

The Child

By Mrs. Belloc Lowndes

I

It was close on eleven o'clock; the July night was airless, and the last of that season's great balls was taking place in Grosvenor Square.

Mrs. Elwyn's brougham came to a sudden halt in Green Street. Encompassed behind and before with close, intricate traffic, the carriage swung stiffly on its old-fashioned springs, responding to every movement of the fretted horse.

Hugh Elwyn, sitting by his mother's side, wondered a little impatiently why she remained so faithful to the old brougham which he could remember, or so it seemed to him, all his life. But he did not utter his thoughts aloud; he still went in awe of his mother, and he was proud, in a whimsical way, of her old-fashioned austerity of life, of her narrowness of vision, of her dislike of modern ways and new fashions.

Mrs. Elwyn after her husband's death had given up the world. This was the first time since her widowhood that she and her son had dined out together; but then the occasion was a very special one—they had been to dinner with the family of Elwyn's fiancée, Winifred Fanshawe.

Hugh Elwyn turned and looked at his mother. As he saw in the half-darkness the outlines of the delicately pure profile, framed in grey bands of hair covering the ears as it had been worn when Mrs. Elwyn was a girl upwards of forty years ago, he felt stirred with an unwonted tenderness, added to the respect with which he habitually regarded her.

Since leaving Cavendish Square they had scarcely spoken the one to the other. The drive home was a short one, for they lived in South Street. It was tiresome that they should be held up in this way within a hundred yards of their own door.

Suddenly the mother spoke. She put out her frail hand and laid it across her son's strong brown fingers. She gazed earnestly into the good-looking face which was not as radiantly glad as she would have wished to see it—as indeed she had once seen her son's face look, and as she could still very vividly remember her own husband's face had looked during their short formal engagement nearly fifty years ago. "I could not be better pleased, Hugh, if I had myself chosen your future wife."

Elwyn was a little amused as well as touched; he was well aware that his mother, to all intents and purposes, had chosen Winifred. True, she had been but slightly acquainted with the girl before the engagement, but she had "known all about her," and had been on terms of friendly acquaintance with Winifred's grandmother all her long life. Elwyn remembered how his mother had pressed him to accept an invitation to a country house where Winifred Fanshawe was to be. But Mrs. Elwyn had never spoken to her son of her wishes until the day he had come and told her that he intended to ask Winifred to marry him, and then her unselfish joy had moved him and brought them very near to one another.

When Hugh Elwyn was in London—he had been a great wanderer over the earth—he lived with his mother, and they were outwardly on the closest, most intimate terms of affection. But then Mrs. Elwyn never interfered with Hugh, as he understood his friends' mothers so often interfered with them and with their private affairs. This doubtless was why they were, and remained, on such ideal terms together.

Suddenly Mrs. Elwyn again spoke, but she did not turn round and look tenderly at her son as she had done when speaking of his future wife—this time she gazed straight before her: “Is not Winifred a cousin of Mrs. Bellair?”

“Yes, there’s some kind of connection between the Fanshawes and the Bellairs.”

Hugh Elwyn tried to make his voice unconcerned, but he failed, and he knew that he had failed. His mother’s question had disturbed him, and taken him greatly by surprise.

“I wondered whether they are friends?”

“I have never heard Winifred mention her,” he said shortly. “Yes, I have—I remember now that she told me the Bellairs had sent her a present the very day after our engagement was in the *Morning Post*.”

“Then I suppose you will have to see something of them after your marriage?”

“You mean the Bellairs? Yes—no. I don’t think that follows, mother.”

“Do you see anything of them now?”

“No”—he again hesitated, and again ate his word—“that is—yes. I met them some weeks ago. But I don’t think we are likely to see much of them after our marriage.”

He would have given the world to feel that his voice was betraying nothing of the discomfort he was feeling.

“I hope not, Hugh. Mrs. Bellair would not be a suitable friend for Winifred—or—for any young married woman.”

“Mother!” Elwyn only uttered the one word, but anger, shame, and self-reproach were struggling in the tone in which he uttered that one word. “You are wrong, indeed, you are quite wrong—I mean about Fanny Bellair.”

“My dear,” she said gently, but her voice quivered, “I do not think I am wrong. Indeed, I know I am right.” Neither had ever seen the other so moved. “My dear,” again she said the two quiet words that may mean so much or so little, “you know that I never spoke to you of the matter. I tried never even to think of it, and yet, Hugh, it made me very anxious, very unhappy. But to-night, looking at that sweet girl, I felt I must speak.”

She waited a moment, and then added in a constrained voice, “I do not judge you, Hugh.”

“No!” he cried, “but you judge her! And it’s so unfair, mother—so horribly unfair!”

He had turned round; he was forcing his mother to look at his now moody, unhappy face.

Mrs. Elwyn shrank back and closed her lips tightly. Her expression recalled to her son the look which used to come over her face when, as a petted, over cared-for only child, he asked her for something which she believed it would be bad for him to have. From that look there had been, in old days, no appeal. But now he felt that he must say something more. His manhood demanded it of him.

“Mother,” he said earnestly, “as you have spoken to me of the matter, I feel I must have it out with you! Please believe me when I say that you are being unjust—indeed, cruelly so. I was to blame all through—from the very beginning to the very end.”

“You must allow me,” she said in a low tone, “to be the judge of that, Hugh.” She added deprecatingly, “This discussion is painful, and—and very distasteful to me.”

Her son leant back, and choked down the words he was about to utter. He knew well that nothing he could say would change or even modify his mother’s point of view. But oh! why had she done this? Why had she chosen to-night, of all nights, to rend the veil which had always hung, so decently, between them. He had felt happy to-night—not madly, foolishly happy, as so many men feel at such moments, but reasonably, decorously pleased with his present and his future. He was making a *mariage de convenance*, but there had been another man on the lists, a

younger man than himself, and that had added a most pleasing zest to the pursuit. He, aided of course by Winifred Fanshawe's prudent parents, had won—won a very pretty, well-bred, well-behaved girl to wife. What more could a man of forty-one, who had lived every moment of his life, ask of that providence which shapes our ends?

The traffic suddenly parted, and the horse leapt forward.

As they reached their own front door, Mrs. Elwyn again spoke: "Perhaps I ought to add," she said hurriedly, "that I know one thing to Mrs. Bellair's credit. I am told that she is a most devoted and careful mother to that little boy of hers. I heard to-day that the child is seriously ill, and that she and the child's nurse are doing everything for him."

Mrs. Elwyn's voice had softened, curiously. She had an old-fashioned prejudice against trained nurses.

Hugh Elwyn helped his mother into the house; then, in the hall, he bent down and just touched her cheek with his lips.

"Won't you come up into the drawing-room? Just for a few minutes?" she asked; there was a note of deep, yearning disappointment in her voice, and her face looked grey and tired, very different from the happy, placid air it had worn during the little dinner party.

"No, thank you, mother, I won't come up just now. I think I'll go out again for half an hour. I haven't walked at all to-day, and it's so hot—I feel I shouldn't sleep if I turn in now.

He was punishing his mother as he had seen other sons punishing their mothers, but as he himself had never before to-night been tempted to punish his. Nay, more, as Hugh Elwyn watched her slow ascent up the staircase, he told himself that she had hurt and angered him past entire forgiveness. He had sometimes suspected that she knew of that fateful episode in his past life, but he had never supposed that she would speak of it to him, especially not now, after years had gone by, and when, greatly to please her, he was about to make what is called a "suitable" marriage.

He was just enough to know that his mother had hurt herself by hurting him, but that did not modify his feelings of anger and of surprise at what she had done. Of course she thought she knew everything there was to know, but how much there had been that she had never even suspected!

Those words—that admission—as to Fanny Bellair being a good mother would never have passed Mrs. Elwyn's lips—they would never even have been credited by her had she known the truth—the truth, that is, as to the child to whom Mrs. Bellair was so passionately devoted, and who now, it seemed, was ailing. That secret, and Hugh Elwyn thanked God, not irreverently, that it was so, was only shared by two human beings, that is by Fanny and himself. And perhaps, Fanny, like himself, had managed by now almost to forget it. . . .

Elwyn swung out of the house, he walked up South Street, and so into Park Lane and over to the Park railings. There was still a great deal of traffic in the roadway, but the pavements were deserted.

As he began to walk quickly westward, the past came back and overwhelmed him as with a great flood of mingled memories. And it was not, as his mother would probably have visioned it, a muddy spate filled with unclean things. Rather was it a flood of exquisite spring waters, instinct with the buoyant headlong rushes of youth, and filled with clear, happy shallows, in which retrospectively he lay and sunned himself in the warmth of what had been a great love—love such as Winifred Fanshawe, with her thin, complaisant nature, would never bestow.

The mother's imprudent words of unnecessary warning had brought back to her son everything she had hoped was now, if not obliterated, then repented of; but Elwyn's heart was filled to-night

with a vague tenderness for the half-forgotten woman whom he had loved awhile with so passionate and absorbing a love, and to whom, under cover of that poor and wilted thing, his conscience, he had ultimately behaved so ill.

Hugh Elwyn's mind travelled back across the years, to the very beginning of his involved account with honour—that account which he believed to be now straightened out.

Jim Bellair had been Elwyn's friend—first college friend and then favourite "pal." When Bellair had fallen head over ears in love with a girl still in the schoolroom, a girl not even pretty, but with wonderful auburn hair and dark, startled-looking eyes, and had finally persuaded, cajoled, badgered her into saying "Yes," it was Hugh Elwyn who had been Bellair's rather sulky best man. Small wonder that the bridegroom had half-jokingly left his young wife in Elwyn's charge when he had had to go half across the world on business that could not be delayed, while she stayed behind to nurse her father who was ill.

It was then, with mysterious, uncanny suddenness, that the mischief had begun. There had been something wild and untamed in Fanny Bellair—something which had roused in Elwyn the hunter's instinct, an instinct hitherto unslaked by over easy victories. And then Chance, that great, cynical goddess which plays so great a part in civilized life, had flung first one opportunity and then another into his eager, grasping hands.

Fanny's father had died; and she had been lonely and in sorrow. Careless friends, however kind, do not care to see much of those who mourn, but he, Hugh Elwyn, had not been careless, nay, he had been careful to see more, not less, of his friend's wife in this her first great grief, and she had been moved to the heart by his sympathy.

It was by Elwyn's advice that Mrs. Bellair had taken a house not far from London that lovely summer.

Ah, that little house! Elwyn could remember every bush, almost every flower that had flowered, in the walled garden during those enchanted weeks. Against the background of his mind every ornament, every odd piece of furniture in that old cottage, stood out as having been the silent, it had seemed at the time the kindly, understanding witnesses of what had by then become an exquisite friendship. He, the man, had known almost from the first where they too were drifting, but she, the woman, had slipped into love as a wanderer at night slips suddenly into a deep and hidden pool.

In a story book they would both have gone away openly together—but somehow the thought of doing such a thing never seriously occurred to Elwyn. He was far too fond of Bellair—it seemed absurd to say that now, but the truth, especially the truth of what has been, is often absurd.

Elwyn had contented himself with stealing Bellair's wife; he had no desire to put public shame and ridicule upon his friend. And fortune, favouring him, had prolonged the other man's enforced absence.

And then? And then at last Bellair had come back,—and trouble began. As to many things, nay, as to most things which have to do with the flesh rather than the spirit, men are more fastidiously delicate than are women. There had come months of misery, of revolt, and, on Elwyn's part, of dulling love. . . .

Then, once more, Chance gave him an unlooked-for opportunity—an opportunity of escape from what had become to him an intolerable position.

The war broke out, and Hugh Elwyn was among the very first of those gallant fellows who volunteered during the dark November of '99.

By a curious irony of fate, the troopship that bore him to South Africa had Bellair also on board, but owing to Elwyn's secret decision—he was far the cleverer man of the two—he and his

friend were no longer bound together by that wordless intimacy which is the basis of any close tie among men. By the time the two came back from Africa they had become little more than cordial acquaintances. Marriage, so Bellair sometimes told himself ruefully, generally plays the devil with a man's bachelor friendships. He was a kindly, generous hearted soul, who found much comfort in platitudes. . . .

But that, alas! had not been the end. On Elwyn's return home there had come to him a violent, overmastering revival of his passion. Again he and Fanny met—again they loved. Then one terrible day she came and told him, with stricken eyes, what he sometimes hoped, even now, had not been true—that she was about to have a child, and that it would be his child. At that moment, as he knew well, Mrs. Bellair had desired ardently to go away with him, openly. But he had drawn back, assuring himself—and this time honestly—that his shrinking from that course, now surely the only honest course, was not wholly ignoble. Were he to do such a thing it would go far to kill his mother—worse, it would embitter every moment of the life which remained to her.

For a while Elwyn went in deadly fear lest Fanny should tell her husband the truth. But the weeks and months drifted by, and she remained silent. And as he had gone about that year, petted and made much of by his friends and acquaintances—for did he not bear on his worn, handsome face that look which war paints on the face of your sensitive modern man?—he heard whispered the delightful news that after five years of marriage kind Jim and dear Fanny Bellair were at last going to be made happy—happy in the good old way.

Among the other memories of that hateful time, one came back, to-night, with especial vividness. Hurrying home across the park one afternoon, seven years ago now, almost to a day, he had suddenly run up against Bellair.

They had talked for a few moments on indifferent things, and then Jim had said shyly, awkwardly, but with a beaming look on his face, "You know about Fanny? Of course I can't help feeling a bit anxious, but she's so healthy—not like those women who have always something the matter with them!" And he, Elwyn, had gripped the other man's hand, and muttered the congratulation which was being asked of him.

That meeting, so full of shameful irony, had occurred about a week before the child's birth. Elwyn had meant to be away from London—but Chance, so carelessly kind a friend to him in the past, at last proved cruel, for surely it was Chance and Chance alone that led him, on the very eve of the day he was starting for Norway, straight across the quiet square, composed of high Georgian houses, where the Bellairs still lived.

To-night, thanks to his mother, every incident of that long, agonizing night came back. He could almost feel the tremor of half fear, half excitement, which had possessed him when he had suddenly become aware that his friends' house was still lit up and astir, and that fresh straw lay heaped up in prodigal profusion in the road where, a little past the door, was drawn up a doctor's one-horse brougham. Even then he might have taken another way, but something had seemed to drive him on, past the house,—and there Elwyn, staying his deadened footsteps, had heard float down to him from widely opened windows above, certain sounds, muffled moans, telling of a physical extremity which even now he winced to remember.

He had waited on and on—longing to escape, and yet prisoned between imaginary bounds within which he paced up and down, filled with an obscure desire to share, in the measure that was possible to him, her torment.

At last, in the orange, dust-laden dawn of a London summer morning, the front door of the house had opened, and Elwyn had walked forward, every nerve quivering with suspense and fatigue, feeling that he must know. .

A great doctor, with whose face he was vaguely acquainted, had stepped out accompanied by Bellair—Bellair with ruffled hair and red-rimmed eyes, but looking if tired then content, even more, triumphant. Elwyn had heard him say the words, “Thanks awfully. I shall never forget how kind you have been, Sir Joseph. Yes, I’ll go to bed at once. I know you must have thought me rather stupid.”

And then Bellair had suddenly seen Elwyn standing on the pavement; he had accepted unquestioningly the halting explanation that he was on his way home from a late party, and had happened, as it were, that way. “It’s a boy!” he had said exultantly, although Elwyn had asked him no question, and then, “Of course I’m awfully pleased, but I’m dog tired! She’s had a bad time, poor girl—but it’s all right now, thank God! Come in and have a drink, Hugo.”

But Elwyn had shaken his head. Again he had gripped his old friend’s hand, as he had done a week before, and again he had muttered the necessary words of congratulation. Then, turning on his heel, he had gone home, and spent the rest of the night in desultory packing.

That was just seven years ago, and Elwyn had never seen Fanny’s child. He had been away from England for over a year, and when he came back he learned that the Bellairs were away, living in the country, where they had taken a house for the sake of their boy.

As time had gone on, Elwyn and his friends had somehow drifted apart, as people are apt to drift apart in the busy idleness of the life led by the fortunate Bellairs and Elwyns of this world. Fanny avoided Hugh Elwyn, and Elwyn avoided Fanny, but they two only were aware of this. It was the last of the many secrets which they had once shared. When he and Bellair by chance met alone, all the old cordiality and even the old affection seemed to come back, if not to Elwyn then to the other man.

And now the child, to whom it seemed not only Fanny but Jim Bellair also was so devoted, was ill, and he, Hugh Elwyn, had been the last to hear of it. He felt vaguely remorseful that this should be so. There had been years when nothing that affected Bellair could have left him indifferent, and a time when the slightest misadventure befalling Fanny would have called forth his eager, helpful sympathy.

How strange it would be—he quickened his footsteps—if this child, with whom he was at once remotely and intimately concerned, were to die! He could not help feeling, deep down in his heart, that this would be, if a tragic, then a natural solution of a painful and unnatural problem—and then, quite suddenly, he felt horribly ashamed of having allowed himself to think this thought, to wish this awful wish.

Why should he not go now, at once, to Manchester Square, and inquire as to the little boy’s condition? It was not really late, not yet midnight. He could go and leave a message, perhaps even scribble a line to Jim Bellair explaining that he had come round as soon as he had heard of the child’s illness.

II

When Hugh Elwyn reached the familiar turning whence he could see the Bellairs’ high house, time seemed to have slipped back.

The house was all lit up as it had been on that summer night seven years ago. Everything was the same—even to the heaped-up straw into which his half-reluctant feet now sank. There was even a doctor’s carriage drawn up a little way from the front door, but this time it was a smart electric brougham.

He rang the bell, and as the door opened, Jim Bellair suddenly came into the hall, out of a room which Elwyn knew to be the smoking-room—a room in which he and Fanny had at one time spent long hours in contented, nay in ecstatic, dual solitude.

“I have come to inquire—I only heard tonight—” he began awkwardly, but the other cut him short, “Yes, yes, I understand—it’s awfully good of you, Elwyn! I’m awfully glad to see you. Come in here—” and perforce he had to follow. “The doctor’s upstairs—I mean Sir Joseph Pixton. Fanny was determined to have him, and he very kindly came, though of course he’s not a child’s doctor. He’s annoyed because Fanny won’t have trained nurses; but I don’t suppose anything would make any difference. It’s just a fight—a fight for the little chap’s life—that’s what it is, and we don’t know yet who’ll win.”

He spoke in quick, short sentences, staring with widely open eyes at his erstwhile friend as he spoke. “Pneumonia—I suppose you don’t know anything about it? I thought children never had such things, especially not in hot weather.”

“I had a frightful illness when I was about your boy’s age,” said Elwyn eagerly. “It’s the first thing I can really remember. They called it inflammation of the lungs. I was awfully bad. My mother talks of it now, sometimes.”

“Does she?” Bellair spoke wearily. “If only one could *do* something,” he went on. “But you see the worst of it is that I can do nothing—nothing! Fanny hates my being up there—she thinks it upsets the boy. He’s such a jolly little chap, Hugo. You know we called him Peter after Fanny’s father?”

Elwyn moved towards the door. He felt dreadfully moved by the other’s pain. He told himself that after all he could do no good by staying, and he felt so ashamed, such a cur——

“You don’t want to go away yet?” There was sharp chagrin, reproachful dismay, in Bellair’s voice. Elwyn remembered that in old days Jim had always hated being alone. “Won’t you stay and hear what Pixton says? Or—or are you in a hurry?”

Elwyn turned round. “Of course I’ll stay,” he said briefly.

Bellair spared him thanks, but he began walking about the room restlessly. At last he went to the door and set it ajar. “I want to hear when Sir Joseph comes down,” he explained, and even as he spoke there came the sound of heavy, slow footsteps on the staircase.

Bellair went out and brought the great man in.

“I’ve told Mrs. Bellair that we ought to have Bewdley! He knows a great deal more about children than I can pretend to do; and I propose, with your leave, to go off now, myself, and if possible bring him back.” The old doctor’s keen eyes wandered as he spoke from Bellair’s fair face to Hugh Elwyn’s dark one. “Perhaps,” he said, “perhaps, Mr. Bellair, you would get someone to telephone to Dr. Bewdley’s house to say that I’m coming? It might save a few moments.”

As Bellair left the room, the doctor turned to Elwyn and said abruptly, “I hope you’ll be able to stay with your brother? All this is very hard on him; Mrs. Bellair will scarcely allow him into the child’s room, and though that, of course, is quite right, I’m sorry for the man. He’s wrapped up in the child.”

And when Bellair came back from accompanying the old doctor to his carriage, there was a smile on his face—the first smile which had been there for a long time: “Pixton thinks you’re my brother! He said, ‘I hope your brother will manage to stay with you for a bit.’ Now I’ll go up and see Fanny. Pixton is certainly more hopeful than the last man we had——”

Bellair’s voice had a confident ring. Elwyn remembered with a pang that Jim had always been like that—always believed, that is, that the best would come to pass.

When left alone, Elwyn began walking restlessly up and down, much as his friend had walked up and down a few minutes ago. Something of the excitement of the fight going on above had entered into him; he now desired ardently that the child should live, should emerge victor from the grim struggle.

At last Bellair came back. "Fanny believes that this is the night of crisis," he said slowly. All the buoyancy had left his voice. "But—but Elwyn, I hope you won't mind—the fact is she's set her heart on your seeing him. I told her what you told me about yourself, I mean your illness as a child, and it's cheered her up amazingly, poor girl! Perhaps you could tell her a little bit more about it, though I like to think that if the boy gets through it"—his voice broke suddenly—"she won't remember this—this awful time. But don't let's keep her waiting—" He took Elwyn's consent for granted, and quickly the two men walked up the stairs of the high house, on and on and on.

"It's a good way up," whispered Bellair, "but Fanny was told that a child's nursery couldn't be too high. So we had the four rooms at the top thrown into two."

They were now on the dimly-lighted landing. "Wait one moment—wait one moment, Hugo." Bellair's voice had dropped to a low, gruff whisper.

Elwyn remained alone. He could hear slight movements going on in the room into which Bellair had just gone; and then there also fell on his ears the deep, regular sound of snoring. Who could be asleep in the house at such a moment? The sound disturbed him; it seemed to add a touch of grotesque horror to the situation.

Suddenly the handle of the door in front of him moved round, and he heard Fanny Bellair's voice, unnaturally controlled and calm. "I sent Nanna to bed, Jim. The poor old creature was absolutely worn out. And then I would so much rather be alone when Sir Joseph brings back the other doctor. He admits—I mean Sir Joseph does—that to-night *is* the crisis."

The door swung widely open, and Elwyn, moving instinctively back, visualized the scene before him very distinctly.

There was a screen on the right hand, a screen covered, as had been the one in his own nursery, with a patchwork of pictures varnished over.

Mrs. Bellair stood between the screen and the pale blue wall. Her slim figure was clad in some sort of long white garment, and over it she wore an apron, which he noticed was far too large for her. Her hair, the auburn hair which had been her greatest beauty, and which he had once loved to praise and to caress, was fastened back, massed up in as small a compass as possible. That, and the fact that her face was expressionless, so altered her in Elwyn's eyes as to give him an uncanny feeling that the woman before him was not the woman he had known, had loved, had left,—but a stranger, only bound to him by the slender link of a common humanity.

She waited some moments as if listening, then she came out on to the landing, and shut the door behind her very softly.

The sentence of conventional sympathy half formed on Elwyn's lips died into nothingness; as little could he have offered words of cheer to one who was being tortured; but in the dim light their hands met and clasped tightly.

"Hugo?" she said, "I want to ask you something. You told Jim just now that you were once very ill as a child,—ill like this, ill like my child. I want you to tell me honestly if that is true? I mean, were you very, very ill?"

He answered her in the same way, without preamble, baldly: "It is quite true," he said. "I was very ill—so ill that my mother for one moment thought that I was dead. But remember, Fanny,

that in those days they did not know nearly as much as they do now. Your boy has two chances for every one that I had then.”

“Would you mind coming in and seeing him?” Her voice faltered, it had become more human, more conventional, in quality.

“Of course I will see him,” he said. “I want to see him,—dear.” She had suddenly become to him once more the thing nearest his heart; once more the link between them became of the closest, most intimate nature, and yet, or perhaps because of its intensity, the sense of nearness which had sprung at her touch into being was passionless.

The face which had been drained of all expression quickened into agonized feeling. She tried to withdraw her hand from his, but he held it firmly, and it was hand in hand that together they walked into the room.

As they came round the screen behind which lay the sick child, Bellair went over to the farthest of the three windows and stood there with crossed arms staring out into the night.

The little boy lay on his right side, and as they moved round to the edge of the large cot, Elwyn, with a sudden tightening of the throat, became aware that the child was neither asleep nor, as he in his ignorance had expected to find him, sunk in stupor or delirium. But the small, dark face, framed by the white pillow, was set in lines of deep, unchildlike gravity, and in the eyes which now gazed incuriously at Elwyn there was a strange, watchful light which seemed to illumine that which was within rather than that which was without.

As is always the case with a living creature near to death, little Peter Bellair looked very lonely.

Then Elwyn, moving nearer still, seemed—or so at least Fanny Bellair will ever believe—to take possession of the moribund child, yielding him as he did so something of his own strength to help him through the crisis then imminent. And indeed the little creature whose forehead, whose clenched left hand lying on the sheet were beginning to glisten with sweat, appeared to become merged in some strange way with himself. Merged, not with the man he was to-day, but with the Hugh Elwyn of thirty years back, who, as a lonely only child, had lived so intensely secret, imaginative a life, peopling the prim alleys of Hyde Park with fairies, imps, tricky hobgoblins in whom he more than half believed, and longing even then, as ever after, for the unattainable, never carelessly happy as his father and mother believed him to be. .

Hugh Elwyn stayed with the Bellairs all that night. He shared the sick suspense the hour of the crisis brought, and he was present when the specialist said the fateful words, “I think, under God, this child will live.”

When at last Elwyn left the house, clad in an old light coat of Bellair’s in order that the folk early astir should not see that he was wearing evening clothes, he felt happier, more lighthearted, than he had done for years.

His life had been like a crowded lumber-room, full of useless and worn-out things he had accounted precious, while he had ignored the one possession that really mattered and that linked him, not only with the future, but with the greatest reality of his past.

The inevitable pain which this suddenly discovered treasure was to bring was mercifully concealed from him, as also the sombre fact that he would henceforth go lonely all his life, perforce obliged to content himself with the crumbs of another man’s feast. For Peter Bellair, high-strung, imaginative, as he will ever be, will worship the strong, kindly, simple man he believes to be his father, but to that dear father’s friend he will only yield the careless affection born of gratitude for much kindness.

In the matter of the broken engagement, Hugh Elwyn was more fairly treated by the men and women whom the matter concerned, or who thought it concerned them, than are the majority of recusant lovers.

“Hugh Elwyn has never been quite the same since the war, and you know Winifred Fanshawe really liked the other man the best,” so said those who spent an idle moment in discussing the matter, and they generally added, “It’s a good thing that he’s spending the summer with his old friends, the Bellairs. They’re living very quietly just now, for their little boy has been dreadfully ill, so it’s just the place for poor old Hugo to get over it all! “