



# BRIGHT STAR

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W.N.U. Service



swallowed. "No need to prolong this, is there?" She started. "You're going?" "You won't be afraid to stay alone tonight?"

She gave a gesture of dissent. "I'll be at Mother's. After you apply you'd better go away a bit—not far..." It was on his tongue to say "near enough for him to see you occasionally—keep him from other entanglements," but he checked it. He turned and left the room.

Hugh went back to his mother's house to live, occupied his old room in the south corner. He spent some evenings at his club, playing cards, often reading in the company of his mother, or in long rambles. Margery and Will were unobtrusively sympathetic when he met them; Kezia was crassly exultant.

### THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Kezia Marsh, pretty, selfish and 20, 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. Hugh passionately in love with Dorrie, is disturbed to find her preoccupied when he comes home to dinner. Fluvanna meets with Kezia the next morning from a dream about her late husband, Jim, whose unstable character she fears Kezia has inherited. Soon Ellen Pendleton comes over. She is an artificially inclined girl who is a distant niece of Fluvanna's and a favorite of Hugh's. She happily tells Fluvanna she has become engaged to Jerry Purdue. His parents are wealthy, although they have given him a splendid education. Ellen tells her father and mother, Gavin and Lizzie, because of their wealth and social position will not approve the match.

CHAPTER II.—Hugh and Dorrie go out to the Freeland Farms to dance with their friends, Cui and Joan Whitney. Whitney, who has been out of work, announces that he has landed a new position. They see Ellen Pendleton and Jerry Purdue, Cui and Dorrie dance together and disappear for a while. Dancing with Joan, Hugh is amazed to find her in tears. Apparently she has some worry about her husband, Cui. Hugh sees Kezia accompanied by a young man, Ellen and Jerry leave early in order to talk to Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton concerning their engagement.

CHAPTER III.—When Ellen and Jerry speak about their engagement to Ellen's parents, Lizzie disapproves until Jerry sympathizes with her imagined ailments. Gavin, a banker, is cold to Jerry's proposal, while Lizzie unbends slightly, the matter is left pending.

CHAPTER IV.—Unexpectedly Hugh has to visit a neighboring city on business. Returning home to ask Dorrie to accompany him, he finds her telephoning. She is in a hurry and quickly hangs up without saying good-by. After hesitating about Hugh's invitation, she finally agrees to accompany him. They spend a delightful day and Hugh is happy. At a family party, Kezia encounters Jerry. They had met a few evenings before at the Freeland Farms. Ellen is disturbed when Jerry is absorbed by Kezia. Kezia goes out of her way to charm Jerry.

CHAPTER V.—Fluvanna is concerned about Kezia, who even at night she has been having at night. She muses over the resemblance of Kezia to her late husband, realizing how temperamental, moody and imprudent he had been. She recalls the tragic picture of his death—how after drinking and gambling he had exhausted his resources 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.

CHAPTER VI.—Overworked and worried over business, Hugh leaves his office Saturday afternoon. Doc Hiller advises a let-up. Hugh and Dorrie are dinner guests at the Whitneys. After a bridge game Hugh and Joan go to the kitchen to prepare a midnight snack. Joan by accident tells Hugh that Dorrie and Cui are having a clandestine love affair. Rushing into the living room, he finds them in each other's arms.

CHAPTER VII.—Hugh drives home alone and begins packing his bags. Dorrie follows immediately in a tempestuous scene she persuades him to stay. Hugh goes out for a drive alone the next day. When he returns Dorrie tells him she has talked to Cui and she will never see him again. Her apparently contrite spirit and his overpowering love move Hugh to forgiveness.

CHAPTER VIII.—After the interview with Ellen's parents, Jerry's devotion seems to cool. He admits to Ellen that he has been seeing Kezia, but still professes his love for Ellen. Fluvanna questions Kezia about whom she has been meeting secretly and learns it is Jerry. Worried, she consents to have Jerry visit Kezia at home.

CHAPTER IX.—Hugh is troubled over conflicts in his emotions. Reason and passion struggle for supremacy in his mind. Meeting Ellen, he notes she is sorrowful when talking about Jerry. The president of his company orders him to take a rest. Reading the paper, Hugh learns that Joan has divorced Cui. Meanwhile Ellen, unhappy and distraught, pleads in vain with her mother to go to Europe for art study.

CHAPTER X.—Hugh departs on a week's hunting trip with Doc Hiller and his companions and regains some measure of peace of mind. But at grips with his soul, he decides on a separation from Dorrie. Returning home, he has further evidence of her duplicity.

— Curling bronze hair, white skin, lovely face, he must look his last upon them. Even desire was forbidden. The hate which surged up in him at her shallowness was almost as great as his desire. Something rose in his throat which made it difficult to speak. He

She gave him a dazzling smile. "I'll do anything you say, darling. I know I'm careless, but I haven't meant to be selfish." She clasped her hands around his wrist, leaned her cheek against his sleeve. "Good," said Hugh relieved. His opinion of Kezia ran through such infinite modifications. She was so incalculable, never twice alike. He felt a warming tender glow toward her. "And if I do that for you, will you do something for me?" "Name it," said Hugh without thinking. "Will you get Jerry a decent job in your plant, something with good pay and a future to it?" Hugh gave a short laugh, drew away from her. "Please, Hughie—please." "So you were bargaining? Weren't you concerned over your mother?" "That goes without saying. But this means such a lot to me—you can manage it!" "A soft job with fat pay?" Any

job at all is scarce in a steel plant. As soon as we can manage it we take back our old men whom we laid off. Kezia gave a deep sigh; her eyes swam in mist. "Oh, Hugh, you aren't going to let us down? I counted on you."

"Us?" "Certainly." "Don't you see he's using you to help himself along? He wants you to ask me, your brother, for a good position! Why doesn't he apply in the regular way—go state his qualifications to Kelly Burns who has charge of that?" "Don't blame him. I thought of it."

"Does he know you're asking me?" "Ye-es." He gave a shrug. "He doesn't want a soft job," she hurried to say. "He wants something with a chance at advancement—something he'll never get where he is. 'Speak to this Burns,' she coaxed, 'just speak to him! Won't you do this tiny favor for me, Hugh?'"

He shook his head. "No, Kezia. He's lucky to have work—if you



"You're Heartless," She Moaned.

ask me. Tell him to take good care of the job he has!" "You're heartless," she moaned. "I'm going to ask Uncle John Renshaw," she threatened.

The monotonous days of November dragged by with a preponderance of leaden skies, of chill, of fog; church and club activities started up; orders slackened at the plant, started up on rush business, died down again.

Dorrie applied for a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. Hugh thought he was all braced for it, but it came as a shock when the papers were served on him, and again when he stared at the newspaper and saw their names linked together in the public admission of defeat.

His mother made cheerful conversation when he felt like talking, served his favorite dishes at the table. She accepted him naturally without reference to his wife—just her son who had been away from home for a few years and had returned.

Dorrie's name never crossed her lips. Instinctively she knew the throb which accompanies a name associated with fatality, realized that Hugh's nerves had not grown the protective layer which would allow him to hear it without agitation.

She showed him some colored pictures of French villages in a magazine one night. "I have a wanderlust at heart, and I've always wanted to see France. Notre Dame, the Seine, the Place de la Concorde, the Bois de Boulogne—and I've kept up my school French by reading Anatole France and de Maupassant in the hope that I might go there some day. I've seen most of my own country—I had hoped that Europe would be my next adventure."

Hugh examined the pictures, not from interest, but from the wish to respond. "It's not impossible at all—you and Kezzie might go next summer. She'd like it." She shook her head. "I wouldn't leave you."

Her eyes looked as if she were seeing distant things. "I won't plan ahead. Time has taught me the folly of that." "Why not plan? Would it tempt you if I said I would try to come over and bring you home?" "Even that would be leaving you—not seeing you for a while." She paused; her voice became almost inaudible. "These days—are precious to me in a way you don't know about, Hugh."

### CHAPTER XII

"You talked to him then, Beautiful?" Kezia's face assumed an expression of silken discontent. "Mmm-mm." "No results!" "None." "Comments?" "He crabbled about the men they laid off at the plant and had to take on as work picked up; he said you should go to Kelly Burns who hires them."

"Never mind. I expect you did the best you could. Providence wasn't willing! It is—or it isn't! Shall we drive to Brookline? Too far? ... Cold?" "Not much." Kezia shivered. "You might run up that window a bit. There—that's better."

"Your brother doesn't like me, but that," said Jerry, heroically, "doesn't keep me from seeing what a fine fellow he is! I hear it on all sides—Hugh Marsh—a prince of a chap!" "Hugh is pretty swell."

The car crossed a bridge with a rattling of planks and made a rather chugging progress up a hill. "Cousin Gavin probably would have taken you in his bank," said Kezia reflectively. "Didn't Lizzie say he would?" "Once," admitted Jerry. "Until I threw the cat in the electric fan!" teased Kezia.

"Woman," cried Jerry with vehemence, "I'll—kiss you!" He suited the action to the word swiftly. "Now will you be quiet?" "Like a mice!" She laughed and leaned possessively against his shoulder.

Jerry's voice came to her with seductive sweetness above the roar of the noisy engine. "It's you, gorgeous, I'm thinking of. I want to marry you, but how can we do it on twenty-five a week?" "You're so practical."

"A fellow has to stop and think occasionally. I adore you, precious—too much to tie you up to poverty! Sometimes I think—" A premonitory shiver went through Kezia. "What do you think?"

"That it might be better for us to break it off." Kezia sat bolt upright. He would go back to Ellen! People would say he had thrown her over! She had a feeling for Jerry that no one else had ever stirred. He brought a swift challenge to her. He was elusive; he never satiated her with his dependence.

Jerry guided the car to a bumpy pause on the shoulder of the road, switched off the ignition. "Come here," he said gently. He gathered her in his arms, laid his cheek against hers. "She cares... my little Kezia cares," he whispered. She felt his lips tremble as they touched hers.

"You want to give me up!" "No, Angel, no! ... I love you—you know I do." "You've been horrid."

He gave a despairing gesture. "It seems so hopeless." "We won't allow it to be hopeless." He was silent for a moment, keeping his arms tightly about her. "No!" he questioned. Another long pause then he said, "Have you anything to suggest?"

"We might live with Mother." Life was very dreary, thought Kezia, when you couldn't have what you wanted! And Jerry was the right combination for her. Just the way his hair went back was invested with a certain quality of emotion; the sulky fullness over his dark eyes sent warm waves up her arms into her shoulders. She was caught up in that attribute of youth which drives for what it wants, mistakes or not, the imperious urge which cannot wait for wisdom.

"Yes, we could live with Mother," she said a little more firmly. The hesitation on Jerry's face deepened. "Yes, that's a thought to hold to! ... Have Hugh patronize me?" "He wouldn't."

"I can see him welcoming me to the family circle—big boy they had to keep!" His tone was rueful. "It would be for only a little while," she coaxed. "You'll get something good in a few months. Perhaps Hugh would... then?" "Do you think so?" His voice, still uncertain, was slightly yielding.

"And Uncle John Renshaw—not really my uncle, but a cousin of Mother's—has a weakness for me. I think if I went to him, asked him very prettily, told him how fond I am of him—and of you—he'd try to help."

for a minute so when the headlights swept a sign on a curve of the hill: "Brookline, Marriage Licenses. No Waiting." Kezia smiled to herself as she turned it over in her mind. Why, it actually stood there as if it were suggesting a way for them! There might be advantages to it. She chuckled a little and he turned to her inquiringly.

"I was thinking about that sign on the hill—the one about marriage licenses." "What about it?" "Think!" she commanded. "Then tell me if you are thinking the same thing I am."

His eyes gleamed with swift intelligence. "You wouldn't—?" She snuggled her face against his sleeve. "Funny boy—it would work, wouldn't it? ... All over and done with... everyone would have to put a good face on about it! ... Is it a grand idea or isn't it?"

"Not give a hang for the future? Let it take care of itself?" "It would—it would!" she chanted gleefully. "I know my family—they're very loyal. Once it's done and over with they'd—"

"Have to like it?" "They'd help us—Hugh, Uncle John, Will Platt." Excitement played over Jerry's face, excitement and something more. He drove with one hand slowly while his right arm encircled her. "And I'd have you for keeps, darling Kezzie!"

In Brookline which was just over the Pennsylvania border, it was not difficult to be directed to the frame house of John Bascome, the marrying squire. He was a small man, with a round head, and close-set eyes. He looked greedily pleased at their appearance, surveyed them with quick speculation, and exacted a good sized fee from Jerry before he asked the necessary questions. He would have the marriage license made out and would mail it to them in a day or so. His wife and daughter appeared as witnesses.

Margery and Will Platt had been over for dinner, and afterward, Hugh and Will discussed the last municipal election and the calibre of the men in office. The talk, with Fluvanna and Margery, making comments, asking questions, switched to national affairs, to the labor situation and to the revolution in business methods.

Hugh was restless after they left. Now that the interlude of having to make conversation and listen to others was over, he was conscious of a slump. "I think I'll go for a walk, Mother."

He had reached for his hat when the front door bell pealed sharply. He took the telegram the boy handed him, signed for it, tore it open. "The fool! the little fool!" he ejaculated.

"Why, Hugh?" questioned Fluvanna. So this was what Kezia had meant when she said "You'll all drive me to something one of these days!" He hesitated a moment before he handed the message to his mother. "From Kezia... she's done what we hoped to prevent—married him."

Fluvanna read: "Jerry and I were married in Brookline this evening. Home in a day or so. Very happy. Tell mother. Love Kezia." Kezia and Jerry came home to live. Jerry was devoted to Kezia, thoughtful of Fluvanna.

Uncle John Renshaw, after much wheedling from Kezia, found a place for Jerry in some government work at a better salary. An interview with Jerry predisposed him in his favor and he recommended that he go to a school for salesmen that his company was promoting. Kezia was triumphant. She did not see the trying, intermediate steps of a salesman's life; her imagination visioned Jerry as a trusted steel salesman with trips to California, New York, South America, Russia. She immediately went out and rented a two-room apartment, had the excitement of finding furnishings for it with the check furnished by her mother and Hugh, and moved in the week after Christmas.

In January Dorrie got her decree, and a few days later was married to Cunningham Whitney, whose divorce had been granted in December. They were married at her sister's home in Forest Hills and went to live in Philadelphia where Cui had secured a position.

Hugh frequently was invited to dinners at the houses of his friends, parties which were dull or lively according to the company. It was a wrench to go but he made it a point to accept most of the invitations. People, places, things which were normal were the best antidote for the perils of introspection.

He saw Gavin Pendleton one noon at a director's meeting, and thought he looked much older. Gavin touched Hugh's arm as they were leaving the meeting. "H'r yuh?" "Very well. And you?" Gavin looked meaningfully back at the room they were leaving and Hugh understood that he wished to speak to him privately. He followed him back to its farther corner.

"Mother well?" blurted Gavin. "Rather frail this winter. How is Lizzie—and Ellen?" Gavin's left cheek and eye twitched, giving the effect of a grimace. "Wanted to speak to you... puzzled... don't know what to do." Hugh waited.

"One of the family... like your advice, Ellen." "Ellen?" said Hugh with quick concern. "Something wrong with Ellen?" Gavin nodded gloomily. "Won't eat... hardly talks... sometimes I think... Mother not good for her." He peered at Hugh with his near-sighted eyes. "What to do?"

"Have you had a doctor?" "Umm-m," he assented. "Tonics and iron no good—nerves." "Young friends?" "She won't go... did for a while... says people terrify her." "You might send her away."

"Sent her to Louise in December—sister—Boston—after that—came out." He shrugged his shoulders and Hugh felt he referred to Kezia's elopement. "No good... came back in ten days... says she's haunted... funny stuff."

"She used to be fond of Mother, came to see her almost every day—and Mother has missed her very much," said Hugh. "My sister isn't there now. Perhaps she would like to come over... you might suggest it to her."

"Good woman, Fluvanna!" blurted Gavin. "Try it." He looked at his watch, and nodding in dismissal to Hugh, rushed for the door. Hugh, on his way out, planned that he would have his mother invite Ellen for dinner very soon. Or he would issue the invitation, call up and coax her a bit if she seemed unwilling. Not tonight—he had to work late tonight. And tomorrow Mother had invited the John Renshaws for dinner, and the next night he had to go to the Wellers... well, some time soon! Perhaps next week.

But the Renshaws could not come the next night and Fluvanna went to a concert with Margery and Will. Hugh read the paper, looked at a trade journal, and at nine o'clock, feeling restless, decided on a long ramble. He took Rowdy, Kezia's dog, with him, a wire-haired terrier, which she could not keep in the apartment.

Hugh circled the boulevard and the park twice, a walk of two or three miles, drawing in deep breaths of the early March air which was keen and cold, yet with a difference.

He walked with a swinging step, submerged in his own reflections. Rowdy investigated lawns where lighted windows drained away into the shrubbery, then returned to him. Hugh did not know when he became conscious that a woman was walking half a block ahead of him. She must have turned out unnoticed from a side street. She walked rapidly, for it was a lonely place for a woman to be, the dark woods on her right, and on her left the houses set far back from the street. Young, slight, and faintly familiar.

Suddenly she turned abruptly to her right and plunged into the wood. She walked swiftly and without uncertainty until she disappeared.

Hugh stood still. He had recognized her by a forward movement of her shoulders—or thought he had. Why was she going into the



She Was Up to Her Knees in the Water and Wading Out When He Reached Her.

park at this time of night?—timid, sheltered Ellen. The perspiration broke out on his forehead as he remembered the small artificial lake...

She was up to her knees in the water and wading out when he reached her. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to a seat near the bank. She looked in his face dazedly. "It's Hugh? ... Hugh?" Then in a low murmur: "Why did you come?"

"Fate sent me, Ellen," he answered simply. He drew her head to his shoulder. "Because you were never meant to do that thing." She gave a long sighing breath that was more poignant than any sob, it held so much of tears unshed, of misery. "Hugh," she whispered, "it aches so here." She laid her hand on her heart.

"I know." A pause, then her voice again on that tremulous, respiratory note: "Yes, you know." She dropped against him shivering. Suddenly she sat up. The water dripped from her sodden clothes. (Continued in next issue)

