



Drawn by Frank Wiles. Half-tone plate engraved by H. C. Merrill

“THIS TIME NEXT YEAR SHE WILL BE LEADING A WOMAN'S NORMAL LIFE”

STELLA MARIS

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CHAPTER XI

JOHN RISCA, at thirty-four, with a ward of twenty, and with the normal hopes of a man's life withered at the root, regarded himself as an elderly man. He looked older than his years. Ragged streaks of gray appeared in his black hair, and the lines deepened on his heavy brow. There are some men who, no matter what their circumstances may be, never take themselves happily. To do so is a gift; and it was denied to John Risca.

Two years had passed since his wife's release. During the years of their separation before her imprisonment, she had counted for little in his thoughts save as a gate barring the way to happiness. She had never molested him, never stood in the way of his ordinary life. In her prison she had begun by being a horror haunting his dreams; gradually she had dwindled into a kind of paralyzed force, had faded into a shadow incapable of action. But since her return to the living world he had felt her hatred as an influence, vague, but active, let loose upon the earth. He dreaded contact with her, however indirect, and through whatever agency; but contact was inevitable. Whereas formerly she had been content to live according to the terms of their agreement on separation, now she made demands. One of them, however, he considered reasonable. In Smith Street, the scene of her misdeeds, she led the life of a pariah dog. She was friendless. Her own relatives had cast her off. The tradespeople round about supplied her reluctantly with necessities and refused to exchange words with her when she entered their shops. Children hooted her in the streets. John, foreseeing unpleasantness, had offered to find her a

home in the country. But this, being town-bred, she had declined. Let her change her name, she urged, and seek other London quarters. He agreed. She adopted the name of Rawlings and moved to a flat off the Fulham Road. To the suggestion of a different part of London altogether she turned a deaf ear. She had lived in that neighborhood all her days and would feel lost elsewhere. The common Londoner has almost the local instinct of a villager. She would also, she said, be near her mother, who still let lodgings in Brompton.

"If your mother refuses to see you," said John, when they were discussing the matter, "I see no reason for your being near her."

She counseled him, in her vernacular, to mind his own business.

"So long as I don't come and live next to you, what have you got to do with it?"

"I certainly am not called upon to protect your mother," said he. He smiled grimly, remembering the hard-bitten veteran of a thousand fights with impecunious and recalcitrant lodgers. She could very well look after herself.

The Bences, much against her will, though she dared not openly rebel, accompanied her to the flat. Her installation was expensive. He paid readily enough. But then came demands for money, insidious enough at first for his compliance, then monstrous, vindictive. She incurred reckless debts; not those of a woman who desires to make a show in the world by covering herself with costly dresses and furs and jewels or by dashing about in expensive equipages. That side of life was unfamiliar to her, and class instinct quenched the imagination to crave it. She had been bred to regard cabs as

luxuries of the idle rich, and it never occurred to her to travel in London otherwise than by omnibus or rail. Her wilful extravagance was of a different nature. She ran up bills with the petty tradesmen of the neighborhood for articles for which she had no use; for flowers which she deliberately threw into the dust-bin; for ready-made raiment which she never wore, —jackets at three pounds ten and six, and hats at ten shillings,—cheap jewelry, watches, and trinkets which she stored away in boxes. There was a gaudy set of furniture with which she bought a kind of reconciliation with her mother. When county-court summonses came in, she demanded money from John. When he refused, she posted him the summonses.

Meanwhile he found that she had struck up acquaintance with some helter-skelter, though respectable, folks in the flat below. The discovery pleased him. It is good for no human being, virtuous or depraved, to sit from month's end to month's end in stark loneliness. She forced him to the threat of revealing her identity to her new friends if she did not mend her ways. She mended them; but he felt his hands soiled by the ignoble weapons with which he had to fight.

After that she was quiet for months. Then one rainy afternoon, as he was walking townward with bent head, he ran into her in Maida Vale, the broad thoroughfare that merges into Kilburn. She started back with a quick gasp of fear.

"What are you doing in this part of London?" he asked angrily.

She plucked up courage. "I 'm free to walk where I like, and just you jolly well don't try to stop me."

"You were going to my house."

"I was n't. But supposing I was. What have you got to hide from me? My successor? Some little tuppenny ha'penny piece of damaged goods you 've picked up cheap? Think I want to see her? What do you suppose I care? Just let me pass."

He thrust aside the wet umbrella which she pushed rudely into his face.

"First tell me what you are doing here. Fulham people don't come to Maida Vale just to take a walk in the rain."

"I was going to see some friends," she replied sulkily.

A motor-omnibus came surging down toward them. At his hail it stopped.

"Get into that at once, or it will be the worse for you."

He took her arm in his powerful grip and dragged her to the curb.

"You bullying brute!" she hissed through her thin lips.

But she entered the bus. John watched it until it whizzed into space, and then retracing his steps, he went home and mounted guard by the window of his aunt's gimcrack drawing-room, to the huge delight of its unsuspecting mistress. But his wife did not double back, as he anticipated; nor did he see her again in the neighborhood.

Thenceforward, save for irritating pin-pricks, reminding him of her existence, such as futile revolts against the supervision of the Bences and occasional demands for money, she ceased to worry him. But since the day when he caught her about to spy on his home-life, her shadow, like that of some obscene bird, hovered over him perpetually. What she had tried to do then she might have already done, she might do in the future. The horrible sense of insecurity oppressed him: it is that which ages a man who cannot take himself happily.

Otherwise the two years had passed with no great stir. The recurrence of seasons alone surprised him now and then into a realization of the flight of time. He had succeeded to the editorship of the weekly review of which he had been assistant editor; he had published a little book on the "Casual Ward of Work-houses," a despised hash of journalistic articles which had brought him considerable recognition; leader writers had quoted him flatteringly, and his publishers clamored for another book on a cognate subject; the President of the Local Government Board had invited him to a discussion of the matter, with a view to possible legislation; honors fell thick upon him: but if it had been a shower of frogs, his disgust could not have been greater. For about the same time he had published a chunky, doughy novel destined to set the world aflame, which sold about a couple of hundred copies. He had cursed all things cursable and uncursable without in any way affecting the heartless rhythm of life. The world went on serenely, and in his glum fashion he found himself going on with the world.

Unity mended his socks and poured out his tea day after day, unchanging in her dull and common scragginess. Neither fine clothes, nor jewels, nor Aunt Gladys's maxims could turn her into a young lady. Miss Lindon sighed. Unity's inability to purr genteelly at tea-parties, the breath of female autumn's being, was the main sorrow in the mild lady's heart. She used to dream of the swelling pride with which she might have listened to Unity playing the "Liede ohne Worte" or Stephen Heller or "The Brook" (such a pretty piece!), before the ladies purring on the gimcrack chairs. But the dream was poignantly vain. She had striven with vast goodness to teach Unity to play the piano, and the girl had honestly tried to learn; but as her brain could not master the mystery of the various keys, and as her ear was not acute enough to enable her to sing

Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,

in tune, the study of music had to be struck out of her curriculum. And she could not talk to the faded gentlewomen who came to the house, and to whose houses Miss Lindon took her. The ordeal always made her perspire, and little beads settled on her snub nose, and she knew it was not ladylike. Such a thing, said Miss Lindon, ought never to happen. But it did, in defiance of all the laws of gentility. So Miss Lindon sighed. But none of these things wrecked the peace of the home. Uneventful serenity reigned in the little house at Kilburn.

Walter Herold went on playing his exquisite miniatures of parts, and, in theatrical terminology, he became very expensive, and prospered exceedingly in his profession; his relations with John remained unaltered. Miss Lindon loved him, first because he was John's intimate, secondly (and here was a reason which she did not avow) because he had the gift of making her feel that, despite seven and fifty years of spinsterhood, she was still the most fascinating of her sex, and thirdly because he reminded her of poor Captain Featherstone, killed in the Zulu War, who was such a very clever amateur conjurer, and could act charades in a way that would make you die of laughing. And Unity came to him with her problems; and, as they both loved John Risca and Stella-

maris, of whom (a thing undreamed of by John, for he rarely mentioned the fairy princess's name to Unity) they talked inordinately, the bond between them was strengthened by links ever freshly forged. And finally, in the sea-chamber at South-cliff, Herold maintained his rank of Great High Favorite, and companioned his august mistress on her fairy vagabondage along the roads that led no whither in the Land That Never Was.

And Stellamaris herself? She was twenty. John, still Great High Belovedest, still finding his perfect rest from care, his enchanted haven, in the great, wide-windowed room looking out to sea, wondered at the commonplace fact. Not long ago, it seemed to him, she had been but the fragile wraith of a child, with arms that you might pass through a signet-ring, and hands no bigger than an acacia-leaf. He had sat but yesterday full on the bed, without danger to the tiny feet which were far away from him. And now the little child had passed into the woman. Thanks to devotion, the world's learning, the resources of the civilized earth, the life-giving air of the sea, her malady had scarcely interfered with bodily growth. And the child's beauty had not been fleeting. It had remained, and matured into that of the woman. Unconsciously John had drifted away from childish things in his long and precious talks with her.

One day she rebuked him.

"Great High Belovedest," she said, "you have n't told me of the palace and Liliass and Niphetos for months and months. Or is it years?"

He laughed. "It must be years. You don't realize that you're grown up."

"So every one says. I often wonder what it really means."

"You've developed," said he.

"How?" she persisted.

"You've got longer and broader and—"

She laughed to hide a swift, pink confusion. "I know that, you silly dear. The doctor's always taking measurements of me and making funny calculations—cubing out the contents, as Mr. Wratislaw used to say. I know I'm enormous. That's an external matter of yards and feet,"—she spoke as if her proportions were Brobdingnagian,—“but I'm referring to inner things. How am I different, in myself, from what I was four years ago?"

John scratched a somewhat puzzled head. How could he explain to her that of which he himself was not quite certain? In the normal case the phenomenon of manhood or womanhood, apart from the physical side,—allowing for the moment that the physical side can be set apart,—is a matter of a wider experience of life, of a million observations unconsciously correlated by a fully developed brain. It implies a differentiation between the facts and fancies of existence. The adult of twenty-one who takes seriously the make-believe of the dolls' house, and, sticking a paper crown on her head, asks you to recognize her as a queen, is merely an imbecile. The sane adult plays at mock tea-parties and crowns itself monarch in obedience to a different set of impulses altogether, either through sheer gaiety of heart, frankly making unto itself no illusions, or using make-believe as a symbol of the highest expression of life—*videlicet*, art—of which the human mind is capable. And, although we know very well that there are adults, many of advanced years, whom circumstances have so perverted that the Alpha and Omega of their lives is the pursuit either of a little ball or of a verminous animal over the surface of God's arresting earth, or else, it may be, a series of conjectures as to the comparative velocities of unimportant quadrupeds, yet none of them (at loose on society) would have the lunacy or the depravity to maintain that such pursuit or conjecture is a vital element in the scheme of existence. Even these who appear still to dwell in the play-world of the child have the essential faculty of discrimination. They have, in dull intervals between round or ride, encountered sorrow and pain and passion and wickedness and fierce struggle and despair. To them the sordid tragedies of criminal courts, the bestial poverty of slums, are commonplaces of knowledge. Any one of them can reel off a dozen instances of the treachery of false friends, the faithlessness of women, the corruption of commercial or political life. To them are also revealed splendors of heroism and self-sacrifice. They have a million data whence to deduce a serviceable philosophy. They are beyond all question grown up. But what wider experience of life had Stellamaris gained in the four years between the ages of sixteen

and twenty? What fresh facts of existence had been presented to her for observation and correlation? What data had she for that deduction of a philosophy which marks the adult? Neither harm nor spell nor charm had come any nearer the lovely lady during the last four years than during those of her childhood. The unwritten law had prevailed as strong as ever. The routine of the sea-chamber had remained unchanged. Her reading, jealously selected, had brought her no closer to the sad core of many human things. The gulls and the waves and the golden sunset clouds were still her high companions. What did people mean when they said she had grown up? John continued for some time to scratch a puzzled head.

"Are you not aware of any change in yourself?" he asked.

She reflected for a moment. "No," she replied seriously. "Of course I know more. I can speak French and Italian—" Professors of these tongues, duly hedged about with ceremonial, had for a long time past attended in the sea-chamber—"and I know lots more of history and geography and geology and astronomy and zoölogy—oh, Belovedest dear, I'm dying to see a giraffe! Do you think if he stood on the beach he could stick his head through the window and look at me? And a hippopotamus—can't you bring one in on a string? Or do you think Constable would bite him?"

John expounded the cases of the giraffe and the hippopotamus with great gravity. Her eyebrows contracted ever so little, and a spark danced in her eyes as she waited for the end of the lecture.

"Oh, dear, can't you see a joke?"

"Joke?"

"Why, yes. Don't you think I know all about hippopotamuses?"

"Four years ago," said John, "if I had told you that a wyvern and a unicorn were coming to tea, you would have believed me. Now you would n't. You've grown up. That's what I meant."

"I see," said Stellamaris.

But she did n't; for she turned the conversation back to the palace.

"I'm afraid, dear," said he, "that the cats are dead and Arachne has married a stock-broker, and I've been so busy that the palace has run to seed."

"I thought she was going to marry a

duke," said Stella, whose memory for unimportant detail was femininely tenacious.

"The duke was caught by Miss Cassandra P. Wurgles," said John, once more launched on the sea of romance.

"What a funny name," said Stella.

"It 's the kind of name," he replied, "always given in English fiction to the heiresses of the Middle West of America."

"Was she an heiress?"

"Worth billions. After they were married they do say she would n't let the duke wipe his razor on anything less valuable than a thousand-dollar note."

"I don't think that 's quite true," laughed Stella.

"I don't know," said John. "Anyhow, Arachne fell back on a stock-broker named MacIsaac, and now there 's no one to look after the palace."

"No one at all?" Her voice was full of pity.

"Not a soul," said he.

A tragic pause followed this forlorn declaration.

"Dear Belovedest," said Stella, very seriously, "I do wish I could come and set it right for you."

Their eyes met. John sighed.

"I wish you could," said he. "There 's a fairy wand standing in the corner which no one but you can touch. It gives every one else an electric shock that sends them head over heels. But if you could get it and wave it about the place, you would make all sorts of dead things come to glorious life, and fill all the garden walks with flowers, and make the waters live again in the fountains."

It was the John Risca whom she had always known that spoke, the John Risca of whom Herold had occasional flashes, so that he could discount his usual gloomy petulance and love the essential man, the John Risca whose hand poor dumb, little Unity Blake had laid against her cheek—the best and purest John Risca, a will-of-the-wisp gleam to all his nearest save Stellamaris; but to Stellamaris just the ordinary, commonplace, unaltering, and unalterable John Risca, the Great High Belovedest of her earliest memories. He had said things like this a hundred thousand times before. Yet now the color rose once more into her cheeks, and a mist such as might surround a dewdrop veiled her eyes.

"What makes you think I could do all that for you?" she asked.

"I don't know, my dear," said John. "You seem to belong to another world." He stumbled. "You 're just a fairy sort of creature."

The answer did not satisfy the instinctive innermost whence sprang the question; but it served. Woman since the beginning of things has had to content herself with half-answers from man, seeing that she vouchsafes him scarcely any answers at all. She smiled and stretched out her hand. John took it in his clumsy fingers. It was whiter than any hand in the world, veined with the faintest of faint blue.

"Anyhow," she said, "you ought n't to have neglected the palace."

"What was I to do?" he asked whimsically. "You 've been so busy growing up that you 've had no time to help me to run it."

"Oh!" she said. She withdrew her hand. "Oh, Belovedest, how can you say such a thing!"

"You yourself," laughed John, "asked whether it was months or years since we talked of it."

"I 've never stopped thinking about it," she protested, and she went on protesting. But like the Shaksperian lady, she protested too much.

"You 've grown up, Stellamaris," said John.

But how much of the old fairy-tale she still believed in he could not gage. He went away, man with the muck-rake that he was, with the uncomfortable conviction that the roots of her child's faith survived.

And yet she had grown up, and John, for the life of him, could not understand it. He was puzzled, because the sweet reverence of the man for the thing of sea-foam and cloud mystery that she had been to him all his man's life could not dream of physiological development. She was longer and broader; that met the eye. Living in her extraordinary seclusion from the multitudinous winds of earth, she could feel no breath of the storms that shake humanity into the myriad molds of character. The physical side (other than mere linear and cubical expansion) apart, there was no possibility of change from childhood to womanhood. But John

counted without his host—Nature, the host who claims reckoning from us all, kick though we may against her tyrannies; Nature, with her frank indecencies, her uncompromising, but loving, realism. The physical side in the development of any human being cannot be set apart. That passage of every maiden across the ford where brook and river meet is accomplished without a good, careless man's knowledge or conjecture. He kisses her to-day, as he has kissed her since she toddled with bare legs, and she responds, and it means little more to her than an acidulated drop. He shall kiss her to-morrow, and she shall grow as red as any turkey-cock, and cast down her eyes, and go through all the pretty antics characteristic, since the beginning of time, of a self-conscious sex. And the man shall go away scratching his head in a deuce of a puzzle.

ANOTHER year passed. Stella was twenty-one. The routine of the Channel House, of the house at Kilburn, of the Fulham flat, went on unchanged and unchanging. Time seems unimportant as a positive agent in human affairs. It is the solvent of sorrow, but it cannot create joy. From its benumbing influence no drama seems to spring. It is events—and events, too, no matter how trivial—that have their roots mysteriously deep in time that shake the world and make the drama which we call history. And it was an event, apparently trivial, but sudden, unlooked for, amazing, that shook the lives whose history is here recorded.

One morning, in obedience to a peremptory telegram from Sir Oliver Blount, John Risca met him at the Imperial Club. The old man rose from his seat near the entrance of the smoking-room into which John was shown, and excitedly wrung both his hands.

"My dear boy, you must come to South-cliff at once."

Two or three times before he had been brought down post-haste by Sir Oliver, only to find himself needed as a mediator between husband and wife. He shook himself free.

"Out of the question, Oliver. I'm overwhelmed with work. I've got my syndicate article to do, and the review goes to press to-night."

"You don't understand. It's our dar-

ling Stella. This morning she lifted her head from the pillow."

"But that's her death-warrant!" cried John, quickly.

"It's her life-warrant. The fatal thing we've been warned against all these years is no longer fatal. She can move her head easily, painlessly. Don't you see?"

The weak old eyes were wet.

"My God!" said John. His breath came fast, and he clapped his great hand on the other's lean shoulders. "But that means—great God in heaven!"—his voice shook—"what may it not mean?"

"It may mean everything," said Sir Oliver.

From time to time throughout Stella's life the great magicians of science had entered the sea-chamber and departed thence, shaking sad and certain heads. With proper care, they said, Stellamaris might live—might live, indeed, until her hair turned white and her young cheeks shriveled with age; but of leaving that bed by the window and going forth into the outer world there was no hope or question. Still, Nature, the inscrutable, the whimsical, might be cozened by treatment into working a miracle. At any rate, no harm would be done by trying, and her guardians would have the consoling assurance that nothing had been left undone. They prescribed after their high knowledge, and pocketed their high fees, and went their way. Dr. Ransome, Stella's lifelong doctor and worshiper, carried out each great magician's orders, and, as prophesied, nothing ever happened either for good or harm.

But six months ago a greater magician than them all, one Wilhelm von Pfeiler of Vienna, who by working miracles on his own account with newly discovered and stupendous forces had begun to startle scientific Europe, happened to be in England, and was summoned to the sea-chamber. He was a dark, silky-bearded man in whose eyes brooded perpetual melancholy. He, too, shook his head and said "Perhaps." Ransome, who had seized with high hopes on the wandering magician, found him vastly depressing. His "Perhaps" was more mournfully hopeless than the others' "No." He spoke little, for he knew no English, and Ransome's German, like that of Stella's household,

was scanty; but Ransome understood him to croak platitudes about time and youth and growth and nature being factors in the case. As to his newly discovered treatment, well, it might have some effect; he was certain of nothing; as yet no sure deductions could be drawn from his experiments; everything concerning the application of these new forces was at the empirical stage. So profound a melancholy rang in his utterances that he left Lady Blount weeping bitterly, and convinced that he had passed death-sentence on their beloved being. Then a near-sighted, taciturn young man, a budding magician who had sat at Von Pfeiler's feet in Vienna, came down from London with apparatus worth a hundred times its weight in gold. And nothing happened or seemed about to happen. Stella called him the gnome.

All this John knew. Like the rest of Stella's satellites, accustomed for years to the unhesitating pronouncements of the great specialists and to their unhealing remedies, he had little faith in Von Pfeiler. The taciturn young surgeon who had been administering the treatment kept his own counsel and gave no encouragement to questioners. John had agreed with Sir Oliver that it was a waste of time and money—a fabulous amount of money; but the treatment amused Stella, and she liked the gnome, whom every one else detested, because he loved dogs, and cured Constable, now growing old and rheumatic, of a stiff leg. So every one suffered the gnome patiently.

And now the miracle had been worked. Stella had lifted her head from the pillow. The two men sat tremulous with hope.

"I've been so upset," said Sir Oliver, "and so has Julia. We had words. Why, I don't know. I love our darling quite as much as she does; but Julia is trying. Waiter! Get me a brandy and soda. What will you have? Nothing? I don't usually drink spirits in the morning, John; but I feel I need it. I'm getting old and can't stand shocks."

"What does Ransome say?"

"He's off his head. Every one's off his head. The very dog is rushing about like a lunatic. Nearly knocked me down in the garden."

"And Cassilis?"

Cassilis was the gnome.

"Ransome has telegraphed him to come down at once. But I thought I'd run up and tell you. We might go together to see him and fetch him back with us. You'll come, won't you?"

"Come? Why, of course I'll come. What do you think I'll do? Stay in London at such a time and send her a post-card to say I'm glad?"

"You said something about seeing your review through the press."

"Oh, confound the review! It can go to the devil," cried John.

London ablaze with revolution would have been a small matter compared with this world-shaking event, the lifting of a girl's head.

"It will be such a comfort to me," said the old man. "I don't know what to do. I can't rest. My mind's in a maze. It's like the raising of Jairus's daughter."

"Let us do some telephoning," said John.

They went out together. John rang up Cassilis. He had been out all the morning and would not be returning for another hour. John rang up Herold at a theater where he knew him to be rehearsing, and gave him the glad news. They returned to the smoking-room. Sir Oliver drank off his brandy and soda at one gulp.

"And Stella herself? What does she make of it?"

"The only one not upset in the house. That little girl's an angel, John." He blew his nose violently. "It appears she was stretching out her arm to pat the old dog's chaps, overreached herself a bit, and mechanically her head came away from the pillow. She called out to nurse, 'Nurse, I've lifted my head.' Nurse flew up to her. 'What do you mean, darling?' She showed her. She showed her, by Heaven! Nurse forbade her to do it any more, and flew down-stairs like a wildcat to tell us. Then we telephoned to Ransome. He saw her; she did it for him; then he came to us white and shaking all over. Naturally I wanted to see the darling child do it, too. Julia interfered. Stella mustn't do it again till Cassilis came. Then we had the words. She said I was eaten through with egotism—I! Now, am I, John?"

Presently Herold dashed in, aflame with

excitement. The story, such as it was, had to be told anew.

"I 'll come with you to Cassilis, and then on to Southcliff."

"But your rehearsal?" said John.

Herold confounded the rehearsal, even as John had confounded his review. In the presence of this thrilling wonder, trivialities had no place.

Cassilis received this agitated and unusual deputation without a flicker of surprise. He was a bald-headed, prematurely old young man, with big, round spectacles. He gave one the air of an inhuman custodian of awful secrets.

"I presume you have called with reference to this," said he, indicating a telegram which he held in his hand. "I 've just opened it."

"Yes," said Sir Oliver. "Is n't it wonderful? You must come down with us at once."

"It 's very inconvenient for me to leave London to-day."

"My dear sir, you must throw over every engagement."

The shadow of a smile passed over the young man's features.

"If you press the point, I 'll come."

"But are n't you astounded at what has occurred? Don't you understand Ransome's message?"

"Perfectly," said Cassilis. "I 've already written to Dr. von Pfeiler—a week ago—detailing the progress and full success of the case."

"Then you knew all about it?" asked John.

"Naturally. I 've been practising her at it for the last fortnight, though she did n't realize what I was doing."

"Then why on earth did n't you tell us?"

"I had arranged to tell you to-morrow," said Cassilis.

"I don't think you 've acted rightly, sir," cried Sir Oliver.

"Never mind that," said Herold. "Mr. Cassilis doubtless has his excellent reasons. The main thing is, Will her cure go beyond this? Will she get well and strong? Will she be able to walk about God's earth like anybody else?"

The little gnome-like man straightened with his toe a rucked corner of the hearth-rug. He paused deliberately before replying, apparently unmoved by the anx-

ious eyes bent on him. There was a span of agonized silence. Then he spoke:

"This time next year she will be leading a woman's normal life."

The words fell clear-cut on the quiet of the room. The three men uttered not a word. Cassilis, asking their leave to make some small preparations for his journey, left them. Then, relieved of his presence, they drew together and pressed one another's hands and stood speechless, like children suddenly brought to the brink of some new wonderland.

CHAPTER XII

THENCEFORWARD a humming confusion reigned in the Channel House. The story of the miraculous recovery spread through Southcliff. Sir Oliver and Lady Blount held a little court every day to receive congratulations. A few privileged well-wishers were admitted to the sea-chamber, where Stella still lay enthroned by the window. She had not realized the extent of her fame among the inhabitants until a garrulous visitor told her that she was one of the pet traditions of the place and that her great-windowed room at the top of the house on the cliff was always pointed out with pride to the tourist.

In her mysterious seclusion she had become a local celebrity. This interest of the little world grouped about the Channel House added a joy to her anticipation of mingling with it. The affection in which she was held by butcher and baker, to say nothing of the mayor and corporation, cemented her faith (in which she had been so jealously bred) in the delightful perfection of mankind.

Meanwhile she progressed daily toward recovery, very slowly, but with magical sureness. Cassilis continued his treatment. Queer apparatuses were fitted to her so that she could go through queer muscular exercises. She was being put into training, as it were, for life. Every new stage in her progress was marked by fêtes and rejoicings. The first time that her bed could be wheeled into a room on the other side of the house was a solemn occasion. It was July, and the rolling hills, rich in corn-fields and forest greenery, were flooded with sunlight. The earth proclaimed its fruitful plenty, and rioted in the joy of its loveliness.

That which to those with her was a commonplace of beauty stretched before Stellamaris's vision as a new and soul-arresting wonder. She had only elusive, childish memories of the actual earth; for before she had been laid upon her back never to rise again, she had been a delicate, invalid child. She had seen thousands of pictures, so that she was at no intellectual loss to account for the spectacle; but, for all her life that counted, sea and sky in their myriad changes had been her intimate conception of the world. And it had been her world—the only world that her eyes would ever rest upon; and as it had never entered her head to hope for another, it had sufficed her soul's needs. Indeed, it had overwhelmed them with its largess, until, as Herold declared, she herself had become a creature of cloud and wave. This sudden presentation of a new and unrealized glory set her heart beating madly; her cheeks grew white, and tears rolled down them.

"Now, is n't that a beautiful view?" said Lady Blount.

"Soon we 'll hire a motor, until you can buy one for yourself, and go and explore it all, my dear," said Sir Oliver.

"Southcliff lies just below there on the left," said the nurse.

"See that red roof there between the trees? That 's where our old friend Colonel Dukes lives. Devilish good house; though, if he had taken my advice when he was building it, it would have been much better."

"And just over there," said Lady Blount, pointing, "is the railway that takes you to London."

"You 're quite wrong, Julia," said Sir Oliver; "that 's a bit of the south coast line. Is n't it, John?"

"Oliver is right. You can't see the London line from here," said John.

They went on talking, but Stella, in a rapture of vision, heeded them not. Herold, who stood quite close to her, was silent. She held his hand, and gripped it almost convulsively. John, with rare observation, noticed that her knuckles were white. Her face was set in an agony of adoration too poignant for speech. John, curiously sensitive where Stella was concerned, realized that these two hand in hand were close together on a plane of feeling too high for the profane. With a

little movement of deprecation which neither Herold nor Stella perceived, he pushed the others toward the door and, following them out of the room, closed it behind them.

"Better leave her alone with Walter," said he.

"Quite so," said Sir Oliver. "Just what I told you, Julia. We must let her go slow for a bit and not excite her."

"I don't remember you ever saying anything of the kind," retorted Lady Blount. "It was Walter."

"Well, Oliver agreed with him, which comes to the same thing," said John, acting peacemaker.

But they wrangled all down the corridor, and when the two men were left alone, Sir Oliver shook his head.

"A trying woman, John; very trying."

Meanwhile Stella and Herold remained for a long time in the quiet room without the utterance of a word. As soon as the others went, her grasp relaxed. Herold drew a chair gently to her side and waited patiently for her to speak; for he saw that her soul was at grips with the new glory of the earth. At last a quivering sigh shook her, and she turned her wet eyes away from the window and looked at him with a smile.

"Well?" said he.

"I feel that it is all too beautiful."

"It makes you sad."

"Yes; vaguely, but exquisitely. How did you guess?"

"Your eyes have been streaming, Stellamaris."

"Foolish, is n't it?"

"I suppose it 's the finite realizing itself unconsciously before the infinite. Is it too much for you?"

She shook her head. "I should like to stay here and gaze at this forever till I drank it all, all in."

"Have you ever read the life of St. Brigit?" he asked. "There 's one little episode in it which comes to my mind."

"Tell me," said Stella.

"She founded convents, you know, in Ireland. Now, there was one nun dearly loved by St. Brigit, and she had been blind from birth; and one evening they were sitting on one of the Wicklow Hills, and St. Brigit described to her all the beauties of the green valleys below, and the silver streams and the purple moun-

tains beyond, melting into the happy sky. And the nun said, 'Sister, pray to God to work a miracle and give me sight so that I can see it and glorify Him.' So St. Brigit prayed, and God heard her prayer, and the eyes of the nun were opened, and she looked upon the world, and her senses were ravished by its glory. And then she fell to weeping and trembling and she sank on her knees before St. Brigit and said, 'I have seen, but I beseech thee pray that my sight be taken again from me, for I fear that in the beauty of the world I may forget God.' And St. Brigit prayed again, and God heard her, and the nun's sight was taken from her. And they both lifted their voices to heaven and glorified the Lord."

Stella sighed when he had ended, and quiet fell upon them. She looked dreamily out of the window. Herold watched her face with a pang at his heart. It was as pure as a little child's.

"It's a lovely legend," she said at last. "But the nun was wrong. The beauty of this world ought to bring one nearer to God instead of making one forget Him."

Herold smiled. "Certainly it ought to," said he.

"Why did you tell me the story?"

"Because it came into my head."

"There was some other reason."

He could not deny, for in her candid eyes he saw assurance; yet he dared not tell her that which dimmed the crystal of his gladness. He saw the creature of cloud and foam gasping in the tainted atmosphere of the world of men; the dew-drop on the star exposed to the blazing sun. What would happen?

"I am going to get well," she continued, seeing that he did not answer, "and walk out soon into the gardens and the streets and see all the wonderful, wonderful things you and Belovedest have told me of. And"—she pressed her hands to her bosom—"I can't contain myself for joy. And yet, Walter dear, you seem to think I should be better off if I remained as I am—or was. I can't understand it."

"My dear," said Herold, reluctantly, wishing he had never heard of St. Brigit, "so long as you see God through the beauties and vanities of the world, as you've seen Him through the sea-mists and the dawn and the sunset, all will be well. But that takes a brave spirit—braver than St.

Brigit's nun. She feared lest she might see the world, and nothing but the world, and nothing divine shining through. People who do that lose their souls."

"Then you think," said Stellamaris, wrinkling her smooth brow—"you think that the blind have the truer vision."

"Truer than that of the weak, perhaps, but not as true as the strong spirits who dare see fearlessly."

"Do you think I am weak or strong?" she asked, with a woman's relentless grip on the personal.

"What else but a strong spirit," he replied half disingenuously, "could have triumphed, as you have done, over a lifelong death?"

"Death?" She opened her eyes wide. "Death? But I've lived every hour of my life, and it has been utterly happy."

"The strong spirit, dear," said Herold.

"Great High Favorite dear, what else could you say?"

She laughed, but the tenderness in her eyes absolved the laugh and the feminine speech from coquetry.

"I might talk to you as John Knox did to Mary, Queen of Scots."

Just as life had been translated to the hapless Miss Kilmansegg of the Golden Leg into terms of gold, so had it been translated to Stella into terms of beauty. History had been translated, accordingly, into terms of romance. She had heard, indeed, of Mary Stuart, but as a being of legendary and unnaughty loveliness. At the stern image of the grave Calvinist she shrank.

"John Knox was a horrid, croaking raven," she emphatically declared, "and nobody could possibly talk like that nowadays."

Herold laughed and turned the conversation into lighter channels. The unwritten law prevailed over his instinctive impulse to warn her against the deceptive glamour of the world. Then the hour struck for an item in the invalid's routine, and the nurse came in, and Stella was wheeled back to her high chamber.

Many days of her convalescence after this were marked with red stones. There was the first day when, carried downstairs, she presided from her high couch at a dinner-party given in her honor, the guests being John Risca and Walter Herold, Wratislaw and the nurse, Dr.

Ransome and his wife, and the gnome-headed and spectacled Cassilis.

It was a merry party, and toward the end of dinner, when the port went round, Stella's own maid coached for the part, at a sign from Sir Oliver who commanded silence, spoke in a falsetto voice sticking in a nervous throat the familiar words: "Miss Stella's compliments, and would the gentlemen take a glass of wine with her." And they all rose and drank and made a great noise, and the tears rolled down John Risca's cheeks and fell upon his bulging shirt-front, and Sir Oliver blew his nose loudly and made a speech.

A great day, too, was her first progress in her wheel-chair about the grounds of the Channel House. All was wonder and wild delight to the girl who had never seen, or had seen so long ago that she had forgotten, the velvet of smooth turf; the glory of roses growing in their heyday insolence; the alluring shade of leafy chestnuts; the pansies clinging to dear Mother Earth; the fairy spray of water from a hose-pipe over thirsty beds; the crisp motion, explaining the mysterious echo of years, of the grass-mower driven over the lawn; the ivy tapestry of walls; the bewildering masses of sweet-peas; the apples, small and green though they were, actually hanging from boughs; the real live fowls, jaunty in prosperous plumage, so different from the apologetic naked shapes—fowls hitherto to her, which Morris, the maid, had carved for her meals at a side table in the sea-chamber, the cabbages brave in crinkled leaf, unaware of their doom of ultimate hot agglutination, the tender green bunches of grapes in glass houses drinking wine from the mother founts of the sun, the quiet cows on the gently sloping pasture-land.

At last she put her hands over her eyes, and Herold made a sign, and they wheeled the chair back to the house; and only when they halted in the wide, cool drawing-room, with windows opening to the south, did she look at outer things; and then, while all stood by in a hush, she drew a few convulsive breaths and rested her overwrought spirit on the calm, familiar sea.

A day of days, too, when, still in glorious summer weather, they hired an enor-

mous limousine from the great watering-place a few miles off, and took her all but prone, and incased in the appliances of science, through the gates of the Channel House into the big world. They drove over the Sussex Downs, along chalk roads, between crisp grass-lands dotted with sheep, through villages, gleams of paradises compact of thatched roof, rambler roses, blue and white garments hung out on lines to laugh in the sunshine, flashing new stucco cottages, labeled "County Police" (a puzzle to Stellamaris), ramshackle shops, with odd wares, chiefly sweets, exposed in tiny casement windows, old inns flaunting brave signs, "The Five Alls," "The Leather Bottell," away from the road, with a forecourt containing rude bench and table and trough for horses, young women, with the cheeks of the fresh, and old women, with the cheeks of the withered apple, and sun-tanned men, and children of undreamed-of chubbiness. And to Stellamaris all was a wonderland of joy.

During most of the month of August the rain fell heavily and outdoor excursions became rare events, and the world as seen from windows was a gray and dripping spectacle. But Stella, accustomed to the vast dreariness of wintry seas, found fresh beauties in the rain-swept earth. The patter of drops on leaves played new and thrilling melodies; a slant of sunshine across wet grass offered magical harmonies of color; the unfamiliar smell of the reeking soil was grateful to her nostrils. And had she not the captivating indoor life among pleasant rooms in which she had hitherto dwelt only in fancy? Hopes in the process of fulfillment gilded the glad days.

She talked unceasingly to those about her of the happy things to come.

"Soon we 'll be teaching you to walk," said John.

She glowed. "That 's going to be the most glorious adventure of my life."

"I 've never regarded putting one foot before another in that light," he said with a laugh. Then suddenly realizing what he had said, he felt a wave of pity and love surge through his heart. What child of man assured of a bird's power of flight would not be thrilled at the prospect of winging his way through space? It would be indeed a glorious adventure.

"My poor darling!" said he, very tenderly.

As usual, she disclaimed the pity. There was no one happier than herself in the wide universe.

"But I often have wondered what it would feel like."

"To walk?"

"Yes. To have the power of moving yourself from one place to another. It seems so funny. Of course I did walk once, but I've forgotten all about it. They tell me I shall have to learn from the beginning, just like a little baby."

"You'll have to learn lots of things from the beginning," said John, rather sadly.

"What kind of things?"

"All sorts."

"Tell me," she insisted, for ever so small a cloud passed over his face.

"Taking your place as a woman in the whirl of life," said he.

She turned on him the look of untroubled sapience that proceeds from the eyes of child saints in early Italian paintings.

"I don't think that will be very difficult, Belovedest. I'm not quite a little ignoramus, and Aunt Julia has taught me manners. I have always been able to talk to people when sick, and I don't see why I should be afraid of them when I'm well. I've thought quite a lot about it, and talked to Aunt Julia."

"And what does she say?"

"She assures me," she cried gaily, "that I am bound to make a sensation in society."

"You'll have all mankind at your feet, dear," said John. "But," he added in a change of tone, "I was referring to more vital things than success in drawing-rooms."

She laid her hand lightly on his.

"Do you know, Belovedest, what Walter said some time ago? He said that if I looked at the world and saw God through it, all would be well."

"I can add nothing more to that," said John, and, thinking that Herold had been warning her of dangers, held his peace for the occasion.

Then there came a day, not long afterward, when she made the speech which in some form or other he had been expecting and dreading.

"The next glorious adventure will be when you take me over the palace."

He laughed awkwardly. "I remember telling you that the palace has run to seed."

"But you still live in it."

"No, dear," said he.

"Oh!" said Stellamaris in a tone of deep disappointment. "Oh, why, why?"

John felt ridiculously unhappy. She believed, after all, in the incredible fairy-tale.

"Perhaps it was n't such a gorgeous palace as I made out," he confessed lamely. "As the cooks say, my hand was rather heavy with the gold and marble."

She laughed, to his intense relief. "I have felt since that there was a little poetic exaggeration somewhere. But it must be a beautiful place, all the same." His spirits sank again. "I could walk about it blindfold, although we have n't talked of it for so long. Who is living there now?"

"I've sold it, dear, to some king of the Cannibal Islands," he declared in desperate and ponderous jest.

"So there's no more palace?"

"No more," said he.

"I'm sorry," said Stellamaris—"so sorry." She smiled at him, but the tears came into her eyes. "I was looking forward so to seeing it. You see, dear, I've lived in it for such a long, long time!"

"There are hundreds of wonder-houses for you to see when you get strong," said John, by way of consolation, yet hating himself.

"Westminster Abbey and Windsor Castle, and so on. Yes," said Stella, "but they've none of them been part of me."

So he discovered that, at one-and-twenty, on the eve of her entrance into the world of reality, the being most utterly sacred to him still dwelt in her Land of Illusion. Two or three frank words would have been enough to bring down to nothingness the baseless fabric of his castle in the air, his palace of dreams; but he dreaded the shock of such seismic convulsion. He had lied for years, putting all that was godlike of his imperfect humanity into his lies, so as to bring a few hours' delight into the life of this fragile creature whom he worshiped, secure in the conviction that the lies would live for ever and

ever as vital truths, without chance of detection. And now that chance, almost the certainty, had come.

John Risca was a strong man, as men count strength. He faced the grim issues of life undaunted, and made his own terms. He growled when wounded, but he bared his teeth and snarled defiance at his foes. In a bygone age he would have stood like his Celtic ancestors, doggedly hacking amid a ring of slain until the curtain of death was drawn before his blood-shot eyes and he fell, idly smiting the air. In the modern conflict in which, fortu-

nately, human butchery does not come within the sphere of the ordinary man's activities, he could stand with the same moral constancy. But here, when it was a mere question of tearing a gossamer veil from before a girl's eyes, his courage failed him. Such brute dealing, he argued, might be salutary for common clay; but for Stellamaris it would be dangerous. Let knowledge of the fact that there had never been a palace come to her gradually. Already he had prepared the way. Thus he consoled himself, and, in so doing, felt a mean and miserable dog.

(To be continued)



REVENGE IN LEHIGH COUNTY

BY ELSIE DUNCAN YALE

WITH PICTURES BY C. F. PETERS

MRS. JACOBY was displeased. In every line of her figure was disapproval: repressed disapproval in the hard-screwed door-knob of dark brown hair which apparently served to "fasten off" her head; active disapproval in the forceful hand which wielded the dish-towel. Yet wrath did not hinder the careful precision with which Johanna wiped the blue-and-gold platter she held



in her hand (it had been Grandmother Geisler's). The level rays of the early-setting September sun slipped through the window-slats and touched its gilt to gold.

Johanna crossed the low, wide kitchen, set the platter carefully in the cupboard behind the blue-and-gold cups that matched it, then turned again to her work; but stopped abruptly as a girl's laugh rang out clearly from the porch,

mingled a second later with a gruff appreciative chuckle.

"Such a teacher!" said Mrs. Jacoby, severely, addressing her milk-pans. "What can such a one learn *die Junge*?"

Again the laugh and the low chuckle.

Johanna dropped her dish-towel, crossed the kitchen cautiously, and peered through the slats of the shutter.

There, clad in a white shirt-waist, seated on the porch (her porch, paid for with her own butter-and-egg money), sat the object of her disfavor, the new teacher, while comfortably seated in the rocker, his elbows resting on his knees, pipe forgotten in his hand, his round blue eyes fixed on the teacher's face, sat Peter—her Peter—drinking in Miss Mabel's gay discourse with the appetite of a child for unaccustomed ice-cream. For a moment Johanna stood sternly eying the offending and unconscious pair, then returned to her work.

It was no novelty that a teacher should board at the brick farm-house. Hitherto Johanna had rather enjoyed the companionship of the teachers, plain, thrifty girls from the Kutztown Normal School. There was Anna Heinemann, who invariably washed the supper dishes, and Linda