



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

"THEN SHE SLOWLY CAME OUT INTO SUNSHINE AND FREEDOM" (SEE PAGE 42)

STELLA MARIS

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"The Glory of Clementina," etc.

CHAPTER IX

MISS LINDON moved her goods and chattels, together with Dandy, Dickie, and Phœbe, into the little house at Kilburn. John and Unity followed with the furniture he had procured on the hire-purchase system for their respective rooms, and the curtain was rung up on the comic opera.

Herold had vainly tried to guide his friend in the matter of furnishing; but their ideas being in hopeless conflict, he had given up in despair. John, by way of proving how far superior his methods were to Herold's, rushed into a vast emporium, selected the insides of two bedrooms and a library complete (as per advertisement), and the thing was done in a couple of minutes. He girded triumphantly at Herold, who would have taken two years. Miss Lindon approved his choice, everything was so clean and shiny. She especially admired the library carpet (advertised as Axminster), a square of amazing hues, mustard and green and magenta predominant, the ruins of an earthquake struck by lightning. It gave, she said, such brightness and color to the room. To the bedrooms she herself added the finishing touch and proudly led John up-stairs to inspect them. He found his bed, wash-stand, toilet-table and chairs swathed in muslin and pink ribbon. His heart sank. This was a mania. If she had owned a dromedary, she would have fitted it out with muslin and ribbon. He glanced apprehensively at the water-jug; that alone stood in its modest nudity. Miss Lindon beamed. Was n't the room more home-like? He had not the heart to do otherwise than assent.

"There 's one thing, my dear Miss Lindon, that John 's very particular about," said Herold, gravely, when he, in his turn, was shown over the premises, with pomp and circumstance; "you must n't put ribbons in his pajamas."

Unity, whose early-discovered gift of the needle was requisitioned for this household millinery, thought it all mighty fine. It had been impressed upon her that she was no longer a guest, as at Southcliff, but an inmate of the house, with a definite position. She had passed from the legal guardianship of the Sisters of Saint Martha to that of Mr. Risca. The house was her home, which she shared on equal terms with him and Miss Lindon. She was no longer to call them "Sir" and "Ma'am." Miss Lindon took the child to her warm heart and became "Aunt Gladys." She suggested the analogous title for her nephew; but he put his foot down firmly and declined to be called "Uncle John." He said it was farcical, subversive of the tragic dignity of the situation. She yielded complacently without in the least understanding what he meant.

"But you must have some name, dear," she pleaded. "Suppose she found that the house was on fire: it might be burned to the ground before she could settle how to call you."

"Oh, let her call me Demosthenes," he cried in desperation, taking up his pen,—he had been interrupted in the middle of an article,—“and also tell her, my dear aunt, that, fire or no fire, if she comes into this room while I 'm writing, I 'll make her drink the ink-pot.”

It was eventually decided that to Unity he should be "guardian." The sacrosanctity of his library was also theoretically es-

tablished. Unity, accustomed to discipline, paid scrupulous observance to the taboo; but Miss Lindon could never understand it. She would tap very gently at John's door, sometimes three or four times before he heard. At his "Come in," she would enter, manipulating the door-knob so as to make no noise, and would creep on tiptoe across the resplendent carpet.

"Now, I 'm not going to disturb you, dear. Please go on writing. I only want to say that I 'm ordering some tooth-stuff for Unity, and I don't know whether to buy paste or powder."

"Give her what you use yourself, my dear aunt."

Then would follow a history of her dentist. Such a gentlemanly man; in great trouble, too; he had just lost his fourth wife. John glared at his copy. "Careless fellow!" he growled. Many of his witticisms were at second hand.

"Indeed he 's not. He 's most careful, I assure you. I would recommend him to anybody."

And so forth and so forth, until John would rise and, taking her by her plump shoulders and luring her across the threshold, lock the door against her.

"She will drive me into a mad-house," he complained to Herold. "I want to murder her and hug her at the same instant."

In its primitive essentials, however, the comic-opera life was not impossible to the man of few material demands: he slept in a comfortable bed, his bath was filled in the mornings, wholesome food, not too fantastic, was set before him. The austere and practical Phœbe saw to these important matters. It was in the embroidery of life that the irresponsible grotesque entered. It took many weeks to persuade Miss Lindon that it was not her duty, if he was out of an evening, to wait up until his return. It was for her to look after his well-being. Before going to bed he might want hot cocoa, or bread and milk, or a cheery chat. How could he, in loneliness, procure these comforts at three o'clock in the morning? It was no trouble at all to her to sit up, she pleaded. When Dandy was ill, she had sat up whole nights together. John prayed to Heaven to deliver him from illness. Another feature of the masculine existence that passed her understanding was the systematic untidi-

ness of the library. Books, papers, pipes, pens, paper-clips, and what not seemed to have been poured out of a sack, and then kicked in detail to any chance part of the room. When she restored order out of chaos, and sat with a complacent smile amid her prim gimcrackeries, John would be dancing about in a foaming frenzy. Where were his long envelopes? Where had that magpie of a woman secreted them? Her ingenuity in finding hiding-places amounted to genius. Then in impatient wrath he would take out drawers and empty their contents on the floor until the missing objects came to light. Miss Lindon sighed when she tidied up after him, not at the work to do all over again, but at the baffling mystery of man.

For a long time Unity regarded the feckless lady with some suspicion, sniffed at her, so to speak, like a dog confronted with a strange order of being. For the first time in her young life she had met an elder in only nominal authority over her. Of Phœbe, stern and Calvinistic, with soul-searching eye, who by some social topsyturvydom was put into subjection under her, she lived in mortal terror; but for "Aunt Gladys" she had a wondering contempt.

"Unity," said Miss Lindon one morning, in the early days, "when you 've finished writing your copy for your guardian, you had better learn a chapter. Bring me your Bible, and I 'll find one. In my young time ladies all learned chapters,"—so do orphans still in convents, until orphans hate chapters with bitter hatred; but this the good lady did not know,—"and then you might, like a dear girl, run off the hems of the new sheets on the sewing-machine."

"I dunno 'ow to work a sewing-machine."

"Then tell Phœbe to give you a lesson at once. It 's a most useful accomplishment. You have such a tremendous lot to learn, my dear. There 's the piano and French, and embroidery and drawing, and nowadays I suppose young ladies must learn politics. Perhaps you had better begin. There 's a leading article on free trade—or the Young Turks, I forget which—in the 'Daily Telegraph.' I 'm sure it must be very clever. You had better take away the paper and read it carefully,"—she handed the paper to the be-

wildered child,—“and when you ’ve read it, come and tell me all about it. It will save me the trouble of going through it, and so both of us will be benefited. And, Unity dear,” she added as the girl was leaving the drawing-room, “it ’s such a beautiful day, so in an hour’s time be ready to come out with me. We ’ll take the omnibus to the Marble Arch and walk in the park.”

Unity went into the dining-room, where in working-hours she was supposed to have her being, and stared at her avalanche of duties: her copy and the one or two easy lessons set by John; the chapter of the Bible; the instruction on the sewing-machine, involving the tackling of a busy and irritable Phœbe; the long column of print in the newspaper; and the preparation of herself for walking abroad—all to be accomplished within the space of one hour. For the first time in her life she encountered orders which had not the doomful backing of the world authorities.

The copy and the lessons for her guardian were, however, matters of high import. They filled her hour. At the end of it she put on her hat. A ride in an omnibus was still novelty enough to be a high adventure. On the way to the Marble Arch, Miss Lindon in her amiable way asked how she had spent her morning, and hoped that she had not been getting into mischief. Of Bible chapter, sewing-machine, or leader on free trade (or Young Turks) she appeared to have remembered nothing. The result of this flabbiness of command was lamentable. The next time Miss Lindon dismissed her to the execution of certain behests, Unity, after closing the door behind her, stuck out her tongue. It was ungenteel, it was ungrateful, it was un-anything-you-like, but the act gave her a thrill of joy, a new sensation. It was the first definite assertion of her individuality. The red tongue thus vulgarly flaunted was a banner of revolt against the world authorities.

It was a long time before she could accustom herself to taking her meals at the table with Miss Lindon and her guardian. Such table manners as had been inculcated at the orphanage had been lost in Smith Street, and the chief point of orphanage etiquette was not to throw food about, a useless injunction, for obvious reasons. Accordingly, despite her proba-

tionary period at the Channel House, Unity regarded the shining knives and forks and china and glass with malevolent dislike. The restrictions on so simple a matter as filling herself with nourishment were maddening in their complexity. Why could n’t she bite into her hunk of bread instead of breaking off a mouthful? Why could n’t she take up her fish in her fingers? Why could n’t she spit out bones without the futile intermediary of the fork? Why could n’t she wipe the gravy from her plate with soft crumb? Why could n’t she use her knife for the consumption of apple tart? And how difficult the art of mastication with closed lips! She did not revolt. She humbly tried to follow the never-ending instructions; but their multiplicity confused her, making her shy and painfully nervous. Drink had a devilish habit of going the wrong way. It never went the wrong way with her two companions. Unity wondered why.

Then at the table sat her guardian, gloomy, preoccupied, Olympian in the eyes of the child; and Aunt Gladys, weaving corrections, polite instructions, reminiscences, and irrelevant information into an inextricable tangle of verbiage; while Phœbe hovered about, fixing her always, no matter what she was doing, with a relentless, glassy eye which no solecism escaped.

There were also a myriad other external matters which caused her great perplexity—the correct use of a handkerchief (one’s sleeve was so much handier when one’s nose watered), a tooth-brush, nail-scissors. The last she could not understand. Why, then, did God give people teeth to bite with? The question of speech presented extraordinary difficulties. It was months before her ear could even distinguish between *o* and *aow*, between *a* and *i*, between *ou* and *ah*; and the mysteries of the aspirate became a terror. She grew afraid to speak. Thus her progress in the graces of polite society was but slow.

John, not fired by enthusiasm, but intent on working out his scheme of indemnification, gave up an hour or so a day to her mental culture. He was not an unskilful teacher, but her undeveloped mind had to begin at the beginning of things. She learned painfully. The great world

had revealed itself to her with blinding suddenness. For months she was simply stupid.

"How are things shaping?" asked Herold one day. He had been lunching at Kilburn, and Unity, feeling that she was expected to be on her very best behavior before him, had been more than usually awkward and ungenteel. This time a fish-bone had stuck in her throat.

John frowned. "You saw. Shapelessly. It's hopeless."

"You're absolutely wrong," said Herold. "There are vast possibilities in Unity."

"Not one," said John.

"Are you trying the right way? Do you remember what the old don said when he came across two undergraduates vainly persuading the college tortoise to eat lettuce: 'Gentlemen, are you quite sure you are trying at the right end?'"

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you try by the way of the heart?"

John flared up. "You're talking rot. The child has n't had a harsh word since she has been here. I'm not honey-tongued as a rule, but to her I've been a female saint with a lily in my hand. And my aunt, with all her maddening ways, would not hurt the feelings of a black beetle."

"Quite so," said Herold. "But all that's negative. Why can't you try something positive? Give Unity love, and you'll be astonished at the result."

"Love," said John, impatiently. "You're a sentimentalist."

This time Herold flared up. "If I am," he cried, "I thank the good God who made me. This affectation of despising sentiment, this cant that a lot of you writing fellows talk, makes me sick. If a bowelless devil makes a photograph of a leprous crew in a thieves' kitchen, you say: 'Ha! Ha! Here's the real thing. There's no foolish sentiment here. This is LIFE!' Ugh! Of all the rotten poses of the superior young ass, this is the rottenest. Everything noble, beautiful, and splendid that has ever been written, sung, painted, or done since the world began, has been born in sentiment, has been carried through by sentiment, has been remembered and revered by sentiment. I hate to hear an honest man like you sneering at sentiment. You yourself took on this job

through sentiment. And now when I tell you in a few simple words, 'Love that child whose destiny you've made yourself responsible for,' you pooh-pooh the staring common sense of the proposition and call me a sentimentalist—by which you mean an infernal fool."

John, who had bent heavy brows upon him during this harangue, took his pipe from his mouth.

"It's you who are feeding the lettuce at the wrong end," he said unhumorously. "This is not a matter of sentiment, but of duty. I do my best to be good to the child. I'll do the utmost I can to make reparation for what she has suffered. But as for loving her—I suppose you know what love means? As for loving this poor little slut, with her arrested development and with the torture the sight of her means to me, why, my good man, you're talking monkey gibberish!"

Herold lit a cigarette with nervous fingers. The animation in his thin, sensitive face had not yet died away.

"I'm not talking gibberish," he replied; "I'm talking sense."

"Pooh!"—or something like it—said John.

"Well, super-sense, then," cried Herold, who did not quite know what he meant, but felt certain that for the instant the term would floor his adversary. "And you're as blind as an owl. Deep down in that poor little slut is a spark of the divine fire—love in its purest, the transcendental flame. I know it's there. I know it as a water-finder knows there's water when the twig bends in his hands. Get at it. Find it. Fan it into a blaze. You'll never regret it all your life long."

John's frown deepened. "If you're suggesting the usual asinine romance, Walter, between ward and guardian—"

Herold caught up his hat.

"Of all the dunderheaded asses! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I can't talk to you."

And in a very rare fury he sped from the house, slamming doors after him, leaving John foolishly frowning in the middle of the violent Axminster carpet.

UNITY, for all her fingers' nimbleness with needle and thread, was clumsy with her hands. Glasses, bowls, vases, whatever she touched, seemed to be possessed

by an imp of spontaneous disruption. Hitherto her code of morals with regard to breakage had been, first, to hide the pieces; secondly, to deny guilt if questioned; thirdly, if found out, to accept punishment with sullen apathy: for chastisement had followed discovered breakage as inevitably as the night the day. Accordingly when she broke a bowl of gold-fish in the drawing-room, she obeyed ingrained tradition. She threw the fish out of the window, mopped up the water, put a hassock on the wet patch on the carpet, and threw the shards of the bowl into the dust-bin. Miss Lindon, entering soon afterward, missed her gold-fish, bought only a few days before from an itinerant vender. Unity disclaimed knowledge of their whereabouts. Phoebe, being summoned, took the parts of principal witness, counsel for the prosecution, judge, and jury all in one. Unity stood convicted. The maid was sent back to her work. "Now," thought Unity, "I'm going to catch it," and she stood with her eyes on the floor, stubbornly awaiting the decree of doom. An unaccustomed sound met her ear, and looking up, she beheld the gentle lady weeping bitterly.

"I should n't have minded your breaking the bowl, though I should like to know what has become of the poor little fishes,—they must be real fish out of water, poor dears! and one of them I called Jacky was just beginning to know me,—but why did you tell me a story about it?"

Unity, not having the wit to retort truthfully that it seemed the natural thing to do, maintained a stolid silence.

Miss Lindon, profoundly upset by this depravity, read her a moral lecture on the sin of lying, in which she quoted the Book of Revelation, related the story of George Washington and an irrelevant episode in her far-away childhood, and finally asserting that John would be furiously angry if he heard of her naughtiness, bade her go and find the gold-fish, which must be panting their little hearts out. And that was the last Unity heard of the matter. She thought Aunt Gladys a fool. Thenceforward she felt cynically indifferent toward accidental breakages of Aunt Gladys's property.

But one day during John's absence she upset a Dresden china shepherd,—such a

brave, saucy shepherd,—that stood on his writing-desk, and, to her dismay, the head rolled apart from the body. It was one of his few dainty possessions. She knew that he set an incomprehensible value on the thing. Even Aunt Gladys touched it with extraordinary reverence. She turned white with fear. Her guardian was a far different being from Aunt Gladys. His wrath would be terrible. Herold was not far wrong in likening John Risca, as conceived by the child, to a Hebraic Jehovah. His dread majesty overwhelmed her, and she had not the courage to face his anger. With trembling fingers she stood the poor decapitated shepherd on his feet and delicately poised the head on the broken neck. She gazed at him for a moment, his sauciness and bravery apparently unaffected by the accident, and then she fled, and endured hours of misery.

The inevitable came to pass. John discovered the breakage, instituted an elementary court of inquiry, and summoned the delinquent into his presence.

"Did you break this, Unity?"

"No," said Unity.

The lie irritated him. He raised his fist in a denunciatory gesture. With a cry of terror, like a snared rabbit's, she clapped her hands to her face and shrank, cowering, to the farther corner of the room.

"My God!" cried John, aghast at the realization of what had happened. "Did you think I was going to hit you?"

He stood staring at the little, undeveloped, raw-boned, quivering creature. Her assumption of his right to strike her, of his capability of striking her, of the certainty that he would strike her, held him in amazed horror. The phantasmagorical to him was the normal to her. He had to wait a few moments before recovering command of his faculties. Then he went up to her.

"Unity, my dear—"

He put his arm about her, led her to his writing-chair, and kept his arm round her when he sat down.

"There, there, my child," said he, clutching at her side nervously in his great grasp, "you misunderstood entirely." In his own horrified dismay he had forgotten for the moment her wickedness. He could find no words save incoherences of reassurance. She made no response, but kept

her hands before her face, her finger-tips pressed with little livid edges of flesh into her forehead. And thus for a long while they remained.

"I was n't going to punish you for breaking the figure," he explained at last. "You did n't do it on purpose, did you?"

She shook her head.

"What made me angry was your telling me a lie; but I never dreamed of hurting you. I would sooner kill myself than hurt you," he said, with a shudder. Then, with an intuition that came from the high gods, he added, "I would just as soon think of hurting Miss Stella, who gave me the little shepherd you broke."

To John's amazement,—for what does a man know of female orphans, or of female anythings, for the matter of that?—Unity tore herself away from him and, falling in a poor little lump on the floor, burst into a wild passion of tears and sobs. John, not knowing what else to do, stooped down and patted her shoulders in an aimless way. Then with a vague consciousness that she were best alone, he went softly out of the room.

It was thus that, in the unwonted guise of ministering spirits, shame and remorse came to Unity Blake.

SHE had broken a sacred idol. He had not been angry. She had told a lie, and instead of punishing her,—of his horror-stricken motives she had no idea,—he had held her tight in kind arms and spoken softly. He had not actually wept, but he had been sorry at her lie, even as Aunt Gladys had been. Now he, being what to her mind was a kind of fusion of Jah and Zeus and Odin,—three single deities rolled into one,—was not a fool. Dimly through the mists of her soul dawned the logical conclusion: perhaps Aunt Gladys, in her sorrowful and non-avenging attitude toward her mendacities and other turpitudes, was not a fool either.

The bewildering truth also presented itself that lies, being unnecessary as a means of self-protection, were contemptible. In the same way she realized that if folks had no intention of punishing her for destroying their valuable property, even sacred gifts of fairy-princesses, but, instead, smiled on her their sweet forgiveness, they must have in them something of the divine which had hitherto been ob-

scured from her vision. She had proved to herself that they could not be fools; rather, then, they were angels. They certainly could not enjoy the destruction of their belongings; therefore her clumsiness must cause them pain. Now, why should she inflict pain on people who were doing their utmost to make her happy? Why?

She began to ask herself questions; and when once an awakening human soul begins to do that, it goes on indefinitely. Some of the simpler ones she propounded to Miss Lindon, who returned answers simple in essence, though perhaps complex in expression; some her growing experience of life enabled her to answer for herself; some of the more difficult she reserved for her rare talks with Herold. But although the awfulness of John's majesty was mitigated by the investiture of an archangel's iridescent and merciful wings, she could never go to him with her problems. Never again since that memorable occasion did he put his arm around her; he held her gently aloof as before. But he had put his arm around her once, and the child's humility dared not hope for more.

Thus in a series of shocks, bewildering flashes of truth, followed by dark spaces of ignorance, was Unity's development initiated, and, indeed, continued. Her nature, deadened by the chill years, was not responsive to the little daily influences by which character is generally molded. Only the great things, trivial in themselves, but great in her little life—for to an ant-hill the probing of a child's stick means earthquake, convulsion, and judgment-day cataclysm—only the great things, definite and arresting, produced perceptible change. But they left their mark. She was too dull to learn much in the ordinary routine of lessons; but once a fact or an idea could be made to appeal to her emotions or her imagination, it was there for all time. Not all the pains and teaching of her two protectors, for instance, could alter one inflection of her harsh cockney twang.

But one day after luncheon, Herold being present, Miss Lindon ordered her to recite "The Wreck of the Hesperus," which artless poem she had learned unintelligently by heart, at Miss Lindon's suggestion, in order to give pleasure to her guardian. To give him pleasure she would have learned pages of the army list or worn tin tacks in her boots. After a

month's vast labor she had accomplished the prodigious task.

Very shy, she repeated the poem in the child's singsong, and ended up on the "reef of Norman's *Waow*."

John, not having been made a party to the "surprise" eagerly contrived by Miss Lindon, nodded, said it was very good, and commended Unity for a good girl. Herold kicked him surreptitiously, and applauded with much vigor.

"By Jove!" said he, impelled by queer instinct, "I used to know that. I wonder if I could recite it, too."

He rose and began; and as he continued, his wonderful art held the child spell-bound. The meaningless words resolved themselves into symbols of vast significance. She saw the little daughter, her cheeks like the dawn of day, a vision of Stellamaris, and felt the moonless dark of the stormy night and the hissing snow and the stinging blast, and she shivered at the awful sight of the skipper frozen at the wheel, and a hush fell upon her soul as the maiden prayed, and the tears fell fast from her eyes as the picture of the fisherman finding the maiden fair lashed to the drifting mast was flashed before her by the actor's magic.

"Now, Unity dear, don't you wish you could say it like that?" Aunt Gladys remarked.

Unity, scarcely hearing, made perfunctory answer; but as soon as she could, she fled to her bedroom, her ears reverberating with the echoes of the beautiful voice, and her soul shaken with the poignant drama, and crudely copying Herold's gestures and intonations, recited the poem over and over again.

The result of this was not a sudden passion for romance or histrionics, but it was remarkable enough. It awoke her sense of vowel sounds and aspirates. Henceforward she discriminated between "lady" and "lidy," between "no" and "naow," and although she never acquired a pure accent, her organs of speech refusing to obey her will, she was acutely aware of the wrong sounds that escaped from her lips.

As with this, so with other stages of development, both in things external and things spiritual. Scales had to be torn from her eyes before she saw; then she saw with piercing vision. Plugs had to be

wrenched from her ears before she heard; then she heard the horns of Elfland. Her heart had to be plucked from her bosom before she felt; then her whole being quivered with an undying emotion.

So the weeks and the months passed and grew into years, and Miss Lindon said that she was a well-behaved and Christian child, and that it was a pity she was so plain; and Risca, forgetful, after a while, of her agony of tears and of Herold's angry diagnosis, retained his opinion that she was just dull and stupid, though well-meaning, and, having his head full of other things, took her at last for granted, together with his Aunt Gladys, as a normal feature in his sometimes irritating, though on the whole exceedingly comfortable, comic-opera household.

CHAPTER X

ONE evening by the last post John received a letter bearing the prison stamp and addressed to him under the care of the firm of solicitors who had defended his wife. It ran:

I am coming out on Wednesday, the thirteenth. I suppose I shall have somewhere to go to and not be expected to walk the streets.

Louisa Anne Risca.

That was all—neither *ave* nor *vale*. It was the only letter she had written. She knew well enough that the house in Smith Street was being maintained and that her allowance would be resumed as soon as she regained her freedom, having been so informed by the solicitors, on John's instructions; but a reference to this explicit statement would have discounted the snarl. Prison had not chastened her.

John sat back in his writing-chair, the ignoble letter in front of him. He made a rapid calculation of dates. It was two years and three months since the trial. She had worked out three fourths of her sentence, the remaining fourth evidently having been remitted on account of good conduct, in the ordinary course. Two years and three months! He had scarcely realized the swift flight of time. Of late his life had been easier. Distracted London had forgotten the past. He had sought and found, at his clubs, the society of his fel-

low-men. His printed name no longer struck horror into a reader's soul. At times he himself almost forgot. The woman had faded into a shadow in some land beyond the tomb. But now, a new and grim Alcestis, she had come back to upper earth. There was nothing trans-Stygian about the two or three cutting lines. She was alive, luridly alive, and on Wednesday, the thirteenth, she would be free, a force let loose, for good or evil, in the pleasant places of the world. At the prospect of the prison doors closing behind her, however, he felt great relief. At any rate, that horror would soon be over and done with. The future must take care of itself.

Presently he wrote:

Dear Louisa:

I am unfeignedly thankful to hear your news. I shall be waiting for you at the gate on the morning of the thirteenth and shall take you to Smith Street, which you will find quite ready to receive you.

Yours,

John Risca.

Then he went out and posted the letter.

"I'm glad you're going to meet her yourself instead of sending a solicitor's clerk," said Herold, when they discussed the matter next day.

"I'm not one to shirk disagreeable things," replied John.

"It may touch some human chord in her."

"I never thought of that," said John.

"Well, think of it. Think of it as much as you can."

"You may as well use question with the wolf," growled John.

"I don't believe it," said Herold. "Anyhow, try kindness."

"Of course I'm going to do so," said John, with the impatience he usually manifested when accepting a new point of view from Herold. "You don't suppose I'm going to stand outside with a club!"

On the appointed day he waited, with a four-wheeled cab, by the prison gate. The early morning sunshine of midsummer flooded the world with pale glory, its magic even softening the grim, forbidding walls. A light southwest wind brought the pure scents of the dawn from many a sleeping garden and woodland far away.

The quiet earth sang its innocence, for wickedness was not yet abroad to scream down the song. Even John Risca, anti-sentimentalist, was stirred. What sweeter welcome, what gladder message of hope, could greet one issuing into the upper air from the gloomy depths of Hades? How could such a one help catching at her breath for joy?

The gate swung open, casting a shadow in the small yard beyond, and in the middle of the shadow a black, unjoyous figure stood for a moment irresolute. Then she slowly came out into sunshine and freedom. She was ashen-colored, thin-lipped, and not a gleam of pleasure lit her eyes as they rested with hard remorselessness on the man who advanced with outstretched hand to meet her. Of the hand she took no notice.

"Is this my cab?"

"Yes," said John.

She entered. He followed, giving the address to the driver. She sat looking neither to left nor right, staring stubbornly in front of her. The sunshine and the scent of summer gardens far away failed to bring their message. Though it was high summer, she wore the heavy coat which she had worn in the wintry weather at the time of her trial.

"I am very glad indeed to see you, Louisa," said John.

"Unfeignedly thankful!" She chewed the literary phrase and spat it out venomously. "You — liar!"

John winced at the abominable word; but he spoke softly.

"You can't suppose it has been happiness for me to think of you in there."

"What does it matter to me? What are you to me, anyhow?"

"I'm your husband in the eyes of the law," said John, "and I once loved you."

"Oh, stow that!"

"I will. But I want you to believe that I am utterly thankful that this—this unhappy chapter is closed—"

She interrupted him with a swift and vicious glance.

"Unhappy chapter! Get off it! You make me sick. Talk English, if you must talk."

"Very well," said he. "I'm glad my legal wife is not in gaol. I want her to believe that I'll do my best to forget it; also, that, as far as my means allow, she

will have comfort and opportunity to try to forget it, too."

Not a muscle of her drawn face relaxed.

"I'm not going to have you or any one else fooling round where I live," she said. "I'm not going to be preached to or converted. I've had enough of it where I've come from. As for you, I hate you. I've always hated you, and if you have any decency, you'll never let me see your face again."

"I won't," said John, shortly, and with this the edifying conversation came to an end.

The cab lumbered through the sunny thoroughfares of the great city, now busy with folks afoot, in trams and omnibuses, going forth to their labor; and John, looking out of the window, fancied they were all touched by the glamour of the summer morning. Every human soul save the woman beside him seemed glad to be alive. She sat rigid, apart from him—as physically apart as the seat would allow, and apart from the whole smiling world. She had her being in terrible isolation, hate incarnate. When by any chance their eyes happened to meet, he turned his aside swiftly and shivered with unconquerable repulsion.

When the cab drew up at the house in Smith Street, the door was opened, and a pleasant-faced woman and a man stood smiling in the passage. Mrs. Risca brushed past them into the dining-room, bright with daintily laid breakfast table and many flowers. The latter, John, at Herold's suggestion, had sent in the evening before.

"You see," said John, entering, "we've tried to prepare for you."

She deigned no glance, but slammed the door.

"Who are those people?"

"A married couple whom I have engaged to live here. The woman, Mrs. Bence, will do for you. The man goes out to his work during the day."

"Warder and wardress, eh? They can jolly well clear out. I'm not going to have 'em."

Then John's patience broke. He brought his fist down on the table with a crash.

"By heavens," he cried, "you shall have whomever I put here. You've behaved yourself for two years, and you're going

on behaving yourself." He flung open the door. "Mrs. Bence, help Mrs. Risca off with her coat and bring in her breakfast."

Cowed, she submitted with malevolent meekness. Prison discipline does not foster the heroic qualities. Mrs. Bence took hat and coat and disappeared.

"Sit down at the table."

She obeyed. He laid some money beside her.

"This is your allowance. On the thirteenth of every month you will receive the same amount from my bankers. If you prefer, after a time, to live in the country, we may be able to arrange it. In the meanwhile you must stay here."

She neither touched the coins nor thanked him. There was a silence hard and deadly. John stood in the sunshine of the window, bending on her his heavy brows. Now and then she glanced at him furtively from beneath lowered eyelids, like a beast subdued, but not tamed. A dominant will was all that could control her now. He thanked an unusually helpful Providence that had sent him the Bences in the very nick of his emergency. Before marriage, Mrs. Bence had been under-attendant at a county lunatic asylum, and John had heard of her through Wybrow, the medical superintendent, a club friend, who had helped him before when the defense had set up the plea of insanity, and whom, with an idea of trained service in his head, he had again consulted. No more torturing of Unities, if he could help it. Wybrow spoke highly of Mrs. Bence and deplored the ruin of a great career as a controller of she-devils; but as a cat will after kind, so must she after an honest but impecunious plumber. John had sought her and come to terms at once. For once in their courses, he thought grimly, the stars were not fighting against him. He had not told Herold of this arrangement. Herold had counseled kindness. The flowers, for instance, would be sure to make their innocent appeal. Tears could not fail to fill her eyes. Tears of sentiment in those eyes! Little Herold knew of the world of realities with which he was at death-grips.

Presently Mrs. Bence came in with coffee, hot rolls, a dish of bacon and eggs. The fragrant smell awakened the animal instinct of the woman at the table. She

raised her head and followed the descent of dish and plate. Then a queer noise broke from her throat, and she fell upon the food. John left her.

Mrs. Bence followed him into the passage and opened the front door.

"I've warned you that you're likely to have a trying time."

"I've been used to it, sir."

"She must never guess that," said he.

He walked homeward through the parks, breathing in great gulps of the sweet morning air. He felt that he had been in contact with something unclean. Not only his soul, but his very body, craved purification. In the woman he had left he had found no remorse, no repentance, no sensibility to any human touch. Prison had broken her courage; but in its sunless atmosphere of the underground, all the fungoid growths of her nature had flourished in mildewed exuberance. He shuddered at the thought of her, a poisonous thing, loathsome in its abnormality. As some women dwell in an aura of sweet graciousness, so dwelt she in mephitic fumes of devilism. Implacable hatred, deadly venom, relentless vengeance, were the constituents of her soul. Relentless vengeance—He sat for a moment on a bench in Hyde Park, feeling chilled to the bone, although the perspiration beaded on his forehead. She would not strike him, of that he was oddly assured. Her way would be to strike at him through those near and dear to him. In the full sunshine of gay midsummer, with the trees waving their green and lusty bravery over his head, and the flower-beds rioting in the joy of the morning, he was shaken by an unreasoning nightmare terror. He saw the woman creeping with snaky movements into the sea-chamber at Southcliff, and a pair of starry eyes become wells of awful horror as the murderous thing approached the bed. And he was held rigid by dream paralysis. After a second or two—it had seemed many minutes of agony—he sprang to his feet with what he thought was a great cry, and looked dazedly about him. A nurse-maid, undistracted from her novellette, and wheeling a perambulator in which reposed an indifferent infant, passed him by. He shook himself like a great, rough dog, and went his way, ashamed of his fears. It was a practical world, he

told himself, and he was a match for any mad-woman.

Unity was watering flowers in the tiny patch of front garden when he swung through the iron gate. She had grown little during the last two years, and still was scraggy and undeveloped; but a healthier color had come into her cheeks and a more confident expression into her common, snub-nosed face. Her movements were less awkward, and as she was eighteen, she wore the long skirts appropriate to her age and her hair done up with a comb.

She set down her watering-pot and stood at a kind of absurd attention, her usual attitude in the presence of John.

"Please, guardian," she said,—she could never rid herself of the school-child's exordium,—“have you had your breakfast?”

"No," said John, realizing for the first time that emptiness of stomach may have had something to do with his momentary faintness in the park.

"Aunt Gladys has been in such a state," said Unity. "She has made Phœbe cook three breakfasts already, and each has been spoiled by being kept in the oven, and I think now she is cooking the fourth."

In this announcement rang none of the mischievous mirth of eighteen over an elder's harmless foibles. Humor, which had undoubtedly presided at her birth, for like many another glory-trailing babe, she had crowed with glee at the haphazard coupling of which she was the result, had fled for good from her environment ever since the day when, at a very tender age, she had seen her mother knocked insensible by a drunken husband and had screamed single-mindedly for unobtainable nourishment. She had no sense of glorious futility, of the incongruous relativity of facts. Each fact was absolute. Three breakfasts had been cooked and spoiled. The fourth was in the cooking. She narrated simply what had taken place.

"Run and tell Phœbe I'm hungry enough to eat all four," said John.

They entered the house. Unity hurried off on her errand. The meal was soon served. Miss Lindon, with many inquiries as to the reason for his early start, which he answered with gruff evasiveness, hovered about him as he ate, watching him in loving wonder. His big frame needed much nourishment, and now sheer hunger

was being satisfied. To her acquaintance she spoke of his appetite with as much pride as of his literary achievements. It was Unity, however, who took charge of the practical service, removed his plates and poured out his tea, silent, submissive, and yet with a subtle air of protection. There were certain offices she would not allow Aunt Gladys or even Phœbe to perform for her guardian. She was jealous, for instance, like a dog, of any one touching the master's clothes. This morning, when Miss Lindon absent-mindedly grasped the handle of the teapot, the faintest gleam of anger appeared in her eyes, and her lips grew instinctively tense, and with a quick, authoritative gesture she unloosed the fat, helpless fingers and took possession of the sacred vessel. John liked her to wait upon him. She was deft and noiseless; she anticipated his wants in an odd, instinctive way and seldom made suggestions. Now, of suggestions his aunt was a living fount. They poured from her all day long. He had a vague consciousness that Unity, by tactful interposition, dammed the flood, so that he could go on his way undrenched. For this he felt grateful, especially this morning when his nerves were on edge. Yet this morning he felt grateful also to Miss Lindon, and suffered her disconnected ministrations kindly. To-day the queer home that he had made assumed a new significance.

When Miss Lindon fluttered out of the room, bound on a suddenly remembered duty,—fresh groundsel for Dickie,—John looked up from the newspaper which Unity had silently folded and laid beside him.

"Come here, my child," he said, after a few moments' thought.

She approached and stood dutifully by his chair.

"Unity, I don't think it right for you to remain in ignorance of something that has happened. I don't see how it can really affect you, but it's better that you should learn it from me than from anybody else. Do you remember—" he paused—"that woman?"

It was the first reference he had ever made to her. Unity drew a quick, sharp breath.

"Yes, guardian."

"She was let out of prison this morning."

She kept her eyes full on him, and for a while neither spoke.

"I don't care," she said at last.

"I thought it might cause you some anxiety."

"What have I to be afraid of when I've got you?" she asked simply.

John twisted round in his chair and reached out his hand—a rare demonstration of affection—and took hers.

"It's to assure you, my dear, that you've nothing to fear that I've told you."

"She can't hurt *me*," said Unity.

"By heaven, she sha'n't!" he cried, unconsciously wrenching her arm so that he caused her considerable pain, which she bore without the flicker of an eyelid. "You're a fine, brave girl, Unity, and I'm proud of you. And you're a good girl, too. I hope you're happy here; are you?"

"Happy?" Her voice quavered on the word. Her mouth twitched, and the tears started from her eyes. He smiled on her, one of his rare smiles, known to few besides Stellamaris, which lit up his heavy features, and revealed a guardian far different from the inaccessible Olympian.

"Yes, my dear, I hope so. I want you to be happy all your life long."

She uttered a little sobbing laugh and fell crouching to his feet, still clinging to his hand, which she rubbed against her cheek. How could she tell him otherwise?

"I think you are," said John.

"I've just remembered I put the groundsel—" began Miss Lindon, coming into the room. Then she stopped, petrified at the unusual spectacle.

John laughed rather foolishly, and Unity, flushing scarlet, rushed out.

"I was only asking her whether we were treating her nicely," said John, rising and stretching his loose limbs.

"What a question to ask the child!"

"Well, she answered it like that, you see," said John.

"But what a way to answer a simple question! She forgets sometimes that she is a young lady of eighteen, an age when manners ought to be formed. But manners," she continued, hunting about the room, "are not what they were when I was young. I declare, I sometimes see young women in the streets with woolen caps and hockey-sticks—"

John took a salad-bowl from the mantelpiece. "Is that Dickie's groundsel?"

"Oh, how clever of you! Where did you find it? Dickie has been so angry. He's just like a man when his dinner's late. I don't mean you. You're a perfect saint, dear."

"Which reminds me," said John, with a laugh, "that I've mislaid my halo and I must go and find it."

With an exultant sense of comfort he went into his library. The women-folk of his household had never before seemed so near to him, so dependent on him, such organic factors of his life. He stood for a long time on his hearth-rug, scowling terribly, with the air of a wild beast standing at the entrance to its lair in defiant defense of the female and whelps within.

(To be continued)



THE MEDITERRANEAN

BY O. W. FIRKINS

IT rose upon my eyes—that wondrous sea,
 Bluer than sky or ocean,—with a hue
 As if the skies that blur when sunsets flee
 Had fallen therein and paved its depths with blue.
 I thought of the far springs in storied lands
 That fed its fountains, of the echoing streams
 That carried memories with their freight of sands,
 And strewed its shores with chronicles and dreams.
 One drop had lain in Ebro, one in Rhone;
 And one had foamed in far Marmora's sea;
 And one, a snowflake in the snow-wrapt zone,
 Had glinted on a crest in Chamonix;
 And one had tossed above the tossing buoy
 In Cyprus, or where Stamboul's turrets burn;
 And one had, in the heart of ancient Troy,
 Snatched a gray ash-flake from a shivered urn;
 And one had sprayed some trail of hanging vine
 Whose root had pierced a block of fallen frieze
 That once had lightened o'er a columned shrine
 In Athens for the joy of Pericles;
 And one had dropped from some bold sea-bird's wing
 By Tunis; one, in Tiber's depths concealed,
 Had washed a moldering bishop's drifting ring
 Into some crumbled emperor's bedded shield;
 And one, a drop of rain, had touched the hair
 Or wing of some bright angel carved of yore
 By Giotto's or high-tasked Ghiberti's care,
 Ere Arno swept it to the Tuscan shore;
 And one in Nile had gleams of sunlight caught,—
 The un pitying sun half-glimpsed through drooping lids,—
 And dreams from vast, imperial Luxor brought
 Had deepened by the timeless Pyramids.
 I thought how legend, annals, fame, romance,
 High memories, conflicts, sagas old and new,
 Lay passive, slumbering, in that bright expanse
 Of fearless and unconquerable blue.