

[The third and final part of the story]

Part three of our exclusive series, by Alfred Shaughnessy

The Bellamy household was in a state of excited turmoil – at last there was an occasion *everyone* could celebrate. Even so, as plans for Richard and Virginia’s wedding gathered pace, both Georgina and Rose went about their preparations with a pang of heartache.

James looked up from his book and saw Hudson standing at the morning-room door. It was early in the new year and around six o’clock on a dark, frosty evening.

“Lily is here.” the butler announced. He and Mrs. Bridges had already vetted this new underhousemaid and it was now up to the Major to give his final approval.

“Oh. I see. Well, show her in, Hudson.”

Hudson called to the quiet, reserved girl, standing outside the door, then left her with the Major.

“Lily, is it, eh?” asked James, trying to put the girl at her ease. From the glow of the fire he could see she was pretty.

“Yes, sir.” It was a pleasing little voice, too. Modest, quiet, but still with a trace of determination in it.

“Well, come on in then. I can’t see you properly over there.”

The girl advanced timidly into the room, but not too far.

“Over here by the fire,” James said. “Now let’s have a good look at you, eh?”

She carried herself well, with a certain pride of bearing. It was a pretty face with small features but the eyes were large and a little sad. Dress her up in expensive gowns, thought James, and she’d look quite aristocratic.

“How old are you, Lily?”

“Nineteen, sir.”

“Do you think you’d be happy in service here?”

“Oh, yes, sir. I think so.”

James explained about Daisy, her predecessor, who’d married the footman, and recently left domestic service. Lily nodded, for she’d been told all this by Rose, downstairs.

“We’ve only had two underhousemaids here in 17 years,” mused James. “Before Daisy, we had Sarah.

She married our chauffeur and left. That was in 1910 – the year, of course, King Edward died.”

The girl really did look appealing, James thought, as she stood there in the soft firelight. He knew he was just making up things to say to her so he could delay her departure.

The truth was, he felt damned lonely tonight and the girl was as desirable as Sarah had been. And what a fool he’d made of himself over her in the dim, distant days of a typically irresponsible youth!

He remembered how he’d looked her up after she’d left service at Eaton Place. He remembered the wining and dining, and that wild weekend in Paris that had brought his world tumbling around his ears.

He sighed as he thought of it, all the ingredients – family disgrace, his exile, as it were, in India, Sarah having his child in a remote cottage, and the final bit of tragedy, the loss of the child.

He wondered where she was now, she and her Thomas, that former immaculate chauffeur. God knew where they were now! All this was before the war.

But despite it all, the loss of his wife, Hazel, his war wounds, all his various ups and downs, he was still, apparently, at the age of 37, only too able to feel his blood race, to feel that tell-tale dryness in his throat at the sight of a pretty girl.

“Will that be all, sir?” Lily was asking him. He looked up, realising he hadn’t said a word to her for long, long moments.

“Yes,” he told her gently. “Perhaps you’d better go downstairs. now, Lily.”

He rang the bell for Hudson, telling himself that he simply must not fall for this one. He was no longer a boy. He was surely now beyond the stage of mad escapades. But what was it about young maids that stirred the blood so? The thought, perhaps, that underneath the forbidding black and starch lay warmth and pleasure?

While they waited for the butler, James asked: “Where do you live, Lily?”

“Shoreditch, sir.”

“I see. Any family?”

“Just my mother, sir, and a younger brother.”

James nodded. Just then, Hudson came in and stood by the door.

“Ah. Hudson.”

“Sir?”

“As far as I can see, Lily seems to be quite suitable to take Daisy’s place.”

“Very good, sir.”

“You’ve told her the wages and everything, I take it, and she’s seen Mrs. Bridges?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Well, you’d better give her some refreshment in the servants’ hall, then she can go home for her belongings and return tomorrow to take up her duties.”

“Very good, sir,” Hudson said. But he didn’t seem all that enthusiastic, thought James. Perhaps, remembering Sarah and the trouble she’d caused, he mistrusted pretty young housemaids. Or was it just his policy to appear a bit of an ogre to them at first, the better to gain their respect and obedience?

After they’d gone James stared long and uneasily into the fire.

But this period of boredom was soon to be over for him. The very next morning he attended another Medical Board, and the Army doctors upgraded him, so that he was now declared fit to resume light duties with his regiment at the Household Cavalry Barracks in Hyde Park. These would involve such things as minor ceremonial duties, running the Officers’ Mess and helping to train recruits.

Thus, on the following Sunday, James attended Morning Service at the Guards’ Chapel, where he sat alone in his pew and thought about Hazel all through the sermon; afterwards, he walked up Constitution Hill to Hyde Park Corner and arrived back at Eaton Place in time for lunch.

Here he heard the good news from Hudson, that Georgina was back from her Christmas visit to Malton Priory, and would be down shortly for luncheon in the dining-room.

James poured himself a glass of sherry and stood with his back to the fire, warming himself. The romantic interlude with his beautiful young step-cousin-in-law was over, and she for her part saw him once again as a sort of kind, reliable older brother, someone to turn to for advice, to lean on in times of trouble. He was fun to be with, too.

James delighted in the prospect of Georgina home again. Her youthful laughter and the scent she wore about the house cheered him up no end, and made life a little more bearable.

It was, therefore, something of a shock, when she came into the morning-room, pale and subdued. It was plain to see that she was upset and depressed, and James remarked on it.

“I’m all right,” she said. “It’s nothing.”

Then she tried to smile and said: “What about you? How have you been? Did you have a nice Christmas at Somerby?”

“Not too bad.”

James was looking closely at Georgina, wondering what could have happened to her.

“Are you not feeling well?” James persisted.

“I’m perfectly well, James. Just...don’t keep asking me, please.”

“Oh come on,” James said, trying to snap her out of it. “You can tell Old Jumbo surely. It won’t be the first time...”

But Hudson came in at that moment to announce lunch and no more could be said.

Quietly, James and Georgina went into the dining-room and sat down. Hudson and Rose served lunch, moving silently about the room. James and Georgina said little to each other throughout the meal, just an occasional remark about the weather, the railway journeys they’d both made, the general topics of the day.

There was no chance to speak intimately until the fruit had been served and they’d reached the coffee stage.

“We’ll take coffee in the morning-room, Hudson,” James said, getting up from his chair. “Come on, Georgina, let’s go through.”

Georgina’s sadness – a concern to James

Georgina rose from the table too, and they moved out of the dining-room across the hall and into the morning-room.

Georgina sat on the sofa and flipped over the pages of a magazine, while James busied himself lighting a cigar. When Rose brought in the coffee and put it down on a table, James noticed that she, too, looked very pale and drawn. All the females in his house seemed pale and drawn today! What the devil was the matter with all of them?

Rose went out, closing the door, and the couple were alone at last.

James poured coffee but Georgina declined it. James decided not to press her too hard. If she had worries, he felt, she’d confess them in her own good time.

So, sipping his coffee, he strolled over to the window and saw that light snow was now powdering the street and pavements.

“Father and Virginia are going to marry in May, did you know?” he said to her, over his shoulder.

But Georgina still sat quite silent and sad.

“St. Peter’s, Eaton Square. Not a white wedding, of course. Virginia’s children will be in the front row with us. Funny, a child watching its own mother getting married in a church”

“Yes,” said Georgina.

“Of course, a second time, like father’s and Virginia’s can hardly compare with a first one, can it?” James went on, feeling that he was making conversation. “You know, the young bride in virgin white and the young stammering bridegroom feeling he’s standing right on the brink of disaster.

“And when are we going to hear about your wedding?” he persisted, turning round to catch Georgina’s expression.

It seemed a fatal kind of question, for Georgina at once buried her face in her hands and sobbed. Immediately he was at her side, his arms about her shoulders. And then it all came out – the whole sad saga of hope, disillusion, then final shock.

“It’s Martin Adams. I felt sorry for him at first, when he lost his arm. Then, I don’t know why, I started feeling more as if I really loved him.

“He was so sweet to me on the boat coming over from France last October, and we’d had such fun on leave in Paris before that, and he’d kissed me a few times.”

“I thought there was something up,” said James.

Georgina told her cousin how it had all seemed so happy at the outset, with their little foursome of close friends – she and Martin and Harry and Angela.

Ever since the Armistice, they’d gone dancing and clubbing together and she was sure that Martin loved her as she did him.

But all had gone wrong alter Christmas at Malton Priory.

“Harry drove Angela over to her parents’ home in Surrey, so Martin and I came up to London by train.

“I wanted to be alone with him to know how he felt about me because he never seemed to say anything *deep* and loving. Yet I was sure he loved me but was just too shy to say so.”

And then, she explained, during the train journey, she’d asked Martin simply if he really liked being with her, which was about as far as a girl could modestly go.

“He told me,” sobbed Georgina. “that he loved being with me – always had – but that he was in *love* with Angela.”

Victim of a callous game of bluff

What, in fact, had happened, was that Angela, trying to force the pace with a somewhat slow Martin, had used the old dodge of throwing herself at good old Harry.

“So Martin made up to you to make Angela jealous. Oh, God, couldn’t you see through that?” said James.

Georgina started to cry again. “I was blind and stupid... Oh, Jumbo, I’ve made such a fool of myself. Angela must have been laughing at me the whole of Christmas; and Martin and Harry. I thought...”

She could not continue. James rocked her in his arms like a hurt child, trying to comfort her. She’d been injured in a callous, cruel game of bluff and counter-bluff by her three closest and dearest wartime friends. No wonder she was upset.

“Blow your nose and cheer up, darling,” said James quietly. “You’re worth a hundred times any of those three.”

“But they’re my *friends*,” wailed Georgina, despairingly.

“Some friends,” James commented wryly, “to use you like a sort of decoy duck.”

James carefully avoided any denigration of Martin Adams. He felt a bit sorry for the chap, losing an arm in the war. He also felt sorry for him on the grounds that he appeared to have fallen in love with Angela Barclay, who, in his opinion, was a spoilt brat and a minx.

“You mustn’t let it depress you, Georgina,” he said finally. “You’re young, sweet and adorably pretty. You could marry any young man you liked.”

“I liked Martin Adams,” she said, her sobs quietening.

“Liked, perhaps. But were you really in love with him? Enough to commit yourself for ever, to give up your whole life for him?”

“I don’t know.”

“Forget all about it, darling, please, if you can.”

Georgina smiled through her tears and blew her nose on a clean handkerchief James had offered her. “That’s better,” he said.

Then he added, “I’d hate to lose my step-cousin, my lodger and my partner at cards, all in one go.”

Georgina reached out for James’s hand, and squeezed it.

“You won’t,” she said. “At least, not just yet, as far as I can see.”

Then she fixed James with her devastating, clear blue eyes and added: “As long as you can put up with all my silliness...”

Lily’s introduction to her new job

Lily sat up in her bed that night – a single bed with its black iron frame and bars and a brass knob on each corner. Rose sat at the rickety little dressing-table – a throw-out from Lady Marjorie’s day – brushing her hair and giving Lily instructions:

“You must do the fires first, that’s the morning room, the Major’s room and Miss Georgina’s room.

“Then lay up the servants’ hall table for our breakfast. If Ruby’s not down before you, you can put the kettle on for Mrs. Bridges’ early tea. Daisy always did, if she was down first.

“Then there’ll be all the curtains to draw and the shutters. After you’ve had your breakfast, you can get on brushing down the stairs and dusting.”

The little attic room had scarcely changed since Edwardian times, when Sarah had first come to share it with Rose. Of course, in those days, they’d shared a double bed. Now, there were single beds, but the wallpaper was the same and the old bits of furniture, like the wicker chair in the corner under the sloping roof.

Lily asked Rose about the other two underhousemaids before her, the ones the Major mentioned at the interview.

She knew both of them had left – Sarah to get married to the chauffeur, and Daisy after her wedding to the footman.

“That’s right,” said Rose. “I wonder who you’ll marry.”

Lily shrugged her shoulders with a shy little laugh.

Rose climbed into her bed and soon turned out the light.

“You’ll find the spring’s gone in that bed,” Rose warned. “Daisy said it stuck into her, so she put a piece of blanket under the mattress.”

Lily said she’d do the same, if it got too bad.

“Sleep tight,” Rose said quietly.

Lily liked her. She was so friendly – kind too.

“Goodnight, Rose,” came the reply. Soon they were both asleep.

But later that night, Lily was awakened by the sound of sobbing. At first, she didn’t know where she was. It couldn’t be home. She lit a candle, and she remembered she was in the little attic room, and realised that the sobs could only come from Rose.

She seemed to be having some terrible dream, tossing about in her bed, with little cries.

“Rose,” Lily whispered, not sure whether her companion was awake or not, “what’s the matter?”

Rose went on crying and mumbling incoherent words between sobs.

“It’s not you, is it? ... Oh, Greg...which are you... Bill?”

Rose muttered on, and Lily tried to understand what she was saying.

Finally, as Rose became more and more distressed and her unhappy dream appeared to move more into the realms of nightmare, Lily decided to waken her.

Very gently she put out her hand and touched Rose on her shoulder – enough to make her open her eyes.

Rose makes up her mind

“Oh... dear... I... was... dreaming...” Rose gasped. “Sorry, Lily, did I wake you up?”

“It’s all right.”

Rose recovered her composure and flopped back with a sigh on the pillow.

“Was it a horrible dream?” Lily asked her.

“A bit,” Rose said. Then, needing to share it with someone, she lay on her back, staring up at the ceiling. and told Lily every detail that she could remember.

It seemed she had dreamt she was at a tea dance with Bill but, as they danced she became aware that she was in the arms of a different man.

At first, his face seemed shadowy but then the shadows cleared and she saw it was Gregory, her fiancé who was killed in the war. He smiled at her once, but then a little thin trickle of blood oozed out of his mouth. Then he became Bill again, and Rose told Lily she had a terrible feeling of disappointment and almost anger.

“Now that I’m awake,” Rose tried to explain, “I somehow know the anger is against myself. I know now that I don’t really love Bill, although he’s very nice. It’s just that he reminds me of my Greg. I should never have gone out with him, making him think I fancied him. It wasn’t fair.”

Lily, who had heard all about Gregory earlier on in the evening, said she could understand.

“There’ll never be anyone like Greg in my life, ever again,” Rose went on. “It’s no use pretending there will be. I’m going to write to Bill and tell him it wouldn’t be honest to go on seeing him. Just suggest we say goodbye and thank him for giving me one or two nice evenings and forget him.”

“Seems a shame,” Lily said, not knowing what else she could say.

“He’ll understand,” Rose said. “He only looked me up out of politeness, for Greg’s sake.”

Lily said no more. Eventually, Rose gave a big sigh and then turned over.

“If I shout out again, wake me, won’t you?”

“All right,” Lily said. “But I expect you’ll sleep better now. Because you’ve made up your mind.”

“That’s right.”

The two housemaids settled down once again in their little iron beds and soon the attic room was quiet and dark and peaceful. The clock on nearby St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square, chimed four.

Four months later, at 11 o'clock in the morning, the bells of St. Peter's were chiming again, a joyous carillon, for a smart wedding was about to take place.

It was May 1919, and quite a large crowd had gathered at the entrance, including several photographers from the society magazines.

A number of servants, cooks, nannies and ladies' maids from nearby houses were also present, craning their necks in the hope of catching a glimpse of the bride.

They were soon rewarded for their patience. At five minutes past 11 exactly, a large black limousine drove up to the church porch and out stepped Virginia Hamilton, petite, charming and very elegant.

She smiled to the photographers, who clicked their cameras, and to the society gossip and fashion writers who noted that Viscount Bellamy's bride was dressed in a soft grey satin dress. She wore suede gloves, a broad-brimmed hat with osprey feathers, and was carrying a bouquet of pink roses.

Virginia's father-in-law, Admiral Hamilton, followed her out of the car and posed for a few seconds with the bride on his arm.

He was a sturdy, square-jawed, clean-shaven man in his early 60s, in morning dress with his grey silk hat at a jaunty angle.

After a few quick photographs, the Admiral said: "Mustn't keep Bellamy waiting, come along."

Good wishes from a new stepson

The verger stepped swiftly into the church ahead of them to give his pre-arranged signal to the organist.

As the opening bars of the Wedding March from *Lohengrin* filled the church, Richard turned round in the front pew, where he was waiting with his bride's children William and Alice, and Lady Prudence Fairfax, an old friend of the Bellamy family. Beyond them were James in uniform, and Georgina in a simple coat with neat rows of buttons and a flower-trimmed hat.

"Here she is," whispered Richard to Prudence, as he rose to wait for Virginia by the altar rail.

Lady Prudence squeezed his arm and smiled encouragingly. As Richard left the pew, he stroked little Alice's head. She smiled, suppressing a nervous giggle. William looked up at his new stepfather and whispered hoarsely, "Good luck, Uncle Richard."

Virginia was now well down the aisle, passing a sea of turning heads, as she came nearer on her father-in-law's arm.

Some of the faces on Richards side of the church were known to her, faces to be seen in the newspapers; politicians and public figures. She caught sight of Mr. Balfour, Lord Curzon, Mr. Amery... there was the present Lord Southwold, Lady Marjorie's cousin, who had succeeded to the earldom after the "Titanic" disaster; these few celebrities were standing only a few pews in front of the Eaton Square servants, Mrs. Bridges, Rose, Hudson, Ruby and Lily, and one or two tenants from the Southwold estate in Wiltshire who had known Richard for many years.

As Virginia reached the altar, her father-in-law let go of her arm and she moved to stand beside Richard. The music changed from the Wedding March to a few bars of quiet, thoughtful voluntary, as the Rector prepared to begin the ceremony.

Lady Prudence watched Richard's back, the handsome, grey head, the alert, youthful figure – for he was a well-preserved man for his 57 years.

She caught herself feeling a little envious of Virginia. who was so young, so charming and so happy. For the truth was that Prudence had dreamed for a little that she, a lonely widow herself, might some day marry him.

The beginning of another chapter...

After all, he had been the husband of her best friend; she knew his ways, his moods in his political career. They would have had so much in common. Ah, well...

In the front pew, Master William was singing lustily, if a little out of tune, as he turned to look behind him. In one of the back pews he caught a glimpse of Hudson who looked straight through him, so seriously – almost as if he wasn't there.

So his eye travelled on to alight on Rose, where he won a wink. William winked back, then, having got this needed response, he turned his mind again to the business of seeing his mother getting married.

Now they had reached the vows.

The Rector's voice rang out.

"Virginia, wilt thou take this man to thy wedded husband... and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

Firmly, quietly, and with pure charm, Virginia's voice echoed through the church "I will", and a new chapter began in the lives and fortunes of the Bellamys of 165 Eaton Place.