

Bright Star

By
Mary Schumann

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SYNOPSIS

Kezia Marsh, pretty, selfish and twenty, arrives home in Corinth from school and is met by her older brother, Hugh. He drives her to the Marsh home where her widowed mother, Fluvanna, a warm-hearted, self-sacrificing and understanding soul, welcomes her. Kezia's sister, Margery, plump and matronly with the care of three children, is at lunch with them. Hugh's wife, Dorrie, has pleaded a previous engagement. On the way back to his job at the steel plant founded by one of his forebears, Hugh passes Doc Hiller, a boyhood friend whom he no longer sees frequently because of Dorrie's antipathy. Fluvanna Marsh wakens the next morning from a dream about her late husband, Jim, whose unstable character she fears Kezia has inherited. Ellen Pendleton comes over. She is an artistically inclined girl who is a distant niece of Fluvanna's. She happily tells Fluvanna she has become engaged to Jerry Purdue. Ellen fears that her father and mother, Gavin and Lizzie, will not approve the match. Hugh and Dorrie go out to the Freeland Farms to dance with their friends, Cun and Joan Whitney. Whitney, who has been out of work, has a new position. Cun and Dorrie dance together and then disappear for a while. Dancing with Joan, Hugh is amazed to find her in tears. Apparently she has some secret worry over her husband, Cun. When Ellen and Jerry speak about their engagement to Ellen's parents, Lizzie is disagreeable until Jerry sympathizes with her imagined ailments. The matter is left pending. Unexpectedly Hugh has to visit a neighboring city on business. Returning home to ask Dorrie to accompany him he finds her telephoning. In confusion she quickly hangs up without saying good-by. She finally agrees to accompany him. They spend a delightful day and Hugh is happy. At a family party, Kezia encounters Jerry. Ellen is disturbed when Jerry is absorbed by Kezia. Kezia goes out of her way to charm Jerry. Fluvanna is concerned about Kezia, who is evasive about dates she has been having at night. She muses over the resemblance of Kezia to her late husband, recalling how temperamental, moody and imprudent he had been. She recalls the tragic picture of his death—how after drinking and gambling to excess he is faced with financial ruin, how he tries to force her to mortgage her resources to pay his debts and threatens her with a gun, how in a struggle for his possession he is fatally wounded. Overworked and worried over business, Hugh stays at the office Saturday afternoon. Doc Hiller advises a let-up. Hugh and Dorrie are dinner guests of the Whitneys.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

"A perfect dinner," commented Hugh. "Jonny, you make cooking an art!"

"It should be," she said blithely. "We practice it enough."

"Notice that vinegar for the salad?" asked Cun. "She makes it in June from the rose petals—much milder than any other."

"And the strawberries?" Dorrie exclaimed.

"Fall bearing ones."

"I never see them. Where did you get them?"

"From the Mennonite farmer who brings me eggs each Saturday. There's a settlement of them a few miles south. They're very unworldly—so carefully honest about every penny."

"Religion means everything to many people," said Joan.

Cun settled in his chair more comfortably. His eyes sparkled, his florid skin was pinker than usual. "I grant you that, Jonny. But I can't see it. Too many hymn-singing hypocrites in church when I was young . . . blasted my youthful illusions!"

Joan looked at him steadily. "You don't believe in anything, do you?"

"I've never felt the need of it. Life has been pretty good to me and when it's over, I want it to be over!"

Dorrie's eyes were applauding. "My sentiments, Cun. Religion is the refuge of a defeated soul."

"Exactly," nodded Cun.

"A person has been overthrown by life, and prays for a heaven which will be a wish-fulfillment of the things missed on earth."

"Then there is no reality in religion? Merely wish-fulfillment?" questioned Joan. "So glad to have it explained—I never understood."

Dorrie took no notice of her irony. She went on: "It's good for some individuals. We have a case in our family—Hugh's mother. Oh, don't look shocked! Your mother isn't sacrosanct, is she? I'm only saying it before Joan and Cur. . . . Hugh's mother has had a tremendous help from religion."

"Then I would say there is reality in it," Hugh defended. "How can one tell there is not? It's supposed to be experienced—a spiritual adventure which convinces people!"

Joan jumped up from the table. "Gracious! Weren't we stupid to get in an argument over religion when it always ends in a yammer? Cun, tell Hugh about your new work while I clear away."

"We went over that the last time," answered Cun. "What do you say we do the dishes for Joan? Wash and dry 'em?"

"That's a valuable idea," approved Hugh.

"Dorrie, you're always getting out of work—oh, yes, you are!—you an begin washing the glasses. Jonny will give you an apron to

cover up that creation you're wearing!"

"Oh, Cun, Dorrie will spoil her manicure!" said Joan.

But Dorrie entered into it gayly, took the dishpan, filled it with hot water, sprinkled some soap chips in it. "Bring on the glasses."

"Wash 'em clean, my girl, or you'll get fired!"

"Wash them clean?" Dorrie laughed as she rinsed a goblet and handed it to him to dry. "Don't you trust me, Cun?"

"No, not now."

Joan and Hugh were clearing the table, going back and forth between the kitchen and the dining-room. When Hugh came through with some plates, Cun and Dorrie were talking in low voices. She said at once in louder tones, "Get a dry towel, nitwit. That's just sopping"—the quick abandonment of a secret conversation for a casual one. But they were always chaffing one another, Hugh remembered.

Dorrie emptied the dishpan, glanced at the clock. "Twenty minutes—no more! Who said I didn't know how to work?"

"Don't misquote," said Cun, his eyes merry. "Always getting out of it, I said."

"That for you!" She snapped her fingers at Cun. "Hugh will tell you I'm a thoroughly efficient person. Come on, Joan, let's go upstairs and repair the damage. Hurry, before I get any more mean cracks from this husband of yours! Does he bully you this way?"

"Most of my waking hours, eh Joan?" said Cun. "She's too loyal to give me away."

"Don't count on me too much," said Joan over her shoulder as she followed Dorrie out of the room.

Hugh rather enjoyed the bridge game. He and Joan had unusual luck, won rubber after rubber. Dorrie seemed absent minded and several times made rather obvious misplays. Late in the evening she



"Jonny, You Make Cooking an Art."

denied Cun's heart bid with one of spades, went back to spades when Cun raised his heart bid, and was promptly doubled. The spades were bunched in Joan's hand and with the double she drew, she went down disastrously.

"If you'd led clubs last, you'd have saved two tricks," said Cun. "Forget they were high?"

"So they were. Sorry, Cun, I played it like a—"

"Nitwit?" he suggested. "It's all right. Your game is usually so cracking good you're entitled to an occasional lapse."

Hugh looked at his watch. "Eleven-thirty," he reminded them.

"Come on, Hugh," said Joan, "we'll go out and fix up a nightcap, get some cheese and crackers—the duty of the winners."

Hugh followed her to the kitchen, lounged against the wall while Joan opened segments of cheese wrapped in silver paper. He admired her deft movements as she went from cupboard to table, quick but not brisk, light but sure. He thought her eyes were like those wild asters on the dining table, smoky blue. And her lashes a thick fringe of black. Nice eyes, Joan had.

He ventured a compliment. "You're looking yourself tonight."

She paused, smiling. "Meaning—?"

"Yes—very," he said emphatically.

"Thanks."

The kitchen was a shining place of cream-colored walls and woodwork, red tile linoleum, and red voile curtains. He opened the door to the porch. "Do you eat out here often?"

"Yes, all our breakfasts. If we pull down the shades on the left side we're hidden from our neighbors. We can see our garden, watch the birds visit the cement pool."

"I wonder if I could build something like this on our place. I've always wanted to eat outside."

"Come over and have breakfast with me some morning."

"I will some morning when Dorrie isn't up and the maid is having a vacation."

"Let it be soon then. No: many more weeks of summer." Her white teeth gleamed in her dark face as she smiled this challenge. Her eyes, so burningly alive, lingered on him with something thoughtful and caressing, something evocative in their depths. She turned away.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



Keeping Christmas

MARIAN turned slowly from where she had been surveying herself for a critical moment, and looked across the room at her twin sister.

"I'm so tired of all this Christmas fuss," she said languidly; "it is all so old-fashioned, so outdated."

"Are you expressing my feelings?" Nadine's voice was even more languid; "but how in the world are we going to make our dear family feel as we do about the matter? You know they are already in the throes of Christmas preparations." She threw out her slender hands in a gesture of infinite boredom as she finished.

"We can let them know that we won't be a part of the silly business—we can serve notice on them that we are going to work against all the noise and fuss that is made about Christmas."

Forgetting their pose of boredom and sophistication for a moment, the seventeen-year-old twins jumped excitedly around the room. "Just think of how they will be shocked!" Marian cried; "I can see mother and dad. It is all going to be so exciting—fighting the world, so to speak."

But they were taken back quite a little when they announced their big news . . . mother's voice was very serious. "If you really feel that way, I guess the rest of us will have to celebrate without you. We're going to miss you a lot, of course, but we must consider your feelings." The twins failed to see the twinkle in her eyes as she looked across the table at dad.

As if to make matters worse, Bill and Dick laughed in derision at their plan. "I bet they'll be on their knees to get in on our fun be-



"I'm Going to Do Like Everybody Else," She Said.

fore Christmas," Bill predicted. And as if that were not enough, he suggested that now there would be nothing to buy for the twins, maybe he could have the moving picture outfit he had wanted so long. "I hope you don't change your mind, sweet sisters," he cautioned, as he proceeded to put a huge piece of pie in his mouth. "I do want that picture machine pretty bad."

The twins threw scornful glances in his direction; they couldn't trust themselves to speak. There were things they had forgotten when they made their big resolve to do away with Christmas preparations. As soon as dinner was over, they hurried from the table.

The days that followed were not very happy. The twins could find no one interested in their plan to change the way of keeping Christmas. Even the most modern of their friends laughed them to scorn. No one was really interested in advancement, they decided. Here they were willing and eager to get a new crusade started, one that would save time and temper and money, and no one, not even their best friends, would lend a hand. They grew fretful, impatient, even peevish at each other.

One evening Nadine came home and found Marian in their mother's bedroom, peering into some boxes that had just been delivered. Nadine smiled to herself, and hurried from the doorway so Marian would not see her.

But next day in the toy department of Smith's store, things came to a showdown. The twins ran into each other, found themselves side by side clutching for foolish things that lay on the counter. Brown eyes challenged blue as they stood in the crowded aisle. Guilt showed plainly on both faces.

Then Nadine was speaking, quickly, incoherently: "You might as well know, Marian, I'm chucking your silly plan. I'm going to do like everybody else. I'm going to make a big fuss about Christmas. I want to push through the crowds—to buy foolish things—to hang up holly wreaths—to do just everything! . . . And if I'm not mistaken, you're just dying to do the same!"

"You're absolutely right," Marian answered, utterly careless of the amused glances thrown in their direction. "We've been a pair of fools, but we're going to have one grand and glorious time in the two days that are left . . . We're going to make the biggest fuss about Christmas that has ever been made before."

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Decorating for Christmas— Some Handsome Window and Room Ornaments That Are Inexpensive

WHILE windows may have been decorated for Christmas before now, the arrangements indoors seldom are made until the day before the holiday. The freshness of the beauty is wanted without any diminution. If the novelty has worn off, some of the zest of Christmas is lost. This is so true that many homemakers refuse to have windows trimmed more than a day or so prior to Christmas.

If you happen to be among this latter group, let me suggest that you take sprays of a tree that is misshapen and so very cheap and make a splashing bow of red crepe paper for each and hang one in every front window downstairs. Or have one in each downstairs window that is discernible from the street.

Ornamenting the Spray.

You can dot the spray with holly berries, or whatever you have in addition to the green. Or you can dip popped corn in red stain or dye, and touch the kernels with glue and secure them to the sprays. These notes of red, with their irregular shapes, are intriguing, sometimes being mistaken for berries and sometimes for flowers.

Bouquets.

Bouquets of Christmas greens in vases can be put in rooms other than the living room and dining room, and give their beauty of Christmas about the house. Be sure to use vases and bowls that have broad standards, lest the uneven weight of the greens tips them over.

decoration. Any small baskets will do for this purpose. There generally are some about a house, but if not, metal paint or green stain some of the little market baskets such as strawberries, brussels sprouts or tomatoes come in. Make a rope or lengths of paper braid for the handles, painted or stained to match the basket. If a length of picture wire has been wound with the strands of paper rope and braid, these handles will keep their shape when ends have been thrust inside the baskets close to their opposite sides. The handles can be wired or glued to the baskets.

Foreign Words and Phrases

A cheval. (F.) On horseback.
Cela va sans dire. (F.) That goes without saying; it is obvious.
De bon augure. (F.) Propitious.
Erinnerung. (G.) A remembrance; a souvenir.
Fortiter in re. (L.) With firmness in action.
Ignis fatuus. (L.) Will-o'-the-wisp.
Pour encourager les autres. (F.) To encourage the others; Voltaire's comment on the motives of the English in executing Admiral Byng for cowardice.
Non omnis moriar. (L.) I shall not wholly die.

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Household Questions

Ink stains may be removed from wall paper with a solution of equal parts of ammonia and hydrogen peroxide.

When tying children's shoes, tie string in bow first, then the loops in a single knot. They will not then easily become untied.

Did you ever try dipping your fresh fish in milk before rolling them in corn meal or bread crumbs preparatory to frying.

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