CHAPTER III

IN WHICH HUGH DRUMMOND COMPOSES A LETTER

Hugh Drummond strolled slowly along Whitehall in the direction of Trafalgar Square. His face wore its habitual look of vacuous good humour, and at intervals he hummed a little tune under his breath. It was outside the Carlton that he paused as a car drew up by his side, and a man and a girl got out.

"Algy, my dear old boy," he murmured, taking off his hat, "are we in health to-day?"

"Passable, old son," returned Algy Longworth, adjusting his quite unnecessary eyeglass. "The oysters wilted a bit this morning, but I'm trying again to-night. By the way, do you know Miss Farreydale?"

Hugh bowed.

"You know the risk you run, I suppose, going about with him?"

The girl laughed. "He seems harmless," she answered lightly.

"That's his guile. After the second cup of tea he's a perfect devil. By the same token, Algy, I am hibernating awhile in the country. Going to dear old Julia Manton's for a few days. Up Sheffield way."

Miss Farreydale looked at him with a puzzled frown.
"Do you mean Lady Manton—Sir John's wife?"

"That's the old dear," returned Hugh. "Know her?"

"Fairly well. But her name isn't Julia. And she won't love you if you call her old."

"Good heavens! Isn't it? And won't she? I must be mixing her up with someone else."

"Dorothy Manton is a well-preserved woman of—shall we say—thirty-five? She was a grocer's daughter; she is now a snob of the worst type. I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

"Your affection for her stuns me," murmured Hugh. "I appear to be in for a cheerful time."

"When do you go, Hugh?" asked Algy.

"To-morrow, old man. But I'm keeping you from your tea. Keep the table between you after the second cup, Miss Farreydale."

He lifted his hat and walked on up the Haymarket, only to turn back suddenly.

"'Daisy,' you said, didn't you?"

"No. Dorothy," laughed the girl. "Come on, Algy, I want my tea."

She passed into the Carlton, and for a moment the two men were together on the pavement.

"Lucky she knows the Manton woman," murmured Hugh.

"Don't you?" gasped Algy.

"Not from Eve, old son. Don't fix up anything in the near future. We shall be busy. I've joined the police and shall require help."

With a cheery nod he strolled off, and after
a moment’s hesitation Algy Longworth followed the girl into the Carlton.

“Mad, isn’t he—your friend?” she remarked as he came up.

“Absolutely,” he answered. “Let’s masticate an éclair.”

A quarter of an hour later Hugh let himself into his house in Brook Street. On the hall table were three telegrams which he opened and read. Then, having torn them into tiny fragments, he went on into his study and rang the bell.

“Beer, Denny,” he remarked, as his servant came in. “Beer in a mug. I am prostrate. And then bring me one of those confounded books which people have their names put in followed by the usual lies.”

“‘Who’s Who,’ sir,” said Denny.

“You’ve got it,” said his master. “Though who is who these days, Denny, is a very dark matter. I am rapidly losing my faith in my brother man—rapidly. And then after that we have to write a letter to Julia—no, Dorothy Manton—erstwhile grocer’s daughter with whom I propose to dally for a few days.”

“I don’t seem to know the name, sir.”

“Nor did I, Denny, until about an hour ago. But I have it on reliable authority that she exists.”

“But how, sir . . .” began the bewildered Denny.

“At the moment the way is dark,” admitted Drummond. “The fog of war enwraps me. Beer, fool, beer.”

Accustomed to the little vagaries of his
master, Denny left the room to return shortly with a large jug of beer which he placed on a small table beside Drummond’s chair. Then he waited motionless behind his chair with a pencil and writing-block in his hand.

“A snob, Denny; a snob,” said Drummond at length, putting down his empty glass. “How does one best penetrate into the life and home of a female snob whom one does not even know by sight? Let us reason from first principles. What have we in our repertoire that would fling wide the portals of her house, revealing to our awestruck gaze all the footmen ranged in a row?” He rose suddenly. “I’ve got it, Denny; at least some of it. We have old Turnip-top. Is he not a cousin of mine?”

“You mean Lord Staveley, sir,” said Denny diffidently.

“Of course I do, you ass. Who else?” Clasping his replenished glass of beer, Hugh strode up and down the room. “Somehow or other we must drag him in.”

“He’s in Central Africa, sir,” reminded Denny cautiously.

“What the devil does that matter? Julia—I mean Dorothy—won’t know. Probably never heard of the poor old thing. Write, fool; take your pen and write quickly.

"Dear Lady Manton,

“I hope you have not forgotten the pleasant few days we spent together at Wiltshire Towers this spring.”"

“But you didn’t go to the Duke’s this spring, sir,” gasped Denny.
“I know that, you ass—but no more did she. To be exact, the place was being done up, only she won’t know. Go on, I’m going to overflow again.”

“I certainly have not forgotten the kind invitation you gave to my cousin Staveley and myself to come and stop with you. He, at the moment, is killing beasts in Africa: whereas I am condemned to this unpleasant country. To-morrow I have to go to Sheffield, ...”

He paused. “Why, Denny—why do I have to go to Sheffield? Why in Heaven’s name does any one ever go to Sheffield?”

“They make knives there, sir.”

“Do they? But you needn’t go there to buy them. And anyway, I don’t want knives.”

“You might just say on business, sir,” remarked his servant.

“Gad! you’re a genius, Denny. Put that in. ‘Sheffield on business, and I wondered if I might take you at your word and come to—to ...’ Where’s the bally woman live? Look it up in ‘Who’s Who.’”

“Drayton House, sir,” announced Denny.

“To Drayton House for a day or two. Yours very sincerely.”

“That’ll do the trick, Denny. Give it to me, and I’ll write it out.”

“A piece of the best paper with the crest and telephone number embossed in blue, and the victory is ours.”

“Aren’t you giving her rather short notice, sir,” said Denny doubtfully.

Drummond laid down his pen and stared at him sadly.
“Sometimes, Denny, I despair of you,” he answered. “Even after four years of communion with me there are moments when you relapse into your pristine brain wallow. If I gave her any longer it is just conceivable—though I admit not likely—that I might get my answer from her stating that she was completely unaware of my existence, and that she’d sent my letter to the police. And where should we be then, my faithful varlet? As it is, I shall arrive at Drayton House just after the letter, discover with horror that I have made a mistake, and be gracefully forgiven by my charming hostess as befits a man with such exalted friends. Now run away and get me a taxi.”

“Will you be in to dinner, sir?”

“Perhaps—perhaps not. In case I’m not, I shall go up to Sheffield in the Rolls tomorrow. See that everything is packed.”

“Will you want me to come with you, sir?”

“No, Denny—not this time. I have a sort of premonition that I’m going to enjoy myself at Drayton House, and you’re too young for that sort of thing.”

With a resigned look on his face, Denny left the room, closing the door gently behind him. But Drummond, left to himself, did not at once continue his letter to Lady Manton. With his pen held loosely in his hand he sat at his desk staring thoughtfully at the wall opposite. Gone completely was his customary inane look of good humour: in its place was an expression of quiet, almost grim, determination. He had the air of a man faced with big
decisions, and to whom, moreover, such an experience was no novelty. For some five minutes he sat there motionless; then with a short laugh he came out of his reverie.

"We're getting near the motto, my son," he muttered—"deuced near. If we don't draw the badger in a few weeks, I'll eat my hat."

With another laugh he turned once more to his half-finished letter. And a minute or two later, having stamped and addressed the envelope, he slipped it into his pocket and rose. He crossed the room and unlocked a small safe which stood in the corner. From it he took a small automatic revolver which he dropped into his coat pocket, also a tiny bundle of what looked like fine black silk. Then, having relocked the safe he picked up his hat and stick and went into the hall.

"Denny," he called, pausing by the front door.

"Sir," answered that worthy, appearing from the back premises.

"If Mr. Darrell or any of them ring up I shall be tearing a devilled bone to-night at the Savoy grill at eleven o'clock."