and without money and there isn't a soul he can trust to look after her? That's where I thought you could have helped, Hugo," said Bunny eagerly. "I can't offer her money, naturally, but you could have done it for me, and as you're a man and a great friend of Paul's, she might have accepted a loan from you. And you may be sure she'd have told Paul . . . I suppose she can write to him sometimes . . . and then he'd have known it was all right."

"Why not?" exclaimed Hugo. "I have a goodish bit of money in the bank and what is the use of it to me any more? If you could get her address, couldn't I write to her, Bunny? . . . Oh damn! Here's someone coming."

It was Lady Donaldson, and Bunny got up and greeted her with an air of virtue.

"I haven't upset him really," she declared. "He's getting better and better, aren't you, Hugo? Please may I come again to-morrow, Lady Donaldson?"

Knowing it was dismissal she carried her dog to the bed that she might exchange an understanding wink with the invalid.

“Shake hands with your uncle, Hound,” said Bunny, and Lady Donaldson, watching this innocent scene with a kindly smile, said gently:

“Shall we say the day after, Bunny dear? Everyone is so kind to darling Hugo, but he mustn’t have too many visitors.”

Bunny was led away by a sympathetic arm, poor Bunny jilted by Paul and “crying like a child.” Hugo knew exactly what his mother was thinking, but he knew better.

“She’s no rabbit,” said Hugo.

CHAPTER IV

LETTER FROM MRS. PAUL MOSTYN TO HER HUSBAND UNDERGOING IMPRISONMENT FOR THEFT.
NOT POSTED.

March 9th.

Paul, my dearest,

This letter can't be sent to you where you are for obvious reasons, but I am going to write it and perhaps some day we may read it together, or if the worst comes to the worst, you will read it alone and it will explain why I am not with you any longer.

Perhaps I am stupidly nervous to-night, but I am suddenly frightened they may succeed in parting us after all. If they do, it will be only because it seems better for you, my dear.

Your counsel, Sir Richard Donaldson, sent for me to-day, and I went, half wild with hope, thinking they must have discovered something after all. But directly I was shown into his room and he said "Be seated, madam," I knew I had been wrong.

Paul dearest, I can't help hating that man with his dark face and piercing eyes. You thought he would be a friend to you because you were a friend of his son's, but he's not. He's only a friend to your people and I hate them all because they could believe what they did of you when they have known

you all your life. I know you better and I'm fighting them, but they have all the weapons and I have none.

Perhaps you can guess why he sent for me. They want to buy me off. He offered me £1000 on behalf of your people if I would give a written undertaking never to see you or communicate with you again. I asked him sarcastically what would happen to you in that case, and he said that your father would see that you were given a new start in Canada or Australia, but unless I gave you up completely they would do nothing whatever for you either now or in the future.

Oh, Paul, if he had said they would take you home and forget everything and give you your proper place in the world, I might have respected them, but to want to send you away like that, alone, believing the one person in the world who loved and trusted you had turned traitor, was too much.

I lost my head altogether and flew at Sir Richard. I said: "Is that how you would treat your son?" (There was a photograph of a boy on his desk. I suppose it would be the Hugo you used to talk of.) I thought for a moment he was going to have a fit. His eyes simply blazed and he was perfectly white. Then he said: "We'll leave my son out of it, if you please." I said: "He was Paul's friend. Does *he* think him a thief like all the rest of you?" "Personalities will not help you, madam," thundered Sir Richard, and I replied: "I am not asking your help, Sir Richard. You are asking mine."

He calmed down then. He even called me Mrs. Mostyn, perhaps hoping I would be flattered and grateful, but they can't make me anything but Mrs. Mostyn, however hard they try, can they? He talked most persuasively and I'll try to give you his exact words, as far as I can:

“Mrs. Mostyn, you tell us you are innocent of all complicity in this unfortunate affair, and we must of course believe you, but you will admit that your association with Paul has brought him nothing but disaster. It lost him a good home and generous allowance; it caused him to slight a young lady in his own walk of life, to whom, if he was not actually engaged, he was most certainly very warmly attached; it has directly led him to imprisonment for theft. My clients feel that a continuance of such an association can lead only to fresh disasters. They wish to do the best for their son and at the same time to deal fairly with you. I beg you to think this matter over quietly and sensibly and I am sure you will see that the arrangement we suggest is in your own interest.”

You see how it is, Paul darling. They believe I am guilty as well as you, and the dice do seem loaded against us. We can’t deny that I got you that job with my firm and that I did know, in a casual business way, the two men who took you to that beastly club. I daresay it does look to your people as though I were at the back of it in some way.

I see now I ought not to have married you, when you were so sure your parents would come round as soon as it was really done. I should have known perfectly well that rich parents of sons are not like that. But I wanted to believe they were because I loved you so. You are such a darling you are simply incapable of thinking evil of anyone and although I adore you for it, I know it is dangerous to be like that. In future I shall be suspicious for us both . . . if there is any future.

I have refused of course, but they won't leave it at that and I am frightened. If they offered to do something really great for you I might feel I ought to give in, and yet I know in my heart that you need me as I need you. I think I want more strength and courage than I naturally possess.

Anyway I shall fight for you, Paul. I have burned my boats and disappeared leaving only the bank address. I've bought a bobbed wig with a straight fringe, sold most of my clothes and bought strange, dowdy ones, and taken a small room in a house belonging to a Mrs. Ponder at Clapham. I am not going to touch the little money we have but work for my living at anything I can . . . sewing perhaps. I couldn't go back to my old kind of job after all the publicity, in my own name and with my own face, and under a new name and face I couldn't produce a reference from a former employer. It seems better to start afresh. And when you come home, my darling, we shall not be quite penniless and can begin the world again together.

I am going to give this letter to the bank to be delivered to you if I have not reclaimed it by that date to which we both look forward, my dearest dear.

Your
HELEN.

CHAPTER V

i

IN spite of the news she had brought him, Bunny Molyneux left behind her a strange peace in the perfect room to which they had carried Hugo Donaldson out of the world of carefree youth he knew. Although he did not define it to himself, it was there as the spring day faded to dusk and one by one lamps in the park opened their yellow eyes among the trees.

Tright crept in once and Leeder came to take the tea-things away, but Hugo feigned sleep and they left him softly. He lay looking out the window at the yellow eyes, and presently seeing far off a chain of twinkling lights as London began to deck herself with jewels for the night.

Cars slipped through the park in a happy, hurrying procession and he could distinguish the soft whir of the limousines carrying people out to dinner or the theatre, and the friendly chug, chug, of little cars going home. One paused in distress beneath his window, the engine bleating loudly. It started, then stopped again.

“Going on one cylinder, that’s what you are doing,” said Hugo, lending a sympathetic ear to the voice of the little car, and picturing the owner jumping out and admonishing it in a fatherly manner, cleaning its defective plug, then getting in again.

“Yes, now she’s off. That’s better,” said Hugo, in a tone of pleased congratulation. “I wonder what they did with my poor little bus.”

He had been fond of Miss Trotsky, so called of course because she was red, and presently the thought of her bright bonnet made him remember Bunny’s flaming scarlet pyjamas which she thought of wearing in the park some day, and he laughed.

Good old Bunny! She hadn’t come to him with pity or sympathy or cheer. She had come to him as one friend to another asking his help for Paul, and Hugo pulled himself together, feeling that once more he belonged to the world of men. As the full measure of Paul’s disaster became clear to him now that he was free from the distraction of Bunny’s presence, his own seemed small indeed, merely filling him with an illimitable impatience because he could not be up and doing on his friend’s account.

“He has always thought a lot of you,” Bunny had said. She had said it as though it were the most natural thing in the world, and Hugo, remembering that, lay still in a glow of wonder and gratitude and an immense surprise. He had never imagined Paul thought of him at all. Paul was such a splendid chap with thousands of friends; yet Bunny, who knew Paul best of all, had put him first as a matter of course. It was amazing.

“As Paul often says, you’re a close old fish. A person could trust you.”

Bunny, dropping her unconscious tributes in the midst of her eager story of Paul and his girl, little knew the healing

she had brought to the “close old fish”, broken and set apart in blue pyjamas on his pretty stage.

“If I’d only been about,” thought Hugo longingly. But he had been fighting everyone in sight! Bunny had said so. (Now that was a funny thing. No one else had told him that, but it was just like them, keeping things dark.) And he hadn’t known a thing, or been able to send old Paul a line.

“I’d have got father to defend him and get him off,” said Hugo in an eager tone. “He’d have done it too, instead of messing things up like that. . . . But then of course he’s dead.”

Dead!

Suddenly a dreadful sinking feeling took possession of him and he knew blank despair. His secret was no longer consoling; he tasted the terrible desolation of loss. Dead? It was like a door shut in his face never to be opened again. Useless to listen any more for the familiar footsteps, hoping and hopeless by turns; useless to plan his defence. The years that he must lie here stretched out before him, endless and empty. Paul was the luckier, after all, for he could get out.

The imperative need to know about his father one way or the other took possession of him again and he remembered the “Who’s Who.” Turning on the light over his bed, he groped for it with hands that trembled, but he couldn’t find it. While he was sleeping Tright must have taken it away. They were all in league against him. Hugo was sure of it. They didn’t want him to know.

Tright came in, seeing the light awaken in his patient’s room, and, accused by Hugo, denied the allegation.

“Must have slipped down. That’s right,” he said, finding the red volume at last under the eiderdown beyond the reach of Hugo’s questing hands. “It’s heavy for you, Mr. Donaldson. Lot of reading in a book like that.”

“My word!” said Hugo, clutching it. But somehow he couldn’t open it now Tright was there. He was afraid the fellow would know what he was after; he was afraid it would show in his face. And in a moment there would be dinner and then the dreadful business of being got ready for the night.

“I thought it would be a good idea to read myself to sleep by and by,” said Hugo in a bright and confidential tone.

“That’s right,” said Tright.

ii

He was alone at last, the “Who’s Who” propped once more against the table edge and Tright safely beyond the dividing door. The nights were always dreadful to Hugo and it was sheer rapture to see them depart, yet on the threshold of them he was eager, because he would be alone with himself at last, and could take off his armour of cunning and look his misery in the face.

And to-night there was his great secret to be discovered; he had outwitted them all; he was going to find out.

D . . . Davis . . . Dawson . . . Devizes . . . Dolby . . . Donaldson. . . . He’d got it at last. Donaldson, Arthur Charles, Major General . . . Donaldson, James. . . . Donaldson, Montague. . . . Donaldson, Richard, Kt.

Hugo shut his eyes and opened them again, because the print had begun to dance before them, and his thudding heart induced a strange giddiness in his mind. The miraculous red book had become a book of Fate, and he, guilty, elated, and yet afraid, was going to steal a glance at it.

> Donaldson, Richard, Kt. cre. 1921; born 1879, sec. son late Rev. H. C. Donaldson; edu. Winchester and Magdalen College, Oxford; First class Clas. Honours; M.A., L.L.B. barrister Inner Temple, 1904; m. Amy, Dtr Mr. Justice Wise, 1906; one s. b. 1907. Served Secret Intel. W.O. during Great War; K.C. 1920. Publications: "Psychology of the Law Courts"; "The Young Criminal"; "A Popular Handbook of Codes, Ciphers, and Cuneiform Inscriptions." Address, 073, Knightsbridge; Club Athenaeum.

"My word!" exclaimed Hugo, momentarily forgetting his great problem in the picture thus presented to him. This wasn't his father . . . the tall, dark figure he knew, chary yet quick of speech, watching the world with sardonic eyes, yet inspiring confidence somehow, as one who would expect a fellow to have intelligence and use it, and to take his triumphs and his knocks without making a song about them. Not a machine like Mr. Mostyn, or a fussy sentimentalist like Uncle William. Different, his father, and immeasurably superior in Hugo's eyes.

But Donaldson, Richard, Kt. was a personage, a career, boiled down and set with dates as milestones for the world to see. This red book knew a lot of things that Hugo didn't know; it showed him a stranger leading a life as secret as his

own. First class Classical Honours! Hugo, whose relation to the classics had been forced and hostile, at least until the night when Archer had set the magic of an ancient world before his eyes, read that entry with wonder and admiration. Served Secret Intelligence, War Office, during the Great War. He hadn't known that either and it was dashed exciting. The Great War was to Hugo merely a phrase, something which the older generation were wont to blame for everything they didn't like about a jolly world. But Secret Intelligence sounded ripping. He was glad his father had had the fun of that.

"I'll bet he was good at it too," thought Hugo.

Publications! Here was another surprise, and he read the titles of his father's works again: "Psychology of the Law Courts" (Bunny applauding Paul's girl and "Silence in Court." That ought to amuse his father.) "The Young Criminal," "A Popular Handbook of Codes, Ciphers, and Cuneiform Inscriptions." What on earth was a cuneiform inscription? Hugo searched his mind in vain. He ought to know a simple little thing like that, but he hadn't the foggiest idea, and the thought of his own abysmal ignorance came home to him with a shock. He knew hardly anything . . . nice sort of son for a learned and distinguished personage. Pretty disappointing for his father . . . must be.

"But of course he's dead," said a wistful echo in his mind and at once his preoccupation was back again.

The red book hadn't said that his father was dead, and he began to turn over the pages eagerly, looking at other names. But nobody was dead as far as the "Who's Who" let out and of course that was ridiculous. Some of them simply must be.

All those other Donaldsons he had never heard of, for instance. They couldn't all be alive.

Hugo, reading them through, came upon one he had missed. Donaldson, Lady (Richard) O.B.E.

Why, it was his mother! His pretty mother was a personage too. Hugo was glad to find her in the red book because he knew she would be pleased about it, whereas his father would probably hate it and think it damned rot.

> Donaldson, Lady (Richard) O.B.E. Dtr. late Mr. Justice Wise; m. 1906 Richard Donaldson, Esq. (Kt 1921); one s.; Com. Convales. Hos. for Of. 1916; Vice Pres. Red X S. (Kens. Branch); Lady of Grace St. J. of Jeru.; ex Chair. Com. Gld. Wking Gs; Mem. Cmte. Wm's Hos.; O.B.E. 1918; Address 073, Knightsbridge. Club The Princess.

There was his mother, with her committees and causes. Cheerful and busy about them she would be, and awfully sympathetic, listening to tales of woe and believing every one. But this entry could not excite him as his father's had done and he read that through again.

Whatever was a cuneiform inscription? This book knew so much but it did not really tell him what he wanted to know. It didn't tell him whether his father were dead.

He pushed it irritably away and it fell on the floor. After a moment Tright came in and picked it up again.

"Heavy for you," said Tright, pretending not to observe his patient.

“I’m sick of it,” said Hugo in a fretful tone. “I pitched the silly thing away.”

“That’s right,” said Tright, putting it on the table within reach and going off again; but he did not close the dividing door.

Soon he was back with a glass in his hand, and the dark eyes from the bed, telling for a brief second, altogether too much, lighted with gratitude.

Tright was no enemy. He was a friend, bringing oblivion.

iii

It was not until the morning that Hugo discovered the perfidy of the red book and of the world in league against him. Portal had moved the “Who’s Who” to make room for his tray; its long stout back was towards him, and suddenly he saw the date. It was an old volume, printed sixteen months ago. They had done it on purpose, he was certain, but they needn’t imagine he could be put off as easily as that. He would demand the new edition, send Tright out to buy it if necessary. The new one ought to tell him. . . . But would it?

“Well, I am a silly fool,” thought Hugo. “Even that would be too old.” He had remembered the beastly book came out in January and on March 1st his father had been alive, as he had good reason to know. That was the day he had been sent down . . . the day he had driven off in Miss Trotsky feeling like nothing on earth.

“If only I’d been reading the newspapers, then I’d have known,” said Hugo to himself. “I ought to read ’em.

Somebody ought to read 'em to me."

He became extremely indignant about the newspapers and injured that nobody had thought of that. He couldn't lie here forever and never have the newspapers read to him. He mustn't, of course, let his mother do it, because she would only read the cheerful bits; besides, she had her committees and causes. Tright wouldn't do, either, and anyway he hated reading. He had said so. Hugo decided he would put the matter up to Tright and get him on his side about the reading. His mother and the doctor would listen to Tright.

"I've thought of an idea, Tright," said Hugo, cunningly later. "Don't you think I ought to have somebody in every day to read the papers to me? I can't lie here forever, never knowing what's going on."

Tright, pleased that his patient should be taking an interest in the world again, proved unexpectedly helpful. He wasn't sure he didn't know the very person to do it, too, supposing her ladyship was agreeable. This person had come to lodge with Mrs. Ponder, who was the mother of the young man Tright's daughter was walking out with, and she was looking for employment, he believed. Her name was Mrs. Hallett, and Tright's daughter's young man didn't think she was a widow, either, but she was quiet and close about her affairs and quite the lady. Miss Tright's Henry, who was a perfect wonder for ferreting things out and putting two and two together, had decided there must have been a little trouble with Mr. Hallett, merely a tiff, very likely, but Henry was entirely on Mrs. Hallett's side in the quarrel, because you could see for yourself, he said, with half an eye. Mrs. Ponder had done one or two little kindnesses for her lodger,

seeing that she was considerate and gently spoken. “Not just some Tom, Dick, or Harry, if you know what I mean, Mr. Donaldson,” explained Tright. And Mrs. Hallett had repaid these services by giving Henry some assistance with the French language, which he was endeavouring to better himself by learning, she having been educated in one of those foreign convents, through her mother having had a pension until she died.

“Mrs. Hallett would be just the kind of person you require, I shouldn’t wonder,” said Tright. “At any rate, if her ladyship doesn’t see any objections, I could bring her for an interview and no harm done either way.”

“Yes, bring her to-day,” said Hugo eagerly. “Couldn’t you, Tright? You suggest it to my mother. She’ll listen to you.”

“That’s right. You leave it to me, Mr. Donaldson,” nodded Tright. “As I shall say to her ladyship, the days are very long for you, and a discreet young woman like that, married, and not one of the flighty sort, to read to you for an hour or two, might be a very good arrangement. Too many visitors now, that’s another thing. They’re wearing, especially, between you and me, sir, the elderly managing ones.”

Tright’s professional resentment against Lady Eleanor was still keen, it was clear. He wouldn’t say this morning that his patient had had a splendid night; he would probably inform Lady Donaldson that it was not to be expected. Hugo, whose night had been mercifully short and sweet, thanks to Tright’s dose, saw in a flash that ease must always come to

him like this in future, not through his own need, but through the reactions to it of other people.

CHAPTER VI

i

HIS mother came in, carrying roses in a crystal jar, which she placed on the top of his desk.

"Tessie sent them up from Brade for you, Hugo darling, some of Mr. Anstruther's special blooms from his glass-houses. And that reminds me. I saw a rather lovely crystal liqueur set yesterday. How would you like that for your present to Roland?"

"Sounds all right," said Hugo, watching her wickedly.

Now that was really clever of his mother, only the dear didn't know it, for liqueurs always made Roland sick, owing to his weak stomach, and he dared not touch them. Roland's stomach had dominated their childhood, it seemed to Hugo, looking back. It had been called a weak heart at first, and under a threat of instantly dying if they did not give way to him, Roland had become for a time a pretty tyrant. Then a specialist, with more honesty than tact, had located the trouble elsewhere, much to Uncle William's indignation, and Roland's former victims had never permitted him to forget it. With the whole-hearted cruelty of youth they had found a rich delight in devouring in his presence all the luxuries which he must never enjoy.

Sending a liqueur set to Roland therefore seemed a distinctly neat touch, for he was such an ass he would merely admire the pretty glass and never see the satire underlying

the gift. Roland's stomach had always filled Hugo with scorn because both Uncle William and the old ass's sister Muriel had become slaves to it, following Roland about with tablets and medicines and admonitions; and now no doubt gruff-voiced, kind-hearted Tessie would have to carry on the sticky task. He felt sorry for Tessie.

"Clever mother. I'd love to send the old ass a liqueur set," said Hugo.

"Very well, dear, then I'll get it for you. I'm so glad," answered his mother. "Shall I take this ugly great book away, if you've done with it? It simply screams at everything in the room."

Hugo didn't blame it, but he smiled at his mother, gathering up the "Who's Who."

"I've found you out," he said. "I've been reading you up in there . . . president of this and that and the other, Lady of Grace and O.B.E. and all the rest of it. My word, you are important."

His mother laughed with delight.

"So that's why you wanted it, you absurd old boy? But you must have known all that about me years ago."

"Ah, but then knowing it is one thing and seeing it in print is quite another. There is something so posh about print," said Hugo.

The smile died suddenly from his face.

"Why aren't you in black, mother?" he said clutching his courage in both hands.

“Black, darling? But it’s so dismal,” exclaimed his mother in astonishment. “You wouldn’t like me to wear black, surely?”

“But you ought to wear black when you’re a widow,” protested Hugo obstinately.

“*Hugo!* Hugo, my darling, what are you saying? I . . . I don’t know what you mean. How can you say such dreadful things to me?” cried his mother, gazing at him with terror in her face.

But she didn’t deny it. Hugo noticed that.

“It’s all right, mother. Don’t try to hide it from me,” he begged desperately. “It’s truly all right. I want you to be a widow. I do, really. You are a widow, aren’t you?”

“No, no, you know I’m not. Oh, Hugo, how can you be so cruel? I . . . I can’t bear it. To want me to be a widow as well as . . .”

She had gone; she had broken down and rushed, crying, from the room, all the brave cheerfulness which she had worn for the invalid wiped away by this stranger who had once been her son.

And Hugo, shaking all over, knew the truth at last. His mother was not a widow; the great secret had gone up in smoke. His father simply did not want to come and see him.

ii

There were no visitors that morning, but Hugo did not care. He could not think of Bunny or Paul or the lodger of

the mother of the young man Tright's daughter was walking out with. He could not even think of his mother, crying and thinking him mad or a villain or both, in the bitterness that possessed him.

Tright came in, hiding concern behind his flat face, opened the French windows, and since the day was mellow and fair, gently wheeled the bed out on to the balcony.

"There now. Might be a summer morning, and that will be a little change for you," said Tright.

Hugo, caring nothing for change or summer mornings, closed his eyes and clenched his hands, every nerve crying out to Tright to go away and leave him alone.

Tright went back to the blue room, was presently called from it, and the faint hum of voices came out to the boy from behind the dividing door. But even the fact that as usual they were talking him over did not rouse him from his misery. Ages later it was time for luncheon and he was moved in again, but he merely played with his food, finally lighting a pipe and smoking furiously, because this action seemed inappropriate to his surroundings and therefore soothed him.

The doctor knocked at the door. Hugo knew that light tap, with a hint of facetiousness behind it, and scowled, biting his pipe stem defiantly. What was the good of Dr. Hissop to him? But behind the too jovial, familiar figure was another, and Hugo's heart beat furiously, until he saw that it was a stranger.

"I've brought my friend Sir John Winde to see you, Donaldson," said Dr. Hissop. "You are my prize patient, you

know, and I like to show you off now and then. Come in, Sir John, and see this fellow's beautiful room."

Hugo's scowl grew darker. Another doctor come to pull him about. He loathed the whole tribe of them. But the newcomer ignored the beautiful room and his face remained inscrutable to the abandoned cheerfulness of the other's tone. He came to the bedside and held out a courteous hand to the young man.

"I've been wanting a pipe for hours," he said. "May I keep you company?"

"Oh, rather," said Hugo, suddenly liking the lined, weary face of this tall old man. "Won't you sit down, sir?"

After a brief examination of the patient, Dr. Hissop strolled out on to the balcony, presently returned and disappeared through the dividing door in search of Tright. Hugo, surprised at these unusual tactics, glanced at his visitor and met the faintest of understanding smiles.

"It is irksome to be a prize patient or any other kind of patient, I know," he said as he filled his pipe, "but Hissop is an enthusiast and sincere. You have a better physique than any fellow he knows, he tells me."

"A lot of use it is to me now," said Hugo with a grimace.

"I rather think you are wrong there," said Sir John conversationally. "Odd thing, Nature. She pays us out roundly, more often than not, but just now and then she does give us a pat on the back. Your fitness will be a big asset to you as your strength returns."

“I’ll never get up again, you know,” said Hugo, making the confidence in spite of himself.

“Who says so?” asked Sir John, as though the idea surprised him.

“It isn’t what they say, but the things they don’t say and the things they do.”

The dark eyes of the patient roved round his stage significantly, then met the other man’s. They wouldn’t, his wistful glance seemed to say, go to all this trouble otherwise.

“Human nature is just as odd as the other kind, my boy,” nodded Sir John. “People are queer fish, full of ideas and most of them wrong in the long run, I’ve come to the conclusion. Just hang on to that notion and ignore their signs and portents. Science can do wonders nowadays and a fellow with a steady mind can help it more than you might think.”

“I don’t know whether I have a steady mind or not,” said Hugo interested. “I’ve never considered it.”

“Then the chances are, you have.”

“Really?” The patient’s eager glance became suddenly suspicious. “Are you an alienist, Sir John?”

The other shook his head.

“No, old man. I’m not even here to throw dust in your eyes, for I have a notion it wouldn’t be any use. Nerves are my department, and since yours have probably been shaken up to some extent, Hissop persuaded me to come along and see you this afternoon. That is another thing you have probably never considered . . . eh?”

“Oh, lord, no. I haven’t any nerves.”

“Good. You don’t dream, I suppose. Or do you, now and then?”

Dream? Hugo became wary, for he knew all about dreams. There was that fellow Freud that a group of brainy chaps had discussed in little Webster’s room one night. Hugo was glad he had sat through the argument now though it had bored him at the time, for they weren’t going to get information out of him about his dreams.

“I dream occasionally,” he admitted in a casual tone. “Last night I dreamt about cuneiform inscriptions.”

He didn’t know why he said it except that it was the first thing that came into his head and quite untrue. He was determined now to lead his questioner astray. “I don’t even know what they are,” he added brightly.

“Let me see. Old Assyrian writing, I fancy,” said the specialist, and was suddenly confronted by a white face and a pair of startled dark eyes. “Now that’s an odd thing to dream of,” he added without appearing to notice. “Did you ever try to hunt a dream to its source? It’s rather amusing.”

Hugo, grateful that his excitement had passed without comment and for the amazing disclosure that had produced it, became cordial again.

“I’ll have a shot at it,” he promised, “I’ll have some really fruity ones for you the next time you come, sir.”

“You’ll pull my old leg, I suppose?” The faint smile was there again, so shrewd and understanding that Hugo felt abashed.

“I’m afraid I have already. Sorry,” he admitted. “I didn’t dream about the beastly things.”

“Well, well, you produced a nice poser for me, I must say, with your cuneiform inscriptions that you didn’t know the meaning of.”

“That part was true,” said Hugo in eager apology. “I simply said the first thing that occurred to me, because you see, I know about that fellow and the dreams.”

“Fellow? . . . Oh, you mean Freud? Yes, I suppose you youngsters of the present day would know about Freud. What do you think of him . . . interesting?”

“I thought it was the most awful bilge I’d ever heard,” admitted Hugo, “only it’s as well to hear these ideas and I daresay I’m all wrong about it.”

“That’s the spirit. Hear as much as you can and believe as little and you’ll keep that steady mind we were discussing,” said Sir John with a very kindly look. “As for Freud, he was a good showman. He took an idea and dressed it to please a mad generation and help it to greater madness. However, he’s growing old-fashioned, so I don’t think we need worry about him. My interest in your dreams had no relation to the fellow, but to the state of your nights, which are none too restful, I dare swear.”

“They are pretty beastly,” said Hugo, strangely grateful to find someone who neither talked down to him as a child nor lied to him as an invalid. He wondered whether Sir John knew his father, but though he felt he could ask him many things that question would not come.

They talked no more of his nights or his dreams just then, but of casual outside things, the specialist, with the incident of the cuneiform inscription before him, delicately establishing communication with his patient.

"You can't read, to pass the time, I suppose?" he suggested presently.

"It makes me so tired," admitted Hugo. "I think it's not being able to move, you know, but I want someone to read to me in the daytime and I'm going to ask about that. . . . Newspapers . . . because I can't lie here forever and never know anything, can I? Don't you think that's a good idea?"

"Nothing could be better. I'll insist upon it, shall I?"

"Thanks awfully."

They smiled at each other, a conspiratorial smile.

"They seem to think they ought to keep everything dark," said Hugo, suddenly confidential, "and when you are tied by the heels and can't go and see for yourself, it's rather maddening sometimes. And you've no idea what liars people are, without meaning to be. I hear them discussing what sort of night I've had and I lie here and grin, for after all they are my nights, not theirs. They can't know."

"So you let them have their fun and say nothing, eh? What have they been keeping dark from you, my boy? Anything I can give away?"

"No, thanks," said Hugo, with his dark look. "I've found them out."

“I see. You were one too many for them, were you?” Sir John stood up and came to the bedside, holding out his hand in farewell. “Don’t worry about their paltry little secrets,” he advised. “Save them up for my next visit and I promise to keep nothing dark. But none of your posers about cuneiform inscriptions to trap an innocent old man, you know.”

The shrewd eyes were watching him and a sudden fear caught Hugo’s heart. Was Sir John going to repeat all this to Tright and Hissop and his mother? Was he like all the rest of them? He could almost hear them talking it over and over. They might even tell his father about the cuneiform inscriptions and his father would know that he had been looking him up.

A great idea presented itself to Hugo in a flash. He would confide in Sir John about Archer. It would be a sort of indirect message to his father, for if cuneiform inscriptions really had to do with old Assyrian writing, wasn’t that only another proof of the tie between them?

“I know what made me think of them now,” he said. “There was a chap named Archer who lectured about Syria at Oxford . . . an archæologist, he was, and I daresay he must have mentioned them.”

“*The* Archer, I suppose,” nodded Sir John. “He’s a very famous man, but like his profession dry as dust, no doubt.”

“*He* wasn’t dry,” protested Hugo, enthusiasm making him forget the attentive eyes upon him. “He was a wonder. I had an idea I’d like to go in for that kind of thing myself and I read it up quite a lot. Began to learn Arabic too, but all that is dished now, naturally.”

The last words were spoken in a nonchalant tone, as was only decent in Hugo's code, but the fire of the beginning had been unmistakable.

"I should go on with the reading if I were you," advised Sir John, "and don't be too sure of the rest. Just concentrate on getting as fit as you can and giving science a first rate chance, for nothing she can do for you is going to be left untried, as of course you know. Or is that another of the things they have kept dark?"

There was a twinkle in the old man's eyes and Hugo met it with a friendly grin.

"They never breathed a word," he declared.

Dr. Hissop returned at this moment, had a few facetious words with his patient, then carried the specialist away, but Sir John left hope behind him, for perhaps he was a messenger.

Hugo could not know that by his eager tale of Archer he had fogged the message. Without it Sir John, remembering the boy's white face and startled glance at mention of the Assyrian writing, would have endeavoured to trace that reaction to its source. Now he merely saw in it a corollary to the patient's thwarted ambition, a thing too normal in the circumstances to have any bearing on shattered nerves that led him to hope his mother was a widow and to talk strangely to the doctor about deaths in the family.

Hugo's message to his father did not get through.

CHAPTER VII

LETTER FROM MRS. PAUL MOSTYN TO HER HUSBAND. UNPOSTED.

March 19th.

My dearest,

Now I am here in my little room in Clapham with long hours when I am bound to have nothing to do but think, I am going to write to you all the things that happen, even though you won't get the letter for a long time even if you get it at all. It will be like talking to you, Paul darling, and besides, I can't bear to think there should be any part of my life since we married that you may feel you didn't share.

I have quite a nice little room with pictures round the walls at regular intervals, all looking brown in patches as though they had been in a fire. They belong to the fluffy Victorian order (Christmas Supplement) when women folded their lily white hands meekly and looked up to the men with awe. They led perfectly blameless lives . . . you can see them doing it, their one real dissipation being to gather roses, while flocks of children, all supplied with dancing golden curls, gambolled beside them. There is only one reprobate among them and the fast little thing is actually leaning on a stile flirting with a young man. I feel sure she came to a bad end.

From a corner of my window I can just see the Common beginning to turn green, and fluffy like the Victorian ladies,

but the rest of the outlook is a bare wall and I generally look at that, for why should I have a better view than you?

My landlady, Mrs. Ponder, is a kind old thing, very proud of her small waist, her plush suite and her son Henry, all of them survivals of another age. She told me Henry bought her the suite second hand because he thought it so genteel. It is, terribly. However, it is too bad of me to laugh at her, for she has been good to me already after a very short acquaintance. I asked her in some trepidation (because of her gentility) whether I might hang a card "Sewing Done" in one of her front windows, as I was anxious to get work, and she not only consented, but began to cast about for ways to help me immediately.

Having evidently consulted Henry the Oracle, she came to me next morning and asked me in a whisper if I could make lingery (pronounced as spelt). I showed her some of my own and she was greatly impressed and said, "Why, you're as good as the convents which is the only bit of worldly pleasure the poor things have, making lingery if you know what I mean, though very godly women I've no doubt."

I told her I was educated in a convent abroad and she said, "Ah there now, you can always tell," in an approving voice, "for as Henry said the moment he set eyes on you, my dear, 'She's quite the lady, mum. Anyone can see that with half an eye.' He's very noticing, is Henry, and has been from a child."

She went on to tell me that Henry's young lady, Miss Fanny Tright, was ambitious to have handmade lingery for her trousseau, but she was afraid of convents unless Henry

could go with her, which both Henry and his mother considered would be most indelicate. Miss Tright is “in the hair-dressing” like Henry and they mean to set up their own business, so there’s no reason, Mrs. Ponder thinks, why they shouldn’t begin with everything genteel, even to the lingery. Besides, Miss Tright’s father is in quite a good way as a masseur and male nurse and is at present employed in a very important house “Overlooking Hyde Park, if you’ll believe me, my dear. Generous living and everything found. Yes, I assure you,” said Mrs. Ponder.

Miss Fanny Tright arrived the same evening en route to the Pictures with her Henry, and I was invited downstairs to meet her, Henry leaving the room with ostentatious gentility when it became evident to him that “you ladies want to talk business.” Fanny, who is moon-faced and fat, giggled, then put her hand to her mouth and burst out with an offer to give me a clip and wave any time I said the word. “Not at the shop, I don’t mean,” said Fanny, “but I could bring my tongs round of an evening and no charge of course.” As my straight, bobbed wig is my best disguise I had to resist her generous offer as nicely as I could and fortunately she is one of those amiable people who don’t take offence. She evidently thought I was misguided but did not suspect me of false pride in refusing her, and I am afraid she will return to the charge as the trousseau progresses. For Fanny has given me the job of making her Lingery and doesn’t much mind how I do it as long as it is very lacy and beset with bows of satin ribbon and she can boast that it is French and all made by hand. “You having been to a French school and that, it comes to the same thing, I mean,” said Fanny.

I was too grateful for the work to argue about it and I am determined to give Fanny a trousseau after her own heart. She is quite willing to pay me well; in fact, she takes a pride in being able to do so and will tell all her friends how expensive her lingery was and enjoy it all the more, I feel sure. I rather like Fanny. She is generous and conceited and sentimentally attached to the Pictures and Henry, and full of professional pride; and nothing else interests her or troubles her in the least. She is wise and will get on.

So you see, darling Paul, I have made a start at paying my way and met with real kindness, for Mrs. Ponder has not stopped at helping me to get work. The last two or three nights she has insisted upon bringing me up a cup of hot soup because she thought I looked pale and a drop of soup was neither here nor there to her when she always had to get it for her Henry's supper. Fortunately, I have found a way to repay her to a small extent, for in her chronicles of Henry she happened to mention he was trying to teach himself French of an evening when not at the Pictures with Fanny. (I now know where the "lingery" comes from and why she uses the word so proudly and often, but I am surprised at Henry.) As he has had no lessons at all, I offered to help him, and after a great deal of grateful expostulation from both of them . . . quite undeserved, as you can see . . . it has been arranged that Henry is to have two lessons a week and the cup of soup is to arrive as usual.

Henry is a gem and you would have to see him to believe in him. He is small and rather pompous with hair parted in the middle and falling in beautiful festoons on each side. He has a moustache, too, which he twirls, and looks so altogether out of his century, that I thought he must have

formed himself on some of the awe-inspiring males in the pictures round my walls. But no . . . I have found Henry out. He is learning to shrug and he is learning French. I can't help admiring him for having a shot at it all alone, though the result so far is naturally too funny for words. He will appear as Henri one of these days, probably in the West End, and will wave and clip and shampoo, speaking English with a French accent.

It is growing late and I mustn't waste Mrs. Ponder's gas, because she was going to charge me extra for it, and didn't. Her little house is her own, she tells me, and Henry doesn't want her to let rooms. "Not in the ordinary way, my dear, but I like a bit of company."

So I shall go to bed and think of you, my dearest, and of the time when we shall be together again.

Your
Helen.

CHAPTER VIII

i

"A LETTER for you, sir," said Portal, appearing sedately with a silver salver, soon after Sir John Winde's departure, "and I'll be doing a bit of work in Mr. Tright's room while he has his two hours, so if you should want anything and will just ring your bell, sir . . ."

Hugo took the letter and smiled at Portal.

"I'll shout like blazes," he assured her. "I'll make you hear."

The bell, which they had placed from his room to Tright's, annoyed him because it was part of his stage, and he never used it. He had a feeling that if he once rang the bell it would be a cry for help and he wasn't going to touch the beastly thing. When he needed Tright, he shouted for him or flung things about, for at least there was something robust about that. Ringing a bell, thought Hugo, watching Portal's departing back, was the kind of fool thing that would appeal to an ass like Roland.

He took up his letter, which had been re-addressed from Oxford, and saw that it had an Indian stamp. Alison's writing, good old Alison, sister of Paul, and married to Bill Anstruther, Alison, who long ago had composed that rhyme about Funny Bunny. Nice of her to write to him and jolly surprising, but perhaps the letter was about Paul. Hugo tore open the envelope.

Dear Hugo, he read,

Your godson, Hugo William Mostyn Anstruther, salutes you, or would if he were not still too busy with celestial matters to speak at present.

Bill and I elected you unanimously to the ancient and honourable company of godfathers before our son was born, deciding that, apart from your taste in socks when we saw you last, you were cut on a rather decent pattern. It is no good your protesting, for your election has been ratified by Church and State, a Lancer friend of Bill's standing proxy for you.

The proxy was distinctly annoyed about it and said, "Who is this fellow, Donaldson, that you consider him a better man than me?" and Bill, being an officer and a gentleman and always courteous to a guest, replied: "You illiterate lout, my son's godparent is pursuing paths of learning at a place called Oxford, where slaughter of our mother-tongue is met with instant death and professional murderers like you could never penetrate." Bloodshed was averted by the tactful intervention of Hugo II, who said "Comeandhaveadrink" or words to that effect.

Said Hugo the second to Hugo the first,
"I've arrived in this world with a terrible
thirst.
When I've drunk up the rivers and
swallowed the sea,
I'll walk home to England, arriving for tea."

Now what you have to do, my lad, is to choose him a nice godmother-in-law, as you will have to see quite a lot of your namesake, when India's coral strand becomes too hot for him and school in England looms ahead.

Bill wishes me to say that young Anstruther is a hefty chap, weighing nine and a half pounds without his boots. He (Bill) is not yet a major-general, because merit counts for nothing in a jealous world, but what shall be, shall be and what isn't, is not.

With these profound reflections by the Sage of Simla, I will close.

Best of luck, old godfather, and love from

Alison Anstruther.

He was a godfather. If he had been suddenly made Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugo could not have been more amazed, and he was filled with gratitude and elation by this friendly gesture from Alison and Bill.

He read the letter again. Not a word about Paul, but then they couldn't have heard the news at the time of writing nor

of his misadventure either. There was something very consoling to Hugo in that, for it showed him that their thought of him had not been born of mere pity. They really wanted him to be the godfather of the little chap.

To Hugo, three years younger than Alison and five years younger than Bill, and still a schoolboy at the time of their marriage, it was astonishing that these elder playmates of his childhood should have thought of him at all, yet they actually liked him and made him the godfather of their son.

There was not quite such a glow about this as the revelation of Paul's affection had brought him, but a glow, none the less. Paul, Bunny, Alison and Bill. With such friends a fellow could not after all feel quite shut out from the world.

"Said Hugo the second to Hugo the first" . . .

He learned the foolish little rhyme with a chuckle of delight. Bunny would enjoy this and she would be coming to-morrow. He could hear her shout of laughter at Alison's absurdity.

"I have a poem now as well as you," he'd say to her. "Alison's written it. You are not the only one." He felt newly allied to Bunny now that he too had been the subject of Alison's muse.

"My word! I am getting important," said Hugo to himself. "Hi, Portal. . . . I say, Portal."

Hugo well, though secretly pleased at the honour conferred upon him, would have been none the less shy and embarrassed about it; but the new Hugo, shut into a world grown small and strange, wanted to shout the tidings aloud.

“Portal, I’m a godfather,” he announced proudly to the sedate figure at the dividing door.

“Well, I never,” said Portal. “Not you, Mr. Hugo? Now, isn’t that nice? Excuse me asking, sir, but is it a little girl?”

“Girl?” shouted the invalid in an outraged tone. “Hang it all, Portal, you surely don’t see me being the godfather of a girl? This is a hefty fellow weighing nine and a half pounds without his boots. . . . Hugo William Mostyn Anstruther. You can’t call a girl Hugo. And he lives in India. What do you think of that?”

“Oh, the poor little fellow. Not among all those dreadful naked savages, Mr. Hugo? Why, they’d frighten any child to death. I’ve seen them on the pictures and that’s quite enough for me. Wicked, I call it,” said Portal.

“Don’t you worry about young Anstruther,” said Hugo smiling at her. “I say, Portal, do you think you could move the desk across because I must write to the chap. I’m a man with responsibilities now.”

Portal moved the desk and gave him a blotter, note-paper and his fountain pen. Then, seeing him begin his letter, smiling cheerfully to himself, she crept back to Tright’s room. He’d never be able to write a letter lying like that, Portal knew, but it was not her place to tell him so, the poor young gentleman, so pleased about being a godfather. Wicked, Portal called it.

ii

“Dear Anstruther,” wrote Hugo the first to Hugo the second, “Here’s luck, old sport. You’re a fine chap, I must say . . .”

The writer paused, for it was a laborious business. His hand ached already and he couldn’t keep the blotter at a proper angle. He tried a dozen ways, but it wouldn’t keep steady and the effort nearly drove him to distraction.

“Damn!” swore Hugo and let the pen drop, a wave of desperate bitterness sweeping over him. A nice sort of crock they had given the little chap for a godfather, lying here on his silly four-wheeled bed in this pretty, pretty room. He pictured Hugo II coming home some day and finding him like this.

“God! I hope I’ll be dead,” cried Hugo.

Tright, returning by and by from his two hours’ off, came in with a look of self-complaisance and the patient, struggling into his armour of false good cheer, announced in rather a sick tone: “I’m a godfather, Tright.”

“That’s right,” said Tright, too much engrossed with his own cleverness to give the statement much attention. “I’ve brought the young lady I spoke of, sir . . . Mrs. Hallett . . . to read the newspapers to you once a day. As I said to her ladyship, it might be a very good arrangement, and Sir John Winde agreed with my judgment absolutely. Her ladyship is interviewing Mrs. Hallett now and between you and me she has quite taken to her, I believe. All being well, she will bring her up to see you, it being agreed that as it’s you that’s to be read to, you should be consulted.”

“Oh, good,” said Hugo.

He was to be consulted. That was something new, and he guessed that he had his friend Sir John to thank for it. The remembrance of the specialist cheered him, for wasn't he a messenger? Surely when his father heard about his archæological studies and his interest in Syria, he'd be pleased and come round a bit. Sir John might even now be telling him and perhaps after dinner his father would come up at last.

In the face of this new excitement, he gave Tright the pen and paper and asked him to push the desk away.

"I have to write a letter, but I'll do it in the morning," he said.

He would feel better in the morning, especially if he had seen his father. Fit as a fiddle that would make him. Perhaps after all Hugo II was not to have a permanent crock for a godfather, for Sir John had said there was a chance, had told him to keep an eye on that, and Hugo had an idea that you could trust Sir John. He wasn't such an awful liar as the rest of them.

iii

"Hugo darling, I have brought Mrs. Hallett in to see you," said his mother. "She has kindly agreed to come and read to you for an hour or two every day if you think you would like that. This is my dear boy, Mrs. Hallett."

Lady Donaldson's tone was at once natural and kind, for she was too well-bred a woman to feel it necessary to divide her manner into classes. Shop-assistants, servants and dependents were always glad to serve her in consequence,

and people outside her own particular walk of life were never rude to her. When her intimates were rude she imagined they must be ill.

Hugo, who was longing to laugh at the odd figure being presented to him, was very proud of his mother at that moment. She really was a darling, and Lady of Grace was a title that suited her exactly, though what Jerusalem had to do with it he didn't know.

The girl for whom his pretty mother was bringing a chair, was certainly a rum 'un, Hugo thought. He didn't know what was the matter with her exactly except that her dress was the wrong length and the wrong shape. She had a straight fringe that hung down under her drooping hat and her eyebrows were two straight lines, not delicately arched and thin and tidy as Bunny's were. She was unlike Bunny altogether; unlike any of the girls he knew. Her complexion was clear but pale and there was no colour on her lips. Her whole face had a stillness about it, where Bunny's was full of movement and life and expression, constantly changing.

Then for a moment he saw her eyes, and with that new acuteness of perception which was growing in him, he was aware of a force and beauty about her, something tragic too, in the desperate courage of her glance.

"Hullo," said Hugo to himself. "Here's another one in the soup."

He felt all at once companionable to Mrs. Hallett.

Leeder, evidently instructed, brought tea rather early and Lady Donaldson went away, leaving the two young people to enjoy it together and talk things over.

“Tright will bring you down when you are ready, Mrs. Hallett. You will see to that, Hugo darling, won’t you?” she said.

“Thank you,” said the girl, faintly.

She did not call his mother “Your ladyship,” he was relieved to notice; she did not call her anything. In fact, she had barely spoken since she entered the room, and Hugo, watching her pour out his tea, and feeling strangely awkward, at length managed to break the silence.

“I hope you won’t mind awfully coming to read to me,” he said.

“I am in need of work,” said Mrs. Hallett briefly.

Her voice was charming, but Hugo thought: “Now isn’t that like a girl? Doesn’t answer my question but makes a statement.”

“I say, really? What beastly luck,” he ventured again.

“Not at all. Everybody,” said Mrs. Hallett, looking significantly round the room, “can’t have plenty of money.”

“Well, it isn’t my fault,” exclaimed Hugo indignantly, in answer to the glance. “I hate the room as much as you do.”

“Hate it? Why, it’s beautiful.” Mrs. Hallett’s tone was outraged. “I think you are very lucky,” she said with sudden bitterness.

“Oh, rather. My word, I am.” Hugo laughed and hoped she knew it was hollow laughter. This girl disliked him already, it was evident, and he felt childishly annoyed about

it. “You’ll simply hate reading to me. I can see that,” he said aggressively.

Mrs. Hallett stood up.

“If I don’t suit you, Mr. Donaldson, I had better go,” she said in a low voice.

There was a shout of laughter, by no means hollow this time, from the bed.

“Don’t be an ass,” said Mr. Donaldson unexpectedly. “Look here, you are a funny girl. You can’t have a row with a person you’ve only known two minutes. It’s simply ridiculous.”

The girl stood looking down at the tea-table in a troubled way. Hugo smiled at her but could not catch her eye, so he said in a friendly voice: “I say, I know all about you.”

“W . . . what?” exclaimed Mrs. Hallett, evidently startled.

“You’re the lodger of the mother of the young man Tright’s daughter’s walking out with.”

He thought that would amuse her, but she merely sat down again abruptly and began in a nervous fashion to drink her tea.

“What shall I be, I wonder?” pursued Hugo, watching her out of one eye. “I suppose I’ll be the client of the lodger of the mother of the young man Tright’s daughter’s walking out with. Now you do one. We can go on for miles.”

This time his effort was rewarded with a little wavering smile, which died, however, as she said in a troubled voice: “I’m afraid I shan’t be cheerful enough for you.”

“Cheerful?” cried Hugo. “My word, if you go being cheerful with me, we shall have a flare-up, I can tell you. You wouldn’t believe how many cheerful people I have about me. It’s awful . . . only don’t you tell them that because I wouldn’t like to hurt their feelings. They think it’s the proper way to treat a battered wreck and you can almost see ’em turning it on at the meter as they come in the door. If you’ll come along and be thoroughly miserable you’ll be doing me no end of a good turn.”

She was no longer able to resist his wheedling tone and she looked at him and smiled.

“Besides,” proceeded Hugo wickedly, “I want somebody to fight with and you are pretty good at that.”

The smile disappeared.

“Yes, I can fight,” said Mrs. Hallett in a level voice. “You haven’t touched your tea, Mr. Donaldson, and if you don’t have it at once, I shall go away until you have finished it.”

“Where?” enquired the villain on the bed with eager interest.

“I suppose I could wait outside your door.”

“Very suspicious. Anyone coming along would be sure you could be lurking there for no good purpose. They’d call the police and you’d be arrested for barratry and arson and selling intoxicating liquors on unlicensed premises after hours. And just as you were about to be shot at dawn the Governor would come rushing out shouting: ‘Unhand that lady, you mugs. Don’t you know she’s the lodger of the mother of the young man Tright’s daughter’s walking out

with?' Exit Mrs. Hallett with halo. Police fall fainting in all directions."

During this precious recital the girl's face had flushed scarlet, then paled again and Hugo proudly imagined she was trying to conceal her laughter. Somehow he wanted dreadfully to make Mrs. Hallett laugh.

At length she managed to say in a rather shaking voice: "What you need is another child to play with."

"Done! Now it's all settled, I shall have my tea."

He let her alone for a little while then, for after all she might hate too much cheerfulness in other people quite as much as he did, and he was convinced this odd-looking girl was very deeply in the soup indeed.

Perhaps Mr. Hallett was a bad hat!

"Mr. Hallett killed his valet," recited Hugo, gleefully to himself, but somehow he could not visualize Mr. Hallett as having a valet, so that was no good. A pity.

"If I am really to come and read to you," said the girl at this point, "we must arrange about the time. Your mother thought perhaps an hour in the morning and another in the afternoon so that it wouldn't tire you too much . . . perhaps from eleven to twelve and from half past two to half past three. Would that suit you?"

"Rather. And then we can read in the morning and fight in the afternoon or vice versa," exclaimed Hugo delighted. "What a good idea. But you know I think you ought to charge a bit extra for fighting because after all you only agreed to be a reader-ess."

“I agreed to do anything that was required of me,” said Mrs. Hallett with dignity, “and I am being generously paid. I hope you will understand that and let me earn my salary, Mr. Donaldson. Perhaps I could write a letter for you occasionally.”

“Now that’s a truly ripe scheme. Why, you can write a letter for me to my godson the very first thing. I’ll bet you didn’t know I was a godfather,” said Hugo with pride. “Hugo William Mostyn Anstruther . . . that’s the fellow’s name.”

Mrs. Hallett stood up so quickly that the tea cups rattled in their saucers.

“I’ll be here at eleven to-morrow,” she said. “I . . . I think I should go now.”

“Well, remember me to Henry, won’t you?”

“Why, do *you* know Henry?”

“No, thank the lord, but he’s a wonder, Henry is, and you are helping him with the French language because he wants to better himself, so don’t deny it.”

“His mother has been very kind to me,” said Mrs. Hallett in extenuation.

“I know. A dear old soul, the mother of the hm hm, etc. Give her my love.”

“You are an absurd boy. I’ve never met anyone like you.”

“Ah, but then I’m a very rare specimen. They haven’t even,” said Hugo in a confidential voice, “a replica of me in the British Museum. There now.”

Mrs. Hallett burst out laughing.

CHAPTER IX

i

BIG BEN was striking midnight. The deep notes fell into the stillness and Hugo's heart seemed to be falling with them, down through illimitable space, for his father had not come.

He had left his light on, cunningly pretending to Tright that he would like to read, but he turned it off now and his arm fell back limply on the bed and lay there as if he had no power to lift even that again. If he lay like this, quite still, holding his breath, couldn't he die, perhaps? He ought to be able to die.

Hugo tried holding his breath, but just when he had reached a place of heavenly emptiness and knew that he must be safely dead at last, the dreadful world came back again.

His father might have come. He might have been a little pleased to know he hadn't been altogether loafing at Oxford, but had gone off on a line of his own, not meaning to say anything about it until he was fairly started.

But it was no good arguing like that. He hadn't come and he didn't mean to come. Hugo knew that hope was dead while he lived on.

He had been amazingly happy all the afternoon when Sir John had gone, carrying that secret message to his father, but now he scorned himself for having given it. Never again. He wasn't going to howl to any man. He'd show them.

Suddenly a fury of anger possessed him.

What had he done after all to be disowned like a criminal or worse? He had done nothing disgraceful . . . but then, neither had Paul, and they had called him a thief and locked him up. The world was a perfectly rotten place, full of liars, and fathers were evidently all alike. They would believe anything.

Perhaps his father imagined he had done something dreadful. Perhaps some other fellow at Oxford had done it and they had put the blame upon him. He couldn't know, tied here on his back with nothing but liars around him. But they needn't imagine he was going to lie down under a thing like that. He would get well; he'd get up and prove he hadn't done it and laugh in their beastly faces. He'd show 'em. Sir John had said he might get well if he set his mind on it.

"All right. You'll see," said Hugo, threateningly to his father.

It was a pity really he hadn't been killed when Miss Trotsky ran him into the telegraph pole. This was quite an impersonal thought, because death was one of the things Hugo had arranged with himself he could not decently wish for, but there was no denying it would have saved a great deal of trouble all round . . . Tright, and the bed on wheels, and the lovely room, and Dr. Hissop and the surgeon and Sir John, and Portal bringing his meals up, and funny Mrs. Hallett coming to read to him . . . all that because he had not been quite killed but very nearly. Whichever way you looked at it, it seemed a shocking waste to Hugo.

Perhaps his father imagined he had tried to kill himself, that he had rushed off and driven bang into the telegraph pole on purpose. What a perfectly horrible idea! Very likely the newspapers had said so, for they told some pretty good lies, as everybody knew.

"Attempted Suicide of K. C.'s Son." Hugo, with horror surging over him, could almost see the heading and the ghastly tale below of how he had been sent down from Oxford and tried to end it all. Or perhaps the papers had said he was drunk when he did it. That was one of their favourite lies. There was that fellow Treve, at New, who came a cropper on his motor bike. Treve had never touched anything stronger than barley water in his life, he was positively rabid on the subject, but some fat-headed village constable had sworn he smelt of spirits. Poor old Treve, they had ragged him unmercifully about it ever since.

If that were the explanation . . . if the newspapers had told some silly tale, Hugo began to see there was a certain amount of excuse for his father's anger. He must find out. He must see all the reports of his accident, by some means, but this would need cunning.

No use asking his mother or Tright to let him see them because they were in league to keep everything dark. He knew. They would put him off or show him only one or two that said nothing of any importance. Hugo was determined to get to the bottom of this. He must see them all.

He would ask Bunny. She was coming to-morrow and she wouldn't try to deceive him. Bunny was different.

The night was warm, one of those nights when Spring, having coquetted with Winter and delayed too long, seems to come running through a waiting world, spilling her scents as she goes. Hugo's French windows were slightly open and the breath of the young and lovely season stole in, bringing hope again and a vague longing for something which he could not even translate into thought. His eyes grew hot and he felt they were full of tears, which was strange, for he never cried; yet such an outrage to his dignity did not even trouble him now; he was hardly aware of it.

Before his mind was the picture of Bunny . . . funny Bunny, all down the years, with her changing elfin face, and he seemed to be gazing at it with an immense surprise.

"Bunny's different," said Hugo eagerly to the spring night.

ii

Donaldson, Richard, Kt., was now on trial before his son. Hugo was going to be perfectly fair about it and give him a final chance. He wouldn't condemn him until he had seen the newspapers, but Bunny was coming to-day and she would get them for him.

The moon-faced clock said it was half-past ten in a determined manner; no nonsense about it. The wide-open windows showed him a golden morning and trees in the park beginning to dress themselves in green. "And very nice you look," said Hugo encouragingly to the trees.

"Did you call, sir?" enquired Tright, appearing immediately like an over-large mechanical toy.

Hugo was not going to tell Tright his opinion of the trees, so he looked about him for some other answer. A fly was strolling languidly across the primrose wall, and he seized upon that.

"Having a friendly chat with the old fly," he said.

"A fly?"

Tright's professional pride was outraged and the patient saw murder in his eye.

"Hi . . . leave the poor chap alone," cried Hugo peremptorily. "You are a bully, hitting a fellow smaller than yourself. He's not doing you any harm."

"Ah, but you never know, not with a fly," said Tright.

The fly, however, won the day. He sat on the ceiling, which was more than Tright could do, and put his finger to his nose. Hugo was delighted . . . a vulgar little chap but hearty, a good, honest Cockney fly.

Tright, having lost the day, departed and Hugo winked at his friend on the ceiling.

"I shall adopt you," he said. "I'll introduce you to Bunny and the Hound as my favourite fly. This is Bill, I'll say . . . no Willy . . . Willy Nilly."

His delight over this latest piece of childishness was interrupted by the return of Tright with the newspapers, looking clever and pleased with himself.

"Now in less than half an hour Mrs. Hallett will be here, sir, and you'll have all the news," said Tright, setting a chair in readiness, and moving Tessie's roses in their crystal jar so

that they would still be in the patient's line of vision when Mrs. Hallett sat down. He had a tidy mind for such details. The angle of a chair in a sick room was of immense importance in his eyes, the hang of a picture too, or a speck on the carpet. Tright, seeking to spare his patient the little irritations, had not wit enough to know that perfection may be the greatest irritant of all.

"Now, you're splendid. That's right," said Tright.

The thought of his splendour in Mrs. Hallett's eyes when she should presently arrive, annoyed Hugo intensely.

"I must look a pretty mug," he thought and took down his pipe and lit it, preparing a scowl by way of greeting.

When, at five minutes to eleven Leeder showed her in, he exclaimed: "Hullo! Come on. I say, you're late."

"I'm not," said Mrs. Hallett, looking indignantly at the little clock.

"Ha, ha! Got a bite," crowed Hugo. "Now what you've got to do is to read me all the juicy bits, do you mind? We'll have a nice bright murder first, please, Mrs. Reader-ess."

"Shove your chair round and be comfortable and take off your hat and do drop a few things about. I like it," he added.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Hallett, in a tone of reproof. She left her hat on, put down her gloves and bag and looked carefully through the newspapers.

"There doesn't seem to be murder of any kind this morning," she said at last.

“Not one?” Hugo was indignant. “Oh, hang it all, there must be at least a tame one.”

“Not a single murder.”

“My hat, what’s the world coming to?” said Hugo. “They ought to provide us with a murder. I’ve a good mind to write and complain. But never mind. I don’t suppose it’s your fault. I say, has Mr. Hallett got a valet?”

“Whatever do you mean?” exclaimed the girl, looking frightened.

“Oh, I just thought I’d like to know, because he sounds as if he ought to have a valet.

Mr. Hallett
Had a valet—

that sort of thing.”

“Well, he hasn’t,” said the girl shortly.

“Never you mind.” His tone was friendly and consoling because he was afraid he had hurt her feelings. “I’ll bet he hasn’t got a warder anyhow, like me. That’s what Tright is, you know, and I’m his prisoner, only they keep it dark. They keep everything dark,” said Hugo with fierce emphasis.

“W . . . what would you like me to read to you?”

“I don’t mind and neither does Willy Nilly.” He put out a hand and touched her arm. “Look up there on the ceiling. That’s Willy Nilly, my favourite fly. Every prisoner has to have some sort of pet, you know. Generally it’s a rat, but

Tright wouldn't let me have a rat. He's fussy. And after all I prefer Willy Nilly. Don't you think he's rather a darling?"

Mrs. Hallett turned a white face to the patient and looked him in the eye.

"Mr. Donaldson, why are you saying such things to me?" she asked, keeping her voice firm with a desperate effort.

Hugo sobered at once.

"You didn't really think I was mad, did you?" he said, in a startled voice. "My word, you poor girl, you look frightened to death. I was only playing the fool. It's about the one thing left for me to do. I thought Willy Nilly rather a bright touch myself, which just shows you what a fellow comes to, lying here dressed up like a doll all day, with old Tright on guard and nobody to read him the murders."

At the last words he had broken into a smile again and Mrs. Hallett looked away.

"You are plucky," she said.

"I'm damned if I am," cried Hugo indignantly. Nobody was going to call him plucky and get away with it. "I curse like blazes, I can tell you, but it doesn't get you anywhere."

"No," said Mrs. Hallett.

"Well, there you are. So don't you worry if I talk an awful lot of bilge, because, cross my heart, I'm not mad. I'll tell you what. We won't read this morning as they've done us out of our murder. We'll write that letter to young Anstruther. Tright . . . I say, Tright, would you mind shoving the desk over? Mrs. Hallett and I are going to write some letters. We have work to do."

“That’s right,” said Tright, beaming upon Mrs. Hallett, whom he had so cleverly produced for his patient. This was going to be a very good arrangement, he could see.

The desk was rolled over and paper and pens laid tidily at Mrs. Hallett’s hand. Then Tright stole off to his lair again.

“Perhaps it would be less tiring for you if I took it down in shorthand first,” said the girl doubtfully.

“What, can you do shorthand? Why, you are a positive genius,” cried Hugo, delighted. “I have got a clever reader-ess. You must be my private secretary, because it sounds posher like that. Do say you are my secretary when anybody asks you, won’t you?”

“Nobody will ask me,” said Mrs. Hallett, pen in hand.

“Not even Henry? Oh, come now, I have a feeling Henry is sure to ask you. He’s a ferret, Henry is. I’d say to him if I were you, ‘I’ve been appointed private secretary to a man named Donaldson . . . you know, Hugo Donaldson,’ and then Henry would get the idea that I’m an awfully big pot and he’d be impressed. I’d love to impress Henry,” said Hugo, wistfully, “but of course I know it isn’t any good. Tright will have told him I’m just a silly ass in blue pyjamas.”

Mrs. Hallett, sitting before the desk, pen in hand, did not look up, but she said in a gentle voice: “I think Mr. Tright is pretty discreet, you know, to do him justice.”

Hugo was amazed and touched. The ignominy of being so completely under Tright’s dominion and the thought of all the things the fellow might tell of him if he chose were the boy’s worst torment, but no one but this strange girl had sensed it, he knew.

“Thanks awfully for telling me that,” he said. “And now what about this letter to young Anstruther? ‘Dear Anstruther,’ I think we’ll begin, ‘Here’s luck, old lad. You’re a fine sort of chap, I must say, to have such a thirst. Take your godfather’s advice and give the whiskey a miss, though I won’t mind your going one over the eight on boat race night because I’ve done it myself, and I’m a fair-minded fellow. Which reminds me, your parents have made a break in giving you a battered crock for a godfather and in case you haven’t heard about it yet, I’d better tell you the tale. One evening in the beginning of the month I went out with Miss Trotsky. Tell Bill, your father, she’s red-headed and distinctly fast. . . .’”

“Mr. Donaldson,” protested the private secretary, “you really can’t say that to a little boy.”

Hugo, crowing inwardly with delight, exclaimed in a pious tone:

“But it’s the truth. I’m not going to conceal anything.”

“Even so . . .”

“Look here, am I writing this letter or are you? You do as you’re told, like a good girl. Come along now. Where was I . . . oh . . . ‘Well, the long and short of it was we went for a spin, had a bit of a fight with a telegraph pole on the Portsmouth road and the pole won. It did in Miss Trotsky completely as far as I know, and jolly nearly did for me too, so here I lie, old sport, dressed up in pretty pyjamas, looking no end of an ass, and unable to move until Doomsday . . . or perhaps not. You never can tell. As for Miss T., she may be lying there still and I rather hope she didn’t survive, because

she was a good pal of mine, and . . . your father will understand this . . . I don't quite like to think of her sold to some other fellow.'"

Hugo, wickedly watching Mrs. Hallett out of the corner of his eyes, was overjoyed to see her put down her pencil at this point.

"Really, Mr. Donaldson," she expostulated, "you can't possibly say such things to the child. It's too dreadful."

"Why?" asked the villain, in much surprise.

"You know why perfectly well." Mrs. Hallett turned upon him indignantly. "Do you mean to tell me you are so utterly callous that you never even troubled to ask about the poor thing's injuries?"

"I always meant to. I give you my word," said Hugo. "But it slipped my mind. You'd have liked Miss Trotsky . . . might have thought her a bit low perhaps, but the real trouble was at the last she wouldn't go straight."

"And what about you, I should like to know," said Mrs. Hallett with spirit.

"I did my best to guide her. I did really, but it was no go. Into the telegraph pole she went. . . . Nice little car she was too," said Hugo, and pulled the bedclothes over his head.

When he ventured to emerge Mrs. Hallett was waiting sedately, pen in hand.

"Don't interrupt again," commanded Hugo, in a reproving tone, "or I shall give you a year's notice. You are not the censor and you just remember I am writing to a man of the world. Let us resume our correspondence. 'So now

you know, Anstruther old man, what your silly parents have done for you, but tell Alison not to worry. I'll be up and about one of these days, and at any rate I have a few pence coming to me that you shall have, only your Uncle Paul must have as much as he wants of it first because I've known him longer than you. And now I come to that subject. Just tell Alison she's not to believe any of the lies they tell her about old Paul, because he didn't do it and that's flat. If I'd . . .'"

"Y . . . you're going rather fast for me," interrupted the private secretary, resting her head on her hand so that Hugo could not see her face.

"I'm awfully sorry. I say, you're not wild with me, are you?"

"Of course not. Please go on. 'If I'd . . .'"

"'If I'd been about at the time I'd have raised hell, but I didn't know the facts until two days ago when Bunny came to see me. Your mother will know Bunny's no rabbit, old man, and she says Paul didn't do it and Paul's girl is not a hussy, so don't you believe them. Bunny went into the court to have a look at Mrs. Paul, and she quite liked her. Jolly nice sort of girl, Bunny thought. I can't tell you details yet, Alison, old thing, but Bunny and I are going to look after her somehow.'

"Am I going too fast now?" asked Hugo, pausing. "Because this is about a friend of mine and I get pretty hot over it."

"No, no. It's all right. I think I've got it all down. . . . 'Look after her somehow . . .'"

“‘Somehow. So that’s what I mean about the money. Paul may want some to make a start with, and I have no use for it except for Hugo II and I know he won’t mind. Don’t worry about the silly affair and if you want to write to Paul better do it care of Bunny because you can depend on her. Trust to the old firm of Molyneux, Donaldson and Co. (The Co.’s Bunny’s Hound, and he’s a blinking bloodhound, young Anstruther.) As for you, I’m jolly glad you’ve arrived, my lad, and I’m as vain as a peacock, I can tell you, strutting like anything because I have a godson weighing nine and a half pounds without his boots. Sorry you’ve chosen such a wreck for him, you two, but thanks awfully. I *was* surprised. Love from Hugo.’”

The letter was finished, and Hugo, limp and exhausted from the excited contemplation of Paul’s troubles and the general cussedness of human affairs, sighed and lay still wishing with all his might that Mrs. Hallett would disappear and leave him alone. That he could not even dictate a letter without feeling faint was a new humiliation, and he held on to his consciousness with a dreadful effort.

Mrs. Hallett, however, took no notice of him whatever. She did not even look at him, and he was too grateful to realize that this was strange. As the weakness began to pass he discovered that she was sitting with her back almost turned to him, writing busily, her head still resting on one hand and her elbow on the desk.

He had thought her an odd-looking creature yesterday, but now he seemed to know her quite well and the impression of oddness had passed. Funny how quickly you could grow used to some people while others would look

quite wrong though you knew them for a thousand years. . . . Tright, for instance. Tright would never look anything but absurd to Hugo. The fellow had the patience of Job and his amiability was unwavering, and yet Hugo knew that somehow everything he said to Tright went down the wrong way and never reached its proper destination. Tright put his own interpretation on everything and was blissfully unaware that he was always wrong.

His own trust in Mrs. Hallett seemed to Hugo suddenly very remarkable, as she sat there, writing what was after all an extremely private letter for him. And he knew she wouldn't tell. Why? It wasn't anything she had said, for in their short acquaintance he now recalled she had said almost nothing at all, while he had talked nineteen to the dozen and hardly any of it sense.

"She's a dark horse," decided Hugo, pleased at the discovery. "I think I'll put my shirt on her."

Mrs. Hallett had opened her bag in search of a handkerchief and on the inner flap the roving eyes of Hugo discovered two initials, H. M. He considered them with interest. Perhaps her name wasn't really Hallett. He felt guilty, as though he had been peering into secrets that were no concern of his, until it occurred to him that the M might have belonged to her unmarried name. She didn't, he thought, look awfully married and she was young . . . couldn't have been Mrs. Hallett long.

"I wonder what her name is," he said to himself. "Hilda . . . Hannah . . . Henrietta?"

“Is your name Henrietta?” he enquired in an interested tone.

Mrs. Hallett started, put down her pen and looked round.

“Why?”

“I’m afraid I saw the initials in your bag. Sounds beastly prying, but I wasn’t really. I do think Hallett might have given you a new bag when you were married.

Mrs. Hallett
Got a wallet.

Struck it at last!”

“Struck what? . . . I don’t know what you mean. Girls don’t have wallets, either.”

“But you must allow a fellow a little poetic license,” protested Hugo. “Well, Mr. Hallett had a wallet, if you like it better. No good telling me he hadn’t because of course he did.”

Mrs. Hallett stood, turned her back, and gathered up her bag as though for flight, and Hugo exclaimed in a horrified tone: “I say, he’s not dead or anything, is he?”

“Who?”

“Hallett. I’m afraid I may have said something to upset you with all this ragging.”

“No, he’s not dead.” She turned round and looked at him searchingly for a moment. “There’s nothing wrong between

us. . . . It's all right. He's just abroad and I couldn't go with him . . . naturally. We're hard up," she said with a rush.

"What a beastly shame! But cheer up. He's sure to make his fortune. Give him my love when you write," finished Hugo, smiling at her.

"Very well," said Mrs. Hallett unexpectedly.

She sat down again and returned to work on the letter, first reading through what she had already written.

"I expect it sounds a frightful mix-up, doesn't it?" said Hugo, all at once nervous about the letter.

"They'll understand," answered Mrs. Hallett soothingly.

"Yes, they won't expect much of a letter from me," agreed Hugo. "They know I'm not brainy, like Alison. She's a friend of mine . . . a sister of my great friend."

"You seem to have a lot of friends," said Mrs. Hallett without satire.

"My word! Paul, Bunny, Alison and Bill, that's four . . . and Mrs. Hallett five," exclaimed Hugo.

She smiled at him faintly and did not deny it.

"Now Paul," proceeded Hugo, "has thousands of friends, but then he's a wonder. I must show you his photograph one of these days . . . big fair chap, he is."

Mrs. Hallett's elbow was on the desk again, the pen busily moving.

"I'm sure you write a much better letter than I do," observed Hugo, watching her. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind

touching it up a little for me."

"I wouldn't alter a word," declared Mrs. Hallett, and then, as though fearing she had been too intense, continued: "It wouldn't be your letter then. Your friends wouldn't recognise your touch."

"No, I suppose that's true. You are a clever girl. I think I shall call you Henrietta."

"You mustn't. I am sure your mother would not approve."

Hugo shouted with laughter.

"I'm not seven years old," he protested, "and she won't know. Besides, my mother never interferes with my private affairs. I've brought her up too carefully. You ask Hallett if I may call you Henrietta."

"You may call me anything you like."

"Well, Henrietta dear, you may go now. Look at the clock. School's out and you have been a very good girl."

"It's only five to twelve," protested Mrs. Hallett.

"And you came at five to eleven. You must be careful about these little things or you'll never get on in life. I hope they are giving you lunch?"

"Your mother kindly offered but I prefer to go out for it, and then I shall go and sit in the park until you are ready for me again."

"Good girl. Go into the nice park and play with your hoop, or isn't it the whooping season? I forget. By the way if you happen to see a girl in red pyjamas with dragons sporting

down the front, go up to her and say: 'I'm Hugo Donaldson's secretary and I'm no rabbit either.' Got that? She'll understand."

Mrs. Hallett laid the pages of the letter near his hand and took up her bag and gloves.

"You might like to glance through what I've done. I hope you'll find it all right," she said.

"It looks ripping," said Hugo, taking up a page. "Good-bye for the present and thanks awfully for writing it."

"I should be thanking you," said Mrs. Hallett and fled.

Hugo looked after her sympathetically.

"It must be rotten to need a job as badly as that," he thought. "I suppose it's a bit early to ask mother to give her a rise in her salary. She's such an independent little cuss."

iii

His mother came in a little later to show him the liqueur set and, as she unpacked the exquisite little glasses and stood them, glowing with colour, in a row before him, it seemed to Hugo that life was all wrong.

"Paul gets six months," he thought, "and Bunny gets the mitten and Mrs. Hallett gets a few bob a week, and that ass Roland gets a liqueur set. It isn't fair."

"What do we pay Mrs. Hallett, mother?" he asked.

"Two pounds a week, dear."

“Oh, mother, that’s sweating. Why, two quid a week wouldn’t have kept me in socks in my palmy days.”

“Hugo,” exclaimed Lady Donaldson. “I’m sure you never spent so much money on socks. It would be wicked extravagance.”

“It would be a dashed impossibility,” grinned Hugo, “unless I were a centipede. Poor old mother, I’m an expensive ornament, aren’t I?”

“My most valuable ornament,” declared his mother, kissing him. “What other use is there for money except to make you well, my son?”

Hugo wondered bitterly what his father thought about that, but he could not ask her, so he said instead: “What became of Miss Trotsky, by the way? Do you know?”

“It’s safe in the garage.”

He knew by his mother’s face that she hated Miss Trotsky, though she had managed her usual cheerful smile as she spoke.

“Do you call her ‘it’ because she’s a corpse? Did I do the poor girl in completely that night?” asked Hugo with interest.

“Greville says the engine is as good as ever, but I haven’t seen her. Hugo, I couldn’t bear it.”

Hugo put a comforting arm round her.

“Good of you to have her brought home in that case,” he said gratefully, “but don’t you worry. I’ll give her away so that you won’t have to see the little blighter any more. Still,

she is a bit of a wonder, you know, mother. She must have a far better tummy than Roland."

"Poor Roland. You are always rather hard on him, Hugo. I hope you like the little glasses?"

"They're beautiful and you are the most tasteful parent in the United Kingdom. Tell the old ass he may have his medicine out of them as a treat on Sundays and bank holidays."

As Lady Donaldson repacked Roland's present, Hugo considered the matter of Miss Trotsky. He had said that he would hate to see her sold to some other fellow, but the new owner he had in view for the red lady was different.

"Do you think Greville could come up and see me for a few minutes?" he asked his mother as she was leaving him.

"If you are sure it won't upset you, my darling boy."

To his mother it was clearly incredible that he could bear to think of the little car, or any car again, but he reassured her at last and Greville was sent up to see him directly after luncheon.

Greville, walking over the blue carpet as though it might at any moment explode beneath his feet, had reassuring news of Miss Trotsky. She was as good as new, he declared with pride, for the engine by a miracle had escaped injury, and the smashed body had been repaired and repainted at the expense of the insurance company. Greville, who waged a perpetual war with the company in question, had seen to that.

"For I knew you wouldn't like to think of her left as she was, Mr. Hugo," said Greville, "and when we pay our

premiums, why not insist on the benefits is my motto, as you know."

"Jolly smart of you, Greville. Thanks awfully," exclaimed Hugo, much pleased. "Are the gears all right now? Don't let on, but that was the trouble, you know. The steering was wonky."

"They're first rate now, sir, but you didn't ought to drive with your gears out of condition, you didn't really."

"I know. Meant to get you to have a look at them but I was in a bit of a hurry that night," said Hugo.

The remembrance of what had occasioned the hurry struck him with a sudden bitter humour. His father was really to blame for the accident, if he only knew it, but of course Hugo wasn't going to let that out.

"Mind you keep mum about the gears, Greville, or I shall get into a row," he said, knowing of old how to ensure silence from this friend of his youth. "And, by the way, would you oil and grease her and fill her up this afternoon because I think of getting a friend to take her over. It upsets my mother to have her in the family just as present, makes her see telegraph poles and all that."

"And very natural too," nodded Greville. "We all feel a bit that way, sir, as a matter of fact."

"Silly lot of asses you are," said Hugo gruffly. "I'm no end obliged to you for getting her fixed up all the same. I had no idea you'd think of it. If you'll get her ready I may send a young lady round to collect her later on . . . someone you know. Mind you make sure of the gears, though."

“You trust them gears to me,” said Greville. “There’s not a gear been made ever got the better of me. I’ll be on the look out for the young lady then.”

“And a dog,” said Hugo.

Greville departed smiling.

CHAPTER X

i

BUNNY MOLYNEUX appeared with the Hound at a quarter past three, slipping into Hugo's room with an air of triumph.

"I just dropped in," she said, "through the skylight if anybody asks. Leeder hasn't set eyes on me because I made him shut them directly he opened the door, to save his conscience. I thought I'd come early and stay till chucked out. Your mother won't expect to find me here until four or after."

"Jolly good," applauded Hugo. "Come along and meet my private secretary. Mrs. Hallett, this is Miss Bunny Molyneux who says her name should rhyme with dux. Bunny, did you hear me say I had a private secretary?"

"Important, aren't you?" said Bunny, then grinned at the other girl who had risen nervously and was standing with her back to the light.

"Shall I go, Mr. Donaldson?" asked Mrs. Hallett, eagerly.

"Certainly not," said Hugo. "Your time isn't up for another fifteen minutes. I never heard of such a thing!"

"Slave-driver, isn't he?" said Bunny, surveying Mrs. Hallett with lively interest.

"I am beginning as I mean to go on," declared Hugo. "Besides, Henrietta, you haven't met the bloodhound. Speak

to the lady, Hound."

The Hound, whose manners were modern, took Mrs. Hallett's chair and yawned.

"He's worn out," explained Bunny, "because we met a lion in the park. At least he thought it was a lion and you couldn't expect a bloodhound to put up with that."

"And wasn't it a lion?" asked Hugo, surprised.

"Best Derby-winning lion I ever saw, if it was," said Bunny. "It sprinted off as if seven devils instead of one hound were after it. Fatiguing job chasing Derby lions, isn't it, Hound?"

"You know," said Hugo to Mrs. Hallett, "he's dressed as a terrier because he's in disguise. Otherwise everyone would know he was a bloodhound and what would be the good of that? Same as us. I'm disguised as a nice little fellow in blue pyjamas, and you are disguised as a private secretary and Bunny is disguised as a rabbit. All quite wrong."

"She thinks you're mad," said Bunny.

"Not Henrietta. Why, we're old friends. I say, Henrietta, do show her our letter to young Anstruther, will you?"

"What, Bill?" asked Bunny.

"Bill? Certainly not. Hugo, my child. I've been turned into a godfather since I saw you last. There now!"

"No?" cried Bunny. "Have Bill and Alison gone and done it?"

"Yes, and I give you my word I didn't cadge for the little beggar either, Bunny. It was the shock of my life."

"You silly donkey," said Bunny, with a shout of laughter, "I could have told you. Good lord, Hugo, do you realise what this means? *Molly's a grandmother!*"

In her excitement Bunny fell off the arm of the chair into the seat and lay there hunched up, her face wreathed in smiles of elfin wickedness.

"I've a good mind to go and congratulate her," she said. "This is the best news I've heard since Christmas."

Mrs. Hallett meanwhile had taken the letter out of its envelope and was waiting for an opportunity to give it to Bunny. Since the other girl's entrance she had become the perfect secretary.

"If you don't happen to know the Mostyn Anstruther gang, this may be all Greek to you," Bunny said to her in a friendly voice. "You see, the baby's grandmother is one of the young-old . . . twenty-five, if she's a day."

"She won't be pleased then," said Mrs. Hallett, clearing her throat, and handing Bunny the letter.

"Pleased?" Bunny chuckled. "Molly will have to let out a few tucks in her age. I shall get everybody I know to go and congratulate her in public. . . . Mean me to read this, Hugo?"

"Yes, we've been taking your name in vain. Better have a look if it's all right," explained Hugo. "Mrs. Hallett is going to post it."

Bunny gave Mrs. Hallett a quick look as she set about tidying the desk and the newspapers, then winked solemnly at Hugo behind his secretary's back, and settled down to read. Hugo watched her changing face, his own lighting

when she smiled and falling into faint anxiety when the smile faded.

She finished it at last and sat quite still for a moment, then jumped to her feet and gave it into Mrs. Hallett's hand.

"Just the thing," said Bunny handsomely. "Thanks."

The last gruff word and the smile that accompanied it were for Hugo and he knew that she was grateful for what he had left unsaid. It would be no use anyone's telling Alison that Bunny had been thrown over by Paul in the face of such a letter. Alison would see for herself that it must be a lie. Hugo began to feel proud of his letter.

There was a doubtful line between Bunny's eyes, however, and she stood with her hands in the pockets of her short coat, staring at the other girl.

"Look here," she said suddenly, "I suppose you won't let the cat out of the bag?"

The Hound, hearing a word of interest to a dog, cocked an ear, but Bunny put out a hand and folded it down again, mechanically, her eyes upon Mrs. Hallett, who had turned slowly scarlet.

"Nothing would induce me to mention Mr. Donaldson's letters or affairs to anyone," she said indignantly.

"It's all right, Bunny. She's an awfully private secretary. You can trust her," interposed Hugo.

"Oh, righto! Cheek of me perhaps, but don't get your hair off," said Bunny, smiling at Mrs. Hallett. "I'm suspicious of everyone just now owing to circs over which I have no

control. But I daresay you're right, because you're young. It is the old ones I can't stick."

Mrs. Hallett stamped the letter, looked at the little clock significantly, and walked to the door with a demure "Good afternoon."

"Good-bye, Henrietta, don't forget to come to-morrow, and remember me to Hallett," called Hugo after her.

"I shan't forget," said Henrietta, and closed the door.

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"Where in the world did you get hold of Freakie?" enquired Bunny, mounting a chair.

"She only looks like that," expostulated Hugo. "Nice girl, dark horse. . . . in the soup too."

"Really? She'll be falling in love with your bright eyes, my lad."

"Rats! People don't fall in love with half a corpse. Besides, she's married," explained Hugo.

"My poor innocent, they are the worst, especially if she's good," said Bunny. "Nothing so bad as the good ones. I didn't mean to barge in like that, but I hope you can trust her, because there's a new development, Hugo. Pretty sinister it is, too."

"Good lord, what's happened now? You can trust her all right, Bunny."

"Righto! Those brutes are trying to buy off Paul's girl," said Bunny with fury in her voice.

“The swine! How do you mean buy her off? They can’t unmarry her and Paul that I can see.”

“Just what I said to Molly, but she said, ‘Don’t you be too sure,’ in that clever way of hers. You know, as though she were in with people in high places. A word in the Archbishop’s ear and a nod to the Angel Gabriel or whoever’s in charge and the thing’s as good as done. That’s what Molly seems to think; and I could see she was actually telling me about trying to buy off Mrs. Paul to make me realise there was still hope for me. I could have killed her, Hugo.”

“I went there really,” continued Bunny, “to see if I could get an inkling as to Mrs. Paul’s address, dropped a few careless questions, such as ‘How is Paul liking it, have you heard? Not so comfy as his last home, I daresay. By the way, where was he living when the bust-up occurred?’ But Molly merely meowed and said: ‘I don’t know, my dear . . . some dreadful place’ and then proceeded with her little story of sale and barter. I talked to her pretty straight. I told her you can’t go buying up people’s wives behind their backs. It isn’t decent; and how would she have liked it if the Mostyns had tried to buy her off when she had been married to Mr. Mostyn about three weeks? Molly said: ‘That’s different. John married me for love.’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘are you suggesting Paul married his girl for her money or her looks or what?’

“I won’t tell you her answer, Hugo, but I’ll tell you mine. I said: ‘You may be Paul’s mother, but I’m sorry for it, for you’re not a nice person to know,’ and I stalked out of the house.”

“Good old Bunny!”

“And there at the door,” added Bunny scowling, “I met Lady Eleanor, just going in. Of course I beamed at her to make her think life was a glad sweet song, but I could hear family skeletons rattling for miles. I’ll be on her list after a few hints from Molly; and the damnable part of it I didn’t get the girl’s address after all.”

“How in the world are we going to find it?” enquired Hugo, anxiously. “Couldn’t you get it out of the lawyers or counsel or somebody?”

“N . . . no. There are difficulties there,” said Bunny, with some hesitation. “Now we know what they are after we shall have to keep very quiet about wanting to help Mrs. Paul for one thing. I’m rather sorry now I quarrelled with Molly because I might have persuaded her to engineer a visit for me to Paul. She would have done it too, thinking it might lure Paul from the girl, for he is obstinate, bless his heart. She admitted that. I could stroll in on him and say, ‘Hullo, you do look a funny ass. Where did you get the fancy dress?’ Paul would like that and see that I was treating the whole thing as a joke, and then I could ask him the girl’s address on the quiet and tell him that you and I wanted to keep a friendly eye on her.”

“I wish to God I could get up,” cried Hugo, with a sudden dreadful misery, and Bunny jumped to her feet and rushed over to him.

“Hugo, stop it. . . . You’re not to,” she cried. “If you go and get upset they’ll chuck me out and won’t let me come again.”

“All right,” said Hugo, looking up at her anxious face. “I’m not upset.” But he had been, at the thought of Bunny, wandering about beastly prisons and standing up to Molly and facing alone the hateful, lying world. “Don’t you worry, Funny Bunny,” he begged in a wheedling tone. “And that reminds me, I have a poem of my own now . . . from Alison. Pitch the old Hound off and sit down there, and I’ll tell it to you.”

Bunny, however, sat on the table instead, because she said it always made her feel a perfect lady to sit on a straight chair. She heard Alison’s rhyme, agreed that young Mr. Anstruther was hot stuff and was finally introduced with much ceremony to Willy Nilly, taking an afternoon stroll in the sun.

These solemnities over, the two young fools, greatly cheered, returned to the question of Paul and his wife.

“I’ve been all up and down Fleet Street this morning,” said Bunny, “looking up the newspaper accounts and I’ve got the address of the firm where she used to be, so that’s something. To-morrow morning I shall go along in my best clothes like a rich client, ask to see the senior partner, and pretend to be an old school friend of Mrs. Paul Mostyn’s who wants to find her. He’s sure to be a fatherly old boy who’ll tell me where she is.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Hugo, in a rather flat voice. The idea of Bunny on such an errand worried him, but he knew that was absurd. “Potty, I’m getting,” thought Hugo. “Oh, I say, Bunny, that just reminds me of a job I wanted you to do. You don’t happen to know what the newspapers said about my little affair, I suppose?”

"No. What did they say?"

"That's what I want to find out," explained Hugo, in a mysterious tone. "Would you mind buying me a copy of every one of the papers the day after it happened and cutting out anything you can see and letting me have it on the quiet?"

"Of course I will, but what's the idea?"

"Well, you never know what lies they may have told. Nobody," said Hugo with violence, "barges into a telegraph pole on purpose."

Bunny laughed.

"You silly donkey. Why, it sounds like a bed-time story by your Aunt Eleanor. You don't mean to say she has . . ."

"How do I know? . . . How do I know what anyone says, when they keep everything dark? You listen and see what you can hear, and do get me those cuttings, old thing."

"I'll get them," promised Bunny. "To-morrow. Busy day ahead of me, I have, one way and another, but I'll get them. I thought if you'd write a letter to Mrs. Paul, and put in it a cheque, say for £50, in case she needs it, I'd give you one for the same amount, and then, when I get the address, I can post it off to her."

"I have £50," protested Hugo. "I could send it."

"Yes, but I have more than you."

"Don't throw your riches in my face, girl. Paul is my friend."

"Mine too. Fifty-fifty, old Hugo," pleaded Bunny.

"Very well, but don't give me a cheque, because I've no one to pay it in for me, and it wouldn't look proper." Hugo smiled at her. "You can owe it to me for the present. Hand out that cheque book from the pigeon hole and a pen. This is where I want my private secretary."

"I'll be her," said Bunny, "and now I know which your bank is I can pay it in for you myself and save a scandal."

She filled in the cheque and gave it to him to sign, then drew out some note-paper.

"Your old Henrietta is not the only secretary on the beach. Come on, Hugo, what shall we say?"

The letter, since the girl was a stranger to them, proved a difficult and delicate matter, but they compassed it at last.

Dear Mrs. Paul, (wrote Bunny for Hugo,)

Will you make use of this money, if you need it, while Paul is away, as I am not wanting any for the moment. It's all right, because Paul is a friend of mine and he has often lent me a bit. He'd tell you to use it.

I expect you are worried about Paul but never mind. Don't you listen to any of them, because he'll soon be coming home again and there's plenty more where that cheque came from, when he needs it.

If you can see him, please tell him I am on his side and so is Bunny. (She's a girl he has known since he was a kid.) I would have been round only I've had a smash-up in my car and can't move at present. If there is anything I can do, please write to

me, because Paul would expect you to, and I shall be hurt if you don't. This, of course, is in confidence, and nobody is going to know about it, I give you my word.

Yours sincerely,
Hugo Donaldson.

Bunny, on her mettle as a secretary, brought the letter for Hugo to sign, in a business-like manner. She was pretending to be jealous of Henrietta and he was delighted. Nice of her, that was.

He wondered, rather shyly, what she would say about the little car, and when presently she had put the letter away and was lighting a cigarette with an air of good work done, he took down his pipe and filled it, as a support to his courage.

Leeder brought tea at this moment and his expression of surprise at the sight of Miss Molyneux was received by his audience with loud applause.

"I can't think how I didn't see you come up, Miss," said Leeder. "I'll bring another cup and saucer."

"We'll have to get that skylight seen to," further remarked Leeder coming back, and retired much pleased with the laughter provoked by this little hit.

Hugo put down his pipe to watch Bunny pouring out the tea. She had taken off her hat and coat and her hair, too short to be untidy, was pleasantly disarranged and shone in the sunlight. She would look nice, he thought, just like that, driving Miss Trotsky through the park, the bloodhound sitting beside her.

“Bunny, will you adopt my orphan child for me?” asked Hugo, speaking mysteriously to hide the fact that he was nervous of Bunny for the first time in his life.

“Righto,” said Bunny, always ready to play any game that was required of her. “Is this some of your sticky past coming out, or what?”

“My word! And, you know, mother doesn’t like to have her about the place. She’s a red-headed minx.”

“Bad lad, aren’t you?” Bunny brought him his tea and put it on the table beside him. “Some relation to Willy Nilly, I suppose?” she remarked looking down at him.

“It’s Miss Trotsky,” said Hugo, with a pleading smile.

“Good lord, you’re joking, of course.”

“No, I’m not. Please, Bunny, take my orphan child.”

“I’ll buy her from you,” said Bunny in a gruff tone.

“You’ll do no such dam’ thing,” shouted Hugo, indignantly. “Why, you’re worse than Molly. Nobody shall buy my child.”

He caught Bunny’s arm and drew her down on the bed beside him.

“I’ve had Greville up and he says Miss Trotsky is as smart as paint and as good as new again,” explained Hugo, “and I know you sold your little car last year. You see, mother hates to have her about, and I couldn’t bear her to be brought up in a family where she wasn’t welcome.”

“Funny, aren’t you?” said Bunny with a queer little smile, “giving away cars with a pound of tea.”

“A cup of tea,” corrected Hugo, grinning, “and I’ve never done it before, I give you my word. You’ve got a lot of dashing about to do, up and down Fleet Street for me and hunting for Paul’s girl, and I’d love to think of you and the old Hound on the war path in Miss Trotsky. You could drive past my window, out there in the park and give three honks, without your hat. I’d know her voice in a million and I’d get Tright to wheel me out on the balcony to have a look. It would buck me up no end, if you only would. Please, Bunny.”

Bunny got up and returned to her place at the tea-table.

“Right,” she said. She attacked her afternoon tea indignantly and presently remarked in a threatening tone: “I’ll give you a car one of these days.”

“I’ll keep you up to that,” exclaimed Hugo, “or you can make it a very posh bath chair.”

“Shut up,” said Bunny hotly.

Hugo laughed.

“Don’t you tell anyone but I mean to be up and about again one of these days,” he said. “There was a specialist fellow here yesterday who gave me a hint.”

“I should jolly well think so, indeed. You don’t mean to say you’ve been lying there persuading yourself that you wouldn’t?” cried Bunny in a scornful tone. “Hound, what do you think of him?”

“Come on, old Hound. You come and talk to your uncle,” invited Hugo, and the Hound strolled over obediently and jumped on the bed.

Lady Donaldson, coming in a few moments later, was delighted to find her son enjoying his tea in such innocent and friendly company.

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Bunny had gone to collect her present, and Hugo pictured her walking jauntily down the mews with the Hound at her heels; saw the slim scarlet form of Miss Trotsky being wheeled out for her by Greville, and Bunny receiving advice about her little mannerisms before driving away.

"And if you have any hanky panky tricks from her, just you come to me, Miss," Greville would say, "for there's not a car been made ever got the better of me."

The gift of Miss Trotsky to Bunny had been a very happy thought, for it wasn't everybody who could give her a car, just casually like that. "Here's a car, Bunny. You can have it." Even Paul couldn't have done it, friends as they were. And presently, he knew, Bunny would remember what he had said about Miss Trotsky in his letter to young Anstruther, and she would know he must think rather a lot of her. A girl couldn't feel so dreadfully jilted in a world where there were other chaps wanting to give her cars, thought Hugo, pleased at his own cunning.

Three loud honks from the park beyond his window! Hugo knew the orphan's voice in a moment and shouted to Tright.

"Out on the balcony, quick, Tright. I've got to see someone," cried Hugo.

There she was . . . Miss Trotsky, the slim red body gleaming in the sun, and there was Bunny, hatless and waving gaily, the old Hound up beside her. Very smart they looked too. Bunny was playing a tune on Miss Trotsky's horn and Hugo conducted it solemnly from the balcony, until Tright came out with a determined air.

Bunny, taking the hint, put on her hat and pressed the self-starter. The little car moved off, very gay in its bright new war paint, and a fitting setting, it seemed to Hugo, for the gallant figure at the wheel.

"That's Miss Molyneux in her car, Tright," he said; and Tright, nodding answered: "That's right. She's one of the lucky ones."

"Which just shows you," thought Hugo. "She doesn't *look* jilted."

CHAPTER XI

LETTER FROM MRS. PAUL MOSTYN TO HER HUSBAND. UNPOSTED.

March 21st.

My darling Paul,

I have done something rather dangerous and perhaps slightly dishonest, but I'm very glad I've done it. I've taken a post as reader to your friend Hugo Donaldson, in disguise of course and under the name of Mrs. Hallett. And I'm glad because of a rather wonderful discovery. He believes in you.

The reason he didn't come round to see you as you expected was that he had met with a dreadful accident, and we were so much immersed in our own troubles that we didn't know anything about it. He was found one night on the Portsmouth road pinned under his car and for a time they thought he would not recover, but he must have a wonderful constitution for he has rallied marvellously, though he may never walk again owing to some injury to his spine.

I came into it in the most curious way. In my last letter I told you about Fanny Tright, who gave me her trousseau to make and whose father is a male nurse engaged upon a case in a house overlooking Hyde Park. That case turned out to be your friend Hugo. The Ponders think Mr. Tright quite a personage, because he works for some of the most famous surgeons and doctors. He is a large, flat, discreet kind of man with all his daughter's professional pride and conceit in himself; and during one of his visits to the Ponders, my

friend Henry, not so discreet, seems to have sung my praises to him.

Henry's mother tells me he is so grateful for the chance of getting a real Parisian accent, "and without paying for it, neither," that he can't speak too highly of me, which is nice of Henry. His eloquence must have been effective, for yesterday afternoon Mr. Tright arrived in a taxi and asked for an interview with me.

He said Henry had told him I was disengaged and he had come to see if I would be willing to read to his patient for two hours every day. When I heard he was with the Donaldsons, Paul dearest, I was terrified, for I thought they had found me out and this was a trap of some kind. Mr. Tright, however, told me that it had been his suggestion and that Lady Donaldson had so much confidence in his judgment that she had sent him at once to see if I would come back with him for an interview.

You may imagine what a temptation it was. I should be there only for two hours in the daytime when Sir Richard was away at his chambers, and yet I should be in the thick of your enemies, with perhaps a chance of hearing what their next moves were to be. It sounds mean and spying but I must use what weapons I can against them, having so few, and I determined to chance the interview at least, for the salary was tempting . . . £2 a week to a suitable person. They can deny their son nothing, Mr. Tright says, and I felt so bitter when I thought of your parents who deny you everything.

On the way back in the taxi Mr. Tright began to tell me a little about his patient, full of pride, you could see, at having brought him back from the jaws of death, as no doubt he

would put it. I began to wonder whether that was a kindness to the boy, for it seemed very dreadful to me, and I asked if he suffered much. He was so complacent about that that I almost hated him. He said, “You’ll not hear a sound out of my patient, Mrs. Hallett, so you needn’t be afraid he will upset you, not in that way.”

He went on to tell me there was one thing he must warn me against, and that as Lady Donaldson would certainly mention it, there was no harm in his preparing the way. His patient had had a severe nervous shock and it was very necessary to guard against upsetting him, as he was liable to get excited. So I was to be very careful, he said, and they had to warn all other visitors to your friend Hugo to the same effect, never to mention his father to him.

You may imagine I pricked up my ears, for we have every reason to hate Sir Richard Donaldson, you and I, and I felt sympathetic to his son for detesting him too. Mr. Tright explained to me with an air of being very learned that “nerves are peculiar things and you never know, not with nerves.” It appears that after Hugo had been brought home, but while it was still touch and go with him and he was nearly all the time delirious, the sight of his father had excited him dreadfully and they had had to keep Sir Richard away. “It came out that the young gentleman had been in a bit of trouble with his father directly before the accident,” Mr. Tright explained, “and probably brooding over it at the moment of the smash affected his mind temporarily. That’s the nerves again, you see, a sort of delusion that his father is his enemy. It will pass in time as he grows stronger, but we must be very careful, for though absolutely sane in every other way, he has this little kink still. Never asked for his

father when he became conscious or seemed surprised that he didn't come to see him, and this morning upset his mother properly if you'll believe me, by telling her straight out he wished she was a widow."

The patient thinks no end of his nurse, according to the nurse, who gave me to understand he was in the confidence of the whole family and the doctors, but especially that of young Mr. Donaldson, who tells him everything and depends upon him to put right any little thing in the arrangements which he doesn't like. Mr. Tright became quite eloquent on the subject of the household and the excellent treatment he received from high and low, as he put it, perhaps hoping to dazzle me and clinch the business. It was evidently a matter of pride with him not to let the patient down by failing to produce a reader when he wanted one.

I was very much frightened when we actually reached the house, but the interview was quite a success. Your Hugo's mother, though pathetically anxious to give her son everything he desires, seems considerate to those who serve him. I daresay you who have known them all your life will be amused that both Lady Donaldson and her house seemed perfect to me, Paul. They have the exquisite look that only money can produce and even money can't do it suddenly or alone. You must have had much the same surroundings and you pretend it doesn't matter that you have lost them through me; but I, who have never had them, see what I've done to you now and it frightens me. How can my love ever be big enough to make up for the trouble I've brought you, my darling?

Perfection has become so much second nature to Lady Donaldson, I suppose, that now she has to turn her home into a kind of hospital, she is determined to make that perfect too. She showed me the floor which has been set apart for the invalid, every door lined with baize so that no noises shall disturb him; thick felt under the carpets of the corridors, and even a miniature kitchen fitted up where much of his food is prepared. He has a big room looking over the park and she told me she spent a great deal of careful thought on it. “My boy is so proud of his room,” she said, and then she took me in and left me to make friends with him, which I thought very nice and unmotherly of her.

But she is quite wrong about the room. He hates it, and she and Mr. Tright are both quite wrong about your friend Hugo. Perhaps I am wrong too, because people always must be, more or less about each other, but then he and I have one great thing in common though he doesn’t know it, so I ought to understand him a little. The room is certainly beautiful, all in a soft tone of blue and not like a bedroom at all. It made me think of a society play, Act I. Morning room at Something Towers, even to the windows looking on the park; and that poor boy watching me out of great dark eyes from the bed, seemed all wrong there. I felt so bitter when I remembered how different your surroundings were, Paul, and I must have looked it, for Hugo took my expression for contempt and snapped it at me that it wasn’t his fault and he hated the room as much as I did. I lost my temper and told him he was very lucky, which was hateful of me and I felt sorry afterwards. In fact, we nearly quarrelled, until he laughed and called me a silly ass as though he had known me all his life. Somehow, because he was a friend of yours, I

liked that, for he didn't know me from Adam and yet accepted me into his world and yours as a matter of course.

Now, on the evening of my first day as his reader, all my early impressions of him are gone, except that I liked him in spite of myself and in spite of his father, although he reminds me of Sir Richard too. I am glad I did, because there is nothing I wouldn't do for him now I have discovered he believes in you and is up against your enemies.

I had a most extraordinary morning with him. Perhaps it was my guilty conscience at having come there more or less to spy that made me think half a dozen times that he knew who I was and that it had been, after all a trap to catch me. But at last he asked me to write a letter for him, Paul, and it was to your sister Alison. He told her you didn't do it, whatever they said, and that "your girl was not a hussy." Bunny had gone into the court to have a look at her and Bunny quite liked her. He told Alison not to worry because he had some money he didn't want and you could have it, and he and Bunny were going to try to look after your girl.

You may guess I could hardly write the letter. I wanted to tell him who I was and I wanted to cry, but I did neither. I must go through with this thing now I've begun it, and though I believe he would willingly help me to deceive your enemies, I can't put that responsibility upon the boy. He seems years younger than I am somehow, though I know he can't be, and I am convinced they don't understand him in the least. He is sensitive and reserved to a degree, and I suspect he thinks he'll never get up again, but he lies there talking nonsense and playing the fool. I've never seen such courage.

I didn't identify the "Bunny" until the afternoon, when she came in and he introduced her as Miss Molyneux and I knew she was the girl they pretended you loved. I was afraid of your friend Bunny, in case she should recognise me, and besides she might hate me, whatever Hugo thought, and feel I had stolen you from her. I kept my face out of the light and spoke as little as possible and as I watched her, I wondered more than ever how you could have chosen to love me instead, for I am quiet and dull and shabby beside the girls you must always have known.

Bunny Molyneux is a very modern product, so quick and bright and beautifully turned out. She and Hugo talked nonsense together and I felt that I stood outside in a strange world. She did not recognise me, luckily, but she didn't like me, I could see. She suspected I might let out the contents of Hugo's letter to your sister, but he told her they could trust me and that I was a friend. He was right but I wonder how he knew. Perhaps Bunny hit it when she said: "I daresay you are all right because you are young. It's the old ones I can't stick."

I understood the reason of their fears when I left them and found Lady Donaldson and Mr. Tright lying in wait for me. It was so evident they expected me to tell them everything the patient had said and to talk it over significantly and draw their own conclusions, probably all wrong. It seemed revolting that just because he was helpless he should have no privacy at all and, though I may spy for your sake, nothing is going to induce me to spy for theirs, against the friend who trusts you and has so wonderfully trusted me without any reason in the world.

I looked as stupid as I could under their questions and declared Mr. Donaldson had said nothing out of the ordinary to me at all. I pointed out that he hardly would to a complete stranger, and they nodded at that and Lady Donaldson said of course when he knew me better it would be different. “I’m sure you’ll tell me at once, my dear, if he ever seems upset or excited,” she added, “because the doctor says that is so very important, and naturally we are most anxious to give him everything he wants and save him any irritation. A cheerful atmosphere is so necessary for an invalid and I always beg his visitors to remember that.” I assured her I had never seen a more cheerful patient, true in fact, having had nothing to do with patients of any kind, but utterly untrue for all that.

I said he seemed in excellent spirits and full of fun, and they both looked pleased and proud, as if they felt themselves responsible for that. What egotists we all are! I suppose Lady Donaldson loves her son, and I suppose it is a consolation to her to make him into a kind of prize patient for the world to admire and wonder at, but it seems all wrong to me. He is a man, after all, and has a right to a normal life, with its irritations and disappointments and despairs, and he’ll have them in spite of her, because he’s not a weak fool who can be turned into a doll.

I went away greatly pleased at having deceived them, for your friend Bunny was right. This is a war between the young and the old and I believe that even if I had not discovered they were true to you, old man, I should still have refused to turn traitor to my own generation.

I feel much happier and more hopeful now I know that others, as well as I, believe in you, for though your marriage

to me has lost you so much, I see it hasn't lost you the trust of your friends, and you won't after all be quite cut off from your own world. . . . Now I can think the matter over quietly I believe I have made another discovery. Hugo Donaldson's accident happened two nights after your arrest, which seems to suggest a reason for that trouble with his father. No doubt he drove down from Oxford directly he heard about you and, when he found his father was against you and entirely on the side of your parents, quarrelled with him. I cannot believe that boy is suffering from any delusion or aberration about his father. He is so bitterly against your enemies that he must number Sir Richard among them. It does make me think there must be such a thing as retribution when, through his injustice to you, Sir Richard sees his only son made a hopeless invalid, perhaps for life. . . . But no, my logic is all wrong, for where does poor Hugo come in? He had done nothing, and neither had you, my darling dear, except marry

Your Helen who loves you.

CHAPTER XII

i

TESSIE ANSTRUTHER returned from her father's house at Brade to her mother's in London, found Hugo's liqueur set among other presents, and came to thank him in person.

Tessie was six feet high and amazingly like her brother Bill, the father of Hugo II. She had the same square-cut, ugly face, which, attractive in Bill, became merely detrimental to the girl, who had been early condemned as an ugly duckling, and had not enough feminine guile in her composition to turn her plainness into attraction.

She and Bill were great friends and his departure for India had left her solitary, for her other brother George was a society man, and Tessie hated society with the terror of the shy woman who can never adorn it.

As Tessie, dressed in manly tweeds, came striding into Hugo's room, it struck that newly made critic of life that her marriage to his cousin Roland was appropriate in a topsy-turvy fashion, for if Tessie ought to have been a man, the old ass had most certainly missed fire by not having been born a girl. He wondered whether they had talked this over between themselves, or whether nature had just been rather clever for once.

"I'm jolly glad you are coming into our family," he said, seeking for the only sincere method of congratulation he

could find.

"You've come into mine too," said Tessie. "Godfather to my nephew, aren't you? And I ought to hate you, for if it had been a girl you wouldn't have had a look-in. I was to have had the honour and glory."

"Never you mind," said Hugo, feeling he had somehow taken a mean advantage of poor old Tessie. "Think what a much better god-daughter you'll get now they've had a bit of practice. You know, I got the surprise of my life. It was decent of Bill and Alison."

Tessie looked at him meditatively.

"You always were a funny kid, Hugo," she said at last. "It was bound to be either you or Paul. George was never in the running. Bill and I always thought him too superior for words."

"Oh, I say, I hope I haven't pinched the little beggar from Paul," exclaimed Hugo.

"Good thing as it turned out, but you needn't worry. I had a letter from Bill and he said they ruled Paul out long ago, as too careless and too popular. Just as likely to mislay a godson as not, was how Bill put it, but he said you were a solitary sort of youngster yourself and you'd know what the little chap would feel like when they had to ship him off to school. Besides, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you when I've known you pretty well since you were born, we always agreed you were the best of the bunch," said Tessie with off-hand melancholy.

"That's a big 'un," accused Hugo, grateful but indignant. It was nice of old Tessie to come along with a tale like that to

cheer a battered wreck, but she always had been kind-hearted. “Why, Paul was, everybody knew. And, that reminds me, he didn’t do it, so don’t you believe them, Tessie, if you want to set eyes on that nephew of yours when he’s in my charge.”

“Didn’t he?” asked Tessie. “I’m hanged if I know. I haven’t seen a great deal of Paul since Bill and Alison were married, but I always liked him and it wouldn’t make any difference to me whatever he did. The elders are all making a song about it and saying as usual that our generation hasn’t any morals. Perhaps it hasn’t, if they mean doing what your parents want you to do, whatever the consequences. I haven’t much time for parents, myself.”

“Haven’t you?” asked Hugo, surprised.

“No.” Tessie shook her head. “I suppose yours are all right, but look at my own case. Mother is pleased with me for the first time in her life because I am going to marry Roland and will soon be off her hands. She never liked having a plain daughter. Well, perhaps you can’t blame her for that, but she didn’t care for Bill either. George was all right, because he wasn’t clumsy and could behave prettily when she had visitors; but even George used to feel as we did, that holiday times were a bore to mother and she tolerated us with difficulty. And when we went to stay with father at Brade, we were just visitors and felt awkward and ashamed. We always supposed one of them had done something awful, and that everybody knew it but us. And we used to talk over what it could be and which was the sinner. We came to the conclusion it must be father, because he stayed at Brade, whereas mother was in London going

everywhere, and the boys rather admired him as a gay Lothario but I thought it was dreadful and he would go to hell.

"That of course," said Tessie solemnly, "was when I was very young. I haven't believed in hell for a long time now and I don't know whether I believe in heaven either, though I think it will be a bit of a sell if there isn't one. When I was sure there was a heaven I used to puzzle my brains about how they would arrange things when father got there, for supposing he'd loved somebody else after mother, which one of them would get him in the end? I couldn't solve it.

"Then last week mother insisted that I should go down to Brade and ask father to give me away. I wanted George to do it . . . give me away, I mean . . . but she was quite shocked and said it was father's right and I must ask him. She couldn't. She hinted that she had sacrificed everything for us, and I supposed she meant by not getting a divorce, and I became more than ever convinced that there was something fishy about father. Going down in the train I determined to ask him straight out, for, after all, I'm twenty-three and going to be married and I thought I'd a right to know. One night at dinner, I managed the question. I said, 'I wish you'd tell me something, father, now it can't matter about my knowing, what did you and mother quarrel about? I never liked to ask her naturally.'"

Tessie paused and Hugo enquired in a tone of deep interest: "Did he tell you?"

"He laughed," declared Tessie glumly, "and said I'd asked him something, for he had completely forgotten, it was so long ago. They were always quarrelling, he said, and their

marriage was a mistake, and one day mother took offense more violently than usual . . . about what he couldn't remember . . . and marched off to town, taking us children with her. He supposed she expected him to follow and beg her to return but that would have been sheer folly as they were much better apart. He'd always given her a generous income and paid for our education and started the boys in the world and given me a dress allowance since I left school and he didn't feel he had anything to reproach himself with. And mother had had the kind of life she wanted, bridge morning, noon and night and plenty of society and rushing about, and he had been left in peace to cultivate his roses."

"Well, I'm dashed."

"Yes, I was too. Perhaps our generation hasn't any morals," said Tessie, "for I wasn't at all uplifted to find I had a pair of entirely respectable parents after all. I couldn't help remembering how we had worried about the situation when we were kids, and I felt we had been rather badly let down. And I remembered too how mother had always grumbled about what an expense we were to her, and how little pocket money we'd all had compared with other children we knew, and how we had always felt under a dreadful obligation. And all the time father according to his own story had been paying for everything lavishly."

"Did you tell him?"

"No, what was the use? He would only have laughed. Later on, I asked if he would give me away and he chuckled and said 'Why?' Well, what could I say, Hugo? There seemed remarkably little reason, as far as I could see, so I said, 'Mother seems to think it's your right.' He looked at me

for a little while and finally said in a dry sort of voice: ‘You shall have your choice. I’ll give you away or I’ll give you £500.’”

“What a rum old bird!”

“Oh no, it was a kind of challenge,” said Tessie bitterly. “He was testing me and it got my back up, for what right had he? He’d never worried about me. I didn’t care by that time whether he gave me away or what he thought of me, and I always had cared about going to Roland empty-handed, so I said I’d take the five hundred. He paid up too, though I could see he was saying to himself: ‘Like mother, like daughter’, and next day I came back to town. When mother heard about the money she said it would do to pay for the wedding, but I knew too much by that time, and said not a penny of it, and stuck to it, though there was a scene. Mother keeps saying Roland has plenty of money, but what has that to do with it? I’m not marrying Roland for his money, whatever anybody thinks.”

Tessie paused and looked suspiciously at Hugo.

“You didn’t think I was, did you?” she asked, “because I’m not. We’re unlucky, Roland and I, and I’ve always been sorry for him. He’s liked various girls but they have laughed at him. Pretty beastly, I call it. He wouldn’t mind my telling you because he’d know you wouldn’t go shouting it to everyone. And he wants me to marry him and nobody else wants me anywhere, so there you are.”

Hugo nodded. He felt sorry for Tessie and didn’t know how to say so, for he had never known her in this confidential mood before and had not suspected her of

domestic sorrows. His impression of Mrs. Anstruther was of a pretty woman, generally impatient and always in a hurry, either for you to be gone or to be gone herself, as she happened to be the hostess or guest of the occasion, and always making engagements with the other elders in a breathless manner and writing them down in a gold note-book.

Uncle William, whose jokes were inclined to be obvious, had once referred to her as the Recording Angel, and Hugo remembered how his father had said: “Play a few games of bridge with her, William, and you’ll come to the conclusion that she represents the rival firm.” Hugo had liked that at the time and now he found it significant. Clever of his father to have seen through Mrs. Anstruther. Having suspended judgment on his father, he could find a wistful pleasure in admiring him while he might, for very soon he would have to agree with Tessie about parents.

“Have you told George?” he asked her. “I mean about your father and that you haven’t a family skeleton, after all?”

“No, he wouldn’t care,” said Tessie. “George is an opportunist. If he had a family skeleton, he’d only hang it up in the hall and use it as a new kind of dinner gong. He and mother are arranging the wedding between them. They like that sort of thing.”

She was detached about the wedding as though it belonged to somebody else. Hugo, remembering the sparkle and excitement of Alison, before her marriage to Bill, felt that Tessie was being cheated out of her fun, and he was indignant.

“Why do you let them, Tessie? It’s your wedding?”

“Yes, I know, but what does it matter? I’ve grown to think that nothing matters very much.”

“Look here, old thing,” said Hugo, in a fatherly manner, “I don’t want to butt in, but aren’t you afraid you might fall in love with some other fellow after you’re married to Roland?”

Tessie laughed.

“I don’t believe in love. We’re brought up to think of it as a kind of epidemic always about and we are bound to catch it, but what a lie! If you are a woman and ugly, you soon learn better than to have romantic notions. You needn’t be afraid. I know you others have always thought Roland rather an ass, but he’s generous and he has a number of good qualities and he has always been a friend of mine. I shan’t let him down. That’s the one thing I’m really certain of. As for love, what’s the good of it, for it’s nearly always a one-sided arrangement? Look what it has done to Bunny Molyneux for instance.”

“Bunny?” shouted Hugo. “It hasn’t . . . she isn’t. I say, Tessie, that is a thundering lie, whoever said it. Bunny’s all right. I see quite a lot of her and she’s as jolly as a sand-boy. She’s not in love.”

“Well, I was told Paul’s affair had made her quite funny in the head,” explained Tessie. “It was your Aunt Eleanor who said it. Mrs. Mostyn had told her Bunny came there and made a frightful scene, and, after all, everyone thought Paul was going to marry her.”

“What business have people to think?” said Hugo furiously, and quite forgetting he had thought so himself. “Bunny had a scene with Mrs. Mostyn over her treatment of Paul and his wife. You take it from me, she was a friend of Paul’s and naturally hates them for treating him like a thief. Nothing else. Why, you should see her cutting about in her little red car and you’d know she wasn’t in love with anybody. As for Aunt Eleanor, she ought to be . . . she ought to be stopped,” finished Hugo, unable to find an epithet polite enough for his company.

“Relatives again,” agreed Tessie. “If you ask me, relatives are only put into the world to interfere and annoy. They haven’t any other use . . . except Bill, but then I don’t consider him a relative. I’ve always liked Bill.”

“Do you mean to tell me a chap can’t be friendly with a girl he has known all his life without people suspecting she’s in love with him?” proceeded Hugo, unheeding. “In these days, Queen Victoria’s dead. I think that ought to be brought to Aunt Eleanor’s notice.”

The door opened, and Lady Donaldson, just in time to hear the last words, came to carry Tessie away to luncheon.

“What ought to be brought to your Aunt’s notice, Hugo, darling?” she asked.

“That Queen Victoria’s dead. She’s lost her memory.”

“Oh no, Hugo.”

“It’s a fact, mother. She is going round talking a lot of stuff about Bunny and saying she was in love with Paul. She wasn’t . . . she isn’t . . . I ought to know.”

“Poor little Bunny!” Lady Donaldson’s tone was now full of sympathy. “But what has that to do with Queen Victoria?”

“A great deal,” said Hugo darkly. “You go and read the old girl up, and tell Aunt Eleanor to try and be a Georgian for a change. And why do you say ‘poor little Bunny’? She is nothing of the kind.”

“Not in the material sense, I know, dear, but it is so sad that she hasn’t any parents to comfort her.”

Hugo winked at Tessie behind his mother’s back.

ii

Hugo, left to himself, began to consider the question of parents. The Mostyns and the Anstruthers wouldn’t be sorry for Bunny because she had none. They were against parents naturally, and Hugo, true to his generation, was convinced it was the parents’ fault. Mrs. Anstruther didn’t like having a plain, clumsy daughter because she was no use in society; and Mrs. Mostyn didn’t like having grown-up children because she wanted to be young. Mr. Mostyn thought of nothing but stocks and shares; and Mr. Anstruther thought of nothing but his roses. Was this attitude typical of all parents perhaps?

Hugo, rather shamefacedly, took out his own and looked them over. His mother was sweet and kind and indulgent, but he knew that she did not understand his real needs in the least, only the things she thought he needed. Though he felt a traitor, he had a suspicion he was becoming a hobby to his mother. As for his father . . . No, Hugo found that he couldn’t

after all look at his father; he must wait until Bunny brought the cuttings; he must give his father every chance.

He turned his thought resolutely to Bunny, running up and down Fleet Street in Miss Trotsky, with the Hound beside her. No chance of seeing her to-day, he supposed, because she had so much to do, and besides his mother didn't seem to think Bunny ought to come every day. That was another fool idea, for why shouldn't she? Perhaps, however, towards dusk he would hear Miss Trotsky's voice from the park. He had a feeling Bunny would be sure to think of it on the off days, so that at least he could have a sight of her, and there was comfort in that.

As for Aunt Eleanor's tale of her, it was too base and foolish for words, but Hugo hoped Bunny wouldn't hear it none the less. Beneath all his eager protestations that she and Paul had been merely friends, he had to admit that he didn't actually know. She might have loved him, for according to Tessie love was a one-sided affair always happening to the wrong people. But no, the idea of Bunny's loving somebody who had not the ordinary decency to love her back, was utterly ridiculous. Paul would never have been guilty of that, careless though he might be. And he was careless, it was true. To Hugo that had always been part of his splendour; there was something so large and generous about it, but now he began to see this quality had betrayed his friend. The world was narrow and cruel, and old Paul, careless to the last, had discovered it too late.

"I hope Bunny has found Mrs. Paul," thought Hugo eagerly, and at that moment the door opened and Mrs. Hallett came in.

“You are looking better,” said Hugo, surveying her with satisfaction. “It must be that nice murder we found this morning, or perhaps it is the park. We’ll soon have you your old self again.”

Mrs. Hallett looked at him with amused affection. She had lost her nervousness of Paul’s friend, and it was impossible to remain formal with him, ungrateful too, she felt.

“What do you know of my old self?” she asked.

“Oh, well, you felt Hallett’s departure, naturally. It was only to be expected. Do you believe in love, Henrietta?”

“You don’t suppose I’d tell you if I didn’t, do you?” asked Mrs. Hallett.

“Of course you would. What is a private secretary for? I don’t want to be harsh with you,” said Hugo in a reasonable tone, “but you look up your book of etiquette and I’m almost sure you’ll find a private secretary must be prepared to supply all information which her chief is too much of a mug to know for himself. And here am I at the mercy of a cruel world. Why, I’ve had a girl in to see me this morning who didn’t believe in love a bit, except as a catastrophe. Is it a catastrophe? You must know.”

“Other people contrive to make it that sometimes.”

“I know . . . parents, eh?”

Mrs. Hallett turned her gaze to the window, colouring faintly.

“You mustn’t ask me about my catastrophe,” she said.

“Oh, I say, I wasn’t truly.” Hugo was appalled at the suggestion. “I was trying,” he explained grandly, “to form a philosophy of life, and you can’t do that without information. You see, this girl, who thought love was a wash-out, didn’t believe in parents either. She had rather a poor pair herself and I know a chap who is even worse off in that respect, so I began to wonder if it were more or less universal. Do you believe in parents, generally speaking?”

“I don’t see how we can very well do without them,” said Mrs. Hallett smiling.

“You are a clever girl. Fancy thinking of that. It looks as though we’ll have to leave them in our philosophy of life then, doesn’t it?” said Hugo. “I think you must have had a nice pair yourself, Henrietta.”

“I had.”

“Well, there now. That was just what I wanted to get at. We ought to write this down. Parents not always wash-outs; love not always a catastrophe. Is that how you’d put it?”

“Love is never a catastrophe, you ridiculous boy. It would be a contradiction in terms.”

Hugo grinned at his private secretary engagingly.

“I’m growing quite fond of Hallett,” he said.

He allowed her to read for him a little then, but his attention wandered from the text to her face, and he began to realise why in the first few moments of seeing her he had thought it beautiful. It had what seemed to him a steadfast look, though the adjective surprised him, hopping into his usually limited vocabulary from some long closed corner of

his mind. It was a solemn word, but it suited her, for she was solemn too, though not prim, and when she smiled her grey eyes lit up with a serious delight.

"Miss Trotsky recovered," remarked Hugo suddenly. "You were anxious about her."

She looked over the top of the paper at him and the smile was there.

He wondered what she thought about Life, this girl with the steadfast look. He would have been complimentary to Life if anyone had asked him, once upon a time, but now, seen through the eyes of other people, it was distorted and strange. Life had been a friend once, but now it was an enemy which had laid him out and left him helpless, while it tackled the rest of his world . . . Paul, Bunny, Tessie Anstruther, and even Mrs. Hallett. Life didn't fight fair, it seemed to Hugo.

"What do you think of Life, Henrietta?"

"You must work out your own philosophy," said Mrs. Hallett firmly.

"Not without a secretary. Such a thing was never heard of. All the best philosophers have secretaries. Besides, this is a very deep subject, and I," said Hugo with great frankness, "am not deep. Please propound."

"As for Life, it is a battle and a sojourning in a strange land," quoted Mrs. Hallett. "That's Marcus Aurelius, isn't it? You ought to know your classics better than I."

"I know hardly anything," confided Hugo. "When a fellow's at school and keen on sports and having a good time

generally, he naturally thinks Greek and Latin and all the rest of it were simply invented to annoy. I didn't mind them as languages. That was a kind of trick, but I never took any interest in their innards until just lately, so it rather looks as though I were not meant to know anything. That telegraph pole came along in the nick of time."

He was trying to be jovial about it but it was a poor pretense, for he had begun with such eagerness and the observant eyes of the girl saw for a moment the bitterness he hid so carefully.

"Surely it looks as though you were meant to know a great deal," she said in her gentle voice. "You must lie here for the present and keep still, and you have plenty of time on your hands. Couldn't you study a little? Unfortunately, Greek is beyond me and my Latin is not very good, so I'm afraid I wouldn't be much use to you there."

"I suppose you don't know any Arabic?" exclaimed Hugo.

"Arabic? No, of course not. You're joking."

"Not on your life. You see, I'd begun it. I say, Henrietta, would it bore you to tears to have a shot at it with me every day for a little while? The specialist advised me not to drop it," said Hugo eagerly, "because he seemed to think there was just a chance . . . you know, if I kept my eyes skinned. . . ."

"Nothing you want me to do could bore me," said the girl in a determined manner. "If you can get your books brought up we'll begin to-morrow. This will be quite an adventure."

"Rather!"

Hugo lay watching her gratefully, as she turned over the newspapers to avoid his glance. A very understanding girl Henrietta, and she kept quiet about it too. She wouldn't go round like Tright and the doctor, thinking she knew all about him, and yet she already knew so much more than they. All at once he found himself telling her about Archer and the Syrian excavations, and little Webster; and something of the rich delight which they had unfolded before his suddenly awakened mind inspired his speech. He became eloquent and then shy again, falling back into slang with a wistful: "I thought it would have been a good wheeze."

"We'll get books on the subject and I can read them to you," declared Mrs. Hallett. "I'll have a list for you to-morrow morning and you can decide which you would like to begin with."

"You are a wonder, Henrietta," said Hugo.

iii

His mother came in to tea with him that afternoon, full of news about Tessie's beautiful wedding presents, her dress and bridesmaids, which Hugo, knowing the bride, decided she must have extracted almost by force.

"Dear Tessie. She is a very lucky girl," said Lady Donaldson. "But I am glad. I have always liked the Anstruther children."

Hugo, with his own picture of Tessie still clear before him, did not contradict her, for it came to him that he and his mother looked upon the same world with different eyes. Their views, like two parallel lines, could never meet. Lucky

Tessie, poor Mary Mostyn, darling Bunny with no parents to comfort her, dear Aunt Eleanor who was so important . . . these strangers of his mother's making passed in procession before his mind, and he knew that his version of them would be equally grotesque to her.

"Mother," he said, "I've given Miss Trotsky away. . . . I've given her to Bunny."

"Hugo, darling!"

His mother was startled, amazed and even, he thought with glee, a little shocked.

"You didn't like having her about, I know," he said. "Made you see telegraph poles, didn't she, the red-headed hussy? But, never mind, she's out of your sight now. Bunny's got her. You see, I couldn't give her to just anybody."

His mother's eyes were very soft.

"You did it for me, my dearest boy," she said, "and I know you were fond of the little car. I was merely surprised because . . . isn't it rather unusual for a young man to give a car to a girl, even if he has known her all his life?"

"Well, I hoped it was unusual," said Hugo much pleased. "I thought I'd like to be unusual just for the fun of the thing. By the way, what became of the books and things I sent home from Oxford? Do you happen to know?"

"I put them in the bookshelves in your old room, dear. They were such shabby looking books," explained Lady Donaldson, "and I wanted you to have only nice bright bindings in your bookshelves up here. But all your things are perfectly safe, just as you left them."

“Artistic little mother, aren’t you?” said Hugo, congratulating her about the bright bindings because he was grateful to her for keeping his old den of horrors downstairs.

Women were queer, he thought. She little knew what a comfort it would have been to him to lie in his shabby room looking on to the din of Knightsbridge, with all his old treasures round him.

“But then,” he remembered, “I couldn’t have seen Bunny driving Miss Trotsky through the park.”

At that he looked with new eyes round his perfect room, and even the bright bindings had a friendly air. Bunny had not been scornful about his room, he remembered. A room was just a room to her, but a car was a car. He was immensely pleased that his mother thought he had been unusual.

When she had gone he lay thinking of Bunny, smiling drowsily. He wondered whether she would drive past his windows presently and tried to persuade himself that she would not, as a safeguard against disappointment. Of course she wouldn’t be coming round this way. Why should she? It was unreasonable to expect it. She had had a lot of things to do to-day, and “Besides,” said Hugo impressively to himself, “it would never enter her head.”

There was a discreet knock at the door, and Leeder, looking like a conspirator came in, with a cautious glance in the direction of Tright’s room.

“Well, now, sir, I didn’t know they’d taken your tea-tray,” said Leeder in a surprised tone, making signs.

“Oh, yes, thanks,” said Hugo, immediately becoming a conspirator too. “I say, Leeder, while you’re here, would you mind just moving this chair a trifle?”

“Certainly, sir,” said the first conspirator, loudly and courteously, and he approached the bed to thrust a fat envelope into the patient’s hand.

“Miss Molyneux telephoned me on the Q.T. to say would I be sure to answer the bell in person round about five o’clock, sir, because this was to be put into your own hands, most confidential,” whispered Leeder.

“Thanks awfully, Leeder, that will do nicely,” said Hugo aloud for Tright’s benefit, and the two conspirators exchanged an understanding smile, gratified and grateful respectively.

Hugo had thrust the fat envelope quickly under the bedclothes, for he knew well what it contained . . . his newspaper cuttings. Bunny had got them for him as she had promised and, knowing he was anxious to see them, she had actually taken the trouble to telephone to Leeder and bring them to him at once. He tried to let the wonder of Bunny’s kindness fill his mind, to shut out the dreadful beating of his heart, for the moment of revelation was at hand, and hope and fear were dancing a devil dance within him. Must he condemn his father?

Tright looked in and Hugo said in rather a strained voice: “It looks nice on the balcony. Couldn’t I go out for a bit?”

He was not of course looking for Bunny, for she had done enough for him already, and why should she go out of her way to pass his window? It was merely childish to expect

it. But the air was lovely out here and the long vistas of the park, so deeply green at this glowing hour of the afternoon, rested his eyes. He did not even look at the cars going by, though he liked the familiar music of their passing, until far off he heard a "Toot, toot" and knew she was coming after all.

Miss Trotsky's voice for a certainty. He couldn't mistake it. . . . Yes, there she was, a flash of scarlet, flying along at a great rate through the sober traffic, small, impudent Miss Trotsky, with Bunny at the wheel.

Three long calls as she drew up beneath him; Bunny with her hat off, waving gaily, and the old Hound, two paws on the door and his tongue out, wagging a tail in greeting.

"Bunny looks well in red," said Hugo to himself, and a smile of satisfaction spread over his face. He took out the precious letter and held it aloft for her to see.

"Toot, toot," said Miss Trotsky, sounding pleased, and Hugo answered her from his balcony in a long call that brought Tright to the door in astonishment. He had never known his patient to burst into song before.

"You are enjoying the nice evening. That's right," said Tright, retreating to let the good work go on. But Hugo did not even hear him. The picture below filled all his world.

Bunny got out and, hands in pockets, walked round her car, surveying it with every sign of pride and admiration. She had a red flower in her coat to match Miss Trotsky, a touch of red in her hat too, and as she stepped on to the footboard again, he saw her scarlet shoes.

"Very smart," thought Hugo.

The little car said good-bye at last, and her new owner, broadly smiling, guided her away, but though the increasing traffic soon hid her from sight, the boy on the balcony could still hear her voice occasionally as she carolled gaily under Bunny's hand.

His own, he presently discovered, was clutching something, his precious envelope of course. With a secret glance over his shoulder, he set himself to tear it open, and with trembling fingers, drew something out.

OXFORD UNDERGRADUATE IN MOTOR SMASH

SON OF SIR RICHARD DONALDSON, K.C.
SERIOUSLY INJURED.

The black letters danced before him under the shelter of the eiderdown, but somehow he could not read the smaller type because he was shaking too much. His groping hand found another cutting . . . no, it was a sheet of note-paper this time, and he opened it eagerly.

"Here you are, old Hugo," he read,
"Dozens of 'em. Love from
Bunny."

His fingers closed upon it and the world grew dim.

CHAPTER XIII

i

IT was morning again and Hugo had grown old. Inert and spent, after a night that had been centuries long, he was aware of this but indifferent about it, as though nothing could matter any more.

In the first hour of seclusion, when Tright had gone, he had read over and over the story of a young man found by passing motorists pinned under his car on the Portsmouth road. Bunny had done her work well. There were fifteen stories of this young man, from morning, evening and Sunday papers, and though each tale varied a little, no one breathed a word of reproach against the victim. Quite a decent fellow you would have supposed him, a promising cricketer and rowing man, an Oxford undergraduate and the only son of Sir Richard Donaldson, the distinguished King's Counsel. The roads, said the story, were slippery and it was through this the car had skidded, hitting a telegraph pole and flinging Mr. Donaldson out on his back. He was unconscious and, at the moment of going to press, in a critical condition. Little hope of his recovery was entertained.

Not a hint that the fellow had been sent down from Oxford, not a lie that he had been drunk or that he had attempted suicide, nothing, in short, to justify the father who had disowned him. For Hugo knew the truth at last. He had passed sentence on his father, who was just like other

parents, selfish to the core, and thinking only of his own credit and his own dignity.

Sent down from Oxford! Nice thing for a classical scholar and a personage to be disgraced by his son in the eyes of the world, for though the newspapers had no word of it and in spite of his accident, the news would get out. Funny that nobody had mentioned it to him, Hugo thought, not even Bunny or Tessie or his mother or Aunt Eleanor. Perhaps his father was trying to keep it dark. Hugo became cynically certain of this after a time, and determined to tell everyone immediately.

He pictured their reception of the news. His mother, at first horrified, would soon smile and tell him nothing mattered as long as he was safe, for unlike a parent, his mother was kind. Mrs. Hallett would want to know all about it and agreed that he had been badly treated and tell him not to mind. Tright would say "That's right," and somehow persuade himself that Oxford had been highly complimentary to his patient. And Bunny would shout with laughter and say, "Bad lad, aren't you?" enjoying the joke no end.

But now that morning was here and he had grown old, the savour of this revenge against his father, the idea of shouting his disgraceful news abroad, faded. It seemed childish and absurd, for though he had passed sentence upon his father, Hugo knew that it was really he who was condemned. He was an outcast in his father's house. The degradation of that filled all his mind. He was helpless and utterly dependent upon a man who hated him; and he saw now the reason for this room and the corridor set apart. It was to shut him away from his father's sight.

The old happy days of the past, the landmarks all along the years, that had been holidays with a splendid fellow he admired, seemed now to him just the figment of a poor fool's imagination. Nothing had ever been as he supposed. There had never been such a fellow . . . only a personage, Donaldson, Richard, Kt.

Portal came in and after her the spring morning, flooding the room with a golden light, but the patient, lying silent and still with blue shadows under his eyes, for once had a welcome for neither.

What did Portal think of it? he wondered. What did all the household think of it . . . that he was shut away up here out of his father's sight? For they must know. Servants knew everything; they had a dreadful wisdom about the people they were paid to serve. He could hear them all talking him over downstairs in voices pleasantly shocked, and wondering what he had done.

He who had once never considered the opinion of the world, now saw it, led by his father, turned against him, and wanted to hide himself away.

He closed his eyes and mumbled a word as Portal put his cup of tea beside him. He could not face her and he was relieved when he heard her go out.

Tright came in to tell him he had had a good night, but changed his mind about it. Hugo, watching cynically for the words, saw them die on the man's lips, and supposed his own forbidding expression was responsible. He had become suddenly aware that his face felt strangely tight and drawn,

but he couldn't help it. The effort to hide his misery this morning was beyond him.

The ritual of the day went on. His mother came in and he received her greeting listlessly, though he felt sorry for her in a detached way . . . a buffer between two contending forces, the mistress of a divided house. Yet she didn't want to be a widow and she didn't want to lose her only son. It must be difficult for his mother, Hugo thought.

Dr. Hissop came in, tall, fair and facetious as usual, and pretended to be much astonished at the scowling figure on the bed.

"Now what have you been up to, I should like to know, to make you look at me like that . . . haven't been going for an early morning stroll on the sly, have you?" said Hissop, jovially.

"You can take it from me that when I do, I won't come back," snapped the patient.

"Poor old chap. So that's how you're feeling, is it?"

"God!" cried Hugo, angrily, "what's the good of pity to me. Why don't you *do* something?"

"All in good time, old man. None of us can perform miracles, though we do our best. I must get your friend Sir John to come and talk to you again. Why, he thought you were a nice chap. Little guesses what a hot time you give your medical adviser of a morning, and being a kind-hearted fellow, I didn't give you away. Now, how much sleep did you get last night?" asked the doctor.

“Sleep? How can I sleep?” cried the impatient invalid. “I’ve forgotten how.”

“Well, that most certainly won’t do.” Dr. Hissop took out his pen and pad and wrote busily for a moment. “We’ll try a dose of this to-night and if it doesn’t bring you pleasant dreams, I’m a Dutchman. A real good night’s sleep will make all the difference. You’ll see.”

Hugo knew better though he did not argue about it, for what was the use of sleep to a prisoner and an outcast, when he must awake to the misery and degradation of another day? Death was the only sleep that would be kind to such as he and for that solace he must not ask or hope.

He must lie here, disgraced and in torment, for weeks, months, years, perhaps for the rest of his life. He was twenty-one and if he lived to be seventy, there was half a century of this before him and it was his father’s fault. But for his injustice he would never have gone out again that night, Greville would have put Miss Trotsky’s gears in order, and he would have been whole like other men.

Mrs. Hallett came in, smiled gently at the white face on the pillow and opened the newspaper.

“I wonder whether they’ve found the murderer,” she said.

“I hope to God the poor devil will get away,” declared Hugo with violence. “I wouldn’t want even a murderer to be imprisoned.”

“You mustn’t worry about your friend,” said Mrs. Hallett, putting down the newspaper.

"What *do* you mean?" The startled eyes of the young man met the girl's, saw them widen and her face turn suddenly white.

"I thought," she said at last in a husky voice, "you were worrying about your friend Paul. You see, I am not a good secretary, or I should be more impersonal and take no notice of what you say in the letters you dictate to me."

"You know about Paul?" asked Hugo, abashed to realise that he had been thinking only of his own misfortunes, and had forgotten his friend.

"I read the case in the papers," said Mrs. Hallett steadily.

"Of course. I never thought of that, but everyone must have read about it and they'll think him a thief. He isn't. . . . He didn't do it."

He spoke with such excited vehemence that she was afraid Tright would hear him and come in, and she said in an eager, soothing voice: "I know. . . . You said that in your letter too. I'm sure he didn't do it. . . . I believe you."

Hugo sighed and turned his head away.

"Nobody else will," he said despondently, "and I lie here and can do nothing. Oh, damn!"

"Please don't fret about it," begged Mrs. Hallett. "It would only make him feel worse if he thought you did . . . naturally, for he must think a great deal of you when you are such a loyal friend."

"He doesn't even know. I haven't been able to send him a line."

“Of course he’ll know. He’ll trust you.”

“Paul always trusted everybody, but after this I shouldn’t think he’d trust anybody on earth. He’s a fellow in a thousand and then they tell a lie like that about him. Why, it’s too idiotic for words.”

“You will help him best by trying to get well as quickly as you can,” persuaded the girl. “Remember what the specialist told you; and, by the way, here is the list of books about Syria for you to choose from.”

She brought the paper from her bag and Hugo took it soberly.

“It’s very good of you, Henrietta, but you must charge them overtime for work like this. It must have taken you hours to find them.”

“Nonsense! Every bookseller has a giant catalogue where he can look out a list like this under a definite subject in a few minutes. It was a pleasure to me to get it. Shall we begin on the Arabic to-day?”

Hugo said restlessly: “I’m too woolly-headed. Let us do it to-morrow; but it’s Sunday. . . . Perhaps you won’t want to come on Sunday. . . . Of course you won’t. I couldn’t expect it.”

Mrs. Hallett hesitated for the fraction of a second only.

“What does the day matter?” she said. “My job is to read the papers to you and there are Sunday papers, so I am sure I was intended to come . . . if you’d like me to, that is.”

“Thanks awfully, Henrietta.”

He lay there unsmiling, gazing straight before him and quite unconscious of the troubled eyes that watched him. He was thinking of Paul, whom he had so selfishly forgotten and how strange it was that both of them had, all in a moment, as it were, become worse than fatherless.

"I know what I'd like you to do for me one day," he said at last. "I'd like you to get me the papers and read me Paul's case."

"Please don't." Her tone was urgent. "I can't help seeing how it distresses you, and you'll only be more upset than ever, and then I shall get into trouble with your mother and Mr. Tright."

"They won't know. They don't know anything about me really. They only think they do," declared the weary voice. "You're wrong too. I wasn't thinking of Paul when you came in, but of my own affairs. I'm selfish, like everybody else. But I want to hear Paul's case and if you won't read it to me, I'll ask Bunny. She will. . . . I'm determined to hear it; so it's no use your trying to stop me."

He was becoming excited again and she hastened to calm him.

"Very well, you shall have it. . . . I'll get it for you as soon as I can," she said.

She opened the newspaper then and proceeded to read about the murder, but although it was declared that the police had a clue, and Hugo had gleefully prophesied yesterday that this would be the next announcement, he let it pass without a word.

He was thinking of Bunny now, Bunny also maligned by a silly world, and carrying it off with such a blithe spirit; Bunny playing upon Miss Trotsky's horn beneath his balcony and showing him her scarlet slippers to match the little car.

"I suppose you've never been jilted, have you, Henrietta?" asked Hugo, interrupting the murder.

"No," said Mrs. Hallett, rather quickly, as though the subject troubled her.

"Neither have I," said Hugo with regret, "but of course you wouldn't have been. You are too young to have been jilted and married and everything."

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said Mrs. Hallett with a smile.

"I didn't mean it personally. I was wondering whether a girl would mind it very much. Do you think if a chap jilted a girl and another fellow came along and gave her a car, it would cheer her up a bit?"

"If I were the girl it would cheer me enormously," declared Mrs. Hallett looking away. "As for minding, any sensible girl would feel she had had a lucky escape from a man who could do that."

"As a matter of fact, he didn't," said Hugo, quickly, "the man I'm thinking of, but people said he did, which is nearly as bad for the girl. Look here, you've read the case, so you'll probably guess I'm speaking of Paul Mostyn, and remember they tried to make out he chucked one girl to marry another. It was a most awful lie. He never was engaged to the girl and he didn't jilt her. I give you my word."

“Thank you for telling me that.”

Hugo turned astonished eyes to the still figure of his secretary, half concealed behind the newspaper.

“You are a funny girl. Why should you thank me?” he asked.

“I’m . . . grateful to you for taking me into your confidence.”

He felt at once touched and abashed and he said impulsively: “I’m a selfish swine, worrying you with my grievances when you have quite enough troubles of your own.”

“Please don’t feel like that. You’re helping me far more than you can know.” As though fearing she had given herself away, she added: “It takes my mind off things.”

“Does it? I suspect you’re just being kind, Henrietta, but I’m very grateful. Somehow I knew you were a friend from the first. I don’t know why, unless it was seeing that you were up against it too. Fellow feeling and all that. Please think of me as a friend if you can.”

“I do,” said Mrs. Hallett. “You are.”

The little clock struck twelve.

ii

“Aunt Eleanor ran in for a few moments, but I didn’t bring her to see you, Hugo darling,” said his mother just before luncheon, “because I thought you were hardly up to visitors to-day.”

"I don't want to see anyone but Bunny," declared the invalid restlessly. "I am always at home to Bunny. She's a particular friend of mine."

"Poor little Bunny. I am glad you feel she doesn't tire you, Hugo, because she wants friends just now. I know you think I am over-nervous, but I do hope you'll beg her not to be reckless in the little car."

The idea of Bunny's being anything but reckless struck Hugo as too absurd for words, but he knew his mother would never understand that, so he said: "Don't worry. She's an excellent driver. She'll be safe enough."

"Yes, dear, but she isn't quite herself just now, poor child. I think I had better tell you what I have just heard from Aunt Eleanor, to put you on your guard," said Lady Donaldson. "Mrs. Mostyn says Bunny has been quite odd since Paul treated her so badly. It does affect people in that way sometimes . . . only temporarily, of course. She will be her own bright self again when the shock wears off, and in the meantime we must be as kind to her as we can. That is why I am so glad she likes to come and chat to you."

Hugo's eyes blazed.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, mother," he said in a level tone, "but if Mrs. Mostyn and Aunt Eleanor were chucked into the Thames, it would be a jolly good thing for everybody, though it would certainly poison the river."

"Hugo *darling*."

"I assure you," continued her son, unheeding, "that Paul did not treat Bunny badly; he was never engaged to her; she is perfectly sane and suffering from no shock whatever. It is

true the Mostyns wanted him to marry her because of her money and continually flung her at his head. You know what they are as well as I do, though you are too kind-hearted to admit it. Paul and Bunny knew what they were up to and merely smiled. As for the tale of Bunny's being odd, that's pretty clever of Mrs. Mostyn. She is saying it because Bunny told her exactly what she thought of them for trying to buy Paul's wife off behind his back . . . dirty trick, if there ever was one."

"But my dearest boy, as I understand it, this girl Paul married is most undesirable . . . quite an adventuress, in fact. They are only thinking of his good."

"Who says so?" enquired Hugo angrily. "Only the Mostyns, I know. They tried to prove all sorts of things against her and they couldn't do it. The girl's a decent girl. Bunny says so and I believe her; and Paul is of age and has a right to choose his own wife. If I married, you wouldn't go and try to buy off my wife when my back was turned, would you? Of course you wouldn't. You'd decide to make the best of her and be kind, whoever she was."

He had struck the right note with his mother, but he was unaware of it. The wrongs of Bunny and Paul filled all his mind.

"Please make it clear to everyone," he commanded. "Paul did not jilt Bunny. I say so and I ought to know. And Bunny is as sane as I am. Saner. If you don't I shall write to the B.B.C. and ask them to broadcast it, as Mrs. Mostyn and Aunt Eleanor seem to be broadcasting their lies all over the place."

“Of course I will say so, Hugo dearest,” said Lady Donaldson soothingly to this son who seemed to have grown from boyhood to manhood in a night, for she was of the type that instinctively obeys the dominant male. “As you say, you ought to know, for you were always in Paul’s confidence, and I am glad you think dear little Bunny is not upset. I was quite concerned about her.”

Hugo’s luncheon was brought in and his mother went away to her own. He lay and looked at the little table, so daintily arranged, with distaste. His father had paid for all this, paid grudgingly no doubt, and for all the paraphernalia of his illness, for Tright, for the doctors and Mrs. Hallett. It was just that he should pay, yet Hugo knew that forever the food of his enemy would be bitter in his mouth, and the knowledge of his dependence deeply humiliating. He tried angrily to eat, because it was his right, but everything seemed tasteless, and he pushed the plate away despairingly.

Must this go on forever? Suddenly he remembered that when he was twenty-five the legacy of £5000 from his grandfather would be his to use as he chose. He would demand of his mother a complete account of the money spent on him from the moment of his accident, and pay it all back. Then he would insist upon being removed from his father’s house to some public hospital, where the income from what remained of his capital would pay for his nursing and support. He would not suffer the indignity of being beholden to the father who had disowned him.

He felt happier when he had reached this decision, until he remembered Paul and Paul’s wife and Hugo II, for whom he had already earmarked his little fortune. He had promised

them and he could not go back on his word. He did not want to go back on it. Paul's claim at least came first; his need was greater than any poor fool's dignity. Hugo saw that he must eat the bitter bread of dependence till the end.

Unless he could get better.

Sir John Winde had said there was a chance, if he set his mind on it. Very well, then he would do so. He would set his teeth and use his will and determine to get well, and once able to walk again, he would go out into the world. Meanwhile he would read and study like blazes, pain or no pain. He would join Archer yet.

His untasted luncheon called forth exclamations from both Leeder and Tright, but he waved them impatiently away. His mother brought him some grapes, which she said had just arrived from Uncle William, and he enjoyed these, because Uncle William was a Wise and not a Donaldson, and he did not therefore owe them even remotely to his father.

"I must be costing a great deal of money," he said moodily to his mother and she patted his hand, exclaiming with a smile.

"On whom should I spend my money, if not on my only son? What a miser you are becoming . . . always worrying about expense."

At that an immense relief possessed him, for his mother had said "my money." Then she was paying, and not his father. He was merely a boarder in his father's house? He had never thought of that way out of it, but it made all the difference and he was very grateful to his mother.

His determination to get better and leave the house of his enemy, however, did not abate, and when Mrs. Hallett returned, he suggested they should begin the Arabic after all. He described the exact position of his old room on the floor below and asked her to go down for the books. Rather nervously she obeyed and it seemed to Hugo, who was now impatient to begin, that she was a long time about it.

Yesterday he would have been pleased that Henrietta should see his old room and know he was not naturally addicted to a drawing-room like this, but his concern for such childish things had passed, and he wished she would be quick. He had not even remembered to tell her to look at Paul's photograph in the old cricket group just inside his door.

She returned a little out of breath and with her cheeks flushed, to explain that she had felt like a burglar and been terrified that she might go into the wrong room; but she had found the books, and they settled down to the difficult business of studying a language of which she knew nothing and Hugo very little.

"I wish you would let me read to you to-day instead," appealed the girl with an anxious look at his white face; and he was instantly suspicious that she had been waylaid and told about his neglected luncheon. Why couldn't they let him alone, instead of chattering about him?

"I wish to do this," he said crossly, and was still toiling at it with Mrs. Hallett's distracted assistance, when Bunny appeared.

CHAPTER XIV

i

"I'M an invited guest, I am," said Bunny. "Your mother rang me up and asked me to come, so here I stay until ejected. Miss Trotsky is calling upon her old friend Greville. . . . Didn't she toot when she saw him too? . . . And the Hound has swelled head through riding in his own car."

The dark eyes of the invalid broke into a smile at last then turned with faint humour to glance at Henrietta, for Bunny had given him completely away . . . herself too, though she little knew it. But Mrs. Hallett gave no sign; she was tact itself, and what did it matter? He had told her the girl who was given the car wasn't really jilted and she had believed him.

"Hullo, Henrietta," said Bunny. "I forget your other name but you can call me Bunny if you like. It will save a lot of time. What in the world do you think you are doing, you two?"

"Learning Arabic," said Hugo. "I shall be going out to dig for Assyrian kings by and by and shall need the language."

"Well, I hope you'll have good sport. Save me the monarch's crown, old Hugo, and I'll come and call for it, when found. I've been thinking I'd like to go to Jericho myself as I can't send some other people there."

Bunny strolled to the wireless and pushed and whirled and set a thousand demons howling. Mrs. Hallett looked apprehensively at the invalid, who laughed.

"Go it, Bunny," he encouraged. "Let's make a din and annoy the household."

Such a prospect was exactly suited to his mood.

The devils, however, resolved themselves into a jazz band playing a fox-trot.

"Come along. Let's dance for him, Henrietta," cried Bunny.

"I can't," said the other girl, drawing away.

"Oh, yes, you can." Bunny seized her and danced her down the length of the blue room and back, then suddenly let her go again.

"It's Saturday afternoon, you slave-driver and the poor girl wants to get away," she said, winking privately at Hugo.

He took the hint and Henrietta was allowed to depart.

"That poor little devil's scared stiff at something," said Bunny. "That's why I suggested pushing her off. What a damnable world it is!"

She turned off the wireless and, hands in pockets, came and sat on the foot of Hugo's bed. She was all in cream today, except for her scarlet slippers and a bright band to match Miss Trotsky on her little hat. There was something faintly different about her face, but Hugo could not identify what it was. He only knew that he loved to see her sitting there

carelessly, just like that, and the bleakness of his mood lifted, and for the moment he could be happy again.

"Miss Trotsky's a wonder," she said. "Flies like a bird and we've had a lovely time. I invited Robin to come for a run in her, but she said, 'Much as I admire your handsome gift and appreciate the spirit of your invitation, Elizabeth, I have no ambition to be mistaken for a female giant in a perambulator.' She sent her love to you, Robin did, by the way."

"No?"

"Yes, really. She said: 'Please convey to Hugo my affectionate remembrances,'" reported Bunny, imitating her dragon's faultless diction and invariable grandiloquence of phrase.

Robin, otherwise Mrs. Boyne, had for many years ordered Bunny's household, and in the opinion of the Law, for the girl was a ward of Court, had also ordered Miss Molyneux herself. She had early discovered that it would be easier to control the winds, however, and, having a sense of humour beneath a frosty and angular exterior, she had made friends with her charge instead. She was well-connected, dressed magnificently on a small income and had a face and manner of grim severity. What better dragon could one find for an heiress, said the world, and Bunny and Robin for once agreed with the world, tongue in cheek, though Robin would have shuddered at the phrase. When they felt dull, Bunny enlivened proceedings by giving Robin an imitation of herself, upon which the dragon would remark: "Your lack of respect for me, Elizabeth, is one of the lamentable features of a lamentable age." Bunny's endeavours to teach her dragon

to wink at this point had always been a failure. Robin was unable to wink.

Hugo, together with the rest of Bunny's intimates, considered Robin a sportsman and a joke, but now for the first time he found himself strangely considering her as a human creature, to whose privileged lot had fallen the care of Bunny and to whom, through her, immeasurable loss must come one day. With Bunny here under his eye, it was impossible for him to believe that even a paid chaperone could face that loss with equanimity, and he said suddenly:

"You know, I like Robin. Whatever will the poor old thing do when you marry, Bunny, and she has to find another job?"

"She won't," said Bunny. "That's all settled. When I get married I'm going to buy her an annuity, because as I said to her I'll need a grandmother for the children."

Hugo smiled.

"That's a bright idea. What did Robin say?"

"She said: 'Really, Elizabeth, for a young girl to mention such events before they occur is most indelicate.' Which just shows you," said Bunny, "what asses people were when Robin was young, for what use would it be to mention it afterwards, when she had got tied up with somebody else? However, when she'd said her little piece, she became quite confidential for her and told me she might have been a genuine grandmother once, because she'd had a son, only he was killed in the War. Youngish, he was, only eighteen."

"Really? Hadn't she ever mentioned him before?" asked Hugo.

"No. Robin says it's a sign of a low intelligence to talk about people. Better to talk about things, she says, and of course if you are really intelligent, you only talk about ideas. That sounds all right, you know, Hugo," added Bunny, "but if it were made a rule, most of the people I know would have to be dumb."

"My word, I should, for one," declared Hugo, thoughtfully regarding Bunny's unwontedly solemn face. "I'm not in the least intelligent. . . . Jolly decent of you, that was . . . about the annuity, I mean."

He spoke the last words rather shyly, and was not unprepared for her scornful protest.

"Rot," said Bunny, "because Robin's a friend of mine. And oh, well . . . I was fed up about a lot of things. Molly Mostyn and your Aunt Eleanor had been round worrying Robin. Didn't I tell you I'd be on the skeleton list? Walk up, Ladies and Gentlemen, and see Bunny Molyneux, the latest addition to Lady Eleanor Wise's gallery of Freaks!"

Bunny jumped up and struck an appropriate attitude, and, though Hugo laughed to please her, his eyes were dark with rage against the world.

"They went to warn Robin," proceeded Bunny, "that she would have to keep an eye on me, as Paul's treatment of me had affected my brain, and a few other delicate insinuations to the same effect. I came home and found Robin raging and I wormed it all out of her. The poor old thing said: 'I have made it a rule of my life, Elizabeth, to be invariably courteous to members of the aristocracy and people in high places. My livelihood depends upon such people, and

sincerity is an expensive hobby such as I cannot afford, but on this occasion I broke my rule and told Lady Eleanor she was an officious and dangerous woman.'"

"Good old Robin," applauded Hugo.

Bunny nodded and took her seat again.

"Robin pointed out that the suggestion that I would dally with the thought of any young man who had not formally asked for my heart and hand," she proceeded grinning, "was a libel upon me and a reflection on her bringing up of me. And in her own moderate way, she invited your aunt and Molly to go to Hell."

"Serve 'em right, too."

"It was then," said Bunny, scowling, "that I thought of the annuity. I know Lady Eleanor. She'd just love to put a spoke in Robin's wheel if she wanted another job, and besides I couldn't stick the thought of the poor dear having to be civil to a lot of cats for a living. It's too beastly. And you can't get away from the fact, Hugo, that she'd make a very sporting grandmother."

"Rather."

Hugo's eyes followed Bunny as she sauntered to the wireless cabinet to console herself with a little noise, and he was aware that she had been both surprised and touched by that loss of self-control in her defence by the grandiloquent Robin. She would never admit it, of course, but she would never forget it either. Bunny was not like a girl. She didn't go round looking for affection or expecting it, and she didn't chuck her own about, but if you did her a good turn she was

grateful, and she paid her debts. Bunny would never let down a friend.

It was less the picture of Robin ousting Molly and his aunt than the occasion of it that soon filled his mind. It was simply damnable that people should be allowed to go about, telling such infernal lies, and, though Bunny had passed over that part of it with her usual humour, he was not deceived. A less loyal pal than Bunny would be sorry that she had ever heard the name of Paul Mostyn.

"I say, Bunny, thanks awfully for getting those cuttings so quickly," he called to her, all at once remembering them. "Did you have any luck about Mrs. Paul?"

Bunny left the wireless and came back.

"All right, were they?" she asked. "You are important, aren't you? You should have seen Miss Trotsky hawking all that literature home and me sitting in the middle of the library floor, cutting you out of it in slices. Robin began to believe I must be mad, after all, when she first caught sight of me. Then she came and read 'em to me, one by one, as I fished them out . . . got quite worked up about you too, I can tell you. I think I'll bring her along to see you soon, old Hugo. She'd like that."

"Yes, do," said Hugo eagerly. "Then I suppose you didn't have any time to see about Mrs. Paul, when you were doing all that for me?"

"Oh, I went down to the city first," admitted Bunny, "and for a time I thought I'd drawn a blank. The head of Mrs. Paul's firm didn't want to hear the name of Mostyn. Very painful, the whole affair, he said, for a reputable business to

be mixed up in, bow wow. He didn't seem to be down on the girl but on poor old Paul. Modern young men were all no good, he barked. There hadn't been any decent young men since the War and then it turned out that his only son had been killed in it, which explained his feeling like that. That was why he took Mrs. Paul into his office, because her father had been killed too, and he asked me if I didn't think it our duty to consider such things, so of course I took the hint and said yes. When he discovered I had lost my only brother in the War too, the old boy quite unbent," finished Bunny.

"I didn't know you ever had a brother," exclaimed Hugo in surprise.

"Neither did I till then," said Bunny calmly, "but something had to be done to thaw Mrs. Paul's chief, and after all Robin's son must have been a sort of brother of mine, if she is to be my children's grandmother. You can't get away from that. Anyway, the old boy and I were life-long friends after that and he told me Mrs. Paul had been in his office four years, and they thought the world of her. A thoroughly dependable and honourable young lady, was how he put it, and her marriage a sad disaster. Well, Hugo, as I'd said I was the girl's friend, I had to let that pass, though I did suggest she was much too bright a lass to marry a thief and perhaps he wasn't guilty after all. The end of it was that he said he couldn't actually give me her address because that was strictly against business etiquette, but if I cared to leave a note for her, he would undertake to forward it without delay. So I gave him the letter and he more or less gave me his blessing and showed me out and thanked me for coming. She'll have got your cheque, with a bit of luck, by now."

"That's good."

Hugo tried to persuade himself that he was immensely relieved that they had been able to send help to Paul's wife but in spite of himself he could really think of nothing but Bunny, who had so blithely and cleverly accomplished it. He who had never criticised Paul in his life before, now pondered with amazement upon this man who had had the chance of winning Bunny and had yet preferred another girl. Paul little knew what he had let Bunny in for, and he would be in a great state when he discovered it, but what was the use of that? She was at the mercy of Mrs. Mostyn, telling lies about her for her own purposes, and of Aunt Eleanor, only too ready to pass them on. Hugo knew that his mother would contradict them, but that was only a mild comfort, for his pretty mother, so kindly in her judgment of everyone, was no match, he shrewdly suspected, for that accomplished scandal maker, her aunt.

"I say, I didn't mean to tell you, Bunny," he said, "but I think I may as well, as Robin did. Aunt Eleanor has been spouting her fairy tales to mother, but I put a stop to that. You should have heard me holding forth this morning. I've told mother to make it clear to everybody that you and Paul were merely friends and that I say so and I ought to know. And I've threatened to ask the B.B.C. to broadcast the fact, if she doesn't shut Aunt Eleanor up."

Bunny laughed aloud, looking quaintly at her champion's stormy face, her head on one side and her eyes dancing.

"Pretty good joke that would be," she said, "and wouldn't Molly be pleased? But don't you go and worry your silly old head about it, you donkey. I don't mind joining the skeleton

brigade, except that it's a kind of reflection on Paul and such a score for Molly. You know the truth, and so do I and so does Paul. I don't think the elders matter, except Robin, who is on our side. They like believing lies about us, if you ask me."

"Yes, don't they?" said Hugo eagerly.

His own trouble, secret, even from Bunny, came rushing back upon him. The elders were to blame for everything. They were devoid of loyalty and understanding and a sense of fair play. Paul, Bunny and he were their helpless victims. But for the Mostyns, Paul would be free and happy as of old, instead of hidden away disgraced in a beastly prison. But for his father, he, Hugo, would be whole instead of a wreck in blue pyjamas, and but for Molly and Aunt Eleanor, Bunny's name would not be bandied about as one jilted by Paul and slightly deranged in consequence. Hugo's rage against the elders blazed in his eyes, and he longed to be revenged upon them and to show them up for what they were.

He could not get Paul out of prison; he could not mend his damaged spine, but surely, if he put his wits to work, he could do something about Bunny, to make her detractors look the fools and liars they undoubtedly were.

He turned his head to watch her, jazzing up and down the room whistling her own accompaniment, and he knew his scowl must have betrayed his mood, so that she had tactfully taken herself away. Bunny appreciated a fellow's need of privacy in his blacker moments. Bunny never pried into other people's moods.

He thought of Miss Trotsky and smiled, recalling his mother's startled face when he had told her of the gift. She had been almost shocked; he was certain of that. "Isn't it rather unusual, for a young man to give a girl a car?" she had said, "even if he has known her nearly all his life."

Suddenly out of his remembrance of his mother, Hugo's great inspiration came, and he shouted to Bunny in triumph.

"Come here quick, I've got it, Funny Bunny," he said. "One good lie deserves another, and we'll fool the lot of them. How could you possibly have been thrown over by Paul when all the time you were secretly engaged to me?"

"What?" cried Bunny, wheeling round and surveying him with wide open eyes.

Then as the full beauty of the scheme unfolded itself to her quick mind, she raced one of the big chairs over to Hugo's bed and sat in the middle of it, her slim legs in their scarlet slippers, sticking out straight before her, and her face alive with mischief.

"Genius!" she apostrophised the gallant on the bed. "That would do Molly brown, for of course we'd have told Paul in confidence, and it would let him out completely. Come on quick, let us work it all out, and make it really artistic. We'll give 'em a bed-time story."

ii

Spring, they say, is the season of young love. Did that blithe spirit, creeping into the blue room, shudder to hear these unscrupulous moderns gambling with his name to

outwit their enemies, or did he draw nearer sentimentally, seeing only two hapless youngsters brought together out of the urgent need to uphold a friend? Hugo at least was aware of his presence and knew that he was playing with fire, but he would have done more than that for Bunny. He would have walked through it. He could not tell how Bunny felt, as he watched her bright eyes and changing face, but he knew that her presence here beside him was the one good thing in a dark and sullen world and her happiness the only necessity of real importance.

"I suppose," he suggested diffidently, "there isn't any other fellow you'd rather be engaged to at the moment?"

Bunny put her hand dramatically on her heart and her head down in a listening attitude.

"Seems to be all right," she reported. "My heart is perfectly whole, thank you, and yours for the taking."

"Hand it over then," ordered Hugo. "I'd love to have it. This is really happening six months ago, of course."

"Yes, but play fair, old Hugo. Aren't you going to offer me yours?" Bunny was going to have no half measures in her proposal.

"Why, you've had it for years and years," declared Hugo, and Bunny threw back her head and laughed.

"Very neat," she said. "Still speaking six months ago, I suppose we'll have to keep it dark till I'm twenty-one, or there'll be a shindy and they'll say we are too young, but I'd rather like to tell Paul, if you don't mind, for, after all, we have been very pally for a long time."

“Oh yes, you can tell Paul. He won’t give us away,” said Hugo, handsomely. “Nice fellow, Paul.”

“Yes, isn’t he?” said Bunny beaming.

“We will now turn our attention to the present day,” continued Hugo, in the tone of a lecturer. “Here we see Miss Bunny Molyneux calling upon her fiancé of six months standing, only the poor fool happens to have been lying here for part of the time, having tried to break his neck. With true womanly tenderness, she soothes the invalid. Come on, Bunny, soothe me at once or I’ll take that nice bit back.”

“Nice, do you call it?” retorted Bunny. “If you accuse me of being womanly, I’ll break it off, I will.”

“Talking of which,” put in Hugo, “when some nice chap you really like comes along, just drop me a hint and we’ll decide that we’ve made a mistake. That, of course, is understood.”

“Or vice versa,” supplemented Bunny. “But the question now before the court is, why are we telling our secret, after all. We’ll have to produce a reasonable reason.”

“We thought we ought to,” suggested Hugo, smugly. “We didn’t like to be deceitful. Besides I have been trying to persuade you to give me up, because I can’t have you tied to a battered wreck, but you have nobly scorned the idea. That’ll fetch ’em, I give you my word. And then I want to see a lot of you and we have your reputation to consider.” Hugo was warming to his theme, and Bunny, convulsed with laughter, lay back in her chair and applauded.

“Engaged, you can run in and out to see me every day if you like. Disengaged, no. Mother will appreciate that point,

you'll see. Rather lucky you've taken over Miss Trotsky, Bunny, because that will give an air of reality to the whole thing. What more natural than that I should give my fiancée a little car? I mean, it's only to be expected."

"Was your mother shocked about that?" enquired Bunny, casually.

"To do mother justice, she is never shocked. Hang it all, she's not so jolly antique as that. But she did suggest it was a little unusual. I was awfully bucked. I told her I was simply bursting to be unusual."

"Well, you are," said Bunny the unexpected.

"Me? Oh, rats, I'm a most usual fellow," protested Hugo, looking startled and hopeful at once.

"No, you're not. You're even unusualer than Paul. You see a lot of things Paul would never spot."

"Yes, but that's because I'm lying here with nothing else to do. Paul never had much time on his hands," defended Hugo.

"No, not until now."

Their gaiety dropped from them in a moment as they stared together at the picture of Paul at this hour and all the other hours, and thought what dreadful centuries each hour must be.

The arrival of tea at this point, a daintily set meal which Paul could not share, seemed utterly indecent.

But tea brought Lady Donaldson to say a word of kindly greeting to Bunny, and Hugo knew that the moment of

disclosure was at hand.

“Stay and have tea with us, mother,” he invited.

CHAPTER XV

i

THE revelation was over and Lady Donaldson had gone away convinced, chiefly through the excellent performance of that accomplished actress, Miss Bunny Molyneux. Bunny had been so noble in her determination not to break off her engagement to the injured Hugo, that anyone but his mother, he felt, must have been suspicious; but jokes and evil intentions in other people always passed her by. She was very innocent, his mother, thought Hugo, feeling immensely sophisticated in comparison; and she had been so moved by their recital that it had seemed a shame to deceive her. Still it was in a good cause and a desperate emergency and it wasn't doing anybody harm.

They had each mentioned casually that Paul alone had been in their confidence about the engagement; Hugo hoped that his mother had taken in that important point, so that it would reach Mrs. Mostyn's ears, but he could not be sure. With many exclamations of surprise she had kissed them both emotionally, thanking Bunny for her goodness to Hugo, then hurrying off lest she should give way to tears before her son.

"Phew! This nobility game is wearing when you've not been used to it," declared Bunny. "Rather a shame to pull your mother's leg, when she is such a lamb. I've a good mind to smoke one of your pipes."

Hugo, delighted at her choice of antidote, handed one over and chuckled at the sight of Bunny, manfully puffing away at its imaginary contents.

"They'll say I'm marrying you for your money, Funny Bunny," he remarked.

"They'll say every dam' thing that isn't true, of course," said Bunny, glaring. "I'm none too sure I ought to have let you do it, Hugo."

"Noble girl," chaffed her fiancé.

"Noble yourself," snapped Bunny. "Do you imagine I don't know why you're doing it? I can guess what Molly's next move will be. She'll tell everyone you cut Paul out and he went off and married the other girl because he was so upset. You'll get the blame for the whole thing."

Hugo, rather pleased at this prophecy than otherwise, lifted up his voice in song.

"'Oh what a lovely web we weave
When first we practice to deceive.'

Come on, Bunny, join in the chorus."

Bunny joined in, made an anthem of it and conducted the performance with the pipe as baton. The noise brought Tright in astonishment to the dividing door, but seeing his patient singing away so happily, he retreated again. Leeder, coming to take the tea-table away, interrupted Bunny's top note, with many apologies.

“Do you think your mother would give us Leeder for a wedding present if we asked her nicely?” said Bunny, as he disappeared.

“We’ll insist upon it,” declared Hugo, grateful to Bunny for pretending it was a real engagement and they would actually be married some day.

If he were only up and about, he thought, wistfully, he would have a jolly good try to make Bunny love him, but he didn’t suppose he’d have a dog’s chance with so many hundreds of likelier fellows seeking her favour.

He wondered how Bunny spent her time and if she went about much, now that Paul, her usual escort, was lost to her.

“Do you still go out a lot?” he asked her curiously.

“Oh, lord, yes. I’m a gay lass, I am, dance nearly every night, and every afternoon too when I’m not round here with you. Robin says I’ll dance at my own funeral and I’ve promised to do it too, if Molly has the impudence to attend. That would give her a jolt, wouldn’t it? Of course,” conceded Bunny, “if you object to all this gadding about, as my fiancé, I’ll stay at home and hem dusters or read poetry and be a perfect ninny.”

“Don’t be ghastly,” ordered Hugo, shocked. “If you don’t go out like anything, there will be a row. And flirt too, won’t you? You know, Bunny, I don’t believe I’ve ever seen you flirt.”

“Ha ha, you just wait.”

Bunny got up and waltzed about the room, casting now and then a secret glance at the figure on the bed.

“I suppose I must be pushing off,” she said, “but I’ll come to-morrow and very likely I’ll bring Robin to see you. I have an idea it will be a matter of etiquette in Robin’s eyes to call upon the bridegroom-elect immediately, and upon your mother too, of course. The parents will want to talk us over, naturally.”

“What will Robin think about it?” enquired Hugo eagerly.

“She’ll be pleased. Robin likes you,” she explained. “Funny of her, but there’s no accounting for taste.”

Bunny collected her hat from one chair, her bag and gloves from another and solemnly proceeded to powder her nose.

“I shall have a long and dignified lecture on the responsibilities of marriage from her at dinner, couched in the most loverly language. I’ll save it up and recite it to you,” she said.

Hugo was not so sure of Robin’s pleasure. A poor sort of swine she’d think him, surely, for permitting Bunny to tie herself to a helpless invalid, but he didn’t say so, for what did it matter how much they blamed him, so long as she was safe from their slandering tongues?

“Mind you come early,” he commanded Bunny, who for some reason was standing out of his line of vision.

There was a sudden rush of feet, Bunny bent over him, then made for the door.

“It’s all right. . . . There aren’t any red smudges on you, because I left it off. I told you I would if I ever wanted to,”

her voice came back to him in off-hand apology. And then she was gone.

Hugo's eyes were dim and the blue room seemed to swim before them, a mere room no longer, but a magic place of rainbow hues and rich delight.

Bunny had kissed him.

ii

This miracle had happened to him quite suddenly, all unprepared for it as he was, and he was filled with wonder at the strangeness and beauty of the world. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine that he was holding Bunny in his arms, but that rapture was too great for his belief, for surely she had only done it out of the kindness of her heart. Yet that was not Bunny's way. She was not one of the kissing sort. She had said so and he had known it was true without quite knowing why.

"You can always tell, somehow," said Hugo secretly to himself.

Perhaps it had been a little joke, appropriate to their mock engagement? But no, she had come prepared, for she had left the colour off her lips and that was the change he had noticed in her and been unable to identify.

Then Bunny had meant to kiss him? This wonder of all wonders held him fast. She had come here to-day, deliberately, with that intention. Getting dressed she had said to herself: "No, I won't put any red on because I'm going to

kiss old Hugo, and he would feel an ass with smudges all over his face." Nice of Bunny to have thought of that.

"I told you I would if I ever wanted to," she had said. No getting away from it. It was perfectly clear and definite. Bunny had wanted to kiss him and she had done it and told him so. Not just out of kindness to console him because he was an invalid, for she couldn't know he was fond of her. He was convinced that he had given her no hint. Not for the fun of the thing, either, or she would have stayed and laughed. Bunny had kissed him because she liked him a bit.

It seemed unbelievable to Hugo, and rather shakily he reviewed this creature whom Bunny liked. A poor thing, he seemed, not only a helpless wreck but, quite apart from that, ignorant and good-for-nothing, a fellow kicked out of Oxford and an outcast in his father's house.

At the last remembrance he was plunged from ecstasy to despair and the day's triumphs faded away and were lost. They had sent help to Paul's wife, so that the old lad would know they had not forgotten him; they had outwitted Aunt Eleanor and Mrs. Mostyn so that Bunny could no longer appear jilted before the world; Bunny had kissed him. But . . .

"Why the devil don't you come and see me, father?" began the old refrain.

Spent by excitement and misery, he fell slowly down, down into a land of troubled dreams, in which Bunny offered the monarch's crown to his father, but his father was in prison, and Hugo, held by Aunt Eleanor and Mrs. Mostyn, was struggling to get to him. He fought them both, but they

were too strong and the agony was overpowering. Just as he had reached the point of suffocation, they released him suddenly, and he awoke to find Tright beside him, the hypodermic needle in his hand.

"Fighting someone in your sleep," said Tright. "That's right."

Hugo heard the fellow's voice incuriously and for a long time the meaning of his words was not clear. But by and by, when Tright had left him again, they took on form and he surveyed them with interest.

Long ago, in the first days after his accident, he had fought everybody in sight. Bunny had told him that. In all this queer world which he had invaded so abruptly that winter night, Bunny alone had told him anything.

And Bunny had kissed him. What did anything matter after that? Doubts, fears and miseries were swept away and he knew that it was really to him that Bunny had offered the monarch's crown. She had made him a king.

"Bunny darling," whispered Hugo secretly to the quiet room.

iii

Lady Donaldson, coming in after dinner to see her surprising son, was received with a smile that made her think of the old Hugo, who of late had seemed to belong to days immeasurably far away.

"I'm so glad Bunny has made you happy, my darling boy," she said with a rush of tenderness. "You know I shall

always love her, don't you?"

Happy? She little knew.

"That's a pretty dress," offered Hugo, considering her. "Gold and shining things suit you. I should like to take you out to dance."

Somehow he could not talk to his mother about Bunny at that moment. Her name could not come.

"My dearest, I wish you could."

"Some day I shall," said Hugo eagerly. "You'll see. I've got to get better, mother. I'm going to. You know now why I said it couldn't be true about Paul, don't you? I told you I ought to know."

"Yes, Hugo dear, I see it all now. Of course you knew, but did you tell me Paul was in the secret?"

"Well, naturally," lied Hugo, delighted to emphasize this most important point in their little legend. "It stands to reason because he and Bunny had been chums for a long time, so it was only fair to give him the tip. Paul was awfully pleased."

Hugo felt he could say this with an easy conscience, for undoubtedly Paul would be pleased. There was nothing mean about Paul.

"And that shows you," he added to his mother, "what awful liars people are."

"I'm afraid it does," said Lady Donaldson, "or not liars so much perhaps as self-deceived. Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn were disappointed that Paul did not marry Bunny and so persuaded

themselves that the other poor girl was to blame. I am sure they wouldn't mean to tell lies about it."

Hugo was not so sure, but it was like his mother to make excuses for other people's shortcomings.

"It is so easy to persuade ourselves to believe what we wish to believe," added his mother, venturing into a realm of conversation that surprised her son, "and so difficult to realise how much harm it may do. Bunny will be very rich by and by, Hugo. I suppose you know that, but in case you are not strong enough to have a profession, my dear, I want you to know that I am going to give you my little fortune when you are married, for it is a man's privilege to support his wife and I have no need of it, except to spend on you. I was afraid you might be worrying about that."

"She means because father has cut me off," thought Hugo with a sinking heart, but he was very grateful to his mother and he tried to reassure her about the money.

"I'm going to get up and make a fortune one of these days. You'll see," he said. "You just decide whether you'd rather have a steam yacht or a diamond necklace, because I'll be wanting to buy you a present and it's just as well to know."

Lady Donaldson squeezed his hand and looking at her slender fingers he saw the glitter of rings and knew with excitement there was something he must buy for Bunny.

Who could do it? Not his mother, for he was too shy to ask her; nor Tright. Hugo shuddered at the thought of that flat face on such a beautiful errand. Mrs. Hallett perhaps? He had a feeling that Henrietta would be a trusty and

sympathetic messenger and it would please her to buy a really lovely ring for Bunny. Yes, he would ask Henrietta.

“You have had such a tiring day that I think I should leave you to rest, Hugo darling,” said his mother, getting up and standing, very slim and tall in her gown of black and gold. Then she produced another surprise to solace his dreams.

“We must try to do something for Paul when he is free, my dear.”

Hugo, his whole face alight, voiced his thanks in the best way he knew.

“Bunny says you’re a lamb,” he told her.

CHAPTER XVI

LETTER FROM HELEN MOSTYN TO PAUL.
UNPOSTED.

March 23rd.

My dearest Paul,

I have had two frights to-day, but Fate has been kind, for nothing came of them after all. I am not really a good conspirator or I should be less of a coward and perhaps more useful to you, for though there have been many opportunities to ask what your people mean to do next, I have not been able to put the question to Hugo Donaldson. Yet I am glad to have taken the post, quite apart from the excellent salary, for he seems to like having me there. He has asked me to come on Sundays and I had not the heart to refuse him, though I know it may be dangerous since his father will probably be in the house. Saturday, however, is equally risky for I met him and actually had to talk to him this afternoon, and I still shiver when I remember how terrified I was that he would know me in spite of my disguise.

Hugo wanted a book from his old bedroom downstairs and asked me to go and get it for him. He had been so strange and bitter all the morning and so utterly unlike himself that I was worried about him, but no doubt it was merely one of the phases of his illness.

It was useless to argue with him, so I crept downstairs and into the room he had described to me, and there to my horror I found Sir Richard. He was sitting at the writing-table

with his head in his hands. I thought I had made a mistake and was backing out again, but he jumped to his feet and called me back, asking what I wanted. Fortunately the blind was half down and the room rather dark. I disguised my voice as well as I could and explained that Mr. Donaldson wanted one of his books, but perhaps this was not the right room. He said "Yes, yes" in a confused kind of way, showed me the bookcase and said he was just going downstairs and would leave me to find what I wanted. Then he said, "You are new here, perhaps? I don't recognise you." He thought me a servant fortunately, so I said, "Yes, sir. I come to read to Mr. Donaldson every day."

When I remembered how fierce he had been as your counsel . . . or your father's counsel, Paul, I was amused at the difference. He seemed so grateful to me for reading to his son and thanked me as though it were a favour and not a paid position. Then he said: "You will be good enough not to mention to my son that you found me here. It might upset him."

Looking back I know it was pathetic, but at the moment I could only remember why Hugo was angry with his father, and how just his anger was. I assured him that Lady Donaldson had already warned me to be careful and he nodded and said, "Yes, yes, of course. Thank you," and went away.

It took me some time to recover my courage, for I was trembling at the knees and was afraid Hugo would notice it. Then I caught sight of a photograph of you, my dear, in a cricket group with Hugo and some other boys, and I wanted to cry. You looked so splendid and I was so proud of you,

and miserable, because it came home to me again that I had taken you out of the world to which you belong, where you were happy and successful and untroubled. How can I ever make it up to you?

I went back to Hugo at last, and your friend Bunny Molyneux came in before my time was up, and I was allowed to go. It was a relief, for she had already given me one shock to-day . . . the other fright I mentioned.

I was going to the bank to leave these letters to you for safe-keeping and to see if any had been sent from our old address. (There were none I was expecting unless a further communication from Sir Richard on behalf of your people, which I dread to receive.)

However, within a stone's throw of the bank, I caught sight of Miss Molyneux, just going in, so I turned and fled, thankful that I had not been seen. It had never occurred to me that she . . . in fact, any number of your friends . . . might use the same bank as you, but now I realise it is dangerous for me to go there, and there is no one I can trust to send. I must think of some other way of getting any letters there may be for me and in the meantime I shall keep these for you locked away in my trunk. Luckily my landlady is incapable of prying among the belongings of her lodger, though she is evidently curious about me and would like me to confide in her.

I have been working away at Fanny's trousseau, and she persuades me to sew in her little sitting room so that she may admire the "lingery" and discourse on Fanny's good fortune in winning her Henry. Henry, she tells me, is a good boy, "which you can't say of most men, my dear, the more's the

pity." Henry's papa, it seems, was not a good man, though she was mysterious about his particular form of wickedness, seeing that "we must not speak evil of them that is dead and laid in their graves."

"Husbands," said Mrs. Ponder significantly, "are a sad trial, my dear, young or old, but we must bear with them, whatever they do and never murmur as the Scriptures tell us." I did not like to ask for the chapter and verse of this statement, which I hope is exaggerated, and as I could not concur with her opinion of husbands, having such a darling of my own, I am afraid the poor old thing was disappointed. She had so evidently worked up the conversation to the point where I would burst into tears and tell her all.

Henry also has given me every chance. He begged me over the French lesson last night to remember that he was at my service if I ever needed any masculine aid. There are some things, Henry delicately reminded me, that a man can do for a lady which another lady could not possibly do. He became quite impassioned about it and assured me that Fanny thoroughly agreed with him, meaning, I presume, that Fanny would not be jealous. When I thanked him as nicely as I could and said I was fairly well used to looking after myself, he asked if my work at Knightsbridge were pleasant and satisfactory, and said he hoped Mr. Hallett would have no objection to my taking a position as reader to a gentleman.

"You're not a widow, I mean, if you don't mind me asking?" said Henry.

I told him, as I have already told your friend Hugo, that my husband is abroad at present, and I added that I had

written to you about my work and the kindness of my landlady and her son, and that you were delighted. “My husband writes to me through his bank,” I said, to explain why no letters come for me to the house. “We arranged that because I did not know I should find such comfortable lodgings when he went away.”

Henry looked most gratified, and being a good business man, his estimation of you went up because you had a bank, I could see.

Oh, my dear, the world is very odd. These kind people upon whom we have no claim whatever, would take us both I am sure at our face value and help you if they could as well as me. And when I think of all your friends who have forsaken and belied you, I begin to wonder whether after all:

“Hearts just as rich and rare
May beat in Belgrave Square
As in the lowly air
Of Seven Dials.”

My mother, who was a darling, used to say that prejudice, patronage and pessimism towards the rich were the cherished vices of the great English middle class who are the biggest snobs in the world, and that to argue from one’s own small experience was a sign of a limited intelligence and inordinate conceit. I am belying her teaching dreadfully, or should do, but for your friend Hugo, who is the dearest boy but one I have ever known. The section of society that produced you both cannot be utterly heartless and diabolical as in my worst moments I try to believe.

Lady Donaldson asked me this afternoon whether Hugo ever spoke to me of his father. I said no, which was the truth, though I should have made the same answer in any event. Yet, thinking it over since, his silence does seem strange, for he has mentioned so many other people to me in the few days we have been friends.

It means, I believe, that his bitterness against his father is deeper even than I had imagined. If it were not for his treatment of you I could feel sorry for Sir Richard, sitting in the boy's old room and not daring to go near his son.

Good night, my darling. I am thinking of you always and loving you and counting the days.

Helen.

CHAPTER XVII

i

DR. HISSOP retrieved his character in the new medicine, for it brought Hugo a night of dreamless sleep, and he awoke to a morning of young spring rain, falling like long slim bars of silver through the sunlight. He watched them until they melted into jewels on the grass, and the scented freshness of a newly washed world came in at his window, with the twitter of birds, their orchestra enlarged by the deep, drowsy chimes of many Sunday bells.

All these things were an invitation to Hugo, and he was aware that life was an immense adventure and he must get out into it again though all the tides of chance were turned against him. He thought it was strange that he, who was to all intents and purposes half dead, should feel suddenly so much more alive than he had ever done before. He did not realise that the Fates, narrowing his horizon to the four primrose walls of this pretty room, had really widened it, opening his mind to a hundred human facets which he had never glimpsed when the freedom of the world was his.

For twenty careless years he had liked people well enough, blamed them very little, but known them not at all . . . even the two bright stars of his firmament, his father and Paul. He had admired their brilliance without ever venturing to draw near. Now one star had gone out, and the other, though shining still, must in future shed its light, alas, from far away.

But Hugo had found other stars . . . his mother wanting to do something for Paul; Robin fiercely telling Aunt Eleanor she was a dangerous woman; Alison and old Bill, electing him a godfather; Greville making Miss Trotsky whole again; Tessie, Mrs. Hallett, Portal and Leeder. And over all, so dazzling that her light filled all the world, Bunny, performer of miracles.

The night had not dimmed the rapture of his belief that Bunny liked him a bit, but he dared not translate the miracle into more ardent terms until he was certain that he should walk again. Hugo was very sure in his own mind, but he knew this might be self-deception, and he was determined when Sir John Winde came again to ask him point blank the exact nature of his injuries and how or if they could be cured.

If not, then Bunny must be released when all the tumult of Paul's disaster had died away, but he was not going to think of that dreadful contingency at present. He was going to study like blazes, for he had a feeling that Bunny, always supposing he had the luck to win her, would not mind his chosen work. She had no prejudices about such things and would roam the world with him gaily. He pictured her strolling across the desert towards them, hands in pockets, and gazing down into their excavations, to enquire in a casual voice whether they were having good sport. And he saw the pleased amazement in old Archer's eyes, at such an apparition in that lonely place.

Bunny would be disrespectful to Archer and give him funds for his work when he ran short, and the old man would be her slave.

But all this, of course, was in the splendid future. At the moment he must be content with their make-believe engagement, arranged so cunningly to defeat Paul's enemies and Bunny's, by countering their bad lies with a good one.

Hugo hoped the news was already getting about and that Mrs. Mostyn and Aunt Eleanor and Paul's silly counsel and all the rest of them would feel small in consequence. He wondered what his father would think, but perhaps his name was forbidden in his father's presence and he would never know. Rather a pity, that. It would be a distinct score over his father that the outcast had won Bunny for his wife.

However, such considerations were childish and he made up his mind to forget his father, to put him away among other youthful delusions of the past. That is what he had been, though rather a splendid delusion, and Hugo, grown up, had no longer time to waste upon regrets for a being who had never really existed after all.

Eleven o'clock brought Mrs. Hallett, her anxious glance at the invalid melting into a smile, when it was clear to her that he looked better this morning.

"I am ready for work," said Hugo, and she produced his book guiltily from beneath her arm, confessing that she had taken it home to get the hang of it . . . or try.

The idea that she should waste her leisure studying for him shocked Hugo and he secretly decided that he must arrange to have a tutor for Arabic and let Henrietta confine herself to reading to him. He chose one or two books for her to buy, from the list she had brought him yesterday and, giving her the money for them, added shyly:

“Do you think when you are out at lunch to-day, Henrietta, you could buy me the biggest box of chocolates in the world? I am expecting a very important visitor.”

He could not bring himself to tell her about the engagement yet or voice the momentous matter of the ring, but he felt he must have a present for Bunny when she came.

“Sunday isn’t the best day, but I’ll do what I can,” promised the girl. “How much would you like me to spend?”

“Pounds and pounds,” said Hugo eagerly, pushing a bundle of notes into her hand.

She returned all but one, sternly reproving such extravagance, and by no amount of persuasion could he move her.

“She’ll like it just as well,” Henrietta assured him. “What coloured ribbon would you like it to be tied with?”

“Red,” said Hugo, then glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, feeling his face grow hot.

Henrietta was stowing the money away in her bag and she did not look at him.

“If you’d really rather make it £2 . . .” she offered unexpectedly.

Hugo gave her the extra money, marvelling at the oddness of girls, for what could have made her change her mind like that? Perhaps she had guessed it was for Bunny and seen at once it ought to be a better box.

He was pleased at this solution of the puzzle and at Henrietta’s penetration and good taste.

“She admires Bunny, naturally,” said Hugo proudly to himself.

ii

When Hugo was in the middle of luncheon and it seemed that the time would never pass to the golden moment when Bunny would be due, she appeared, followed by Leeder beaming all over his face and laden with fruit and champagne.

“We’re here,” explained Bunny, “to lunch, Robin and I. Your mother sent a note round this morning and I have been allowed to escape and have my dessert with you. We’re going to drink our own healths, old Hugo.”

They drank to the firm of Molyneux, Donaldson and Co., with much solemnity, deploring the absence of the Hound, who was too dashing, Robin had considered, for a visit of ceremony such as this.

“I have bought the Hound a scarlet leather collar and lead,” confided Bunny, “so of course he’s dashing. Robin will come up and call upon you with felicitations before she leaves, but at present she and your mother are cataloguing our respective virtues and vices for each other. Up to the time I left the virtues had it. I had no idea what treasures we both were.”

“I of course,” continued Bunny wickedly, “added a modest word to the conversation now and then. In case you don’t know it, you proposed to me at Henley after you’d won your race because we were both so worked up. (I was, by the way, and so was Paul, but you were too busy to notice.) I

thought it as well to give the parents a few romantic details, because they like that kind of thing. Very realistic I was too. And as luck would have it your mother remembered seeing Paul there . . . with a girl, and she now wonders whether perhaps it was the girl he married."

Bunny, paraphrasing "The Mikado," sang in stentorious tones:

"As a matter of fact it was instead
Her daughter-in-law elect."

"I say, Bunny," said Hugo eagerly, "I don't suppose you ever really would be? I mean if I got well, of course, and some other chap you liked awfully didn't come along?"

"Bless your heart," exclaimed Bunny, producing an expression of maidenly astonishment, "how many more times do you want me to accept you this week? Am I a hussy that goes round taking cars from people I'm not going to marry, and kissing 'em too? Why, I never even did that to Paul."

"Thanks awfully." Hugo's voice was husky and his whole face aglow. "You know, Bunny, I wouldn't say a word against old Paul, but I can't get over that about him. I can't really."

Bunny burst out laughing.

"You should talk to Robin about that," she said. "It appears now that she was afraid at one time I was going to marry Paul and she told me last night it would have been a marriage of propinquity and therefore disastrous. Not that

she has anything against Paul, but we know each other too well, she said. The most valuable quality in marriage, according to Robin, is an element of surprise. ‘While you can surprise your husband, Elizabeth,’ intoned Robin, ‘you may be sure you will never bore him.’ I said: ‘This comes of my taking you to those naughty modern plays, Robin. Tut, tut! The wives in them are most surprising to their husbands. I’ve noticed that.’ Robin, who always tries to do her duty as a guardian, pointed out that there was nothing in the least surprising in immorality in these degenerate days and she was suggesting nothing so vulgar.”

“I shall have to get some tips from Robin,” said Hugo, “because perhaps husbands ought to be surprising too. You tell me the kind of husband you’d like, Bunny, so that I can practice a bit.”

Bunny considered the subject solemnly.

“I like my husbands,” she reported at last, “dark-eyed and with a grin, one with a comic aunt preferred if possible.

“And of course,” she added as an afterthought, “fond of bloodhounds and digging in deserts after mouldy kings.”

Hugo, who had not dreamed that she would take in his casual explanation about the Arabic, was amazed and dazzled by such penetration.

Just as Leeder appeared with coffee and liqueurs Mrs. Hallett returned and, finding the meal still in progress, wished to retreat again, but Bunny rushed after her and brought her back by force.

“Another glass and cup, please, Leeder,” she demanded and, drawing Henrietta by the arm, pushed her into a chair

and proceeded to wait upon her.

"You have to drink our health, Henrietta," said Bunny. "We're engaged."

"Really?"

There was such eagerness in Mrs. Hallett's tone and such a blaze of pleasure in her usually sober face that Hugo was immensely touched. He thought Henrietta must like Bunny even more than he had supposed.

"I am so very glad," said Henrietta. "I hope you'll both be awfully happy."

"We've been engaged secretly for six months," proceeded Bunny, "and now we've decided to let the cat out of the bag. If you heard a noise downstairs, that was our parents and guardians sporting on the green and celebrating the event in song. Have a grape?"

"Six months?" repeated Henrietta in a bewildered voice. "Didn't . . . didn't anybody know?"

"Paul did," contributed Hugo. "You know my friend Paul, I'm always talking about."

"Not really?" Mrs. Hallett, white now and shaken, pulled herself together with an effort. "I am sure I ought not to be here, spoiling your fun. Won't you let me go?" she pleaded.

Bunny and Hugo exchanged a quick glance.

"You are not spoiling it," said Bunny. "But I daresay it's pretty dull for you, and Hugo can't want to be read to, with parents and things prowling about. He oughtn't to make you

come on Sundays, anyway. Don't you be put upon like that, Henrietta."

"I'll come early to-morrow," offered Henrietta, quickly, and coming to the bedside, she gave Hugo his chocolates. "I hope they are good enough. . . . You know I'm awfully glad, don't you? . . . Good-bye."

Hugo put out a hand and found hers was cold and trembling.

"Thanks awfully. I'm sure you are a splendid shopperess," he said with a smile.

Mrs. Hallett almost ran from their presence, and Bunny, watching her with a comical air, remarked to Hugo, when she had gone:

"I'm afraid the poor girl's fond of you. Quite funny she was. Didn't you notice?"

"No, Bunny, she's thinking of Hallett. She's wrapped up in the poor chap and he's had to go abroad because they haven't any money. Pretty rotten, isn't it? Money's a curse when you haven't got it."

"Let's give her some," said Bunny practically. "You know, just for a moment she reminded me of someone, but I can't think who it was."

She knitted her tidy brows in the effort to identify the fugitive memory, and Helen Mostyn's secret trembled in the balance, but Hugo fortunately provided a distraction, for he had untied his parcel.

"These are for you," he said. "Just for the look of the thing . . . you know, to make them think we've got it very

badly."

"Bright lad! And you sent poor little Henrietta to get them? How like a man!"

Bunny was determined to pretend that Henrietta had grown fond of him, and she took the broad red satin ribbon from the box and tied it round his arm in a coquettish bow.

"Now you have been vaccinated . . . against girls," said Bunny. "And very necessary too."

iii

Mrs. Boyne, elegant as a stage duchess and far more aloof in appearance than any duchess of fact, sat in one of the leather chairs beside Hugo's bed. She was a majestic woman in the late fifties with a stern and uncompromising aspect, and Bunny's name for her was absurd. No doubt it had been chosen for this reason.

Lady Donaldson had brought Robin upstairs after luncheon and carried Bunny away, and Hugo having been polite to the dragon in public felt he could dispense with such formalities and now remarked impertinently:

"Hullo, Robin!"

"Well, Hugo." There was the faintest flicker of a smile in the frosty eyes.

"I wish I'd heard you telling Aunt Eleanor to go to Hell," mourned her host with relish.

"That locality, when I was young," returned Robin reprovingly, "was not mentioned before gentlewomen except

from the pulpit. I appreciate your sentiments, however, while deploring the phraseology of your generation."

"It's Bunny's generation too," insinuated Hugo. "I'll bet you like it."

Robin did not deny the accusation though she shook her head at the accuser, as though admonition to the young had become a habit.

"Well, well," she conceded, "we have been together for eleven years, Elizabeth and I, and it has been an enlightening experience, I admit."

"Tell me about it," begged Hugo, unconscious that once he could never have compassed this request. Robin had risen in stature from an absurd creature of farce to be chuckled over and enjoyed, to a being almost celestial who held the key to eleven magic years of Bunny. "What did you think of her, first go off, do you remember?"

"I remember that I was informed she was wayward and unmanageable and would need a very firm hand," said Robin drily. "My own appearance, which I have no doubt was severe enough to terrify the ordinary child of nine years old, probably had much to do with my suitability in the eyes of the judge who was appointing her guardian. Elizabeth, however, was not an ordinary child."

"No, she wasn't, was she?" agreed Hugo, with enthusiasm. "Nothing ordinary about Funny Bunny even then. She could fight, I can tell you."

"Ah, our first meeting did not disclose her capacities in that direction. Nor did I believe her the abandoned reprobate I had been led to expect. The child was extremely thin with

round, solemn eyes and she received me with the *sang froid* of a woman of the world. When I had greeted her she observed: 'You do use nice long words. Say some more.' I regret to say that she sat throughout tea with her elbows on the table and her head in her hands expecting me to perform for her. I have a very strong suspicion, Hugo," added Robin sternly, "that I have been doing nothing else ever since."

Hugo was smiling all over his face, for Robin had rolled the years back, and he was seeing again Bunny as he had first known her that far-off summer at the sea, a thin, brown, independent little creature and though the youngest of them, immediately an individual to the group of children who had forcibly befriended her. He was grateful to old Robin for having seen through the outrageous libels of the judge, who was just like most elders, thought Hugo darkly, an awful liar, for what could he have known about Funny Bunny? He had probably never set eyes on her.

"It was very lucky you looked so fierce, wasn't it?" said Hugo in a tone of congratulation, "for if you hadn't they might have given Bunny the kind of guardian who just hated her, or else a sloppy fool she'd have simply loathed."

He was appalled at the risks Bunny had run in being an orphan at the mercy of lying old judges. And yet when you came to think of it, people ran the same risks in their parents. Look at old Paul and the Anstruthers, how badly they had come off in this respect! And Donaldson, Richard, Kt. Having a personage for a father, who only thought of his own dignity and wouldn't give a chap the benefit of the doubt, was not much of a catch, Hugo knew.

"Any such person as you describe," said Robin presumably referring to the sloppy fool, "would no doubt have retired, as did my predecessor, suffering from nerve strain." Her voice was full of scorn for a moment, and Hugo was delighted. In just such a tone he could hear her tackling Aunt Eleanor and telling her off. "I trust I should never have permitted any child of her years to derange my nerves," she continued, "but there was no question of it. Elizabeth, like all your generation, Hugo, may choose to hide her sensibility, but that does not prove her devoid of it."

"Rather not."

Hugo approved of Robin's method of saying that Bunny was a wonder and was charmed that the old judge had been so completely sold. His mother had pitied poor Bunny who hadn't any parents, and she and most of the world no doubt would pity poor Robin having to be a paid guardian to someone else's child, but what rot! People were nearly always wrong about everything. Sir John Winde had said so, and day by day Hugo was finding out how true it was. He wished very much that he could talk about his father to Sir John, put the whole question before him and see what he thought of it, but somehow he knew when the moment came he would never be able to do it. There were things he couldn't say, however hard he tried. He hadn't been able to say "I love you, Bunny darling," though it was true and so easy to find the words when she wasn't there. And even to Bunny he had not once managed to mention his father's name though she must know something was up to keep him silent. Probably everybody knew, Robin among the rest, and he wondered what *she* thought of her Bunny's engagement to

a fellow who was an outcast and disgraced . . . a fellow, too, who might never walk again.

Robin at least offered no reproaches. Sitting magnificently beside him, she told him of Bunny's delight at his gift of the little car, and Hugo exclaimed:

"I expect that made you suspicious, didn't it . . . about Bunny and me, I mean?"

"Suspicious? Certainly not. I thought your handsome present and Elizabeth's acceptance of it a happy augury, but not an occasion for vulgar speculation," declared Robin. "However, I rejoice to learn of your affection for each other."

Of a sudden her voice was kind and he smiled at her gratefully, aware that, outcast or not, he had an ally in Robin. But of course Bunny had told him so. He wondered whether his father had been at home for lunch to-day, but no, he would be playing golf, no doubt, and that would have given his mother the chance to invite Robin to come and talk the matter over.

"Will you have to ask that judge whether Bunny can be engaged to me?" he enquired, his thoughts turning suddenly in a new direction.

Robin, who had been gazing out the window, her mind evidently far away, returned to the present at this hostile reference to the detractor of Bunny's childhood.

"There will be no need to do that," she consoled him. "You are both so young that your mother and I have decided a formal announcement of the engagement may well be postponed for the present, and in six months Elizabeth will

be of age and legally entitled to decide such matters for herself."

"Yes, but I say, Robin, we don't want it kept absolutely dark," cried Hugo eagerly. "I think we ought to tell a few people, like the Mostyns and Aunt Eleanor, you know . . . old friends and relatives."

"Indeed?" enquired Robin, surveying him in an interested manner. "Then you may make your mind easy in one particular. Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn have already been informed of the engagement, I understand."

"Oh, good! For, of course, we've known them for years and years," elaborated Hugo, lest he should have roused the suspicions of Robin in his excitement. He smiled at her, but getting no response, endeavoured to divert her mind. "There's something I want you to do for me," he said, confidentially. "If any other chap comes along that Bunny is fond of, please give me a hint, because unless I get better I'm not going to hold her to the engagement, naturally.

"Though I haven't been able to persuade her to break it off up to now," added Hugo, as a brilliant afterthought.

Robin shook her head at him.

"Truth, as we were taught to regard it in my youth, is a stranger to you young people of the present day," she observed severely.

"Us? Why, we're positive George Washingtons," protested Hugo.

"Possibly. Historians nowadays, I understand, dissociate the American statesman from the legend of the cherry tree.

However, to return to the question of your future, we will not meet trouble halfway, for I hope no such disclosure as you suggest will be necessary. You are young and have always enjoyed good health.

"When your strength returns and your nerves have recovered from the severe shock occasioned by the accident, the doctors consider these things may assist you to a complete recovery; but you must not permit yourself to worry about anything if you can possibly avoid it. Your mother tells me peace of mind is the supreme necessity for you at the moment and she is therefore grateful to Elizabeth for what she believes to be her loyalty to you. I did not tell her, Hugo, that I suspect her gratitude to be misplaced."

"Oh, I say, Robin, it isn't." Hugo's tone was startled. "Why, Bunny will make me get well, if anybody can, I give you my word."

"I don't doubt it," said Robin. She had been putting on her gloves and now rose, still looking at him severely. "But I do doubt the length of this very sudden engagement. I have not, however, mentioned my views even to Elizabeth and you may trust me not to do so. Though it may be reprehensible in me to condone the deception, it would be even more reprehensible not to appreciate your motives. It is, in fact, I who am grateful."

"Robin, you *are* an ass . . . at least, you know what I mean," said Hugo, grinning apology.

"I know what you mean," said Robin, smiling at last. "Good-bye, Hugo."

So the Mostyns knew about the engagement already? Hugo, when Robin had gone, looked this surprising information over, joyful yet a little bewildered, for he had not expected his mother to see the necessity of telling them at once. This was really very clever of his mother.

The return of Bunny, declaring that she was going to stay for hours, dismissed the subject for a little while, for how could he keep any thought tidily in place with Bunny's smile upon him?

She gave him an excellent performance of his mother and Robin saying good-bye and at the end of it, he found himself asking her eagerly:

"Was there anybody else at lunch to-day, Bunny?"

"Outsiders? Certainly not," declared Bunny. "This was a private view of the bride-elect. Even Royalty was not admitted."

Hugo had not meant outsiders. He had meant his father, and he explained rather lamely:

"You see, Robin told me the Mostyns know."

Bunny nodded, grinning widely.

"Yes, and now we're off," she said. "The firm of Molyneux, Donaldson and Co. will not languish for the want of advertising. I daresay poor Molly is spending her Sunday afternoon making wax figures of you and me and sticking pins into them. Very witchcrafty, she'll be."

"Quick work, wasn't it? . . . letting them know, I mean. Jolly good idea."

“Yes, rather a well-managed family you have,” said Bunny in a tone of congratulation. “You have brought it up to believe what it’s told. I approve of that in a family.”

It didn’t always, Hugo knew, for though he had firmly determined to forget his father, the task was not as easy as he had supposed, and always the thought of him lay in wait, as it were, a bitter thing in the back of his mind.

“Did mother actually go and tell Mrs. Mostyn, do you know, Bunny?” he asked wistfully.

He wanted Bunny to say: “No, your father did,” but he knew that was absurd. A father who wouldn’t even come near a fellow wasn’t likely to take the smallest interest in his engagement, even to Bunny, who was like no other girl in the world. Why hadn’t he been able to say to her, “Did father go?” It was idiotic not to be able to say a thing as simple as that, and Hugo was determined he would be idiotic no longer. He would say it, because Bunny wasn’t like the rest of them and she would understand.

“Bunny,” he said in a husky voice, “did my . . .”

“I’ve got it,” interrupted Bunny, jumping out of her chair and sitting down again excitedly. “I know who your old Henrietta is like. She’s rather like Paul’s girl.”

“No?” cried Hugo.

If she had been anxious to divert his mind from a dangerous topic because of the sudden dark misery of his face, she succeeded.

Hugo lay and gazed at her in immense astonishment.

“You don’t think it’s really her, do you?” he asked, evidently eager to be told that she did.

“Of course not. Her hair isn’t the same and Mrs. Paul dresses rather well. But there’s something about Henrietta. I think it’s her voice . . . unusual voice, rather deepish,” said Bunny. “I like it.”

“Yes, and, besides, she wouldn’t have any reason to pretend she was somebody else with us, would she? Paul would have been certain to tell her we were friends of his. I mean this family. And that just reminds me, Bunny, mother is on Paul’s side too, it turns out. She said last night we must try to do something for the old lad as soon as he’s free. I was bucked, but I hope to God I’ll be up and about by then.”

“You’ll be up all right,” Bunny assured him. “I’ve got it all worked out. When the time comes you’ll call for him in Miss Trotsky or if Mrs. Paul wants to go, and I daresay she will, you’ll drive her there and just hop out and come home by train, and Paul will find his girl and the car waiting. It ought to cheer him up a lot to be able to say ‘toodle-oo’ to the warders and jump into a smart little car and drive off casually like that. And we’ll be waiting somewhere to give them a wedding breakfast, you and I. If you’re not quite up to moving by then, I’ll have to drive Mrs. Paul and we can have the wedding breakfast here. Rather nobby idea, don’t you think?”

“By Jove!”

Hugo was charmed with the scheme, and in the dazzling contemplation of putting the world right for Paul, to some

extent, the troublesome question of who had told the Mostyns was forgotten.

Very soon now in all probability they would hear from Mrs. Paul, but even if she did not acknowledge the cheque, there was comfort in the knowledge that it had been sent and she would know she had friends at need.

The two young schemers presently decided that a wedding breakfast without any wedding presents would be ridiculous, and that since they were engaged themselves, a joint gift would be appropriate.

"For, you never know, Mrs. Paul may be a bit jealous of me, after all the tripe Molly has talked," said Bunny. "Let's give her a dressing case and old Paul a cheque for the honeymoon. Of course if he likes to use it for something else, that's not our affair."

The only drawback to this suggestion was the somewhat delicate one of fixing upon a sum that would be large enough to give Paul a start in life and small enough to look like a wedding present and not a piece of beastly patronage.

The problem was still unsolved when it was time for Bunny to go home, and they were obliged to leave it for another day.

"I'm rather glad Henrietta is like Mrs. Paul," Hugo said at parting. "Nice girl, that."

Bunny shook her fist at him.

"It's a lot of use vaccinating some people," she said. "You keep your eye on the red, my lad, and just remember that you're marrying a jealous woman."

A long arm came out and caught her gently, pulling her down beside him. Bunny winked.

“Funny Bunny, I can’t believe it will ever happen.”

She bent her head suddenly and he felt her soft cheek and cold little nose rubbing his face.

He put his arms round her, holding her fast.

CHAPTER XVIII

LETTER FROM SIR RICHARD DONALDSON, K.C., TO MRS. PAUL MOSTYN, POSTED ON MONDAY MORNING TO HER OLD ADDRESS, READDRESSED TO HER BANK AND THERE LYING TO AWAIT COLLECTION.

Dear Mrs. Mostyn,

This is to inform you that I have to-day severed my connection with your husband's case, as representative of his father.

I have taken this step after careful consideration, a matter having come to my knowledge which proves that in one particular at least I was grossly misinformed at the time of the trial. It seems reasonable to suppose therefore that I may have been deceived also in other directions, and led into a maze of misapprehensions which, though pardonable in the disappointed parents, could not be wittingly countenanced by an officer of the Crown, whose duty it is to aid and not to obscure the course of Justice.

The particular matter to which I refer is my son's engagement to Miss Molyneux, which was, I learn, known to Paul months ago, and no doubt therefore to you also. That you two young people should have kept the lad's secret so loyally in the face of your own disaster is a piece of youthful quixotry which I am not too old, I trust, to understand. It was, nevertheless, extremely injudicious, for though it could in no way have altered the verdict, my knowledge of the

facts would have saved you some painful cross-examination and presented Paul's hasty marriage in a less unfavourable light.

I shall make it my business to see Paul if it can be arranged, as soon as possible, and since his parents remain of the same mind as before with regard to his marriage, you have my assurance that, for my son's sake, as well as his own, I will see that he has sufficient funds to make a new start as soon as he is free.

In the meantime it will somewhat facilitate matters if you can bring yourself to disregard the unpleasant nature of our former interviews, and call upon me to talk things over.

I need hardly add that I shall make no conditions with regard to you in any help I am able to give the lad.

Believe me, dear Mrs. Mostyn,
Yours faithfully,
Richard Donaldson.

CHAPTER XIX

LETTER FROM HELEN MOSTYN TO PAUL.
UNPOSTED.

March 25th.

My darling Paul,

Your friend Hugo is engaged to Bunny Molyneux and everybody knows, although it has been a secret for six months, they tell me.

I am so amazed and so relieved, because although I trust you absolutely and know you were not nearly engaged to her, as your people declared, I was always a little afraid she might have been fond of you and have thought you had treated her badly. But Hugo tells me you knew all the time, and I suppose, as you promised to keep their secret, you didn't feel it fair to tell even me.

I can't help wondering what Sir Richard Donaldson thinks of it, for he must see now that he misjudged you, but no doubt to a hard man like that such things are unimportant. He only wants to win his cases by any means in his power.

He was at your father's yesterday (Sunday) morning, for when I was talking to Lady Donaldson for a moment, she was called to the telephone, and I heard her say so to someone who was evidently enquiring for Sir Richard. I wished she would go on to say why he was there, but such lucky things don't happen to me. It is ungrateful to grumble, however, for this engagement is lucky, if only because it will

show the world how very unjust your people have been to you, my dear one.

Hugo is very happy over his engagement and yet he worries me. There is something on that boy's mind, I am convinced, for over and over again during the past few days, when he thought he was unobserved, I have caught a look of the most dreadful misery on his face; and he doesn't fool any more in the lighthearted way he used to do when I first went to him. I imagined in the beginning that he was worrying about you, and even forgot to be discreet for once and begged him not to. However, he denied it and I believe he was speaking the truth, for he so often talks of you to me that he would have told me, I am sure.

He seems to be hopeful enough about his illness, and he has begun to study again regularly, as he means by and by to be an archæologist, he says. But this may be just a desire to deceive everybody. Very likely he thinks in his heart he never will recover and be able to marry Bunny and that may account for his misery.

I feel so helpless, Paul. It seems like spying upon the poor boy to tell his mother and yet I have a feeling it is making him worse, whatever the worry is. These people don't see anything. Mr. Tright and his mother told me this morning that the doctor had not been too pleased with him on Saturday (the day I first noticed a distinct change in him, though he had looked worried occasionally before), but that he was a different person since the engagement had come out and he knew he could see Miss Molyneux whenever he liked. Lady Donaldson said she didn't know why the silly children hadn't told her about it before, and she was sure Hugo's

happiness would soon make him quite normal again. I wanted to shout at them that they were stupid and blind. He's perfectly normal, but they don't understand him and I don't believe they ever will. What is the good of their money, if they don't *do* something instead of letting him lie there, fretting his heart out in secret?

He asked me the other day to get the newspaper account of your case and read it to him and this morning he mentioned it again. I have promised to take it with me to-morrow because it seems wisest not to refuse him anything in reason, but I shall have to keep his father's name out of it somehow. I gave my word never to mention Sir Richard to him, and sometimes it seems an idiotic promise, yet if I broke it and it really had a bad effect upon him as they seem to think it would I should never forgive myself.

He actually wanted me to go and choose an engagement ring for him this morning, but I persuaded him to get Lady Donaldson to telephone to the jeweller to send some for him to see instead. He was delighted at the idea. They came before I left and the jeweller's man was waiting until Miss Molyneux arrived to choose one. Hugo spread them out on his bed to dazzle her when she came in. He is evidently very much in love though he would be much too reserved ever to admit it. I think he hides himself away from most people but perhaps I understand him a little because he is so fond of you.

Fanny has just gone off in a new frock with her Henry to the Pictures and I have been out on the Common, which is full of Henrys and Fannys walking arm in arm and looking foolish and not caring in the least, as we should care, or

Hugo and Bunny, that people should see us parading our love. They are happy enough now, but I don't suppose it will last. Does it ever, I wonder? Oh, Paul, let us make ours last and not grow dull and indifferent, whatever we do.

Life seems full of evil things lying in wait, but perhaps we were lucky after all to have had this trouble while we were young and able to bear it and to put it aside and be happy again.

It must be our turn for a little good luck after this. No one should have only trouble surely, without earning it. But then I think of Hugo Donaldson, lying helpless and perhaps never to walk again and be able to marry the girl he loves, and there seems to be no sense or meaning in a world where such things can be.

It's frightening and I want your arms round me, Paul, and I want to hear you laugh. You always thought the world such a jolly place. Don't let them take that from you where you are, my darling. I couldn't bear you to be changed.

Helen.

CHAPTER XX

i

THOUGH Helen Mostyn, coming to him as she had done in the first bewilderment of her own disaster and revealing it in a way she little guessed to the new perceptiveness his illness had given him, was sufficiently akin to Hugo to recognise his misery, she could only guess its source in part.

He lived in these days between Heaven and Hell. There was no middle course. On Saturday Bunny, worker of miracles, had kissed him; on Sunday he had held her in his arms; on Monday spread out jewels on his bed for her to choose from and seen her go off at last with his ring on her finger, declaring that gloves in future were superfluous. The greatest of all miracles had happened. Bunny loved him, Bunny with the world to choose from. He knew now that it was not just a game to deceive the elders on Paul's account, or because she liked him a bit. While she was with him this supreme wonder held him entranced, but always when she had gone, he was desolate, and dark fears sat in his mind, because he could not go with her, and how long might this not have to go on?

Bunny was getting a rotten deal. She had a right to a man who could walk on his legs and care for her as a man should and take her about, not a silly ass in blue pyjamas, who couldn't even move at her coming.

Hugo knew hours of dreadful self-contempt that he had been so low a thing as to let Bunny love him, for what was all this talk of getting well, after all? It might just be a poor fool's hallucination.

Whenever this possibility came home to him afresh, he was recalled to the reason at the back of it all. If his father had not raged at him so unjustly that night, he would never have gone out again in Miss Trotsky with her wonky gears, and Bunny would be loving a man now instead of half a corpse. It was all his father's fault, and, not content with the mischief he had done, he had cast him off and left him, not only broken but disgraced.

Fierce anger against his father shook him. He had decided to put him out of his mind and forget him, but that was impossible now, because wasn't his father's behaviour an affront to Bunny?

"He might at least have been decent to Bunny, if he couldn't be to me," said Hugo hotly to himself.

Yet Bunny had not even seen his father. He was certain of that or she would surely have told him so, making a little play of the encounter for his entertainment.

Wistfully he thought of Bunny and his father together. He knew exactly how she would look, her little nose wrinkled up in a cheeky yet friendly fashion, and he could see the twinkle in his father's eyes and hear his voice moved from its usual irony at sight of her. But that was the father he had once believed in and such a person didn't really exist, only a personage secure in his own dignity and anger.

An agony of pain filled Hugo's throat and he knew black despair as at a loss greater than death, for such is disillusion.

On Monday afternoon while Bunny chose her ring, he had tried to tell her about his father, but as usual the words would not come. He had managed the Oxford story easily enough and Bunny, to whom the flouting of solemn elders seemed the natural prerogative of youth, had been delighted with it, but perhaps seeing the shadow in the eyes of the culprit, she had added that Oxford could lose its old boat race in future and serve it right.

Bunny was on his side about Oxford; she would be on his side about his father too. Hugo, thinking it all over in the night, knew gratefully that his foes were Bunny's, but that didn't alter the fact that she was getting a poor deal in marrying a fellow whose own father had turned him down.

The old judge who was Bunny's head guardian would think so too, Hugo was sure, and then he remembered this authority was not to be consulted. His mother and Robin had decided the announcement could wait until Bunny was of age, and at once Hugo saw his father's hand in that, for he would know the judge of course, and wouldn't want his nosing round to discover that he, a personage, had a son who had disgraced him.

The bitterness of this conviction filled him with a desperate desire to get up and go out of his father's house, but he could not move and he was now sure that he never would again. He was reminded of old nightmares in which it was necessary to run and he could only crawl on leaden feet. Perspiration poured from his face, though he was cold, shivering, and in the darkness he begged for death, yet knew

that this too would be denied him. His courage had gone and even Tright, waiting behind the dividing door, did not matter. Nothing mattered.

Hugo arrived at this decision defiantly, and swore violently and long at the top of his voice, but for once there was no response from the next room. Tright's sleep was sound.

The silence which he had broken became whole again. It seemed to be closing in upon him, and in a frenzy of terror, he pressed the bell, the silly bell which he had despised, then shrank from the near-by clamour of its voice.

The light leapt up in Tright's room and the fellow was there in a moment, knowing all about it in his own estimation, ready for anything.

Hugo no longer cared what he knew, and he said to him furiously: "Why to God don't you let me die?"

Tright smoothed the tossed pillow, found it hot and brought a fresh one, slipping it deftly beneath his patient's head. He opened the windows wide for a few minutes and went away, to return presently with a lemon drink, still fizzing attractively with soda.

As a substitute for the death he asked for, Tright's contributions in fact were characteristic, and Hugo suddenly found himself shouting with laughter, which had, however, no humour in it.

"The answer's a lemon, eh?" said Hugo.

And "That's right," was the inevitable reply. To Tright there were evidently no shades of mirth, and he was glad

Hugo was amused. Getting up mechanically in the middle of the night to provide some real or fancied requirement of the patient had become second nature to him, and at this hour the most bizarre demand could not disturb him. Hugo, who for many nights had hidden his misery away and kept such careful hold upon himself lest Tright should hear, now saw that this had been quite unnecessary. And at that, as though knowing itself despised, his fortitude came back.

He drank the lemon, finding it grateful to his parched throat.

"Three o'clock," said Tright. "It will be morning in an hour or two," and gently switched off the light.

Hugo saw his shadow mounting the dividing door and towering there, a ridiculous, gigantic figure, and he found himself saying: "Thanks awfully."

The shadow moved and the substance turned back into the room for a moment.

"You'll get a bit of sleep now, I shouldn't wonder," said Tright. "The nights are longish for you. That's the trouble."

It wasn't, yet the suggestion was soothing, somewhat. Tright, who could be dragged unreasonably from his bed in the middle of the night and still spout platitudes without rancour, was rather a wonderful fellow. Hugo, considering this, found himself growing drowsy and the rapture of sleep enfolding him at last.

ii

Day, though it would eventually bring him the immeasurable solace of Bunny's presence, did not dissolve the miseries of the night, but the instinct to hide them had returned. Sick at his self-betrayal to Tright and certain, now that daylight had come, that it would be duly reported to Dr. Hissop and his mother, he endeavoured to defeat this purpose by an air of cheerful good health, yet the success of this ruse filled him more than ever with depression. These people would believe anything, and what was the good of that? Hissop was a fool . . . like a facetious horse in a comic picture, Hugo thought him. A doctor with brains would know better than to believe any lie his patient chose to tell him; but all Hissop cared about was trying to be funny and charging fat fees. He didn't want a fellow to get better, naturally.

Hugo, knowing this suggestion unjust, yet indignant at it none the less, told himself that he would get well in spite of Hissop, but this morning he spoke without conviction, for he was strangely exhausted and the zest for life had gone. Sir John Winde had told him that nothing that could be done for him, was to be left undone, but that, no doubt, was a lie like all the rest, for why didn't they get on with something, instead of letting him lie here in this silly room? He had an impulse to shout at them that he hated the dam' room and wanted it green or purple or orange, anything to startle and annoy, but he knew if he did so, they would probably take him at his word. More than anything at the moment he wanted someone to oppose him violently, but he was only dimly aware of this.

Mrs. Hallett arrived at last and he said to her in a morose voice: "I'm in a bad temper this morning. You don't mind, do you?"

“Very much,” answered Mrs. Hallett, but she smiled.

“Don’t you think it’s a rotten world, Henrietta? I can’t see what’s the use of it, myself. I’d like to take a hammer and smash it up.”

“Wasn’t . . . wasn’t the ring all right?” asked the girl, anxiously.

“Oh, rather. It isn’t Bunny or the ring, but the ass who had the cheek to give it to her. I’ll bet you despise him in your heart, even if you won’t admit it.”

“You must not be morbid,” admonished the girl. “It isn’t as if you hadn’t been engaged before your accident.”

“No,” said Hugo, in a flat voice.

Another lie that everyone believed and kind little Henrietta, trying to justify him in his own eyes, little knew the truth. He would have liked to tell her, but withstood the impulse, feeling it weak. Only a contemptible fool would tell a thoroughly good lie and then go and blab about it, and this was Bunny’s secret too.

Warmth crept into his heart at that remembrance, for he had done it for her, and even if he never got well, and had to give her up, there would be comfort in the thought that he had silenced Molly Mostyn’s wagging tongue and Aunt Eleanor’s tales of Bunny.

“I know it’s hard for you to have to lie there and not be with her,” said Mrs. Hallett, “but fretting about it will retard your recovery. The doctor is so very anxious you should not be worried or upset for that reason, but perhaps he hasn’t told you.”

She looked so concerned that he smiled.

"I'm not really fretting," he assured her. "I'm whining because I'm in a nasty temper. You never whine, Henrietta."

"Oh, yes, I do," she declared.

He didn't believe her, yet he was grateful for the assurance and at the same time abashed. A plucky girl, this one, far pluckier than he. If all the fathers in the world turned her down, she wouldn't whine, he was convinced.

"Let's go to Syria for an hour or two, shall we?" he suggested. "I'm feeling better, thank you."

Yet when she read to him he found he was too tired to attend and his mind roved instead over the past week and all the unexpected drama it had brought him. Paul's troubles, Bunny's love, the conviction of his father's anger and injustice; Hugo II, that amazing gesture of friendship from Alison and Bill; Tessie marrying Roland, and the true story of Mr. and Mrs. Anstruther; the perfidy of Molly Mostyn and Aunt Eleanor; the epic of Bunny and Robin; his mother suddenly announcing a desire to do something for Paul.

As in a panorama they seemed to pass before him, these people he had known all his life and yet had never really known at all; and slowly there was borne in upon him the surprising thought that Fate, in laying him by the heels, had not so much cut him off from life as thrust him into it. Beauty, love, anger, despair, selfishness, cowardice and courage were no longer just words, but a part of the fabric of life. He had seen them masquerading in strange guises and recognised them all.

“Rum,” said Hugo to himself and became suddenly conscious of Henrietta’s voice, low pitched and beautiful, reading of Semiramis.

She was apart from all these others, as much apart as though she had walked into his world from another he had never seen. Yet she too was in the panorama, steadfast and still and secret, but very understanding.

He looked at Henrietta, at her little pale face, with the straight-cut fringe above the level brows, and the solemn eyes bent in concentration on the page before her.

She was a stranger, coming and going every day from a background he could not visualise, filled with thoughts he could not guess, and yet she was a friend.

Rather like Paul’s girl, Bunny had thought her. Hugo pondered that and was glad, not only because it marked Bunny’s approbation of Henrietta, but because it reflected credit on Mrs. Paul. He had had no letter from her yet in reply to his own, so supposed she must be busy or away, or perhaps shy of writing, yet he was glad they had sent the cheque, whatever happened, for if she were like Henrietta, she would be an independent little cuss, who would starve rather than ask help from anyone.

“I say, Henrietta, you were going to read me Paul’s case,” he interrupted her reading to say.

She put her book down for a moment, looked at the clock and protested.

“There won’t be time this morning, but I haven’t forgotten.”

“This afternoon then. Promise.”

“Very well. This afternoon.”

Her voice was rather faint and she took up the reading again quickly, as though to ward off argument, trying her best to hide the trouble in her face. But Hugo saw it and thought he knew the reason.

“You needn’t be worried,” he said persuasively, as the little clock pointed to twelve and she rose to go. “You think I’ll get in a state if you read it to me. I know, but I won’t, I give you my word. I’ve got over that a bit because things are going to be all right for Paul again.”

She turned her head away and made a great business of straightening her hat, but her voice betrayed her as she said: “And for you too. Please do believe that.”

“And you and Hallett,” said Hugo, touched. “Let’s all believe it. Have you been able to hear from him yet, Henrietta?”

“No . . . not yet. There hasn’t been time.”

“Never you mind. I’ll bet the old lad has begun to make his fortune. Look here, Henrietta, don’t be offended, will you, but when you’re ready to go out to him if you’re short, Bunny and I could easily lend you a bit. We’d love to.”

“I shan’t be short,” said the girl steadily. “I’m saving money, but I won’t forget you offered. Thank you.”

She gave him a little wavering smile and hurried from the room.

"I hope Hallett's a nice chap," thought Hugo, waiting when luncheon was over for her return. "I hope he's good enough for Henrietta. . . . Wonder what her name is, really. She has never told me. Quiet sort of girl."

It would be distressing to think of Henrietta's loving a fellow who didn't really appreciate her, yet, according to Tessie, that nearly always happened. Tessie, however, was prejudiced because of her parents. Hugo, suddenly scowling, decided that parents had a lot to answer for. Recalling the Anstruthers and Mostyns, he saw now why Alison and Bill had had to look round for a godfather for Hugo II, for they couldn't send the poor kid home to such grandparents as those.

Robin now would be different . . . a very sporting grandmother, as Bunny had said. Bunny's comic excuse for looking after her dragon had not taken Hugo in, nor Robin either very likely, for she was pretty wide awake, old Robin was. Yet the fact remained. If Bunny had any use for a grandmother, there she was, one of the very best.

If Bunny and he . . .

Hugo felt his heart turn over at the wonder of this thought. Bunny and he might have a son. The little chap would have two decent grandmothers, his mother and Robin, but not a grandfather, of course.

"Better without him," said Hugo angrily to himself, and proceeded to give him a godfather instead . . . Paul. Bunny

and he would be at one about that as they were at one about everything, and Paul it would be, careless or not.

"I daresay he won't be so very careless after this anyhow," thought Hugo, "but even if he is I don't care and Bunny won't either."

Mrs. Hallett, returning, found him gazing into space at a future that held wonders that were nearer to her than she guessed.

"You know, the only thing that's wrong with old Paul, Henrietta," he said, as though continuing a conversation, "is that he's a bit careless, but that isn't a crime."

"No," said Mrs. Hallett.

She opened her bag and took out the newspaper cutting as though she had come to a place where she could no longer deny him anything, but she did not sit down at once. She looked round the room, bringing her eyes back at last to the face of Paul's friend, and saying steadily:

"You said things were to be all right for him again. I suppose . . . his parents have come round then?"

"Oh, lord, no." Hugo's laugh was hard. "Little you know them. They won't come round. You know my view of parents, Henrietta. I've told you. Paul's people have been pretty beastly from the start, but the old lad has friends and they're putting their heads together. There will be money for him and all that."

He could not tell her that he and Bunny were the friends, because he wanted her to see Paul as the splendid fellow he really was, not just a chap depending for aid upon a girl and

a silly ass who liked him. But there was his mother who would carry more weight in Henrietta's mind perhaps.

"My mother's on Paul's side for one," he said eagerly, "and Bunny's guardian and various other people. Paul was always a popular fellow, and you see the point is he didn't do it and has been scandalously treated all round."

"I see."

Mrs. Hallett sat down and took up the cuttings and began to look them through, then put them down again.

"They won't have anything to do with this girl he married, I suppose?" she said.

"Paul's wife? Oh, rather. It was only the Mostyns who were down on Mrs. Paul, and, if you'll believe me, Henrietta, they had the dam' cheek to try and buy the poor girl off . . . afterwards, I mean, when Paul was safely out of the way. That will show you what they are."

"You don't think it might be better for him if they succeeded?"

"Better? Why, hang it all, she's the girl Paul married and he has a right to his wife. Of course, you only know what the newspapers say, but I'll bet you wouldn't let anyone buy you off behind Hallett's back, and this girl is rather like you. Bunny says so."

"Like me? Oh, nonsense."

Hugo thought she was insulted and almost angry and he hastened to reassure her.

“She meant it as a compliment . . . she did, really. Bunny thinks a lot of Mrs. Paul.”

“Does she? But she couldn’t be like me. It’s ridiculous. I . . . I saw a photograph of her in one of the newspapers.”

“Not really like, of course,” admitted Hugo soothingly. “Only rather, Bunny said. She thought it was just your voice and manner that reminded her, but she meant it nicely, I give you my word. Bunny admired Mrs. Paul. Nice girl, she said she was, and she went into the court and applauded her. You read me the case and I’ll show you where. Dashed exciting, it must have been.”

The momentous reading began but after a line or two, Mrs. Hallett got up and moved her chair so that the light was behind her and her face in shadow. The precaution was unnecessary, for Hugo was soon far too much engrossed in Paul’s wrongs to give any heed to the girl, who had played a leading part in the story and who now, holding fast to her precarious courage, unfolded before him the unlovely image which the defence had made of her.

“There,” cried Hugo, interrupting excitedly at last. “That’s the spot where Bunny applauded, when the fat-headed counsel asked Mrs. Paul whether she knew Paul was engaged to another girl, and she gave him one in the neck. Have a look, Henrietta, did they put it in about the applause?”

“Here there was an interruption by someone among the onlookers,” read Henrietta, “and cries of ‘Silence in the Court!’”

“That’s it. You see.”

“I . . . I suppose she applauded because she knew it was untrue,” ventured Henrietta.

“Yes, rather. Because between you and me, Bunny was the girl they meant,” said Hugo confidentially. “I know you probably guessed that because of the little car.”

“Yes, I did guess. And of course you and she were engaged all the time. But why didn’t she tell them that?”

The question was sudden and Hugo, startled, saw himself on dangerous ground. Why hadn’t she? He and Bunny had never thought of that, but surely if it occurred to Henrietta, who was quite an outsider, the Mostyns would want to know too and other people.

“You see, she was taken unawares, Bunny was,” he invented rapidly. “She came dashing over from Nice knowing nothing whatever and I was crocked up and delirious and there was nobody to tell her a thing. She had to go into court to hear it. She was bewildered, naturally.”

“Of course . . . I suppose she would be,” said Mrs. Hallett.

“She did try to make the Mostyns see sense about it,” Hugo went on, “but it wasn’t any good. Molly . . . that’s Mrs. Mostyn . . . was properly up the pole about the whole affair and wouldn’t listen. As soon as Bunny could get a word with me we told my mother and it all came out. Molly would have to listen to my mother, naturally.”

“It is kind of your mother to want to help him,” said Mrs. Hallett in a low voice.

“Oh, well, she liked Paul. Everybody did. And she’s not the kind of person who would go and try to buy off a fellow’s wife, whoever he chose to marry. What comes after the applause, Henrietta?”

She took up the cutting again and went on reading. After a moment, he interrupted indignantly.

“You’d think the counsel and the judge and everyone would have seen the girl was all right if Bunny did. They must have been a lot of fools.”

“After all,” said Henrietta, “I suppose the counsel was instructed by Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn, and had to do what they said. I don’t know much about law, but I believe that is the way of it.”

She was defending her enemy, Sir Richard, in spite of herself, for it had become clear to her that Hugo did not know of his father’s connection with the case, and she was desperately afraid he would ask. She went on reading hastily, but Hugo stopped her again.

“Who was the silly ass?” he demanded.

“What silly ass?” she said, playing for time. “There is a good deal more of it and I’m sure I ought not to be reading it to you, Mr. Donaldson. It is upsetting you though you promised not to let it.”

“No, it isn’t. I’m merely interested. Who was the silly ass of a counsel, Henrietta? When you began I didn’t catch his name.”

“I’ve forgotten it myself. What does it matter?”

“Have a look at the top. It will be sure to give it.”

“I am going on reading,” said Mrs. Hallett firmly, “and if you interrupt again, I shall know you are getting excited and throw the whole thing in the fire.”

It was a desperate bluff and it failed.

Suspicion grew in his eyes and became a certainty. She was deliberately concealing the counsel’s name and that could mean only one thing. It was his father . . . Paul’s enemy as well as his own.

Hugo knew that he ought not to be surprised, yet such sickness swept over him at this new discovery that he could not see, and the girl’s voice going on and on was just a meaningless noise beating above his head.

At last he had himself in hand again and with infinite cunning waited his chance.

She came to the end of a column and moved the cutting through her fingers to begin another. In a flash his arm shot out, and caught the end of it, tearing it in two.

Mrs. Hallett jumped to her feet, for the first time in his knowledge of her losing her self-control, though more often than he could guess she had been near it.

“Give that back immediately. How dare you?” she cried in her terror and distress. “If you don’t . . . this very moment . . . I’ll go and never come near you again.”

He gave one glance at it and handed it back.

“You needn’t have been afraid to tell me his name,” he said. “I assure you he’s no friend of mine.”

His voice was quiet, matter-of-fact, composed; it was as though all youth and life had left it, and the bitterness in his eyes was more than she could bear.

"Don't!" she begged in a broken voice. "Oh, I shouldn't have read it to you. I've done a dreadful thing."

"My dear girl, I was bound to know it sooner or later, and it makes no difference," he told her wearily. "A fellow who would cast off his own son would believe the worst of his son's friend as a matter of course. That's what my father has done . . . chucked me."

"Oh, *no*!"

"I was sent down from Oxford," said Hugo in the same dull voice. "Not for anything very bad either. I started a rag and some of the fellows went too far and I copped it. Somebody had to, and you'd think a chap's father who had been there himself, would have understood or at least made a few enquiries. He didn't. He said I had disgraced him and from that day to this, accident or no accident, I've not set eyes on him."

"I . . . I can't believe it," stammered Mrs. Hallett.

"True all the same. Now you know why I'm hidden up here like a kid in disgrace. It's to be out of his way. I'm helpless in the house of a father who won't acknowledge my existence. Do you wonder I'm impatient to get well and be out of it?" He turned his head away and lay staring miserably at the wall. "I thought rather a lot of him," he said. "That's the kind of young fool I was."

"Please don't take it to heart," begged the girl, almost in tears. "If he could treat you like that he's not worth grieving

over. You should just despise him. Make up your mind to forget him and grow strong and give yourself a chance. You must think of Bunny and Paul and your godson and all your friends."

"I'll forget him all right, Henrietta. Don't you worry." A sudden blaze of anger lit his eyes. "I'd be actually dependent on him for the food I eat if it were not for my mother," he said furiously. "She's paying for everything. I've never thought enough of my mother . . . always of him."

He closed his eyes; he could no longer face her, and the girl, with pity and understanding, took up her book on Syria, opening it at random.

"I'll read to you for a little while," she said. "You needn't listen."

She read and for a long time he was conscious of her voice, though he couldn't have distinguished a word for the life of him. Yet it was a friendly sound and soothing, and at last his mind relaxed beneath it and exhaustion had its way with him.

He could not believe that he had slept, yet when he opened his eyes, she had gone, and on the table beside him stood a photograph of Bunny, in a silver frame, which he had never seen before.

"I must be going potty," said Hugo to it, in a startled tone.

A laugh answered him, and the Hound in a scarlet collar, leapt on the bed.

“Get off it, Hound. That’s my place,” said Bunny. “And turn your back like a gentleman.”

CHAPTER XXI

LETTER FROM HELEN MOSTYN TO PAUL.
UNPOSTED.

Tuesday evening.

I am very blue to-night, dearest, and in a rage with all the world, and so I am writing to you for relief. I know now I shall never ask you to read these stupid letters which are selfishly full of my own poor little troubles, but I go on writing them because it seems to bring you near.

I have found out what is troubling Hugo. It is his father. I thought Sir Richard Donaldson hard in his treatment of you, my darling Paul, but you were after all a case to him and your parents were his friends. There was at least some excuse for his prejudice and misunderstanding. But for his treatment of Hugo there is no excuse. It is simply monstrous and inhuman, and I was so furiously angry this afternoon, that I very nearly went and demanded an interview and told him so, damning the consequences.

After all, I didn't, however, for I knew it would mean the end of my visits to Hugo and I believed he would miss me. . . . No, that wasn't the real reason either, only a minor one. I want to keep my job, because with such a good salary I can save for our future. I can't help loving Hugo for his loyalty and devotion to you, and I would do almost anything to help him, but you come first.

Everything they told me about Hugo's strange attitude to his father was a lie. It was all the other way round. The poor

boy got up to mischief at Oxford and was sent down and, although there was no real harm in what he did and in spite of his accident, Sir Richard has not seen him or spoken to him since. Hugo tells me this is why he is shut away upstairs, out of his father's sight, and that his mother even pays for his food and nursing because his father won't acknowledge his existence. I suppose such behaviour shouldn't surprise me after the way your parents have treated you, yet it seems beyond belief that a man should be so wrapped up in his own dignity when his son is lying helpless in his house.

No doubt they invented that story about Hugo's delusions with regard to his father for my benefit, to make me avoid the subject with him, so that I would not learn the truth, but it seems absurdly unnecessary. Or perhaps they tell everyone the same story to explain why his father never goes near him. I daresay Lady Donaldson is ashamed of Sir Richard's behaviour and wants to hide it. I don't wonder, though if I were in her place I should take the boy away and go with him and never speak to Sir Richard again.

Hugo lies there breaking his heart about it, for he seems to have thought the world of his father. It's too cruel. You would think he had enough to bear, knowing he may perhaps never walk again, without this misery and humiliation. I wanted to cry and rage and swear all at once when he told me, and if I had seen his mother, when Bunny Molyneux arrived and I was able to slip away, I should probably have done all three, but Lady Donaldson was out this afternoon and I saw no one. This was fortunate, really, for I must not offend her. Hugo tells me she is going to help you, my dear, and Bunny's guardian too and other friends. I wonder what Sir Richard will say when he discovers that.

I am very grateful to them all, whoever they are, but I know it is Hugo who is really at the back of it, and I can do nothing for him in return.

I might of course go to see Sir Richard and tell him Hugo is fretting, but I can't think a man as hard and self-centered as that would be moved by anything I could say. And, besides, it would be useless to try to disguise my identity and I should have to admit I have been going to his house under an assumed name, hoping to hear news of your enemies and what they are going to do next. Then he would be more than ever convinced that all the evil things he thought of me were true, and I can't risk it.

I remember at the last interview we had how he stormed at me when I mentioned his son, and now I see the reason. Yet Hugo's photograph was on his desk, which seems queer. One would have expected him to put it out of his sight, if he had done with his son. His whole attitude, in fact, seems incredible.

If Lady Donaldson can't bring him round . . . and no doubt she has tried . . . it isn't likely that I could do so, and I know it is quite useless to think of it. I must just go on reading to him and doing what I can though it is really nothing at all. At least he has Bunny, and what can a mere father matter beside love like that? We know, don't we, my dearest Paul?

I had left this letter and gone to bed, but I couldn't sleep and now something else has just occurred to me. . . . That

day I saw Sir Richard in Hugo's old room! He was sitting at the desk with his head buried in his hands and he certainly looked very much confused at being found there. Why should he have gone there if he hates his son? Am I being utterly sentimental in supposing his presence there had any connection with Hugo? I thought at the time it was because he was distressed about the boy and dared not go near him, and that he found some comfort in being among his things, but in the light of what I know now that is ridiculous. And I remember he begged me not to mention to Hugo that I had found him there, in case it should upset him. Did he mean that he couldn't bear his son to know that he would even condescend to enter his old room? . . . It sounds like a silly child in a temper. Besides, he thanked me for reading to Hugo, and why should he have done that?

I *can't* understand it. The whole thing seems so contradictory, and the more I think of it, the more confused I become. He surely can't be held back from making up this difference with Hugo through mere stiff-necked pride, and yet there are people like that, who don't seem to realise there is enough misery in the world without adding to it by their own blind obstinacy and self-conceit.

It is too much for me, Paul darling. I can find no answer to all these questions, so I shall go to bed and take myself firmly in hand and think of you instead.

Your
Helen.

Wednesday morning.

I have been packing since six o'clock because I shall have to leave Mrs. Ponder and find another lodging. It isn't any good, Paul dearest. I have been arguing against myself all night, but I must go and see Sir Richard.

You and I are young and strong and we are not such poor fools that we can't face the world without help from any of them; but Hugo is helpless and I owe him so much for believing in you, and in the girl you married because you married her and in spite of all they said against her. After all, Safety First is a coward's excuse.

I am still at sea over Sir Richard's queer behaviour, but at least certain he was concerned for Hugo when I saw him on Saturday. There was nothing hard about him then.

He is sure to see me, because he will imagine I have come about that offer from your people. If he refers to it I shall ask him if he has heard of his son's engagement to Miss Molyneux and how he can reconcile it with your mother's story. I shall enjoy giving him that little shock, for of course he will have no idea how I could have heard about it.

I have taken off my wig and put on that grey suit you used to like, for I am to be Helen Mostyn again for a few hours instead of Mrs. Hallett. It is no use my going to him as the latter for he would see through the disguise. (Bunny Molyneux, who only saw me in court, has nearly done that.) Of course he will forbid me the house in future. That is only to be expected, but I must not forget to tell him Mr. Tright knew nothing about my identity, and that is why it will be better to leave the Ponders'. After all their kindness they must not be allowed to suffer for my misdeeds, fancied or otherwise.

When I have seen Sir Richard I shall go to the bank, I think, and draw out the money you left in my name, and put it in a Post Office Savings Bank, where I shall not be in danger of running into your friends. Then another lodging and another job to find.

I shall miss my hours with Hugo, but if I can make Sir Richard come to his senses, I shall not mind anything. If he remains obstinate, I may see Bunny Molyneux and get her to try. A rich daughter-in-law meant so much more to your parents than their son, that her money may be equally persuasive to Hugo's father. Yet very likely she has already tried and failed.

Am I a fool to rush into the affair at all? Very likely, but at least I can't sit with Hugo day after day and see his misery and do nothing about it. Paul darling, I'm going. Wish me luck.

H. M.

CHAPTER XXII

i

ON that day of destiny for Hugo Donaldson rain fell in torrents, and the wind made sport with it, driving it against his window until, if he closed his eyes, he could almost believe he heard the sea. Stormy seas and great gales blowing nearly tossing you off your feet! There was a tonic in the imagined effort to resist them and Hugo, opening his eyes at last from this delight, said to the rain: “Go it. That’s the spirit.”

On the table beside him stood the picture of Bunny impishly smiling and keeping an eye on him. Buttoned into the pocket of his pyjama suit was another, a snapshot Robin had taken for him, of Miss Trotsky with Bunny and the Hound beside her. Bunny had labelled this “Hugo’s Family. 1, Miss Trotsky, née Donaldson; 2 and 3, Bunny and Hound, Donaldsons-elect.” Whenever the coast was clear he took it out and held it in his hand, convinced anew that Bunny was unique, for who else in the world could have thought of so perfect a gift?

His mother, coming into the cosy, fire-lit room and finding him with a book propped up before him, went off contented to a committee meeting, unaware of the treasure he had hidden between the pages at her approach, as she was unaware of the storm that had shaken him yesterday. Only Henrietta knew that, and Hugo waited her coming this morning with a slight uneasiness.

It had been a relief at first . . . that outburst against his father . . . and throughout Bunny's visit, presently reinforced by Tessie and Roland come to hear about the engagement, he had been upheld by a sense of excitement.

Tessie and the old ass were inclined to be solemnly romantic about his engagement to Bunny, and that bright spirit, always ready to oblige, had provided them with a heart-rending account of the long and secret devotion that had preceded it, turning to Hugo from time to time for corroboration. The comedy had been high. Tessie's voice had grown gruffer than ever with emotion, and even the old ass had brayed in a minor key.

"After this," said Bunny, when they had gone, "your bone-collecting aunt will be sorry she ever had anything to do with my frisky skeleton. We're cramping her style at every turn."

But Bunny too had had to go at last, and soon his elation had faded, and reaction set in. Going over and over the scene with Mrs. Hallett he knew that he had shouted his grief aloud, and he was filled with self-contempt and shame. This was the kind of poor whining cur he had become. Turning from the appalling spectacle at last, he had shut the thought of his father away, determined that, even in secret, he would never take it out again. He was fatherless. Very well, he would accept the fact and ignore it, facing the future with resolution.

Now, waiting for Mrs. Hallett to come, he planned a greeting to disarm her, not fearing her contempt, for she was kind, but dreading her pity.

He might say to her: “What about reading the rest of Paul’s case?” nonchalantly, to show her he was now completely calm about it. But she would probably protest, however calm he was, so perhaps it would be safer to stick to Syria. She had read to him yesterday, but he hadn’t a notion what. He would make a joke of that and ask her to begin again.

Eleven o’clock came and she had not arrived, which was surprising, for punctuality was one of her besetting sins. Yet the rain might be responsible, for it was still coming down, and little Henrietta was hard up. She mightn’t have a mackintosh. She’d be wet through in this downpour if she didn’t take care. He must watch out and see that she changed her shoes . . . get Portal to borrow a pair of his mother’s for her, if necessary.

Five past eleven. He grew uneasy and brought out the snapshot of his family to steady his mind. What were five minutes anyway? Girls were always late. Ridiculous to get in a stew because she wasn’t here on the tick.

Ten minutes.

Fifteen.

Wasn’t she coming then? Had Henrietta turned him down in disgust because of that exhibition of yesterday? He had hardly summoned the courage to look this dreadful possibility in the face, when he heard a sound at the door and laughed aloud with relief. She was coming after all. She had come.

The door was pushed gently open, and, before his unbelieving eyes, his father walked in.

The next moment Hugo was sitting up in bed. He saw the mantelpiece topple over, the floor rush up to meet the ceiling and the whole world split asunder.

ii

"Hugo . . . Hugo . . . God! I haven't killed you, have I?"

Hugo heard his father's voice from a great distance and knew he was struggling out of a dream. He was conscious of a strange, tingling sensation all over him, and when at last he was able to open his eyes, he saw his father's stricken face above him.

His father's arms, which had caught him as he fell, were still about him, though he was back on his pillows again. He touched one of them, found it real, and a blaze of welcome broke over his face.

"Hullo, father," he said.

They smiled at each other with complete understanding.

Sir Richard released him gently and sat down on the bed, his fingers closing over those of his son.

"You gave me the fright of my life, you young scoundrel," he said. "What do you mean by it?"

Hugo grinned, regarding both question and questioner with approval. He had not at the moment the least curiosity as to how his father had come there or why he hadn't come before. He was simply content.

"Feeling all right, old man?"

"My word!"

A sudden blinding remembrance came back to the boy and he exclaimed excitedly: “Good lord, I sat up. . . . I say, father, look here, I can move. . . . I could do it again.”

“Steady!” his father’s hand pressed him back against the pillows. “We’ll let the doctor have a look at you before you try that again, I think. As soon as the faintness has worn off enough for me to leave you, I’ll find that fellow Tright and get him to telephone.”

Hugo decided he didn’t want any doctors nosing round, or Tright either.

“This faintness won’t wear off for a couple of hours, I give you my word,” he invented, eagerly, and watched with delight the little twinkle dawning in his father’s eyes.

Sir Richard gave him a cigarette and lit one himself, and they sat in silence happily. Tright, opening the dividing door upon this amazing picture, stood still in speechless surprise, his mouth half open.

“Is that you, Tright? You might telephone to Dr. Hissop and tell him his patient has taken it into his head to sit up, will you?” said Sir Richard, turning. “Ask him to come and have a look at him as soon as possible and get Sir John Winde too if you can.”

“Yes, sir.”

Tright vanished. Tright, in whose hands his mother and Dr. Hissop were wax, obeyed his father on the moment. But no . . . he was coming back, bearing a little glass.

“Fainted, I expect,” said Tright in explanation to Sir Richard, and Hugo saw his father’s keen glance and nod of

approval. His father would like a fellow who could use his wits and didn't make a song about it.

He drank his dose and felt a grateful glow creep through him.

"Thanks awfully."

"That's right," said Tright, and departed on his errand to the doctor.

The dividing door was closed; they were alone again; and Hugo lay and looked at Donaldson, Richard, Kt., peacefully smoking on the side of his bed. Tall chap, he was, and fit as a fiddle. Nice clothes he had too, and the little touch of grey in his hair suited the severity of his glance. Hugo, screwing his own expression up to match it experimentally, wondered if he would ever look as imposing as that, then found his father watching him amused, and became young again.

"Been away?" he asked cheekily.

"Sent into outer darkness by the medical fraternity, old man. They seem to think I should have a terrifying effect upon their patient."

"Not really, father? What a lot of liars they are!"

"Dam' fools, eh? Still there was some excuse for them. While you were delirious my appearance undoubtedly did excite you and the doctors' theory seemed plausible. They imagined that little difference of ours might have been on your mind at the moment of the crash and the shock temporarily upset your mental balance. So I was ordered to keep out of the way until called for and give you a chance to get back to normal."

“I’ve been normal for weeks,” protested Hugo, indignantly, and then at something of strain in his father’s face, he added eagerly: “Besides, I didn’t think you were so awfully waxy that night.”

“Oh, you didn’t, you young devil? Thought I was pleased, no doubt.”

“No, but I knew you’d get over it after a bit.”

“Nice of you. Then, where’s this fellow who wanted his mother to be a widow?”

“Oh lord, I thought you were dead,” admitted Hugo in a small voice. “When you didn’t come near me and they never mentioned your name, I got the fright of my life and thought you must be dead and they were keeping it dark. I couldn’t stick the suspense and I said that to mother so that she wouldn’t be afraid to tell me.”

Sir Richard laughed.

“Well, well, so that’s the explanation of it! You played into Hissop’s hands finely that time, I must say, and just as he was about to lift the embargo too.”

His hand closed over his son’s again.

“There’s life in the old dog yet, Hugo, and in the young one too, eh? Still feel you can move and sit up?”

“Rather!” Cautiously he moved one leg and then another and the full knowledge of what this meant swept over him in a tide of wonder and gratitude.

“I’ll be able to walk again,” he said huskily at last.

Sir Richard nodded and silence fell once more. The rain tapped on the window in a friendly fashion. Bunny in her silver frame seemed to wink, as though she knew.

Thousands of things he had to tell his father some time or other. He who had talked to him so little all his life now saw these last few weeks of silence simply charged with things his father ought to share.

Bunny! He would see them together after all.

As though the thought flashed to him, Sir Richard took up the photograph and looked at it, and to the eager eyes that watched him, it seemed that he shared a joke with Bunny.

"She's no rabbit," said a confidential voice.

"So I gather. Bright pair of young devils, aren't you?"

Hugo took out his precious snapshot and thrust it into his father's hands.

"My family. You'll see their names on the back."

Sir Richard examined the family, and his verdict, though brief, was entirety satisfactory.

"Couldn't have done better myself," he admitted handsomely as he handed the treasure back.

Hugo beamed.

"Lovely sell for Hissop when he finds the bad effect you have on me," he said gleefully after a while. "Did he know you were coming this morning?"

"No, old man. We owe that to a little friend of yours," said his father, and there was a quality in the quiet voice that

Hugo had never heard before.

"Bunny?" he asked at once.

"Not this time. Another girl."

"Henrietta," breathed Hugo in a tone of wonder. He had completely forgotten her in his excitement, and she had done this.

"Is that your name for her? She came to see me this morning and pitched into me like blazes for my scandalous treatment of my son. Eloquent girl," said Sir Richard with a faint chuckle.

"No?" A wave of colour swept over the culprit's face. "My fault," he admitted shyly. "Did she tell you the things I said about you, father?"

A shake of the head reassured him, and in the shrewd eyes regarding him he read complete exoneration for anything he might have said.

"She's a good friend of yours, Hugo, and of mine too in future. We'll see to that, eh? She risked a good deal in coming to me, or believed she did so, which comes to the same thing since it was done for you. And, by the way, I have her permission to tell you who she really is. Her name is Helen Mostyn. She's Paul's wife."

Mrs. Paul? Hugo could hardly believe his ears. Little Henrietta was Paul's wife. Then Bunny had been right about the likeness! Wonderful of Bunny to spot it when she had only seen her once, but Bunny was like that. Hadn't she known at a glance that Mrs. Paul was all right . . . with all the world against her?

Out of the happy confusion of this amazing revelation about little Henrietta and Bunny's marvellous perception, there struggled the remembrance of the most urgent thing of all he wanted to say to his father, and he exclaimed excitedly: "He didn't do it, father . . . Paul didn't. I'll bet you he didn't pinch that money."

"You young fool," said his father gently, "do you suppose I would have defended him if I thought he had?"

"*Wouldn't* you?"

Hugo at last looked into a completely rosy world. He hadn't thought of that; he hadn't known it. It was simply appalling the number of things he didn't know.

But his father was going on to explain, untroubled by the dreadful ignorance of his son.

"Not unless he had pleaded guilty, when I should have done my best for him on your account. Paul refused to do that and stuck to his story. His parents believed it was sheer obstinacy, but I had a long talk to the lad and was convinced he was telling me the truth, though I thought he had been led into bad ways. I was mistaken there, I find. Prejudice can influence us in spite of ourselves. I did what I could for Paul, but all the evidence went against him, old man. Such things do happen and it's hard, I know, but you mustn't worry. We'll help him to make another start. Your mother and I had already decided that, and now I owe the girl he married a debt no money can repay."

The quiet voice ceased abruptly. It was a long speech for his father, who did not parade his eloquence in private life,

but to Hugo it was the most momentous utterance of this wonderful morning. His father too was on Paul's side.

Tright knocked at the door, an unexpected tribute to his patient's visitor, and announced that Sir John Winde and Dr. Hissop were downstairs.

"Ask them to come up, will you?" said Sir Richard and rose, looking down to exchange a heartening smile with the invalid.

Under the bedclothes first one long leg and then the other moved, and the bright dark eyes blazed back an answer charged with hope.

"If this doesn't knock you up too much I may bring you a visitor," said Sir Richard. "I sent one of my chaps with Mrs. Paul to her bank for a letter of mine that was waiting there for her, and told him to drive her here afterwards. Leeder, I think we shall find, has been making her comfortable downstairs."

"Thanks awfully," said Hugo and the doctors came in.

iii

The examination was over and they had gone downstairs with his father, but this time Hugo did not care in the least that they would be talking him over. He did not even care what they said, for he knew in his own mind without question that he would walk again.

Their learned references to functional injuries and the rest, had passed over his head unheeded. He had not even noticed that in his father's presence Dr. Hissop ceased to be

funny and became a physician of repute. All the little irritations that had beset him during the past weeks in his perfect room seemed now fantastic and absurd, for he looked into a future rich with promise.

His father had come, and like a magician changed all the world. Not only the miracle of recovery had his father brought him, but, with a wave of his hand, so to speak, he had changed little Henrietta into Mrs. Paul.

She had been here day after day while Bunny hunted for her in the city and they wrote their letter to her enclosing £50. Hugo laughed aloud. He had always known she was a dark horse, and see how cleverly she had taken them in. Why and how had she come to be his reader, he wondered. Perhaps she had known he was Paul's friend. Bunny's Mrs. Paul. . . . Bunny had gone into the court and applauded her; Bunny had liked her and known she was a good 'un on the spot; Bunny had gone out, like the little sport she was, to lend her a helping hand. Hugo saw suddenly with delight and pride that Bunny had been the real arbiter of destiny. She had come in to see him, seeking his help for Paul. All that followed had been the result of that.

No wonder quiet solemn Henrietta, receiving their confidences about Paul and his girl, had been sympathetic and understanding. Bunny would like this. She would be tickled to death.

Day after day he had talked to Henrietta about Paul and she had never given herself away. And Hallett, who was supposed to be away, was really Paul. Jolly good! Hugo remembered that he had been hoping Hallett was a decent fellow.

The rain was coming down in torrents again, and Tright came in, poked the fire into a blaze and straightened the chairs which the doctors had left in disorder.

“I’m going to do you out of a job, Tright,” said Hugo.

“That’s right,” said Tright and exchanged a smile with his patient to mark the fact that, from being a mere case, he had become a man again.

“My father thinks you are a pretty clever chap,” remarked Hugo, offering a bouquet.

“Well, sir, I must say your parents are the most considerate lady and gentleman I could wish to meet. I’ve been in a number of houses one way and another, and you never know, not with parents,” said Tright, returning the compliment.

“No, you don’t, do you?” exclaimed Hugo, naturally regarding the matter from quite another angle than Tright’s.

“Nor with patients, neither, for that matter,” said Tright, somewhat obscurely.

“Really? Well, you’ve been jolly good to this one, old man.”

“Thank you, Mr. Donaldson, but if you don’t mind me saying so, I couldn’t have wished for a pleasanter patient.”

Hugo laughed.

“You are a liar, Tright. Why, I’ve had you out of bed every night for weeks. Look here. Shake hands.”

“Getting up at night is a mere nothing in my profession,” explained Tright, as he obeyed, “all in the day’s work as you

might say."

He turned on the light, for the day had grown dark with the storm, and slipped gently away, bland as of old, yet, in Hugo's new view of things, a fit subject for rich rewards. He decided he must talk to his father about Tright, and had just remembered that here was another instrument of destiny, since Tright had brought him Henrietta, when there was a soft knock at the door and she came in.

Henrietta with a difference, but he knew her at once. In her little grey suit and soft grey hat she looked far more a part of Bunny's world and Paul's and his own than the Henrietta of old, and that was the world to which in the future she inevitably would belong.

"Hullo, Mrs. Paul, you do look nice," said Hugo.

She had two open letters in her hand and there was a little misty smile in her eyes as she came to his bed. She looked younger and he could see her hand shaking.

"The doctors say it's all right. You're going to get better," she said breathlessly. "Your father was very kind. He said I might come and tell you."

"Because you did it," Hugo declared in an accusing voice, and drew her on to the bed. "Do you like him a bit, Henrietta?"

They smiled over the old name and the girl nodded, holding out one of her letters to him.

"He wrote me this days ago, and it has been waiting for me at the bank. I wanted you to see it because you'll know

then what we didn't realise, that he was going to be kind to Paul and even to me."

It was the letter about his engagement to Bunny, and Hugo read it, guilty yet elated that their little fairy-tale invented for Molly Mostyn and Aunt Eleanor should have had an effect so unexpected. But the fairy tale had become gloriously true, and what did it matter since all the time his father had believed in Paul?

"I found this one waiting too," said Mrs. Paul when he had finished, and she held up his letter and the cheque for fifty pounds.

Her composure was going and he saw that she could hardly speak.

"That was Bunny really," he confessed. "She just let me go fifty-fifty because I was Paul's friend. Bunny will be awfully bucked about all this. I say, Henrietta, you know it was a wonderful piece of luck for us that Paul married you."

It was the one tribute she needed, and he saw her melt into happy tears.

EPILOGUE

ON a day in summer the doors of the blue room which had been Hugo Donaldson's stage were open wide, and inside them, in gala fashion, a luncheon table had been laid for four.

The bed on pneumatic wheels had been long since moved away and its occupant, who no longer received the world in pretty blue pyjamas, had done his best, in his own estimation, and his worst in his mother's, to turn the place from a dam' drawing-room into a habitation befitting a man of twenty-one.

This was Hugo's study now, as various books in bindings distressingly dull bore witness. Such treasures as he considered essential to the pursuit of learning had been moved up from his old room, including a medley of bats and racquets and other archæological specimens as his father called them.

The cricket group, with Paul triumphant and debonair in the centre, hung over his desk. Bunny in her silver frame was repeated in snapshots all over the room . . . Bunny and Hound; Bunny, Miss Trotsky and Hound; Bunny, Helen and Hound. There was even a snapshot of Henrietta in her old disguise taken by Bunny just to show Paul what his wife had been up to.

A table in the corner of the room was covered with parcels and envelopes addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Paul

Mostyn, for this was to be the wedding luncheon. This morning Paul was free.

Instead of confining it to themselves as at first intended, Bunny had shamelessly canvassed all their little group for presents while inviting nobody to the feast. Tessie and Roland had come forward handsomely, and even Hugo's Uncle William, a good deal bewildered as to what it was all about, had produced a cheque. George Anstruther had contributed only under a threat of being omitted from Bunny's wedding if he didn't; his social leanings turned the scale. A cable from India testified that Alison and Bill were represented; and Hugo had produced a gift from his godson, and Bunny one from the Hound. Robin had sent her own.

Lady Donaldson was giving Helen her trousseau and Paul a month's honeymoon for them both, for this had been Sir Richard's idea (and a jolly bright one, Hugo thought it) that the old lad should have an untroubled month abroad with his girl before he had to face the world again. Trunks and suitcases were ready packed for them downstairs, and, when luncheon was over, Greville would drive them to their train. Lady Donaldson had gone out by request, so Paul would see no one but Hugo and Bunny and his wife to-day.

An envelope for each of them, addressed by Sir Richard, lay on the table. Hugo did not know the contents, but he could guess them happily. He was giving Helen a sumptuous writing-case and Bunny a dressing-case to match it, but their gift to Paul, soaring magnificently and dwindling in turn, had been a much more difficult affair. At length they had decided upon a joint cheque for £1000, "for a bit of house for us to

come and stay in." They felt that, put like that, old Paul couldn't mind.

Miss Trotsky and Helen, who had learned to drive under Bunny's tutelage, were bringing Paul home; and Hugo, looking very tall and thin in his grey suit, and Bunny in a summer frock watched for them from the balcony, or walked restlessly round Leeder, who was putting the finishing touches to the table. The Hound, wearing the white ribbon of a blameless life, had caught the prevailing excitement and was under everybody's feet, growling mournfully at intervals.

"Really, Hound," said Bunny. "You are the skeleton at the feast. Anyone would think you belonged to Lady Eleanor."

She came out and perched herself on the railing of the balcony and Hugo's arms shot out to hold her.

"If you hear the voice of that siren, Miss Trotsky, you'll fall over, Funny Bunny," he said.

"I'll bet Paul's driving. That will cheer him up," prophesied Bunny. "Wonder if he had enough money to tip the warders."

Hugo smiled.

"You don't."

"How do you know, old Hugo? You've never been there."

Her head rested against his arm.

“Nice of your people to make themselves scarce. I think you’ve brought them up rather well. Decent they’ve been to Helen, too,” said Bunny, in the casual tone she reserved for her utterances of importance.

“Your doing, that was,” said Hugo, a warm glow at his heart.

“Liar.”

“Yes, it was. Who went into court and applauded her and said she was a nice girl?”

“That was sheer swank because I was jilted,” said Bunny, grinning.

“What’s that? When you were engaged to me all the time?”

Bunny shouted with laughter.

“Pretty useful pair of liars, aren’t we?” she said with glee. “We’ll have to tell Paul this one, Hugo. He’ll simply love to know he jilted me. Joke of the season he’ll think it.”

Hugo was happy, for if she could tell Paul he knew at last it had never been true or she didn’t care a button if it had been. She loved him only, or as she had loved no other. Her love for Paul was like his own, something quite different.

He lifted her off the railing and, his arm around her, looked down the road by which Paul and his Helen would presently come. The trees which had been just touched with young green, on those afternoons when Bunny had driven past his window in the little car to please a poor ass in blue pyjamas, were now deep-fringed and lovely, and their beauty stirred his pulse. Beyond their quiet he could hear the heart

of London beating, the heart of the world to which he had come back.

Suddenly he perceived that sight and hearing had been given him for the first time when he lay helpless. Until then he had neither seen nor heard.

“Toot . . . Toot!”

Miss Trotsky’s voice in the distance. Hugo’s heart turned over and Bunny clutched his arm, as the little red car shot into view, swift and smart as of old with Paul at the wheel.

Two on the balcony waving wildly. Two in the road below, waving back. Then she had passed, she was out of sight, and Bunny and Hugo were racing downstairs.

Once there they paused and looked at each other with suddenly frightened faces. But Bunny laughed and Hugo kissed her.

Cheered, they put on their armour of casual welcome and opened the door to their friend.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

Obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected. Variations in hyphenation and accents have been standardised but all other spelling and punctuation remains unchanged.

[The end of *Visitors to Hugo* by Alice Grant Rosman]