

The Fifth Wheel

By *Beatrice Heron-Maxwell* and *Florence & Eastwick*

CHAPTER XXIV.

Twenty-four hours sounds more important than one day, yet the same swing of the pendulum marks the passing of years and the fulfilment of a life-time. How much, or how little may be accomplished while the hands move round the clock?

THERE had been twenty-four hours of absolute calm in the sick-room, during which Laurie seemed to be in a peaceful sleep—the first natural continuous sleep since his illness began.

Mrs. Pridham, who had shown signs of breaking down from the nervous strain of this ceaseless watching and waiting, was ordered by Dr. Fraser to go for a drive every day and had reluctantly withdrawn from her usual afternoon vigil, leaving Theo in her place.

Recently Theo had begged to be allowed to take her turn in the sick room, pleading that to have no occupation was insupportable to her, and that, whereas Agnes had outside work in the shape of visiting the poor, and moreover liked to spend many hours in church, she herself found it difficult to pass the time.

She sat at Laurie's side, her hands idle but her thoughts busy, trying to follow the two wanderers with whom her heart had set sail over the sea.

And suddenly all the grief that had been within her heart, all the restlessness, the regret and the longing, welled up in one great sob, and sinking down, she buried her face in the coverlet, on Laurie's bed, and murmured brokenly, "Oh, come back everybody—Tubby, Fen, Laurie! You're all so far away! 'Come back!'" She did not see the ripple of life that came over the still white face close to hers, nor the gradual lifting of the eyelids, until Laurie's eyes were gazing at the ceiling with the dawn of a real awakening in them.

For a moment he lay quiescent—his mind a blank, slowly invaded by puzzled memories. Then it occurred to him to shift his gaze, which, travelling downwards, met the familiar objects of his own room and reassured him.

The echo of Theo's words was still faintly throbbing in his brain—Tubby, Fen, Laurie,—and he wondered where and why, in some remote past, those names had meant something to him. Finally a ray of light broke through the darkness of his long lapse; and dispelled the lingering unconsciousness.

And with the light came an overwhelming desire to pick up the broken threads and piece them together.

"Fen!" he said, while he tried to raise himself on one arm. "I want her. Where is she?"

In an instant Theo had sprung to her feet, her limbs shaking under her, her brain dizzy with the shock of hearing and seeing Laurie in his normal state.

For even in the short sentence and the first mutual look between them, she understood that Laurie had "come back."

"Where is Fen?" she stammered. "I don't know, Laurie. But—but I will fetch Agnes."

He sank back on his pillow, weak with his transient effort.

"Have I been ill?" he asked, "long ill?"

Theo's colour came and went, and she tried to steady her voice lest its trembling should convey alarm to Laurie.

"Yes, dear," she answered softly,

"you haven't been very well lately. But you are better now. Mother told me to let her know if you wake up. I'll go and find her."

"Don't go," he pleaded. "Ring for someone and send a message. I want you to tell me what has been happening. I feel as if I had lost count of things."

And as she moved softly to the bell, he added: "Why ring at all? I am all right; I only want to get my mind clear about things. Come and sit down. Do, please, child!" Again he tried to raise himself, stretching out an imploring hand to her, and Theo felt that it would be dangerous to thwart him.

"Now," he said, as she sat down, "to begin with—what made me ill? Something happened—something dreadful—but I can't quite remember what. Tell me, Theo!"

"You had a fall," she replied soothingly, "on your way to the station. But, Laurie, please don't talk about it—yet. You are not strong enough, nurse would not like you to. I ought to let her know—really."

"I have had a nurse, then!" he said. "How long ago was this fall? Wait—it is beginning to come back to me. It was the night my leave ended—I went to the station—I remembered that I had left something here—something important—that I must come back for. I came back—Wait! Did I come back, or was that all a dream?"

HE passed his hand over his eyes, his voice quivering with weakness and agitation.

Theo, really alarmed, wished that Agnes would return. It seemed to her that this sudden complete recovery of Laurie's lost memory might presage a crisis—possibly a dangerous one. (She had heard of people coming to themselves just before the end. But directly she moved, his hand grasped her wrist.

"Theo," he said, in a hesitating troubled tone, "is it part of my dream that someone was murdered?"

It was a terrible moment for her. His eyes were full of a wild appeal, his fingers throbbled on her wrist.

"For God's sake," he added piteously, "tell me. I am so afraid of the cloud coming back over my brain I want to get clear."

Theo hesitated no longer. It seemed to her that any truth must be better than this horrible uncertainty for him.

"You are thinking of Lisbeth Bainton," she said quietly, though her heart was throbbing with anxiety. "She came to a sad end just about that time."

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "Liz Bainton, of course. Murdered—stabbed on the canal path. And the knife—the knife was here—put back! Fenella was there. Did she know? Had she seen or heard something?" Again he pressed his brow, distracted with the effort to regain full possession and control of his brain.

"I think," Theo went on, "that Fen saw you from her window and went down to meet you. You came back for her photograph, Laurie dear."

"That's it!" he exclaimed eagerly. "I came back for her photograph. And then—what happened after that? Go and fetch Fen, Theo! Tell her I must see her at once!"

"I'll ring for someone to come to you first," she said, "because mother asked me not to leave you alone." Laurie, who had closed his eyes in order to concentrate his confused

thoughts, made no further opposition, and when the bell was answered, Theo directed that the nurse should be sent for, and that either Miss Agnes or Mrs. Pridham should be found, if possible.

As it happened, they all three arrived on the scene within a moment or two, for the housemaid ran down in a scared way to say that Miss Theo looked frightened to death, and she believed Mr. Laurie had passed away in his sleep.

Quickly and silently, with anxious questioning glances at Theo, they hurried to the bedside, and as the nurse bent over him, and Mrs. Pridham, sinking into a chair, let her hand rest on his, Laurie opened his eyes again.

"Mother, dear, I'm so glad you've come," he said, faintly but naturally; "I expect you've been worrying about me. But I'm all right now." It was too much for Mrs. Pridham.

All the agony of love and suffering which she had held in check only by doing the utmost violence to her feelings, welled up from her heart to her lips, as she cried out: "My boy!" and then her face worked and she broke into a passion of tears.

"Hush!" said the nurse reprovingly, "You ought to laugh, not cry, Mrs. Pridham. I always rejoice when a patient turns the corner. Why, we shall have him up and about in no time now. What will Dr. Fraser say, I wonder!"

She bustled about, and, mixing some restorative, held it to his lips, talking meanwhile to give Mrs. Pridham time to recover herself and to prevent Laurie from being too upset at the sight of his mother's emotion.

Agnes, gently moving to Mrs. Pridham's side, whispered: "Be brave, mother! Remember how critical it is!" and persuaded her to move away where her sobs were not so painfully evident to Laurie.

Laurie drank obediently at the nurse's command, and allowed her to prop him up with a pillow.

Theo glided out of the room, and ran straight downstairs and to the library.

Her father, sitting, as he had been accustomed to do latterly, thinking, with his head on his hand, seeing her flushed face, sprang to his feet.

"Not—?" he questioned. And Theo, with a catch in her voice, caught him up quickly.

"Yes, Laurie's himself again. He's talking quite rationally. He woke up from his sleep with his mind clear. Oh, father, ring up Dr. Fraser and tell him to come at once."

For her father had taken a step backwards, as though he would reel and fall, and she realized the danger that good news may be. Instinct told her that to do something, to help in some way, would be a safety valve.

She was right. Mr. Pridham, his ruddy face purple, and his hands trembling, seized the telephone and rang up the doctor.

And then Theo, in her turn, gave way. She sat down in her father's chair and, letting her face fall on her clasped hands, cried her heart out.

The first glimpse of light in the impenetrable darkness had been too much for all of them. There is no moment when a mental strain comes so near to snapping the fine ligaments of the brain as the reactionary one when the intolerable burden has just been eased!

Mrs. Pridham came down to her husband before long, for the nurse depre-

Schools and Colleges

WESTBOURNE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

278 Bloor Street West,
Toronto, Canada

School re-opens Monday,
Sept. 14th, 1914.

A residential and day school, well appointed, well managed and convenient. Number of resident pupils limited to twenty-eight. Students prepared for University Examinations. Specialists in each department. Affiliated with the Toronto Conservatory of Music. F. McGillivray Knowles, R.C.A., Art Director. For announcement and information address the Principal, MISS M. CURLETTE, B.A.

TORONTO Conservatory of Music

A. S. VOGT, Mus. Doc.,
Musical Director.

REOPENS TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st.

A national institution, unrivalled in Canada as regards the distinction of its faculty and the superior character of its buildings and general equipment.

Send for YEAR BOOK and LOCAL CENTRE SYLLABUS of 1914-15 and pamphlet descriptive of the Women's Residence.

Conservatory School of Expression
Special Calendar.

F. H. Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., Principal.
Public Reading, Oratory, Physical and Vocal Culture, Dramatic Art and Literature.

Ridley College

St. Catharines, Ont.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR BOYS

The School has won Matriculation Scholarships in four out of the last five years. Three were won in June, 1913.

Separate buildings and special attention to boys under fourteen. Reopens Wednesday, Sept. 9, 1914.

REV. J. O. MILLER, M.A., D.C.L.,
Principal.

Bishop Strachan School

FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR
A Church Residential and Day School for Girls.
Full Matriculation Course.
Elementary Work, Domestic Arts, Music and Painting.

PRESIDENT: The Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Toronto.
PRINCIPAL: MISS WALSH
VICE-PRINCIPAL: MISS NATION
Wykeham Hall, College St., Toronto

Junior Day School, 423 Avenue Road.

Head Mistress, Miss R. E. Churchard, (Higher certificate National Froebel Union.) Reopens Sept. 10th, for Resident Pupils and 10 A. M., Sept. 11th, for Classes.

STAMMERING

overcome positively. Our natural methods permanently restore natural speech. Graduate pupils everywhere. Write for free advice and literature.

THE ARNOTT INSTITUTE, Berlin, Can.

FREE BOOK ON MOTORING

KNOW OF TEACHING
BY MAIL
DYKE
WORKING MODELS
CHARLES HARRINGTON

Explains how we assist YOU in the Auto Business as Repairman, Chauffeur, Salesman or Auto Mechanician, with DYKE NEW IDEA WORKING MODELS. Good salaries. Our employment plan tells how. Beware of imitators. Let us tell you the names of some of our students. Send for this book to-day.

Webb-Dyke Motor School, 4632 X Walnut St., Phila., Pa.