

# *The Rosary*

(An Edwardian Romance)

## Chapter One

The peaceful stillness of an English summer afternoon brooded over the park and gardens at Overdene. A hush of moving sunlight and lengthening shadows lay on the lawn, and a promise of refreshing coolness made the shade of the great cedar tree a place to be desired.

The old stone house, solid and substantial, suggested unlimited space and comfort and was redeemed from ugliness outside by the fine ivy, magnolia trees and wistaria climbing its plain face. It was covered now with a mantle of soft green and large white blooms.

A terrace ran the full length of the house, at one end a large conservatory and the other an aviary.

There were clumps of old trees haunted by shy brown deer and beyond the wide park, through the trees, ran a graceful, winding river bordered by long grass and buttercups. The sundial pointed to four o'clock. The birds were having their hour of silence. The stillness seemed almost oppressive. The one brilliant spot of colour in the landscape was a large scarlet macaw, asleep on his stand under the cedar.

At last came the sound of an opening door. A quaint old figure stepped out onto the terrace, walked its entire length to the right, disappearing into the rose-garden. The Duchess of Meldrum had gone to cut her roses. She wore an ancient straw hat tied with black ribbons and carried a wooden basket.

If you had met her Grace in town you might have given her a few coppers to buy a meal. But the duchess lived alone in regal splendour having no desire for a paid companion. Thomas, fifth Duke of Meldrum had come to a sudden, and, as the duchess often remarked, very suitable end. On his sixty-second birthday, clad in all the splendours of his hunting scarlet, top hat and proper breeches, the mare he was mercilessly putting at an impossible fence suddenly refused it and Thomas, Duke of Meldrum, shot into a field of turnips, pitched on his head and spoke no more.

This sudden cessation of his noisy and fiery life meant a complete transformation in the life of the duchess. Hitherto she had tolerated his boon companions who loved to spend countless days in the lovely Overdene out of friendship for them both. Quaint and rough old diamond she might appear but at heart she was a true gentlewoman and could always be trusted to say and do the right thing. The late duke's language had been sulphurous and some of it transferred to the bright macaw!

At first the duchess contented herself with gardening and making the aviary but after a while her natural inclination to hospitality and her humorous enjoyment of other people, a delight in parading her own foibles, led to a constant succession of house parties at Overdene which soon became known as a place to meet anyone you wanted to meet and to find every facility for enjoying your favourite pastime. You would be fed and housed in perfect style and spend some of the most ideal days of summer, never dull, never bored, free to come and go as you pleased but with the delight of never knowing what the duchess would do next.

Of all her many pets, Tommy the scarlet macaw was prime favourite. He opened one eye and watched her pass, gave a loud kiss as she reached the gate, laughed to himself and went to sleep again.

After the demise of the duke she had found it very depressing to be invariably addressed with suave deference by every male voice she heard. If the butler could have snorted or the rector have rapped out an uncomplimentary adjective, the duchess would have felt cheered. As it was, a settled melancholy lay upon her spirit until Tommy began the full use of his vocabulary. And when the duchess came sailing down the stairs, ten minutes after the gong sounded for meals, and Tommy, flapping his wings angrily, shrieked at her, 'Now then, old girl! Come on!' She went in to meals considerably more cheerful than she had been for months.

The only one of her relatives who practically made her home with the duchess was her niece and former ward, the Honourable Jane Champion. She was allowed to invite herself to Overdene or Portland Place, arrive when she like, stay as long as she pleased and leave when it suited her convenience. On the death of her father when her lonely girlhood in her Norfolk home came to an end, she would gladly have filled the place of a daughter to the duchess. But the duchess did not require a daughter; certainly not one with pronounced views, plenty of backbone and a beautiful figure. So she could stay as long as she like, have complete liberty but with no responsibilities.

Jane Champion was now in her 30th year. She had once been described as a perfectly beautiful woman in an absolutely plain shell. No man had as yet looked beneath the shell and seen the woman in her perfection. No-one had drawn near enough to experience the wealth of tenderness of which she was capable, the comfort of the shelter of her love, the perfect comprehension of her sympathy. No man had, as yet, with far-seeing vision enough, had had the marvellous joy of winning and wedding her. It had always seemed to be her lot to take a second place, on occasions when she would have filled the first to perfection.

She had been bridesmaid at weddings, godmother to her friends' babies, she who was richly endowed with the qualifications for wifedom and motherhood. She had glorious voice but as her face did not match it, its existence was rarely suspected. So Jane gladly took second place and accompanied to perfection.

In short, all her life long Jane had never known what it was to be absolutely first with any one. Her mother's death had occurred during infancy so, although she tried occasionally to imagine it, there was no recollection of any maternal love or tenderness.

Jane saw little of her father, who had found it difficult to forgive her, firstly, for being a girl when he wanted a son; secondly, being a girl, for having inherited his plainness rather than her mother's beauty.

In after years, when she became her own mistress, one of her first actions was to advertise for Sarah Matthews, her mother's elderly maid and engage her as her own.

Sarah Matthews was able to tell her many stories of her mother's care - how she would kiss her fingers calling them 'rose-petals' - her heart full of memories of the sweet babe on whom she and her dear lady had lavished so much love and care. She had found a tall, plain girl with a frank and boyish manner.

The hero of Jane's childhood, the real friend of her girlhood and the closer friend of her maturer years, was Deryck Brand, only son of the rector of the parish and her senior by nearly ten years. But even in their friendship, close as it was, she had never felt herself first to him. Jane's strong character and original mental development interested him and her devotion pleased him but later on her married a lovely girl, as unlike Jane as one woman could possibly be to another. Still their friendship held and deepened and now, when he was rapidly advancing to the very front of his medical profession, her appreciation of his work and understanding of his aims and efforts, meant more to him than even the royal favour he knew.

Jane Champion had no close friends among the women she knew.

Her lonely girlhood had bred in her a frankness towards herself and other people which made it difficult for her to understand or tolerate the artificialities of society.

She could not comprehend the trivial weaknesses of her own sex. But of men friends she had many especially the young men just out of college the duchess always invited to her special parties. Jane knew perfectly well they called her 'old Jane' or 'dearest Jane' among themselves but she believed in the harmlessness of their fun and the genuineness of their affection and gave them a generous amount of her own in return.

Jane Champion happened just now to be paying one of her long visits to Overdene and was playing golf with one of these boys when the duchess went to cut blooms in her rose garden.

## Chapter Two.

The sundial pointed to half past four. The hour of silence appeared to be over. The birds commenced twittering and a cuckoo, in an adjacent wood, sounded his note at intervals. The house awoke to sudden life. There was an opening and shutting of doors. Two footmen, in the mulberry and silver of the Meldrum livery, hurried down from the terrace, carrying folding tea-tables and spreading snowy cloths over each. The macaw awoke, stretched his wings and flapped them twice, sidling up and down his perch. 'Mind!' he said, suddenly, in the butler's voice. 'Hold your jaw,' said one young footman irritably, flicking the bird with the tablecloth and glancing furtively at the rose-garden. 'Tommy wants a gooseberry,' shrieked the macaw, dodging the tablecloth. The footman told him what he thought of him and where he wished him, cuffed him soundly and returned to the house, followed by peals of laughter, mimicking the duchess.

A few minutes later the tables were spread with the large variety of eatables considered necessary at an English afternoon tea. The massive silver urn and teapots gleamed on the buffet-table, behind which the old butler presided; muffins, crumpets, cakes and every kind of sandwich and dainty little rolled slices of brown bread and butter, while heaped-up bowls of freshly gathered strawberries gave a touch of colour to the lovely white and silver.

When all was ready the butler sounded the gong hanging in the cedar tree and before the penetrating boom had died away, voices were heard in the distance from all over the grounds.

Up from the river, down from the tennis courts, out from the house and garden, came the duchess's guests, hurrying to the welcome shade of the cedar. There were charming women in white, carefully guarding their complexions beneath shady hats and parasols; men in flannels, sunburned and handsome, joining in the talk and laughter.

They made a picturesque group as they gathered under the tree, subsiding with immense satisfaction into the low wicker chairs or on to the soft turf and helping themselves to tea. The conversation flowed again when all were supplied with tea, coffee or iced drinks.

'So, the duchess's concert comes off tonight,' remarked someone. 'I wish to goodness they would hang this old tree with lanterns and have it out here. It's far too hot to face a crowd indoors.'

'That's all right,' said Garth Dalmain. 'I'm doing the stage and I can promise you that all the long windows onto the terrace will stand wide open. No one need be in the concert room who would like to stop outside. There'll be a row of chairs on the terrace near the windows. You won't see much but you will hear perfectly.'

‘Half the fun is seeing, especially afterwards when the dear duchess shows us how everyone did it. I’ll have a seat in the front row.’ exclaimed one of the tennis girls.

‘Who is the surprise packet tonight?’ asked Lady Ingleby.

‘Velma,’ said Mary Strathern. ‘She is coming for the weekend. It will be wonderful. No one but the duchess could have worked it, and no place but Overdene would have tempted her. She will only sing one song at the concert but she is sure to give us more afterwards. We’ll have to persuade Jane to drift to the piano accidentally and play over, just by chance, the opening bars of some of Velma’s songs and we will soon hear the magic voice again. She can never resist a piano perfectly played.’

‘Why do you call Madame Velma the ‘surprise packet?’ asked someone.

‘That, my dear,’ replied Lady Ingleby, ‘is a little joke of the duchess. This concert is arranged for the amusement of her house party and the gratification of local celebrities. The whole neighbourhood is invited. They furnish the entire program, to their own delight, then, afterwards the duchess takes us through every item, with original notes, comments, and impersonations. Oh, Dal! Do you remember when she tucked a sheet of white writing-paper into her gown for a dog-collar and took off the curate singing a comic song? Then, at the very end, and really some of it is quite good for amateurs, she brings out Velma or some equally perfect artist to show them how it really can be done. But they’ve forgotten about it by next year and they always come back.’

‘The Honourable Jane does not approve of it,’ said young Ronald Ingram, ‘therefore she is generally absent. But no one can accompany Madame Velma so well, so this time she is commanded to stay. Jane has been known to speak sharply to the duchess for that sort of thing but it wont make any difference. The duchess enjoys her little joke so much.’

‘I think Miss Champion is quite right,’ said a bright-faced American girl, bravely, holding a gold spoon poised for a moment over the strawberry ice-cream with which Garth Dalmain had supplied her. ‘In my country we should call it real mean to laugh at people who had been our guests and performed in the house.’

‘In your country, my dear,’ said Myra Ingleby, ‘you have no duchesses.’

‘Well, we supply you with quite a good few,’ replied the American calmly, going on with her ice.

A general laugh followed then someone inquired presently, ‘Where is the Honourable Jane?’

‘Golfing with Billy,’ said Ronald Ingram, ‘and here they come.’

Jane’s tall figure was seen, walking along the terrace, accompanied by Billy Cathcart, talking earnestly. They put their clubs away in the lower hall then came down the lawn together to the tea-tables.

Jane wore a tailor-made coat and skirt of grey tweed, a blue and white shirt, a silk tie and a soft felt hat with quills.

She walked with the freedom of movement and swing which indicated her great strength and a body well under control.

She was in no sense masculine but her appearance was quite unlike that of all the pretty and graceful women grouped beneath the cedar tree. She was so truly feminine that she could afford to adopt a severe simplicity in her dress which suited her plainness and superb proportions of figure.

But as she stepped into the circle beneath the cedar she was able to take one of the seats immediately vacated by at least half-a-dozen men. 'How was the golf Miss Champion, what did you go round in?' enquired one of them.

'My ordinary clothes!' laughed Jane. But Billy Burst out, 'She was amazing-she went round in . . .,' 'Oh, be quiet, Billy, no-one here is the least bit interested. You and I are practically the only golf maniacs. Where is my aunt? Poor Simmons was toddling all over the place when we went in to put away our clubs, searching for her with a telegram.'

'Why didn't you open it?' asked Myra.

'Because my aunt never allows her telegrams to be opened. She loves the shock and it is always possible with a telegram. Besides some are very private and come from the Foreign Office or somewhere equally mighty. And also she says it completely spoils it if someone tries to break things to her gently.'

Garth Dalmain was sitting where he could see the entrance to the rose garden.

'Here she comes now,' he said.

'Don't mention the telegram,' cautioned Jane, 'it wouldn't please her that I even know of its arrival. It would be shame to spoil it for her when nothing unusual seems to be happening this afternoon.'

They turned and looked towards the duchess as she bustled across the lawn; this quaint old figure, who had called them all together; who owned the lovely place where they were spending such delightful days; and whose odd whimsical ways had been so freely discussed while they drank her tea and feasted off her strawberries. The men rose as she approached but not quite so spontaneously as they had done for her niece.

The duchess carried a large wooden basket filled to overflowing with exquisite roses. Every bloom was perfect and each had been cut at exactly the right moment.

The duchess plumped down her basket in the middle of the strawberry table.

'There, good people,' she said, breathlessly, 'Help yourselves and let me see you all wearing roses tonight, and the concert room is to be a bower of roses. We will call it 'La Fete des Roses' . . . No, thank you, Ronnie. The tea has been made at least half an hour and besides I never take tea. I have whiskey and soda when I wake from my nap and that sustains me until dinner. I know,

Myra dear, I know I signed your lovely pledge but my doctor says I must take something when I need it and I always need it when I wake up. Really, Dal, it is positively wicked for any man off the stage to look as picturesque as you do in that pale violet shirt and dark violet tie and white flannels. If I were your grandmother I would send you in to take them off. If you turn the heads of old dowagers like me what chance have all these chicks. Hush, Tommy, that was a very naughty word and you don't need to be jealous of Dal. I admire you more! Dal, will you paint my scarlet macaw?'

The young artist whose violet shirt had just been censured, lay back in his chair with his arms behind his head. There was a gleam of amusement in his brown eyes. They were all amused. His portraits in that year's Academy had created much interest in the artistic world.

'No, dear Duchess,' he said. 'I beg respectfully to decline. Tommy would require a much better artist to do full justice to his attitudes and expression. Besides, it would be demoralising to an innocent, well-brought up young man to spend long hours in Tommy's society. But I'll tell you what I will do. I will paint you, dear Duchess, only not in that hat! I'd hide my face in Miss champion's lap and kick and scream until you take it off if I yielded to my natural instincts. I'll paint you.'

Garth half closed his eyes and an attentive hush fell on everyone. 'I'll paint you in that black velvet gown you wore last night with the lovely Medici collar and your arrangement of lace and diamonds on your head. In your hand you will be holding an antique crystal mirror but you won't be looking into it. You never look into mirrors, dear Duchess, do you, except to see if the scolding you are giving your maid is making her cry. You'll scold some more if she isn't and then pay her journey to see here elderly mother again.'

'Dal, Dal, stop, you ridiculous child!' said the Duchess. 'and tell me what I do with the mirror.'

'You do not look into it.' continued Garth Dalmain, meditatively, 'because it will be reflecting something exactly in front of you. In the mirror I will paint a vivid, brilliant, complete reflection of your scarlet macaw on his perch. You will be gazing at him with great affection. We shall call it 'Reflections,' or some such title, but when the portrait goes down to posterity as a famous picture, it will figure in the catalogue of the National Gallery as 'Meldrum's Duchess, the Mirror and the Macaw'. Now, what about that?'

The Duchess was delighted. 'You'll do it, Dal and we will all go and see it in the Academy next year.'

She turned with an exclamation. 'Here comes Simmons with something on a salver. How that man waddles. Jane, you march across the lawn like a Grenadier. Can't you explain to him how it is done? Well? . What is it? Ha. A telegram. What horrible thing can have happened? It's probably some idiot has missed the train.'

Amid a breathless and highly satisfactory silence, the Duchess tore open the orange envelope.

Apparently the shock was quite thorough as the Duchess, at all times highly coloured became purple as she read and absolutely inarticulate with indignation. Jane rose quietly, looked over her aunt's shoulder, read the long message and returned to her seat.

'The creature!' exclaimed the Duchess at last. 'Oh, the creature! This comes of asking them as friends. And I had a lovely string of pearls for her worth far more than she would have been given for one song, professionally. And to fail me at the last minute. Oh, the creature!'

'Dear aunt,' said Jane, 'if poor Madame Velma has a sudden attack of laryngitis, she could not possibly sing a note, even if the Queen commanded her. Her telegram is full of regrets.'

'Don't argue, Jane!' exclaimed the Duchess, crossly. 'And don't drag in the Queen, who has nothing to do with my concert or Velma's throat. I hate irrelevance and you know it! Why must she have her what-do-you-call-it just when she is coming to sing here? In my young days people never had these newfangled complaints. I've no patience with all this appendicitis and what not cutting people open at every possible excuse. In my young days we called it a good old-fashioned stomach-ache, and gave them Turkey rhubarb.'

Myra Ingleby hid her face behind her garden hat; Garth Dalmain whispered to Jane, 'I do hate irrelevance and you know it!' But Jane shook her head at him and refused to smile. 'Tommy wants a gooseberry!' shouted the macaw. 'Oh give it to him somebody!' said the worried duchess.

'Dear aunt,' said Jane, 'there aren't any gooseberries.'

'Don't argue, girl,' cried the Duchess, furiously and Garth delightedly shook his head at Jane. 'When he says gooseberry, he means anything green, as you very well know.'

Half a dozen people hastened to Tommy with lettuce, watercress and cucumber sandwiches while Garth picked a blade of grass and handed it to Jane which she ignored.

'No answer, Simmons,' said the Duchess. 'Oh, how that man waddles. Now the question is, what is to be done? Here is half the county coming to hear Velma by my invitation and Velma in London pretending to have appendicitis, no, I mean the other thing, oh, drat the woman.'

'Hold your tongue,' shouted the macaw. The Duchess smiled at him.

'Dear, dear Duchess,' suggested Garth in his most soothing voice, 'the county does not know Madame Velma was to be here. It was a profound secret was it not? You were to trot her out at the end as your surprise.'

'Quite true. That was the lovely part about it.'

'Well,' pursued Garth persuasively, 'if the county did not know, the county will not be disappointed. They are coming to listen to one another and to hear themselves and to enjoy your claret-cup and ices. They will do all this and go away delighted saying how cleverly the dear duchess discovers and exploits local talent.'

'Ah, yes!' said the Duchess, with a gleam in her hawk eye and a raising of the hooked nose which Mrs. Parker Bangs of Chicago described as 'genuine Plantagenet' 'but they will go away not knowing the truth and they will be satisfied with their own mediocre performances. My idea is to let them do it and then show them how it should be done.'

'But aunt 'Gina,' said Jane, gently, 'surely you forget that most of these people have been to town and heard plenty of good music, Madame Velma herself most likely, and all other great singers. They know they can't sing like a prima donna; they do their anxious best because you ask them. They cannot see that they need an object lesson of any kind.'

'Jane,' said the Duchess, 'for the third time this afternoon I must request you not to argue.'

'Miss Champion,' said Garth Dalmain, 'if I were your grandmother, I should send you to bed.'

'What is to be done?' cried the Duchess. 'She was going to sing The Rosary. I had set my heart on it. The whole decoration of the room is planned to suit that song. Festoons of white roses and a great red cross at the back of the platform made entirely of crimson ramblers. Jane!'

'Yes, aunt.'

'Oh, don't say 'Yes aunt,' in that senseless way. Can't you make some suggestion?'

'Drat the woman!' exclaimed Tommy suddenly.

'Hark to that sweet bird,' cried the duchess, her good humour fully restored. 'Give him a strawberry someone. Now Jane, what do you suggest?'

Jane Champion was seated with her back half turned to her aunt, one knee crossed over the other, her large, capable hands clasped round it. She loosed her hands, turned slowly round and looked into the keen eyes peering at her from under the mushroom hat. As she read the half-resentful, half-appealing demand in them a slow smile dawned in her own. She waited a moment to make sure of the Duchess's meaning then said quietly, 'I will sing 'The Rosary' for you in Velma's place tonight, if you really wish it, aunt.'

A sense of blank astonishment was in the air and one or two quietly expressed gasps of surprise.

The Duchess was the only one present who had heard Jane sing.

'Have you a copy of the song?' asked her Grace of Meldrum, rising and picking up her telegram and empty basket. 'Yes, I have.'

‘Good,’ said the duchess. ‘Then I count on you. Remember everybody dinner is at eight and music will begin at nine. Ronnie, be a kind boy and carry Tommy into the hall for me. He will screech if he sees me walk away without him, dear bird!’

There was a silence under the cedar tree following her departure.

Most people were watching terrified Ronald holding the stand as much at arm’s length as possible. The Duchess walked on quite satisfied with the new turn events had taken. One or two people were watching Jane.

‘It’s very brave and kind of you, Jane,’ said Myra Ingleby, at length.

‘I would offer to play for you, dear, but I can only manage Three Blind Mice with one finger.’

‘And I would offer to play for you, dear,’ said Dal, ‘I can play quite beautifully with ten fingers but I’ve seen The Rosary and would not dare to face those chords. To begin with, you start in every known flat and before you’ve gone very far you have a handful of known and unknown sharps and you have to cling to them not knowing if they will be needed any moment. Alas, no! I shall have to say as the old farmer at the tenants’ dinner the other day said to the Duchess when she pressed on him a third helping of pudding, - Madam, I can’t!’

‘Don’t be silly, Dal,’ said Jane. ‘You could play it perfectly if I wanted you to. But as it happens, I prefer to accompany myself.’

‘Ah,’ said Lady Ingleby, sympathetically, ‘I quite understand that. It would be such a relief all the time to know that if things seem to go wrong you could stop the other part and give yourself the note.’

The only two real musicians present glanced at each other and a gleam of amusement passed between them.

‘It would be useful if necessary,’ said Jane.

‘I would stop the other part and give you the note,’ said Garth, demurely.

‘I’m sure you would,’ said Jane, ‘you are always so kind. But I prefer to keep the matter in my own hands.’

‘You realise the difficulty of making the voice carry in a place of that size unless you can stand and face the audience?’ Garth Dalmain spoke anxiously. Jane was a very special friend and he had a man’s dislike of a friend failing in anything publicly.

The same quiet smile dawned in Jane’s eyes and passed to her lips as when she had realised that her aunt meant her to volunteer in Velma’s place. She glanced around. Most of the party had wandered off in twos and threes, some to the house and others back to the river. She and Dal and Myra were practically alone. Her calm eyes were full of quiet amusement as she steadfastly met the anxious look in Garth’s and answered his question.

‘Yes, I know. But the acoustics of the room are perfect and I have learned to throw my voice. Perhaps you don’t know - no, how should you know - but I have had the privilege of studying in Paris and London and I haven’t - erm - wasted such golden opportunities.’

These quiet words were Greek to Myra, conveying no more to her mind than if Jane had said she had been learning Tonic sol-fa. Lady Ingleby had herself once tried to master the system in order to instruct her men and maids in part-singing. Her staff could all sing a little but Myra herself was the first to admit that she had not much ear for it. She easily mastered mi, re, do, and so, fa, fa, mi, because these represented the opening lines of Three Blind Mice, always a musical landmark to Myra. But when it came to the fugue-like intricacies of 'they all ran after the farmer's wife,' Lady Ingleby was lost with the words to cling to and gave up the Tonic sol-fa system in despair.

So, when Jane mentioned the name of her tutor in singing, one of the greatest teachers of the age, it did not convey much to Myra's mind. But Garth Dalmain sat up.

'Wow, no wonder you take it so calmly. Even Velma herself was a pupil of the great Madame.'

'That is how I happen to know her. Anyway, I'm really here because I was going to play for her.'

'I see. And now you have to do both. Land's sakes, as Mrs. Parker-Bangs would say. But you prefer playing for other people, don't you?' Jane's smile dawned again. 'I prefer to sing, but playing for other people is more useful.'

'Of course it is,' said Garth, 'heaps of people can sing a little but not a lot can accompany properly.'

'Jane,' said Myra, her grey eyes looking out lazily from under her long black lashes, 'if you have had singing lessons and know some songs, why haven't we heard you before?'

'For a sad reason,' Jane replied. 'You know the Duchess had an only son who died eight years ago. He was such a handsome, talented man and he and I inherited our love of music from our grandfather. My cousin wanted to take it up professionally but died just before he was due to sing at a concert my aunt had arranged. She was frantic with grief and ever since then, any mention of me taking up music professionally, which I wanted to do, makes her very bitter. So I scarcely ever venture to sing or play while I'm here.'

'Why not elsewhere?' asked Garth, 'we have stayed about in the same places and I hadn't the faintest idea you sang.'

'I don't know,' said Jane slowly. 'But music means so much to me. It is a sort of holy of holies in the innermost - in my inner soul. It is not easy to lift the veil.'

'The veil will be lifted tonight, dear,' said Myra Ingleby.

'Yes,' agreed Jane, smiling a little ruefully, 'I suppose it will.'

'And we shall pass in,' said Garth Dalmain.

## Chapter Three

The shadows silently lengthened on the lawn. The homecoming rooks circled and cawed around the tall elm trees. The sundial pointed to six o'clock. Myra Ingleby rose and stood with the slanting rays of the sun full in her eyes, her arms stretched over her head. The young artist noted every graceful line of her willowy figure. She yawned.

'It is so perfect out here and I must go in to my maid. Jane, be advised in time. Do not ever begin facial massage. You become a slave to it and it takes up hours of the day. Look at me.'

They were both looking already. Myra was worth looking at. 'For ordinary dressing purposes I need not have gone in until seven and now I must lose this last, perfect hour.'

'What happens?' asked Jane. 'I don't know anything about it.'

'I can't go into details,' replied Lady Ingleby, 'but you know how sweet I have looked all day. Well, if I did not go in to my maid now, I should look less sweet by the end of dinner and at the close of the evening I should appear ten years older.'

'I don't believe it. You would always look sweet,' said Jane, with sincerity, 'and why mind looking the age you are?'

'My dear, a man is as old as he feels and a woman is as old as she looks,' quoted Myra.

'I feel just seven,' said Garth.

'And you look seventeen,' laughed Myra.

'And I am twenty-seven,' retorted Garth, 'so the duchess should not call me a ridiculous child. You better go, dear lady, because if you look one whit less lovely I shall burst into tears at dinner and you know the Duchess hates scenes.'

Lady Ingleby flapped him with her garden hat as she passed.

'Be quiet, you ridiculous seven-year old, You shouldn't be listening to what I was saying to Jane. You shall paint me this autumn and after that I'll go abroad, give up facial massage and come back quite old.'

She flung this last threat over her shoulder as she trailed away across the lawn.

'How lovely she is.' commented Garth, gazing after her. 'How much of that was true do you think, Miss Champion?'

'I really haven't the slightest idea but I do know that Myra is very honest and always inclined to be frank about herself and her foibles. She had a curious upbringing. She is one of a large family and was always considered the black sheep by her mother. Nothing she was or said or did was ever right. When Lord Ingleby met her and I suppose saw the possibilities, she was a tall, gawky girl, with lovely eyes and a sweet, sensitive mouth. She always seemed to have a what-on-earth-am-I-going-to-do-next expression on her face. He was twenty years her senior, but he fell in love and would have none of the other

daughters. It was Myra or nobody. When he proposed to her it was impossible at first to make her understand what he meant. When it dawned on her at length, she accepted at once. I have often heard him tease her about it. 'Why of course, I'll marry you gratefully and what a blow for mamma!' After the honeymoon, when he had taken her abroad for six months, we were staying together and I heard her mother say, about a fault she was finding in Myra, 'Hasn't Lord Ingleby often told you of it?' Myra looked up in her sweet, lazy way and answered, 'Dear mamma, I know it must seem strange to you but, do you know, my husband thinks everything I do is perfect.' 'Your husband is a fool!' snapped her mother.'

'Why ever are people like that allowed to be called 'mothers?'' remarked Garth. 'We who have had tender, perfect mothers, would like to make it law that the other kind are always called 'she-parents' or 'female progenitors' anything but profane the sacred name of mother.'

Jane was silent. She knew the beautiful story of Garth's boyhood with his widowed mother. She knew his passionate adoration of her sainted memory. She liked him best when she got a glimpse beneath the surface and didn't want to interrupt his mood by reminding him that she herself had never even lisped that name.

Garth rose from his chair and stretched his slim figure in the slanting sun-rays, much as Myra had done.

Jane looked at him. As is often the case with plain people, great physical beauty appealed to her strongly. She only gave that appeal its right proportion in her estimation of her friends. Garth Dalmain by no means came first among her friends. He was older than most of them and yet in some ways younger than any and his remarkable youthfulness of manner and lively spirits sometimes made him appear foolish to Jane whose sense of humour was more sedate. But of the absolute perfection of his outward appearance there was no question and Jane looked at him now much as his own mother might have looked, with honest admiration in her kind eyes.

Garth, notwithstanding the pale violet shirt and dark violet tie, was quite unconscious of his own appearance and, dazzled by the golden sunlight, was also unconscious of Jane's look.

'Well, Miss Champion,' he cried, boyishly. 'Isn't it nice that they have all gone in? I've been wanting to have a good talk with you. Really, when we all get together we do drivel on sometimes. It's just like balloons, all air. Do you remember the wild excitement of buying balloons at Brighton and man coming along the parade with a huge bunch of them, all colours, I always knew exactly which one I wanted. I'd rather have none than that particular one. Wouldn't you?'

'I never bought balloons at Brighton,' replied Jane, without enthusiasm. Garth was feeling seven again and Jane was feeling bored.

For once he seemed conscious of this. He took his coat from the back of the chair where he had hung it and put it on. 'Come along, Miss Champion,' he said, 'I'm tired of doing nothing. Let's go down to the river and find a boat for two. Dinner is not until eight o'clock and I'm certain you can dress, even for the role of Velma, in half an hour. I've known you do it in ten minutes at a pinch. We can talk as we go.'

But Jane did not rise.

'My dear Dal,' she said, 'you would not feel much enthusiasm for the sunset or the river if you had to pull my twelve stone in a boat. You would drop exhausted among all the cowslips. And anyway I like to row myself. You would have to gaze at me all the way up and all the way down the river knowing all the time that I was mentally criticising your stroke.'

Garth sat down, lay back in his chair, with his arms behind his sleek dark head and looked at her with his soft shining eyes, just as he had looked at the duchess.

'How cross you are, old dear,' he said, gently. 'What is the matter?'

Jane laughed and held out her hand. 'Oh, you dear boy! You have the sweetest temper in the world. I won't be cross any more. The truth is, I hate the duchess's concerts and I don't like being the duchess's surprise packet.'

'I see,' said Garth, sympathetically. 'Then why did you offer?'

'Dal, I had to. Poor old dear. She so rarely asks me anything, and her eyes were beseeching. I would black her boots if she wanted me to but she keeps me at arm's length. This one thing she asked of me and her proud old eyes pleaded. How could I refuse?'

Garth was all sympathy. 'No, dear,' he said, thoughtfully, 'of course you couldn't. And don't worry about that silly joke, the surprise packet. You won't be that, will you? I have no doubt you sing vastly better than most of them but they will not realise it. It takes a Velma to make such people sit up. They will think The Rosary is a very pretty song, give you a mild clap and there the whole thing will end. So don't worry.'

Jane sat and considered this. Then she said, 'Dal, I do hate singing before that sort of audience. It's like giving them your soul to look at and you don't want them to see it. It seems indecent. To my mind, music is the most revealing thing in the world. I shiver when I think of that song and yet I dare not do less than my best. When the moment comes, I shall live in the song and forget the audience. Can I tell you about a lesson I once had from my teacher, Madame Blanche? I was singing Bemberg's Chant Hindou, the passionate prayer of an Indian woman to Brahma. I began: 'Brahma! Dieu des croyants,' and sang it as I might have sung do, re, me. Brahma was nothing to me. 'Stop!' cried Madame Blanche in her most imperious manner. 'Ah, vous Anglais! What are you doing? Brahma, c'est un Dieu! He may not be your God. He may not be my God. But he is somebody's God. He is the God of the song.'

Ecoutez!’ And she lifted her head and sang; ‘Brahma! Dieu des croyants! Maitre des cites saintes!’ With her beautiful brow illumined and a passion of religious fervour which thrilled one’s soul. It was a lesson I never forgot. I can honestly say I have never sung a song tamely, since.’

‘Fine.’ said Garth Dalmain. ‘I like enthusiasm in every branch of art. I never care to paint a portrait unless I adore the woman I am painting.’

Jane smiled. The conversation was turning exactly the way she had hoped eventually to lead it.

‘Dal, dear,’ she said, ‘you adore so many in turn, that we old friends, who have your real interest at heart, fear you will never adore to any definite purpose.’

Garth laughed. ‘Oh, bother!’ he said. ‘Are you like all the rest? Do you think adoration and admiration must necessarily mean marriage. I should have expected you to take a saner and more masculine view.’

‘My dear boy,’ said Jane, ‘you friends have decided that you need a wife. You are alone in the world. You have a lovely home. You are in a fair way to be spoiled by all the silly women who run after you. Of course we are perfectly aware that your wife must have every incomparable beauty under the sun united in her own exquisite person. But each new divinity you see and paint apparently fulfils, for the time being this wondrous ideal. Perhaps if you married one, instead of painting her, she might continue permanently to fulfil it.’

Garth considered this in silence, his level brows knitted. At last he said, ‘Beauty is so much a thing of the surface. I see it, I admire it and I paint it. D When I have painted it I have made it my own and somehow I find I have done with it. All the time I am painting a woman, I am seeking for her soul. I want to express it on my canvas and do you know, Miss Champion, I find that a lovely woman does not always have a lovely soul.’

Jane was silent. The last thing she wished to discuss were other women’s souls. ‘There is just one who seems to me perfect,’ continued Garth. ‘I’m going to paint her this autumn. I believe I shall find her soul as exquisite as her body.’

‘And she is ?’ enquired Jane.

‘Lady Brand.’

‘Flower!’ exclaimed Jane. ‘Are you so taken with Flower?’

‘She is so lovely,’ said Garth, with reverent enthusiasm. ‘It is positively not right for anyone to be so absolutely flawlessly lovely. It makes me ache. Do you know that feeling, Miss Champion, of perfect loveliness making you ache?’

‘No, I don’t,’ said Jane shortly. ‘And I don’t think other people’s wives ought to that effect on you.’

‘My dear old chap,’ exclaimed Garth, astonished; ‘it has nothing to do with wives or no wives. A wood of bluebells in morning sunshine would have precisely the same effect. I ache to paint her. When I have painted her and really done justice to that matchless loveliness as I see it, I shall feel all right. At present I have only painted her from memory but she is to sit for me in October.’

‘From memory?’ questioned Jane.

‘Yes, I paint a great deal from memory. Give me one look of a certain kind at a face, when I can see below the surface and I can paint that face from memory weeks after. Lots of my best studies have been done that way. It’s beauty! - The worship of beauty is to me a religion.’

‘Rather a godless form of religion,’ suggested Jane.

‘Ah, no,’ said Garth reverently. ‘All true beauty comes from God and leads back to God. Do you know that text, ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.’ Nothing bad was ever truly beautiful, nothing good is ever really ugly.’

Jane smiled as she watched him, lying back in the golden sunlight, the very personification of manly beauty. The absolute lack of self-consciousness, either for himself or for her, which allowed him to talk to the plainest woman he knew, like this. It appealed to her more than buying coloured balloons in Brighton.

‘Then are plain people to be denied their share of goodness, Dal?’ she asked.

‘Plainness is not ugliness,’ replied Garth Dalmain simply. ‘I learned that when I was quite young. My mother took me to hear a famous preacher. I thought he was quite the ugliest man I had ever seen! He reminded me of a grotesque gorilla and I dreaded the moment he would get up and speak. But when he did speak his face was transfigured. Goodness shone from it making it like the face of an angel. I never thought him ugly again. Child though I was, I could see the beauty of his soul shining through, transfiguring his body. When he sat down at the close of a magnificent sermon, I remembered the divine halo of his smile. Of course, his actual plainness of feature remained. It was not the sort of face one could have wanted to live with or to have day after day opposite to one at a table. But that sort of discipline would have been martyrdom to me. But it has always reminded me that goodness is never ugly. And also that divine love and aspiration shining through the plainest features may redeem them temporarily into beauty, and permanently into a thing one loves to remember.’

‘I see,’ said Jane. ‘That must have been a great help to a right view of things. But now let’s return to the important question of the face which you are going to have daily opposite you at the table. It cannot be Lady Brand’s nor can it be Myra’s but, you know, Dal, a very lovely one is being suggested for the position.’

‘No names, please,’ said Garth, quickly. ‘I object to girl’s names being mentioned in this sort of conversation.’

‘Very well, dear boy. I understand. You have made her famous already by your impressionist portrait of her and I hear you are to do a more elaborate picture in the fall as the Americans call it. Now, Dal, you know you admire her immensely. She is lovely, she is charming, she hails from the land whose women, when they possess charm it is united with a freshness and piquancy which places them beyond compare. In some ways you are so unique yourself that you ought to have a wife with a certain amount of originality. You may like to hear how fully your friends approve of your very open allegiance to. shall we say, the beautiful ‘Stars and Stripes?’

Garth Dalmain took out his cigarette case, carefully selected a cigarette and sat with it between his fingers in absorbed contemplation.

‘Smoke if you like,’ said Jane.

‘Thanks,’ said Garth. He struck a match and very deliberately lighted his cigarette.

As he flung away the match the breeze caught it and it flared on the grass momentarily. Garth jumped up and extinguished it, then drew his chair more exactly opposite to Jane’s and lay back, meditatively, watching the little rings he blew. Jane was watching him. She had learned from Deryck Brand the value of silences in important conversations and the art of not weakening a statement by a postscript. At last Garth spoke.

Jane had quietly waited for the response to her appeal to his deeper nature. ‘It’s very good of you, Miss champion, to take the trouble to think all this and to say it. Can I explain for once what the real trouble is? I have hardly been able to think it out for myself yet.’

Another long silence. She did not want, now, to bring in anything superficial to the conversation. Garth smoked and pondered. Jane waited. It was a very companionable silence. Garth found himself thinking over the last lines of an old sixteenth-century song:

‘Then ever pray that heaven may send  
Such weeds, such chairs, and such a friend.’

Either the chair or Jane or both were producing in him a sublime sense of calm and rest and well-being; an uplifting of spirit which made all good things seem better, all difficult things easy and all ideals possible.

The silence, like the sunset, was golden but at last he broke it.

‘Two women, the only two women who have ever really been in my life, form for me a standard below which I cannot fall. One was my mother, a very sacred and ideal memory. The other is old Margery Graem, my childhood friend and nurse and now my housekeeper and general tender and mender. When I became an adult, Margery kept the sweet sense of my mother’s presence near me. She lives at Castle Gleneesh. When I go home, she is always there

and probably the first sight of the place is old Margery in her black satin apron and lavender ribbons. I always feel seven then and I always hug her. You, Miss champion, don't like me when I feel seven but Margery does. Now this is what I want you to realise. When I bring a bride to Gleneesh and present her to Margery, the kind old eyes will try to see nothing but good and her faithful heart will yearn to love her and to serve her. Yet I will know that she knows the standard I want just as I know it. She will remember the ideal of gentle, tender, Christian womanhood, just as I remember it and I dare not let her down.

Believe me, Miss Champion, more than once, when physical attraction has been strong and I have been tempted in the worship of outward loveliness and to forget the things which are unseen and eternal, then I seem to sense her clear eyes looking into mine and hear the voice which has guided me from infancy, saying in gentle astonishment, 'Is this your choice, Master Garthie, to fill my dear lady's place?' No doubt, Miss Champion, it will seem almost absurd to you, when you think of our friends and our sentiments and the way we rush around, that I have been held back from proposing marriage to the women I have most admired, because of what would have been my old nurse's opinion of them. But her opinion is formed by the memory of my dear, dead mother. Margery's voice is my best self and expresses my own judgement when it is not blinded by passion or warped by my worship of the beautiful. Not that Margery would disapprove of loveliness, in fact, she would approve of nothing else for me, I know very well. But her penetration rapidly goes beneath the surface. According to one of St. Paul's sublime paradoxes, she looks at the things that are not seen. It seems strange I can tell you all this and really I have only just formulated it properly in my own mind. It's just that it is so kind of you to trouble to give me good advice on the matter.'

Garth Dalmain ceased speaking and silence which followed suddenly assumed alarming proportions, seeming to Jane like a high fence which she was vainly trying to scale. It was so totally unexpected. She rushed hither and thither in her mind, trying to find something to say. She was infinitely touched by Garth's confession and when Jane was deeply moved speech always became difficult. That this young man, adored by all the girls for his good looks and delightful manners; pursued for his extreme eligibility by mothers and chaperones; famous already in the world of art; flattered, courted, sought after in society, should calmly admit that the only woman really left in his life was his old nurse, and that her opinion and expectations held him back from a worldly or unwise marriage, touched Jane deeply, even while in her heart she smiled at what their friends would say could they realise the situation. It revealed Garth Dalmain in a new light and suddenly Jane understood him as she had not understood him before.

And yet the only reply she could bring herself to say was, 'I wish I knew old Margery.'

Garth's brown eyes flashed with pleasure.

‘Yes, I wish you did,’ he said. ‘And I should like you to see Castle Gleneesh. You would enjoy the view from the terrace, sheer into the gorge, and away across the purple hills and I think you would like the pine woods and the moor. I say, Miss Champion, why shouldn’t I get up a party in September and implore the Duchess to come and chaperone it? And then you could come and who else you thought suitable or you would like asked. And, and, perhaps we might ask, er, the beautiful Stars and Stripes, and her aunt, Mrs. Parker Bangs of Chicago and then we should see what Margery thought of her.’

‘That’s a lovely idea,’ said Jane, thankful to be on fairly familiar ground. ‘I would come with pleasure. And really, Dal, I think that girl has a sweet nature. Could you do better? The exterior is perfect and surely the soul is there. Yes, ask us all, and see what happens.’

‘I will,’ cried Garth, delighted, ‘and what will Margery think of Mrs. Parker Bangs?’

‘Never mind,’ said Jane decidedly. ‘When you marry the niece, the aunt goes back to Chicago.’

‘And I wish her people were not millionaires.’

‘That can’t be helped,’ said Jane. ‘Americans are so charming, that we really must not mind their money.’

‘Well, I know they are going to Lady Ingleby’s next week. Will you be there?’  
‘Yes, I will,’ said Jane, ‘I am going to the Brands for a few days on Tuesday but I’ve promised Myra to turn up at Shenstone for the weekend. I like staying there. They are such a harmonious couple.’

‘Yes,’ said Garth, but no one could help being a harmonious couple, who had married Lady Ingleby.’

‘What grammar!’ laughed Jane. ‘But I know what you mean, and I’m glad you think so highly of Myra. She is a dear. Only make haste and paint her and get her off your mind so as to be free for Pauline Lister.’

The sundial pointed to seven o’clock. The rooks had circled round the elms and dropped contentedly into their nests.

‘Let’s go in,’ said Jane, rising. ‘I am glad we have had this talk,’ she added as he walked beside her across the lawn. ‘Yes, your advice went home but still, I have shewn you how it really is, haven’t I?’

He was feeling seven again but Jane saw him now through old Margery’s glasses and it did not annoy her.

‘Yes,’ she said, smiling at him with her kind, true eyes, ‘it will prove a strong tie to our friendship and I do thank you, Dal, for all you have told me.’

Arrived in her room, Jane found she had half an hour to spare before dressing. She took out her diary. Her conversation with Garth Dalmain seemed worth recording, particularly his story of the preacher whose beauty of soul redeemed the ugliness of his body. She wrote it down verbatim.

Then she rang for her maid and dressed for dinner and the concert which should follow.

## Chapter Four.

‘Miss Champion. Oh, here you are. Your turn next, please. The last item of the local programme is being played, after which the Duchess explains Velma’s laryngitis. Let’s hope she will not call it appendicitis and then I usher you up. Are you ready?’

Garth had sought for Jane on the terrace and stood before her in the soft light of the hanging Chinese lanterns. The crimson Rambler in his buttonhole and his red silk socks which matched it, lent an artistic touch of colour to the conventional black and white of his evening clothes. Jane looked up from the comfortable depths of her wicker chair then smiled at his anxious face.

‘I’m ready,’ she said, and rose. ‘Has it gone well?’

‘It’s a packed audience and the Duchess is enjoying herself. It has been funnier than usual. But now comes the event of the evening. Where is your music?’

‘I’ll play it from memory, Dal.’

They passed into the concert-room and stood behind screens and a curtain, close to the half dozen steps leading from the side up onto the platform.

‘Oh, listen to the Duchess!’ whispered Garth. ‘My niece, Jane Champion, has kindly consented to step into the breach, which means that you will have to step up onto that platform in another half minute. Really it would be kinder to you if she said less about Velma. There! Appendicitis! I told you. Poor Madame Velma! Let’s hope it won’t get into the local papers. Oh, heavens, she’s enlarging on newfangled diseases. Well, it gives us a moment’s breathing space. To be honest, Miss Champion, I was joking about the music this afternoon, I can play for you if you like. No? Well, just as you think best. But remember, it takes a lot of voice to make that much effect in this concert room and the place is crowded; now the Duchess has gone. Come on. Mind the bottom step. Hang it all. It’s very dark behind this curtain’

Garth gave her his hand and Jane mounted the steps and passed into view of the large audience assembled in the Overdene concert-room. Her tall figure seemed taller than usual as she walked alone across the rather high platform. She wore a black evening gown of soft material, with old lace at her bosom and one string of pearls around her neck. When she appeared the audience gazed at her and applauded doubtfully. Velma's name on the programme had raised great expectations and here was Miss Champion, who certainly played very nicely, but was not supposed to be able to sing, volunteering to sing Velma's song.

A more kindly audience would have cheered but this one expressed its astonishment in the dubiousness of its faint applause.

Jane smiled at them good-naturedly, sat down at the piano, a Bechstein grand, gathered her graceful gown behind her, glanced at the festoons of white roses and the cross of crimson ramblers, then, without further preliminaries, struck the opening chord and commenced to sing.

The deep, perfect voice thrilled through the room. A sudden breathless hush fell upon the audience. Each syllable penetrated the silence, borne on a tone so tender and amazingly sweet, that casual hearts stood still and marvelled at their own emotion and those who felt deeply already, responded with a yet deeper thrill to the magic of that music.

‘The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,  
Are as a string of pearls to me;  
I count them over, every one apart,  
My rosary, - my rosary.’

Softly, thoughtfully, tenderly, the last two words were breathed into the silence, holding a world of reminiscence - a large-hearted woman's faithful remembrance of tender moments in the past.

The listening crowd held its breath. This was not a song. This was the throbbing of a heart; it throbbed in tones of such sweetness that tears started unbidden.

Then the voice which had rendered the opening lines so quietly, rose in a rapid crescendo of quivering pain.

‘Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer,  
To still a heart in absence wrung;  
I tell each bead unto the end, and there,  
A cross is hung, a cross is hung.’

The last four words were given with a sudden power and passion which electrified the assembly. In the pause which followed the tension could almost be heard. But in another moment the quiet voice fell soothingly, expressing a

strength of endurance which would fail in no crisis, nor fear to face any depths of pain; yet gathering to itself a poignancy of sweetness, rendered richer by the discipline of suffering.

‘O memories that bless and burn,  
O barren gain and bitter loss.  
I kiss each bead and strive at last to learn  
To kiss the cross, to kiss the cross.’

The lingering retrospection in each word, breathed out a love so womanly, so beautiful, so tender, that her identity was forgotten even by those who knew Jane best, in the magic rendering. The accompaniment, which opened with a single chord, closed with a single note.

Jane struck is softly, lingeringly, then rose, turned from the piano, and was leaving the platform, then a sudden burst of wild applause broke from the audience. Jane hesitated; paused; looked at her aunt’s guests as if almost surprised to find them there. Then the slow smile dawned in her eyes and passed to her lips. She stood in the centre of the platform for a moment, awkwardly, almost shyly, then moved on as men’s voices began to shout ‘Encore, Encore’ and left the platform by the side staircase.

But there, behind the scenes, in the semi-darkness of screens and curtains, a fresh surprise awaited Jane, more startling than the enthusiastic tumult of her audience.

At the foot of the staircase stood Garth Dalmain. His face was absolutely colourless and his eyes shone out from it like burning stars. He remained motionless.

Jane stepped from the last stair and remained motionless close to him, also, not knowing what else to do. Garth caught her by the shoulders. ‘Go back,’ He said, the overmastering need quivering in his voice drew Jane’s eyes to his in mute astonishment. ‘Go back at once and sing it all over again, note for note, word for word, just as before. Don’t stand there waiting. Go back, now, you must’

Jane looked into those shining eyes. Something she saw in them excused the brusque command of his tone. Without a word she quietly mounted the steps and walked across the platform to the piano. People were still applauding and doubled their demonstrations of delight as she appeared but Jane took her seat at the instrument without giving them a thought. She did just wonder if she had really seen tears in her aunt’s eyes but at the same time she was experiencing a very curious and unusual sensation.

Never before in her whole life had she obeyed a command like that. In childhood days her nurse and her tutor had found they could only obtain their

desires by carefully worded requests or pathetic appeals to her good nature. An unreasonable order was met with a blank refusal. This had all been modified with time but even the duchess, as a rule, said please to Jane.

But now a young man with a white face and blazing eyes had unceremoniously swung her round, ordered her up the stairs and commanded her to sing a song over again, note for note, word for word and she was meekly going to obey.

As she took her seat Jane suddenly made up her mind not to sing The Rosary again. She knew many equally fine songs. The audience expected another. Why should she disappoint those expectations because of the imperious demands of a very excited boy?

She commenced the magnificent prelude to Handel's 'Where'er you walk,' but, as she played it, her sense of truth and justice intervened. She had not come back to sing again at the bidding of a highly excited boy, but of a deeply moved man and his emotion was of no ordinary kind. She scarcely understood what he had meant by saying she 'must' play it and although a whole orchestra seemed marshalled at the moment under those strong fingers, equally suddenly she made up her mind to yield to its necessity. So, when the opening bars were ended, instead of singing the grand song from Semele, she paused for a moment, caught sight again of Garth's agonised face and struck once more 'The Rosary's opening chord and did as Garth had bidden her to do.

Garth had momentarily forgotten his usual sweet courtesy of manner, it seemed the highest possible tribute to her song. She sang as she had done so before.

'The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,  
Are as a string of pearls to me;  
I count them over, every one apart,  
My rosary; my rosary.

Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer,  
To still a heart in absence wrung;  
I tell each bead unto the end, and there  
A cross is hung. A cross is hung.

O memories that bless and burn,  
O barren gain and bitter loss.  
I kiss each bead, and strive at last to learn  
To kiss the cross, to kiss the cross.'

When Jane left the platform, Garth was still standing motionless. His face was just as white as before but his eyes had lost that terrible look of unshed tears which had sent her back at his bidding, without a word or question.

A wonderful light now shone in them. A light of adoration which touched Jane's heart because she had never before seen anything quite like it. She smiled as she came slowly down a stair or two and held out both hands to him with an unconscious movement of gracious friendliness. Garth stepped close to the stairs and took them in his, while she was still on the step above him. For a moment he did not speak.

Then in a low voice, vibrant with emotion, he said, 'My God! Oh, my God!' 'Hush, Dal,' said Jane, 'I never like to hear that name spoken lightly.' 'Spoken lightly,' he exclaimed. 'No speaking lightly would be possible for me tonight. 'Every perfect gift is from above.' When words fail me to speak of the gift, can you wonder if I exclaim at the Giver?'

Jane looked steadily into his shining eyes and a smile of pleasure illumined her own. 'So you like my song?' she said. 'Liked?. Liked your song?' repeated Garth, a shade of perplexity crossing his face. 'I do not know whether I like your song.'

'Then why this flattering demonstration?' enquired Jane, laughing.

'Because,' said Garth, very low and slowly, 'you lifted the veil and I . . . I passed within.'

He was still holding her hands in his and as he spoke the last two words, he turned them gently over and, bending, kissed each palm with an indescribably tender reverence; then loosing them, stood on one side, and Jane went out onto the terrace alone.

## Chapter Five.

Jane spent very few minutes in the drawing-room that evening. The fun in progress there was not to her taste and the

praises heaped on herself, annoyed her. Also she wanted the quiet of her own room in order to think over that closing episode of the concert which had taken place between herself and Garth behind the scenes.

She didn't seem certain how she was to take it.

She felt there was an element which she could not fathom and Garth's last act had awakened in her, feelings which she did not understand. She extremely disliked the way in which he had kissed her hands and yet he had put into the action such a passion of reverent worship that it gave her a sense of consecration. Would her gift of music be able to uplift people like that? She couldn't lose the sensation of the impress of his lips upon the palms of her hands. She caught herself looking at them anxiously.

The Duchess was at the piano, completely hidden from view by the whole of her house party, crowding round in fits of delighted laughter. As she saw Ronnie breaking through to fetch something for the Duchess to use in her imitations and Billy dashing to the writing table for a sheet of note-paper Jane concluded it all meant something to do with a clerical dog-collar and she turned rather wearily toward the door.

Quiet and unobserved though her retreat had been, Garth was at the door before her. She did not know how he got there because she had seen his sleek head close to Myra's on the further side of the crowd. He opened the door and Jane passed out. She wanted to say 'how dare you behave in so unconventional a way?' Or, alternatively, 'Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it,' but she said neither.

Garth followed her into the hall, lit a candle and threw the match at Tommy then handed her the silver candlestick. He was looking absurdly happy. Jane felt slight annoyance at something she couldn't share. Also, she felt she must break this intimate silence. It was saying so much which ought not to be said, since it couldn't be spoken.

She took her candle a little aggressively and turned on the second step.

'Goodnight, Dal,' she said, 'and you know you are missing the curate?'

He looked up at her. His eyes shone in the light of the candle.

'No,' he said. 'I am neither missing nor missed. I was only waiting in there until you went up. I shall not go back. I am going out into the park now to breathe in the coolness of the night air. And I am going to stand under the oaks and tell my beads. I did not know I had a rosary, until tonight, but I have, I have.'

'I should say you have a dozen,' remarked Jane, dryly.

'Then you would be wrong,' replied Garth. 'I have only one. But it has many hours. I shall be able to call them all to mind when I get out there alone.'

I am going to count each pearl.'

Jane hesitated. 'And how about the cross?' she asked.

'I haven't reached that yet,' answered Garth. 'There is no cross in my rosary.'  
'I am afraid there is a cross to every true rosary, Dal,' said Jane, gently, 'and I also fear it will go hard with you when you find yours.'

But Garth was confident and unafraid.

'When I find mine,' he said, 'I hope I shall be able to,.' Involuntarily Jane looked at her hands and Garth smiled as he saw her but coloured slightly. 'to face the cross.'

Jane turned and began to mount the stairs.

'Just a moment, Miss Champion. There is something I want to ask you. Will you think me impertinent, presuming, inquisitive?'

'I've no doubt I will,' said Jane. 'But I think you all sorts of unusual things tonight so three adjectives more or less will not matter much. You may ask.'

'Miss Champion, have you a rosary?'

Jane looked at him blankly, then suddenly understood.

'My dear boy, no,' she said. 'Thank goodness, I have kept clear of memories that bless and burn. None of these things enter into my well-ordered life and I have no wish that they should.'

'Then, how did you sing The Rosary as if each line were your own experience; each joy or pain a thing, long passed perhaps, but your own?'

'I told you,' explained Jane, 'didn't I? about the Chant Hindou?'

I had a rosary while I was singing, but in the sense you mean, no, I haven't.'

Garth mounted two steps bringing his eyes on a level with the candlestick.

'But if you cared,' he said, speaking very low, 'that is how you would care? that is as you would feel?'

'Yes,' said, Jane, considering, 'if I cared, I suppose I should care like that and feel as I felt during those few minutes.'

'Then it was you in the song?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' Jane interrupted, 'but I think this conversation is a bit unprofitable.' She paused.

Then she said, 'Goodnight, master Garthie.'

'Just one thing more, Miss Champion. Just one thing more. Will you come to the music-room and sing all the lovely things I want to hear? Will you let me play a few of them for you. Please promise you will come and sing whatever I ask and I won't bother you any more now.'

He stood looking up at her, waiting for her promise, with such adoration shining in his eyes that Jane was startled and more than a little troubled. Then suddenly it seemed to her that she had found the key to this extraordinary behaviour of his.

'Oh, yes,' she said, 'what an artist you are. How difficult it is for commonplace people like me to understand the artistic temperament. You like the perfection of the eye and now you hear the perfection of sound you feel you must worship that. I begin to understand how you turn the heads of the women

you paint. You are almost turning mine by your rapture. However, you are very delightful but I want to go to bed so I promise to sing all you want tomorrow. Don't spend the whole night in the park and don't frighten the deer. Run away and count your pearls and remember, if you suddenly come upon a cross, it can, in all probability, be persuaded to return to Chicago.'

Jane was still smiling as she entered her room and placed her candlestick on the dressing-table.

The Duchess refused to modernise Overdene so Jane proceeded to light both candles on either side of the mirror and all the others in the room. She wanted a brilliant illumination tonight.

She took out her diary and wrote 'Sang The Rosary for Aunt Gina when Velma failed to arrive' and then came to a full stop. Somehow the scene with Garth was difficult to record. The vibrant emotion in Garth, so strangely disturbing to her own solid calm, was not personal to herself.

Just as the sight of beauty craze him with delight, so his passion for the beautiful in sound had been awakened.

When she had given him his fill of song, he would be content. Then that disquieting look of adoration would pass from those beautiful brown eyes. Meanwhile it was pleasant to look forward to tomorrow.

Garth better go to hear Jane's own teacher if music delighted him so much. Jane began planning this and then her mind turned to Pauline Lister, the lovely American girl, whose name had been coupled with Garth Dalmain's all the season. Her loveliness would content him, her shrewd common sense and practical ways would counterbalance his erratic temperament. Once married he would give up raving about Flower and Myra and kissing people's hands in that absurd way. Jane was always truthful, even in her thoughts so had to change that to extraordinary way, as being more correct. She sat forward in her chair for a moment and held her large hands before her. She realised again the sensations of that moment. Then she pulled herself up sharply. 'Jane Champion, don't be a fool. You would wrong that dear boy and yourself if you took him for one moment, seriously. Don't spoil your success and his sweet homage to your art by any stupid sentimentality. Now, wash your very ungainly hands and go to bed.'

And under the oaks with soft turf beneath his feet stood Garth Dalmain, the shy deer sleeping around, unconscious of his presence, the stars hanging like lamps in the deep purple of the sky.

'I've found her,' he said, in low tones of rapture, 'the ideal woman, the one I have wanted all these years. To have known her so long and not realised. What a fool I've been. Oh, Jane! Jane! The perfect mate for spirit, soul and body. How blind I've been but she lifted the veil herself and I passed in. There will never be a veil there again. And she has no rosary, thank God for that. What will it mean? Jane's love, Jane's tenderness. 'I count each pearl.'

She will count them some day. Her pearls and mine. God spare us the cross. Must there be a cross to every true rosary? Then God give me the heavy end and may the mutual bearing of it bind us together. Oh, Jane, those dear hands, those steadfast eyes. Surely it has always been Jane and I didn't know it. Blind fool I am. Well, it will be her from this moment on and through eternity.'

The night breeze stirred his thick dark hair and his eyes as he raised them heavenward, shone in the starlight.

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And Jane, almost asleep, was roused by the tapping of her blind against the casement and murmured; 'Anything you wish, Garth, just tell me, I'll do it.' Then woke suddenly to consciousness and scolded herself furiously. 'Oh, you middle-aged donkey. A little flattery turns your head completely. Pull yourself together or leave Overdene by the first train tomorrow.'

## Chapter Six.

The days which followed were golden days to Jane. There was nothing to spoil the enjoyment of a very new and strangely sweet experience. Garth was very quiet and seemed to Jane older than she had ever known him. He had very few lapses into his seven year-old mood and when someone asked him whether he was practising the correct deportment of a soon-to-be-married man, 'Yes,' said Garth quietly, 'I am.'

'Will she be at Shenstone?' enquired Ronald.

'Yes,' said Garth, 'she will.'

'Oh, lor'!' cried Billy, dramatically. 'Are we to take thee seriously?'

But Jane who was wrapped in the morning paper, came out from behind it to look up at Garth and spoke so that only he heard.

'Oh, Dal, I'm so glad. Did you make up your mind last night?'

'Yes,' said Garth, turning close to her, 'yes, last night.'

'Did our talk in the afternoon have something to do with it?'

'Nothing whatever.'

'Was it The Rosary?'

Garth hesitated. Then said, without looking at her, 'The revelation of The Rosary. Yes.'

To Jane his mood of excitement was now fully explained and she could give herself up freely to the enjoyment of this new phase in their friendship because the hours of music together were a very real delight. Garth was more of a musician than she had known and she enjoyed his clean, masculine touch on the piano, more delicate than her own.

What her voice was to him during those wonderful hours he did not express in words, as, after that first evening he put a firm restraint on his speech. Under the oaks he had made up his mind to wait a week before speaking and he waited. But the new and strangely sweet experience to Jane was that of being absolutely first to some one. In ways known only to them both, Garth made her feel this.

There was nothing for anyone else to notice and yet she knew perfectly well that she never came into the room without his being instantly conscious that she was there; that she never left a room without being at once missed by him.

His attentions called forth no chaffing from his friends or 'hoity-toity' from the Duchess. The days were golden and the parting at night was sweet, and yet the thought of love in the ordinary sense of the word never entered Jane's mind. Jane had not come through a dozen seasons without receiving nearly a dozen proposals of marriage. She was an heiress and independent but her ignorance of the real thing drawing so near came from knowing too much of the travesty of it all.

Middle-aged men, becoming bald and grey and tired of attempting the upkeep of beautiful old country houses without adequate wherewithal, had proposed in a businesslike way and been quietly refused. Two or three nice boys whom she had helped felt it would be good to have her at hand to keep them straight in a sort of motherly way had been slapped and told not to be silly.

One solemn proposal lately from the bachelor rector who inflicted wearisome conversation when he called had put the momentous question to Jane who did not see any occasion to rise from her desk. As he intoned the opening sentence of his proposition, Jane opened a despatch-box and drew out her cheque-book. 'I shall be delighted to subscribe, Mr. Bilberry,' she said, 'Is it for a font, a pulpit, new hymn-books?'

'My dear lady,' said the rector tremulously, 'you misunderstand me. My desire is to lead you to the altar.'

'Dear Mr. Bilberry,' said Jane Champion, 'that would be quite unnecessary. From any part of your church the fact that you need a new altar-cloth is quite

obvious. With the greatest pleasure I'll subscribe. Please accept my cheque towards it.

You'll find my aunt in the aviary!

Jane would have liked to receive it back by post torn in half with a few wrathful lines of manly indignation but it didn't arrive. These were Jane's experiences of offers of marriage. And so now, when the adoring love of a man's whole being was tenderly, cautiously beginning to surround and envelop her, she did not recognise the reason of her happiness or of his devotion.

She considered him the avowed lover of another woman, with whose youth and loveliness she would not have dreamed of competing and she regarded this closeness of intimacy between herself and Garth as just a development of their friendship, though more beautiful than she had hitherto considered possible.

When Tuesday arrived, the party at Overdene broke up and Jane went to town to spend a couple of days with the Brands. Garth went straight to Shenstone where he had been asked expressly to be with Miss Lister and her aunt, Mrs. Parker-Bangs. Jane was due at Shenstone on Friday for the weekend.

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As Jane took her seat and the train moved out of the London terminus she leaned back in her corner with a sigh of satisfaction.

Why had she felt so restless and dissatisfied and lonely these last three days? She wondered why they had merely seemed like weary steppingstones to Friday. Here was Friday at last and she began to feel happy and exhilarated. What had been the matter with these three days?

Flower had been charming; Deryck, his own friendly and interesting self; little Dicky, delightful and Baby Blossom as sweet as only she could be. What was amiss? 'I know,' thought Jane. 'Of course! Why didn't I realise it? I had too much music during those last days at Overdene and *such* music.' She was soon absorbed in a pile of newspapers again and took up the Spectator with a sigh of satisfaction.

Myra met her at the station driving her two ponies and without losing a moment, Jane and her hostess were off along the country roads at a brisk trot.

The fields and woods were an exquisite, restful green in the afternoon sunshine. Wild roses clustered in the hedges. The last loads of hay were being carted in and there was an ecstasy in the songs of birds and a sense of sweetness about it all that Jane felt she had never known. She drew a deep breath and exclaimed involuntarily, 'Oh, it is so good to be here.'

'You are a dear,' said Lady Ingleby, twirling her whip and nodding graciously to waves from the hay field. 'It's such a comfort to have you. I always feel nothing can go wrong when you are around.'

Jane snatched a spray of clematis as the ponies brushed against the overhanging masses of honeysuckle and wild clematis. 'Traveller's joy it is called,' she said, and put the white blossoms in her buttonhole, smiling in glad anticipation. 'My house-party is going quite well,' continued Myra. 'And Jane, there seems to be no doubt about Dal. I shall be so pleased if things come off under my roof. The American girl is simply exquisite and so vivacious and charming. And Dal has quite given up being silly and is quite pensive and quiet, really if it were any one but he, I would almost say, dull. They both roam around together in the most approved fashion. I'm so afraid of the aunt putting Dal off, I try to get her to make all her remarks to me. I've promised Billy anything up to the half of my kingdom if he will sit at the feet of Mrs. Parker Bangs and listen to her wisdom. Anything to keep her away from them both.

You'll manage these boys now you are here but I really believe Dal will propose to Pauline Lister tonight. I don't know why he didn't last night. It was such a perfect evening and they went out on the lake. What more could Dal want? A lake and a moon and that lovely girl. Billy took Mrs. Parker Bangs over to the other side of the lake and nearly upset her laughing at the things she said. Mrs. Parker Bangs asked me afterwards if Billy was a widower. Whatever do you think she meant by that?'

I haven't the faintest idea,' laughed Jane. 'But I am delighted to hear about Dal and Miss Lister. She is just the girl for him and she will soon adapt herself to his ways and needs. Besides, Dal must have flawless perfection and he certainly gets it there.'

'He does indeed, you should have seen her last night in white satin and wild roses in her hair. I suppose Dal is making up his mind.'

'No,' said Jane, 'I believe he did that at Overdene. But it does mean a lot to him. He takes marriage very seriously. Who else is here?'

Lady Ingleby told off a list of names and Jane knew them all.

'Oh, that's lovely,' she said. 'Oh, I am glad to be here. London has been so hot and so dull. Ah! There's your new church. I want to hear the new organ. Has it two manuals or three?' 'Half a dozen I think,' said Lady Ingleby, 'and you work them up and down with your feet. But I think it is wiser for me to leave them alone when I play for the Sunday school. You never know what will happen if you touch those mechanical affairs.'

'Don't you mean the composition pedals?' suggested Jane. 'I dare say I do,' said Myra placidly. 'Anyway, it's those things underneath like footrests.'

Jane smiled at the thought of Garth's laughter if she told him about this.

They passed the church on the village green, ivy-clad and picturesque and half a minute later swerved in at the park gates. Myra laughed as she saw Jane's horrified look at the gateposts they had just missed.

'Here we are,' she said, as they dashed up the long drive between the elms, 'do notice Lawson, by the way, he is new and such a nice man. He sings well and plays the concertina and teaches in the Sunday school. He is also very good at mowing the lawns and is studying French with my maid. The only thing he seems really incapable of being is an efficient butler. Michael says I have a fatal habit of liking people and of encouraging them to do the things they do well instead of the things they are paid for. I suppose I have but I do like my household to be happy.'

They alighted and Myra trailed into the hall with a lazy grace which gave no indication of the masterly way she had handled the ponies.

'This way Jane, dear,' said Myra, 'we've put you in the Magnolia room. I knew you would love the view of the lake. I expect you know Michael is still in Norway. Oh, I forgot to tell you. There is a tennis tournament in progress. I must hasten down to the courts. Tea will be down there under the chestnuts. Dal and Ronnie are to play the final for the men's singles.'

'Thank you,' said Jane, 'I don't need to change but I'll just get rid of the railway dust and follow you.'

Ten minutes later, guided by sounds of cheering and laughter, Jane made her way through the shrubbery to the tennis lawns. The whole of Lady Ingleby's house party was assembled there, forming a picturesque group under the white and scarlet chestnut trees. Beyond, on the beautifully kept turf of the court, an exciting game was in progress. As she approached, Jane could distinguish Garth's slim, agile figure, in white flannels and violet shirt and young Ronnie, huge and powerful, trusting to the terrific force of his drives to counterbalance Garth's keener eye and swifter return. It was a good game with the score in Ronnie's favour but it was Garth's serve and he was almost certain to win. Jane walked along the line of garden chairs to where she saw a vacant one near Myra. She was greeted with delight but the watchers were eager to see the end of the game. Suddenly a general howl went up. Garth had served into the net and then over the line. 'Well,' said Billy. 'I never saw Dal do that before. However, as that is one all, it gives us the delight of watching another game.'

The players crossed over, Garth rather white beneath his tan. He was beyond words vexed with himself. Not that he minded losing the set but it seemed to him it must be patent to the whole crowd that it was the sight out of the corner of his eye of a tall, grey figure moving quietly along the line of chairs, which for a moment or two set earth and sky whirling and made a confused blur of the net and lines. As a matter of fact, only one of the onlookers connected Garth's loss of the game with Jane's arrival, that was the lovely girl, seated exactly opposite the net, with whom he exchanged a smile and a word as he crossed to the other side of the court.

The last game was the most exciting and went on the longest. 'Doesn't it make one giddy,' said Mrs. Parker Bangs to Billy who reclined at her feet on the grass.

'I should say it has gone on long enough. They must both be wanting their tea. It would have been kind of Mr. Dalmain to have let that last ball pass.'

'Yes, wouldn't it?' said Billy earnestly. 'But you see, Dal is not naturally kind. Now, if I had been playing against Ronnie, I should have let something pass a long time ago.'

'I am sure you would,' said Mrs. Parker Bangs, approvingly, while Jane leaned over, at Myra's request and pinched Billy.

'Deuce! Deuce!' shouted half a dozen voices.

'They shouldn't say that!' said Mrs. Parker Bangs.

'No, isn't it sad?' murmured Billy. 'I never say naughty words like that,' looking up at her with seraphic innocence. Jane gave him a little kick this time.

'Billy,' said Myra sternly, 'go into the hall and fetch my scarlet sunshade. Yes, I dare say you will miss the finish.' Billy leaned over her chair, remonstrating. 'I've made up my mind what to ask, dear queen,' whispered Billy as he returned, breathless, three minutes late, 'You promised me anything, up to the half of your kingdom. I'll have the head of Mrs. Parker Bangs in a charger.'

'Shut up, Billy, and get out of the way,' said Jane.

'Come on, Dal,' she cried amid the general hubbub.

Garth knew that dear voice. He did not look in its direction but he smiled. The next moment his arm shot out like a flash of lightning. The ball touched the ground on Ronnie's side of the net and shot the length of the court with rising. Ronnie's wild scoop at it was hopeless. Game and set were Garth's.

They walked off the ground together, their rackets under their arms, the flush of a well-contested fight on their handsome faces. Pauline Lister had been sitting with Garth's coat on her lap and his watch and chain were in her keeping. He paused a moment to take them up and receive her congratulations then, slipping on his coat and pocketing his watch, came straight to Jane.

'How do you do, Miss Champion?' he said.

## Chapter Seven.

Garth's eyes sought Jane's eagerly. The welcoming gladness he saw in them filled him with content. He had missed her so unutterably during these days. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday had just been weary stepping-stones to Friday. It seemed incredible that one person's absence could make so vast a difference. He felt certain that Jane also experienced the blank. That was perfect, he thought, as this was the day when he intended to tell her how desperately he wanted her always. A thing so complete and overwhelming as the miss of her had been to him could not be one-sided. Well, it was worth it if it had taught them what together could mean. Now he would speak the words which should insure forever no more such partings.

All this sped through Garth's mind as he greeted Jane with that commonplace English greeting. But from Garth, at that moment, it did not sound commonplace to Jane, and she wanted above all things to tell him exactly how she was and to compare notes on the happenings of these three interminable days. She wanted to hear all about himself and to take up their close companionship again, exactly where it had left off. Her hand went home to his with a firm completeness. 'I'm very well, thank you Dal, now that I've arrived here at last.'

Garth stood his racket against the arm of her chair and deposited himself full length on the grass beside her.

'Was anything wrong with London?' he asked, rather low, not looking up at her, but at the smart brown shoe, planted firmly on the grass so near his hand. 'Nothing wrong with London,' replied Jane, 'something wrong with me and you will be ashamed of me, Dal, if I confess what it was.'

Garth did not look up, but patiently picked little blades of grass and laid them in a pattern on Jane's shoe. This conversation would have been exactly to the point had they been alone. But was Jane really going to announce to the assembled company, in that dear, resonant, carrying voice of hers, the sweet secret of their miss of one another?

'Liver?' enquired Mrs. Parker Bangs suddenly.

'Muffins!' exclaimed Billy instantly, and rushed to get them, shot them into her lap almost falling over Garth's feet.

Jane stared at Mrs. Parker Bangs and her muffins then looked down at the top of Garth's dark head, bent low over the grass. 'No, I was dull,' she said, 'intolerably dull. And I found it was largely Dal's fault. Do you hear, Dal?'

Garth lifted his head and looked at her, realising in that moment that it was, after all, possible for a complete and overwhelming experience to be one-sided. Jane's calm grey eyes were full of gay friendliness.

'It was your fault, my dear boy,' said Jane.

'How so?' queried Garth and though his voice was quiet, there was a deep flush on his sunburned face.

'Because, during those last days at Overdene, you led me into a time of great musical enjoyment, such as I had never known before and I missed it to an alarming degree.'

'Well,' said Myra, coming out from behind her red parasol, 'you and Dal can have orgies of music here if you want them. You'll find a piano in the drawing-room and another in the hall and a Bechstein grand in the billiard-room. But I think I play best on the little cottage piano we had in the schoolroom at home. It seems more accustomed to the way I play, but if you want something really exciting you could attend some of the rehearsals for this service of song we are doing in aid of the organ fund. I believe they are attempting great things.'

'I'd sooner pay off the whole deficit for them,' said Jane. 'Oh, no,' said Garth quickly, noting Myra's look of disappointment, 'it's so good for people to work off their own debts and earn what they need for their own churches. I'm sure it will be delightful. Lawson was outlining some of the songs for me this morning. Miss Champion, you will walk down with me to the very next rehearsal.'

'Shall I?' said Jane, unconscious of how tender was the smile she gave him, conscious only that in her own heart was the remembrance of the evening at Overdene when she felt so inclined to say to him - 'tell me just what you want me to do and I'll do it.'

'Pauline will just love to go with you,' said Mrs. Parker Bangs. 'She dotes on rural music.'

'Rubbish, aunt,' said Miss Lister, 'you know I don't care for any music but the best there is.'

'You must come,' said Jane, quickly, 'Dal will explain it all to us and we will enjoy it.'

Jane turned in her chair and listened with appreciation while the lovely American girl talked about an exciting experience on board as they came from the States and neared Ireland. She watched with real delight, the exquisite face and graceful gestures of Miss Lister, thinking how Dal must enjoy looking at her when she spoke with so much charm and animation. She glanced down, trying to see the admiration in his eyes but his head was bent and he was apparently absorbed in the occupation of tracing the shoe she was wearing with the long stalk of a chestnut leaf. For a moment she watched the slim brown hand as

carefully intent on this useless task as if he were working on a canvas. Jane suddenly withdrew her foot feeling almost vexed with him for his inattention and apparent indifference.

Garth sat up instantly, taking a keen interest. Lady Ingleby laughed in all the right places. 'Well,' she said, at last, 'how about the tennis continuing, now. Dal, you and Miss Lister play Colonel Loraine and Miss Vermont and I think you ought to win fairly easily. You are both so well matched. Jane, this will be worth watching.'

'I'm sure it will,' said Jane, warmly, looking at the two who had risen and stood together in the evening sunlight. They made such a radiantly beautiful couple it was as if nature had put her very best and loveliest into every detail. The only fault which could possibly have been found with the idea of them wedded was that her dark slim beauty was so very much just a feminine edition of his, that they might easily have been taken for brother and sister. This was not a fault which occurred to Jane. Her wholehearted admiration of Pauline increased every time she looked at her and now she had really seen them together, she felt sure she had given wise advice to Garth and rejoiced to know he was taking it.

Later on, as they strolled back to the house together, she and Garth alone, Jane asked simply, 'Dal, is it settled yet?'

'You mean and I don't mind what you ask me, at all, any time; you mean, is it settled that Miss Lister and I should be engaged? No, and what made you suppose we should be?'

'You said, you said, at Overdene, we should take you seriously.'

'It seems years ago,' said Garth. 'I sincerely hope you will take me, seriously. All the same I have not proposed to Miss Lister and I am anxious to have a serious talk with you about it.' Garth turned to Jane and spoke in a low voice. 'Miss Champion, I would like you to come out onto the terrace with me after dinner. The moonlight on the lake is worth seeing. I spent an hour out there last night, no you are wrong, I was quite alone, and I thought of, how, tonight, we might be talking there together.'

'Certainly, I'll come,' said Jane.

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Jane sat on her windowsill enjoying the sunset and the exquisite view and glad of a quiet half hour before she need think of dressing. Immediately below her ran the terrace and beyond a stretch of smooth lawn sloping down to the lake which now lay a silvery stream in the soft evening light. The stillness was perfect with a great sense of peace. A sense of content and well-being filled her. Presently she heard a light step on the gravel below and leaned forward to see to whom it belonged.

Garth had come out of the French windows and was walking briskly to and fro. Then he flung himself into a wicker seat just beneath her window and sat there meditatively. Garth was humming softly and then gradually broke into words and sang in his sweet baritone:

‘It is not mine to sing the stately grace,  
The great soul beaming in my lady’s face.’

The tones became vibrant with passionate feeling and Jane felt herself an eavesdropper. She hastily picked a large magnolia leaf and leaning out, let it fall on his head. Garth, startled, and looked up. ‘Hello’ he said, ‘is it you up there?’

‘Yes, it’s me up here, and you are serenading the wrong window.’

‘What a lot you know about it,’ remarked Garth, moodily.

‘Don’t I?’ whispered Jane. ‘But you mustn’t mind, because you know how much I care - in old Margery’s absence.’

Garth sprang up, looking up at her, half-amused, half-defiant.

‘Shall I climb the magnolia? I have heaps to say to you and it cannot be shouted to the whole front of the house.’

‘Certainly not, it will all have to keep. I don’t want any Romeo’s climbing in at my window.’

‘All right, all right,’ said Garth. ‘But you must come out after dinner and let me have as much time as I want.’

‘I’ll come as soon as we can escape. And look at those beautiful white flowers. Would you like one for your buttonhole?’

He gave her a wistful little smile and then turned and went inside.

‘Why ever do I feel like teasing him?’ thought Jane. ‘I’m being silly and he is being serious. Myra is quite right, he is taking it all very seriously. And how about her? I hope she cares enough and in the right way. Yes, come in, Matthews and you can put out the gown I wore on the night of the concert.’

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All the impatience in the world could not prevent dinner at Shenstone from being a long function, and two of the most popular people in the party could not easily escape afterwards unnoticed. So a distant clock in the village was striking ten as Garth and Jane stepped out onto the terrace together. Garth caught up a rug in passing and closed the door of the lower hall carefully behind him. They were quite alone. It was the first time. They walked silently side by side to a wide stone parapet overlooking the old-fashioned garden. The silvery moonlight flooded the whole scene with radiance.

Garth spread the rug and Jane sat down on the coping. He stood beside her, one foot on the coping, his arms folded and his head erect. Jane seated herself sideways, turning towards him, her back to an old stone lion mounting guard on

the parapet and looking down on the lake. She thought Garth was looking in the same direction, but Garth was looking at Jane. She wore the same trailing black gown of soft material she had worn at the concert only this time with crimson rambler roses nesting in the creamy old lace which covered the bosom of her gown.

There was a quiet strength and nobility about her attitude which thrilled the soul of the man who stood watching her. All the adoring love and the passion of worship which filled his heart rose to his eyes and shone there. No need to conceal it now. His hour had come at last and he had nothing to hide from the woman he loved.

Presently she turned wondering why he did not begin his confidences about Pauline Lister. Looking up enquiringly, she met his eyes. She half rose from her seat. 'Dal! Oh, Dal, - don't!' He gently pressed her back. 'Hush, dear,' he said, 'I must tell you everything and you have promised to listen and I am sure, to help and advise.'

Jane, I shall need your help. I want your help badly, greatly, and not only your help, Jane, but you, you, yourself. Ah, Jane, how I want you. These three days have been one continual ache of loneliness, because you were not there. Life began to live and move again only when you came back. It has been very hard, waiting all these hours to speak. I have so much to tell you, Jane, of all you are to me, all you have become to me, since the night of the concert. Everything before this has been trivial and on the surface. This need of you, wanting you, is so huge. I tell you, Jane, it dwarfs all that went before. Jane, Jane, listen to me, I've admired so many women. I've raved about them, sighed for them, painted them and then forgotten them. But I never loved a woman before. I never knew what womanhood meant to a man, until I heard your voice thrill through the stillness 'I count each pearl.' Jane, beloved Jane, I have learned to count pearls since then, precious hours in the past, long forgotten, now remembered, and at last understood. 'Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer.'

My passionate prayer has been that all that has passed between us and all that is to come may blend together to be a perfect rosary. Ah, Jane, Jane, how can I make you understand.'

She was not sure just when he had come so near but he had dropped to one knee in front of her and as he uttered the last broken sentences, he passed both his arms around her waist and pressed his face into the soft lace at her bosom. A sudden quietness came over him. All struggling with explanations seemed hushed into the silence of complete comprehension, an all-pervading, enveloping silence.

Jane neither moved nor spoke. It was so strangely sweet to have him there - this whirlwind of emotion come home to rest, in a great stillness, just above her

quiet heart. Suddenly she realised that the blank of the last three days had not been the miss of the music but the miss of him and as she realised this, she unconsciously put her arms about him.

Sensations unknown to her before, awoke and moved within her. A heavenly sense of aloofness from the world, the loneliness of life all swept away by this dear fact, just he and she together. Even as she felt it, he lifted his head, still holding her, and looking into her face, said, simply 'You and I together, my own, Jane, my own.'

But those beautiful shining eyes were more than Jane could bear. The sense of her plainness smote her, even in that moment and those adoring eyes seemed lights that revealed it. With no thought in her mind but to hide the outward part of herself from him she quickly put both hands behind his head and pressed his face down again in the lace at her bosom. He had come so close to the shrine within and she couldn't bear it. But to him those dear firm hands holding him close, seemed an acceptance of himself and of all he had to offer.

For ten, twenty, thirty exquisite seconds, his soul throbbed in silence and rapture beyond words. Then he broke from the pressure of those restraining hands; lifted his head and looked at her. 'My wife!' he said.

## Chapter Eight.

Into Jane's honest face came a look of startled wonder then a deep flush, making her cheeks red and her heart die within her.

She disengaged herself from Garth's hold, rose and stood quite still. Garth Dalmain stood beside her. He did not touch her nor speak again. He felt sure he had won. His whole soul was filled with a gladness unspeakable. His spirit was content. The intense silence seemed more expressive than words. Any ordinary touch would have dimmed the sense of those moments when her hands had held him.

At last Jane spoke. 'Do you mean that you wish to ask me to be - to be that - to you?'

‘Yes, dear,’ he answered, gently but his voice vibrated with self-control. ‘At least I came out here intending to ask it of you. But I cannot ask it now, beloved. I can’t ask you to be what you are already. No promise, ceremony or giving or receiving of a ring, could make you more my wife than you have been just now in those wonderful moments.’

Jane slowly turned and looked at him. She had never seen anything so radiant as his face. She longed again to cover his shining eyes but shielded her own face with a hand. Then she answered him, trying to speak calmly.

‘You’ve taken me absolutely by surprise, Dal. I knew you had been delightfully attentive since the concert and, and we had an increased intimacy because of all the music. It has, I must honestly admit it has meant more to me than any friendship has ever meant but Dal, I truly thought you wanted me out here in order to pour out confidences about Pauline Lister. Everybody believes that her loveliness has brought about your final choice, Dal, truly, I thought so, too.’

‘Well now you know otherwise.’

‘Dal, you have so startled me. I, I can’t give you an answer tonight. You must let me have until tomorrow.’

But, beloved,’ he said tenderly, moving a little closer, ‘there is no more need for you to answer than I felt need to put a question. Don’t you realise that? My dear, come back to me. Sit down again.’

But Jane stood rigid.

‘No, no, I can’t. I can’t allow you to take things so much for granted. You took me by surprise. I lost my head utterly. But marriage is different. It’s a serious thing. Marriage is not a mere question of feelings. It has to last and wear forever. It must have a solid foundation, it has to stand the test and strain of daily life together. Oh, Dal, I’ve seen so many married couples, actually staying in their homes, I vowed I would never risk it myself. And now I’ve let you put this question, I just must have twelve hours at least, to think it over.’

Garth took this silently. He sat down on the stone coping and leaned back, trying not to see her face.

He rocked himself gently backwards and forwards for a while stealing his mind and quieting his heart with the utmost self-control. He had to master the impulse to speak or act violently. He concentrated his mind on trivial things, his red socks, resolving that Jane should always knit them for him. He counted the windows along the front of the house noting which were his and which were Jane's and how many came between. At last he knew he could trust himself and spoke very gently, his dark head almost touching the lace of her sleeve.

‘Dearest, tell me, didn’t you feel just now,’

'Oh, hush.' cried Jane, almost harshly. 'Hush, Dal, don't talk about feelings. Marriage is fact, not feeling. If you want to do really the best thing for us both, go indoors now and don't speak to me again tonight. I heard you say you were going to try the organ in the church at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. Well, I'll come there soon after that and listen while you play and at noon I will give you my answer. Please, dear, I can't bear any more now.'

Garth loosed the strong fingers clasped so tightly round his knee. He slipped the hand next to her along the coping, close to her foot. She felt him take hold of her gown with those deft, masterful fingers. Then he bent his dark head quickly and whispered, 'I kiss the cross,' with a gesture of infinite reverence and tenderness which Jane never forgot, he kissed the hem of her skirt. The next moment she was alone.

She listened while his footsteps died away. She heard the lower door open and close. She sat slowly down and the tension of the last few moments relaxed. She pressed both hands over the lace at her bosom where that dear, beautiful, adoring face had been hidden. Had she felt, he asked. Ah! What had she not felt? Tears never came easily to Jane. But tonight she had been called a name by which she had never thought to be called. Her honest heart told her she would never be called by it again. Then large, silent tears overflowed and fell on her hands and on the lace at her breast. The wife and the mother in her had been awakened and stirred and the deeps of her nature broke through the barriers of her stern repression and self-control. The womanly tribute of tears would not be driven back.

Around her feet lay the scattered petals of crushed rambler roses. Presently, quietly, Jane passed indoors. The upper hall was filled with chattering, happy groups and resounded with 'goodnights' as the women mounted the wide staircase. Garth Dalmain was standing at its foot, talking to Pauline Lister and her aunt. Jane saw his slim erect figure and glossy head as soon as she entered, but although she drew quite near, he gave no sign of being aware of her presence. His back was towards her and joy in his voice seemed to make him hers again in this new sweet way. She alone knew what had caused it and unconsciously she put one hand over her bosom as she listened.

'Sorry, dear ladies,' Garth was saying, 'but tomorrow morning is impossible. I have an engagement in the village. Yes . . . Really! At eleven o'clock.'

'Why not take Pauline along,' said Mrs. Parker Bangs. 'It sounds so rural and pretty. We haven't seen any dairies or dairymaids or any of the things in 'Adam Bede' since we came over. I'd love to see myself reflected in the warming-pans.'

'Perhaps we would be in the way,' murmured Miss Lister.

She looked very lovely in her creamy-white satin gown, her small head held regally and the brilliant charm of American womanhood radiating from her.

She wore no jewels save one string of perfectly matched pearls but on Pauline Lister's neck even pearls seemed to sparkle.

All these remarks, flung at Garth, passed over his sleek head and reached Jane, lingering in the background. She took in every detail.

Garth laughed. 'My appointment is with a very grubby small boy with a shock of red hair. I give him threepence an hour.'

'Oh, how philanthropic, it's a caddy, isn't it?' said Mrs. Parker Bangs. Well, now we know you will be on the golf course, it will be well worth the walk to see you play.'

Jane could hear the twinkle in his voice.

'My dear ladies,' said Garth. 'In your great kindness of heart you overestimate my kind of golf as you overestimate many other things about me. But I should like to think of you at the links tomorrow morning at eleven. I would offer to escort you but duty takes me in another direction. However, when it is known that Miss Lister intends to wander through the woods to the golf course, there will be a host of others suddenly deciding to do the same thing.'

Mrs. Parker Bangs was beginning to question effusively when her niece interrupted.

'That will do, aunt,' she said, suddenly, 'and we are now blocking the staircase and Miss Champion has for some time been trying ineffectually to pass us. Do you play golf tomorrow, Miss Champion?'

Garth stood on one side and Jane began to mount the stairs. He did not look at her but it seemed to Jane that his eyes were on the hem on her gown as it trailed past him. She paused beside Miss Lister, knowing exactly how effectual a foil she made to the American girl's white loveliness. She turned and faced him. She wished him to look up and see them standing there together. She wanted the artist eyes to take in the cruel contrast. She wanted the artist soul of him to realise it. She waited.

Garth's eyes were still on the hem of her gown, close to the left foot but he lifted them slowly to the lace at her bosom where her hand still lay. There they rested a moment, then dropped again, without rising higher.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Parker Bangs, 'are you playing a round of golf with Mr. Dalmain tomorrow, Miss Champion?'

Jane suddenly flushed crimson and then was furious with herself for blushing and hated the circumstances which made her feel and act so unlike her ordinary self. She hesitated one long, dreadful moment. How dared Garth behave in that way? People would think there was something unusual about her gown. She felt a wild impulse to stoop and look at it herself to see whether his kiss had materialised and was hanging like a star to the silken hem. Then she forced

herself to calmness. 'I am not golfing tomorrow but you could not do better than go yourselves. Goodnight to you both. Goodnight, Dal.,'

Garth was on the step below them.

'Goodnight, Miss Champion,' he said and for one instant his eyes met hers but he did not hold out his hand or appear to see hers half extended.

The three women mounted the staircase together then went separate ways.

'They've had a tiff,' sniffed Mrs. Parker Bangs.

'Poor thing,' said Pauline. 'I do like her. Now aunt, come in and sit down and make yourself comfortable for a short while.'

'Well, if you are going to talk about Miss Champion, can you tell me why she doesn't pay someone to help her with her looks?'

'Now listen, aunt. She is not a raving beauty but she has a fine figure and she dresses so well. She has heaps of money and wears pearls far finer than mine. All the men adore her, not for her looks but for what she is. That is what counts. In ten years time the Honourable Jane Champion will be just the same and I shall be trying to look what I'm not. Now aunt, about Garth Dalmain,'

Pauline turned to the mirror to begin undoing her hair and take off her jewellery.

'He has eyes for all of us and a heart for none of us. His admiring looks do not mean marriage. He has an ideal of womanhood and he will not marry below it. If the Sistine Madonna held out the infant to a certain woman he might consider it but only until he found another dainty foot that would look better on his Persian carpet.'

Pauline turned to her aunt who looked aghast. There was a gentle knock on the door. 'Mais, oui, Josephine, entrez - if I stay in this tight dress any longer I shall not answer for the consequences. Now, aunt, don't look so horrified.

The Honourable Jane Champion is Garth's ideal woman but she is too sensible to let him tie himself to her, thinking she is too plain.' Miss Lister spoke very gently while Mrs. Parker Bangs sniffed into a lace handkerchief, thoroughly upset.

'Garth Dalmain already possesses her in his soul.'

'But, dear ,' said her aunt.

'Now, aunt, let me finish. While you dear ladies have been matchmaking, he has been worshipping the ground she walks on.' Pauline turned back to the mirror and began to brush her hair. 'You see. He enjoyed being with me because I understood and let him talk about her. He knew I could be trusted to disappear when she came in sight.'

She sighed and put her arms round her aunt. 'Now, dear, aunt, There is little more to be said, so you and I will toddle off the bed. Goodnight, dear aunt.'

She closed the door firmly behind her aunt and the maid and sat looking out of the window into the night. She was seriously hurt but would never allow it to be seen.

'Dear Dal,' she said to herself, 'I think I stated your case well - but you ought to have let me know about Jane weeks ago. As for you, you will go on sighing for the moon and when you find it is unobtainable there will never be any question of seeking solace anywhere else, even in our brave America.'

Jane, meanwhile had turned away and passed slowly to her room.

Garth had not taken her half-proffered hand and she knew perfectly well why. He would never again be content to clasp her hand in friendship. If she cut him off from the touch which meant absolute possession, she cut herself off from the contact of simple comradeship. Garth, tonight, was like royal tiger who had tasted blood.

She thought of him in his conventional evening clothes, correct in every line, well-groomed and smart almost to a fault. But out on the terrace with him she had realised for the first time the primal elements which go to the making of a man - a forceful, determined, ruling man - creation's king.

They echo of primeval forests. The roar of the lion is in them and fierceness of the tiger, all the instincts of dominant possession which says, 'mine to have and to hold, to fight for and enjoy against all comers.'

She had felt it and her own brave soul had understood it and responded to it, unafraid and been ready to mate with it, if only, oh, yes, if only . . .

But things could never be again as they had been before. If she meant to starve her tiger, steel bars must be between them for ever more. None of the sentimental suggestions or attempts to be a sort of sister and friend would do for the man whose head she had held against her breast. Jane knew this.

He had kept himself magnificently in hand after she put him from her but she knew he was only giving her breathing space. He considered her his own and that very certainty had given him a gentle patience to wait. But even now, waiting for her answer, he would not take her hand in friendship.

Jane closed her door and locked it. She must face this problem of the future with everyone and every thing else locked out. Just for a little while she would clasp this perfect gift of his love that he had given her, into her empty arms. Afterwards she must bring herself into the problem, her possibilities, her limitations, herself, in relation to him in the future. She had to think of the effect that marriage to her would have on him.

What it might mean to her did not consciously enter into her calculations. Jane was self-conscious, with that intense self-consciousness of reserved natures, but she was not selfish.

She drew the curtains back and looked out onto the river and the moonlight. Her window was almost opposite to the place where she and Garth had talked. She could see the stone lion and the vase full of scarlet geraniums. She could locate the exact spot where she was sitting when he, memories awoke, vibrant

Jane allowed herself the most wonderful mental experience of her life. She was woman of purpose and decision. She had said she had a right to that hour and she took it to the full. In her soul she met her tiger and mated with him, unafraid. He had not asked whether she loved him or not and she did not need to ask herself. She surrendered her proud liberty and tenderly, humbly, wistfully, yet with all the strength of her strong nature, promised to love, honour and obey him.

She met the adoration of his splendid eyes without a tremor. She had locked her body out. She was alone with her soul and her soul was all-beautiful, perfect for him. The loneliness of years slipped from her. Life became rich and purposeful. He needed her always and she was always there and always able to meet his need.

‘Are you content, my beloved?’ she asked over and over again and heard Garth’s joyous voice, with the ring of perpetual youth in it, answered always ‘Perfectly content.’

Jane smiled into the night and in the depths of her calm eyes dawned a knowledge hitherto unknown with an unspeakable sweetness, an understanding of the secret of a woman’s truest bliss. ‘He is mine and I am his.’

To all this she gave herself completely, gathering him into the shelter of her love.

Then the mother in her awoke and realised how much of the maternal flows into the love of a true woman when she understands how largely the child-nature predominates in the man in love and how the very strength of his love reduces the strong nature to unaccustomed weakness.

Jane pressed her hands upon her breast. ‘Garth,’ she whispered. ‘I understand it was so hard for you to be sent away at that moment, but you had all, all you wanted in those few wonderful moments and no other head will ever rest here, ever. I am yours, tonight and henceforward, forever.’

A clock in the distant village struck midnight. The twelve strokes floated up to Jane’s window across the moonlit park. Her freed spirit resumed the burden of her body. A new day had begun, the day on which she had promised her answer to Garth. The next time that the clock struck twelve she would be standing with him in the church and her answer must be ready.

She turned from the window, took off her evening gown and slipped on a sage-green wrapper. She took her diary, unlocked the heavy clasp and began to read. She turned the pages slowly, pausing her and there until she came to the words she sought. They contained a very full account of her conversation with Garth on the afternoon of the day of the concert at Overdene. It was Garth’s account of a sermon he had heard as a child - a sermon his mother had taken him to hear - and from the ugliest man he had ever seen. ‘Child though I was, I could see the difference between ugliness and plainness and I saw goodness and

inspiration making it as the face of an angel. I have associated his face ever since with the beauty of his soul. I remembered the divine halo of his smile! Of course it was not the sort of face one could have wanted to live with . . .’

At first Jane read the entire passage. Then her mind focused itself on one sentence: ‘Of course it was not the sort of face one could have wanted to live with or to have day after day opposite at the table, which would have been martyrdom to me.’

At length Jane rose, turned on all the lights over the dressing-table, and, sitting down before it, faced herself honestly.

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When the village clock struck one, Garth Dalmain stood at his window taking a final look at the night which had meant so much to him. He remembered, with an amused smile, how, to help himself to calmness, he had sat on the terrace and thought of his socks, and then had counted the windows between his and Jane’s. There were five of them. He knew her window by the magnolia tree where he had chanced to sit. He leaned far out and looked towards it now. The curtains were drawn and there seemed to be a light but as he watched, it went out. He could see the exact spot where she was sitting when he . . .

Then he dropped on his knees beside the window and looked up into the starry sky.

Garth’s mother had lived long enough to teach him the holy secret of her sweet patience and endurance. In moments of deep feeling, words from his mother’s Bible came to his lips more readily than expressions of his own thought.

‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’

‘Father,’ Garth added, ‘keep us in the light and may there be no shadow that is cast by turning for us.’

Then he rose to his feet and looked across once more to the stone lion and the broad coping. His soul sang within him and he folded his arms across his chest. ‘My wife!’ he said. ‘Oh, my wife!’

.....

And as the village clock struck one, Jane arrived at her decision.

Slowly she rose, turned off all the lights, then groping her way to the bed, fell on her knees beside it and broke into a passion of desperate, silent weeping.

## Chapter Nine.

Jane paused beneath the ivy-covered porch of the old church and stood listening. She knew there was no need to hurry as the clock showed the time as half past eleven.

The tones of the organ seemed to reach her from an immense distance. Pushing the heavy door open, she went in. Instantly a stillness entered into her soul. The worshipping minds of centuries seemed to hush the insistence of her beating heart. For a few moments she forgot her errand and bowed her head in worship.

Garth was playing the 'Veni, Creator Spiritus' to Attwood's perfect setting and as Jane walked noiselessly up to the chancel, he began to sing the words of the second verse. He sang them softly but his beautifully moderated voice carried well and every syllable reached her. She paused at the entrance to the chancel.

Garth sang unhurriedly -

    'Enable with perpetual light  
    the dullness of our blinded sight;  
    Anoint and cheer our soiled face  
    With the abundance of Thy grace;

    Keep far our foes; give peace at home;  
    Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come.'

Had she not prayed for guidance? Then surely all would be well. Then the organ swelled into full power and Garth played again without the words. Enable with perpetual light - what a beautiful expression. The soft amber light entered through the stained-glass windows.

As Garth sang again, each syllable seemed to pierce the silence like a ray of purest sunlight. Jane could just see the top of his dark head over the heavy brocade of the organ curtain. She dreaded the moment when he might turn and those vivid eyes should catch sight of her.

'The dullness of our blinded sight' - How would he take what she must say? Would he be tragically heartbroken? Would he argue and insist and override her judgement? 'Anoint and cheer our spoiled face,' he sang, 'With the abundance of Thy grace.'

Could she oppose his fierce strength, if he chose to exert it? What reason could she give that Garth would take as final? - 'Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come.' Then, suddenly, after a few soft cords, the music changed.

Jane's heart stood still. Garth was playing The Rosary. He did not sing it but the soft insistence of the organ pipes seemed to press the words into the air as no voice could do. Memory's pearls, in all their purity and preciousness held new meaning for Jane. Then sadder notes of the flute sounded the finding of the cross. Jane looked helplessly around as if seeking some escape from the little church and the sad sweetness of the sounds which filled.

Suddenly it ceased and Garth stood up, turned and saw her. The same great joy she had seen before leaped into his face. A red-headed, grubby boy, clutching a shilling Garth had handed him, came out from behind the organ where he had been pumping, and clattered down the aisle and the heavy door closed behind him with a resounding clang.

Garth had remained standing beside the organ, quite motionless, without looking at Jane and now that they were absolutely alone in the church, he still stood and waited a few moments. To Jane those moments seemed days, weeks, years, an eternity. Then he came out into the centre of the chancel, his head erect, his eyes shining, his whole bearing that of a conqueror sure of his victory.

He walked slowly down, passing beneath the carved oaken screen and stood at the step. Then he signed to Jane to come and stand beside him.

'Here, dearest,' he said, 'let it be here.'

Jane came to him and for a moment they stood together.

It was darker than the rest of the church but the centre stained-glass window gleamed with gems of colour showing the Saviour of the world, dying upon the cross. They stood over the communion table gazing at it in reverent silence.

Then Garth turned to Jane.

'My beloved,' he said, 'it is a sacred Presence and a sacred place.

But no place could be too sacred for that which we have to say to each other, and the Holy Presence, in which we both believe, is here to bless and ratify it.

I am waiting for your answer.'

Jane cleared her throat and put her trembling hands into the large pockets of her tweed coat.

‘Dal,’ she said, finally, ‘my answer is a question. How old are you?’ She felt his start of intense surprise. She saw the light of expectant joy face from his face. But he replied, after only a momentary hesitation; ‘I thought you knew, dearest, I am twenty-seven.’

‘Well,’ said Jane slowly and deliberately, ‘I am thirty and I look thirty-five and I feel forty. You are twenty-seven, Dal, and you look nineteen, and often feel like nine. I have been thinking it over and - you know - I can’t marry a mere boy.’

There was absolute silence in the little church.

In sheer terror Jane forced herself to look at him. He was white to the lips. His face was very stern and calm, a strange, stony calmness. There was not much youth in it just then. ‘Anoint and cheer our soiled face,’ The silent church seemed to wail the words in bewildered agony.

At last Garth spoke.

‘I hadn’t thought of myself,’ he said slowly. ‘I can’t explain how it comes to pass but I have not thought of myself at all since my mind has been full of you. Therefore, I had not realised how little there is in me that you could care for. I just believed you had felt as I did, that we were just each other’s.’

For a moment he put out his hand as if he would have touched her. Then it dropped heavily to his side. ‘You are quite right,’ he said. ‘You could not marry any one whom you consider a mere boy.’ He turned from her and faced the window over the holy table, where hung the suffering Christ.

For the space of a long moment he gazed at it then bowed his head. ‘I accept the cross,’ he said, and turned to walk quietly down the aisle. The church door opened, closed behind him with a heavy clang, and Jane was alone. She stumbled back to the seat she had left and fell onto her knees.

‘O God,’ she cried, ‘send him back, send him back. Oh Garth! It’s I who am plain and unattractive and unworthy, not you. Oh, Garth, come back. Come back. Garth, come back. I’ll, I’ll trust and not be afraid.. Oh, my own dear Garth, please come back.’

She listened with straining ears. She waited until every nerve of her body ached with suspense. She decided what she would say when the heavy door reopened and she saw Garth standing in a shaft of sunlight. She tried to remember the ‘Veni, Creator Spiritus’ but the hollow clang of the door had silenced even memory’s echo of that haunting music. So she waited silently and as she waited the silence grew and seemed to enclose her within cruel, relentless walls which opened only to allow her the vision of future lonely years.

Just once more she broke that silence to cry aloud 'Oh darling boy, come back! I will risk it,' but no step drew near.

Then, kneeling with her face buried in her clasped hands, Jane suddenly realised that Garth Dalmain had accepted her decision as final and irrevocable and would not return. How long she knelt there after realising this, she never knew. But at last comfort came to her. She felt she had done right. A few hours of present anguish were better than years of future disillusion. Her own life would be sadly empty. Losing this new found joy was costing her more than she had expected but she honestly believed she had done rightly towards him and what did her own pain matter?

At last she rose and passed out of the silent church into the breezy sunshine. She glimpsed the little redheaded organ pumper flying a new kite, full of joy and with a knot of excited boys around him. 'There goes my poor boy's shilling,' she said to herself, sadly, 'but he's lost his own joy.'

As she passed up the avenue a dog-cart was driven swiftly down it. Garth Dalmain drove it and behind him a groom and luggage. He lifted his hat as he passed her but looked straight before him. In a moment he was gone. Had Jane wanted to stop him she could not have done so. But she didn't want to stop him. He would eventually, perhaps not before too long, find another to be to him all and more than he had believed she could be. But the dull ache in her own bosom reminded her of her own words the night before, whispered in the secret of her bedroom to him, who alas, was not there to hear; 'Whatever the future brings for you and me, no other face will ever be hidden here.' And in this first hour of the coming lonely years, she knew them to be true.

In the hall she met Pauline Lister.

'Is that you, Miss Champion?' said Pauline. 'Well now, have you heard of Mr. Dalmain? He has had to go to town unexpectedly, on the 1.15 train and aunt has broken her false teeth and must get to the dentist right away. So we go to town on the 2.30 train. It's an uncertain world, complicating one's plans, isn't it? However, I'd sooner break false teeth than other people's hearts, any day. The former can be mended but I guess no-one can mend the later. We are lurching early in our rooms so I wish you goodbye, Miss Champion.'

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In the long days following as Jane's heart grew cold and frozen in its emptiness she found in subtle ways known only to herself that this Jack of hers did not break his crown. His portrait of Pauline Lister, painted six months afterwards, had proved the finest bit of work he had as yet accomplished. He had painted the lovely American in creamy white satin, standing on a dark oak

staircase, one hand resting on the balustrade, the other full of yellow roses, held out towards an unseen friend below. Behind and above her shined a beautiful stained-glass window belonging to an ancient ancestral home, placing her in surroundings which breathed an atmosphere of the best traditions of England's old world and wedding it to the fearless expression of the new. People smiled and said the painter had done on canvas what he shortly intended doing in reality

But the tie between artist and sitter never grew into anything closer than a pleasant friendship and it was the noble owner of the staircase and window who eventually persuaded Miss Lister to remain in surroundings which suited her so well.

Nearly a year elapsed before Jane heard a story told of Garth refusing to paint more on a day when someone had hummed the tune of The Rosary behind him while he painted. This incident warmed and woke Jane's heart for a moment and with the waking came a sharp pain. When next she stayed with Lady Brand she wandered to the piano and began to play the chords for herself.

Suddenly a voice behind her said: 'Sing it, Jane.' She turned quickly. The doctor had come in and was lying back luxuriously in a large armchair at her elbow, his hands clasped behind his head. 'Sing it, Jane,' he said again. 'I can't, Deryck,' she answered, still softly sounding the chords. 'I haven't sung for months.'

'What has been the matter for months?'

Jane swung round impulsively. 'Oh, dear boy,' she said, 'I have made a bad mess of my life. And yet I just know I did right. I would do the same again, at least, at least, I hope I would.'

The doctor sat in silence for a minute, looking at her and pondering these short, quick sentences. Also he waited for more, knowing it would come more easily if he waited silently.

'I . . . I gave up something which was more than life itself to me for the sake of someone else and I can't get over it.'

The doctor leaned forward and took the clenched hands between his.

'Can you tell me about it, Jeanette?'

'I can't tell anyone, Deryck, not even you.'

'If you ever find you must tell someone, Jane, will you promise to come to me?'

'Yes, I promise.'

'Good! Now, my dear girl, here is a prescription for you. Go abroad. And, mind, I don't mean just to Paris and back. Go to America and see a few big things. See Niagara. And all your life afterwards when trivialities are trying, you will love to let your mind go back to the vast green mass of water sweeping over the falls. When you are bothered by pouring water in and out of teacups you will remember, Niagara is flowing still. Stay in a hotel so near the falls that you can hear their great voice night and day, thundering out themes of power. Go to the Cave of the Winds where the guide will shout to see if your

rings are on tight. Learn in passing, the true meaning of the Rock of Ages. Thank God for Niagara.

Then go in for other big things in America. Seek out Mrs. Ballington Booth, the great 'Little Mother' of American prisoners. I know her well, I am proud to say, and ask her to take you with her to Sing-Sing, or to Columbus State Prison and to let you hear her address an audience of two thousand convicts, holding out to them the gospel of hope and love. You will hear her own inspired and inspiring belief in fresh possibilities even for the most despairing.

Go to New York city and see how, when a man wants a big building and has only a small plot of ground, he makes the most of that ground by running his building up into the sky. Learn to do likewise.

And then, when the great-souled, large-hearted, rapid-minded people of America have woken you to enthusiasm with their bigness, go off the Japan and see a little people nobly doing their best to become great.

Then, my dear go to Palestine. Spend months tracing the life of the greatest human being that ever lived. Take Egypt on your way home just to remind yourself that there are still, in this very modern world of ours, a few passably ancient things, a well-preserved wooden man, for instance, with eyes of opaque white quartz, a piece of rock crystal in the centre for a pupil. These glittering eyes looked out upon the world from beneath their eyelids of bronze, in the time of Abraham. You will find it in the museum at Cairo.

Ride a donkey in the Mooskee if you want a real sport! Then if you feel a little low still, climb the Great Pyramid. Ask for an Arab name Schehati and tell him you want to do it one minute quicker than any lady has ever done it before. Then come home, my dear girl, ring me up and ask for an appointment and let Stoddart slip you into my consulting-room between patients and report how the prescription has worked. I never gave a better one and you need not offer me the guinea!

Jane laughed and gripped his hand. 'Oh, Deryck, I believe you are right. My whole life has been focused on myself. I'll do as you say and God bless you for saying it.

Here comes Flower. Flower,' she said, as the doctor's wife trailed in, wearing a soft tea-gown in pink with roses at her belt, 'will this boy of ours ever grow old? Here he is seriously advising that a stout, middle-aged woman should climb the Great Pyramid as a cure for depression, and do it in record time!

'Darling,' she answered, seating herself on the arm of her husband's chair, 'I didn't think we knew anyone middle-aged, stout and depressed. Whoever have you been seeing in your surgery. If you meant Mrs. Parker Bangs, she's American and no American is ever middle-aged and anyway I've heard her say

that although she intends at some time to visit Egypt she would never think of going up the pyramids unless the children of Israel had had the sense to put an elevator right up the centre.'

Jane and the doctor laughed and Flower settling herself more comfortably in the doctor's arm, said, 'Jane, I heard you play the Rosary just now, it's such a favourite of mine and it is months since I heard it. Do play it.'

Jane met the doctor's eyes and smiled, then turned without hesitation and did as Flower asked. The prescription had already done her good.

At the last words of the song the doctor's wife bent over and laid a tender little kiss just above his temple, where the thick, dark hair was streaked with silver. Then the doctor took the dear little hand resting on his shoulder, for the doctor had had past experience of the cross and now the pearls were very precious.

But his mind was intent on Jane and before those final chords were struck he knew he had diagnosed her case correctly.

She must go abroad, he thought. It will take her mind off herself altogether and give her a larger view of things ingeneral.

And the boy won't change, or, if he does, Jane will be proved right, to her own satisfaction. But if this is her side, good heavens, what must his be. I had wondered what was sapping all his buoyant youthfulness. To care for Jane would be an education but to have made Jane care. And then to have lost her. He must have nerves of steel. Whatever is this cross they are both learning to kiss and holding up between them? Perhaps Niagara will sweep it away.

## Chapter Ten.

So Jane took the prescription and two years went by in the taking. Here she was, on top of the Great Pyramid and moreover, she had done it in record time. She laughed as she thought of how she should report the fact to Deryck.

Her Arabs lay around, very hot and shiny and content. Large baksheesh was assured and they looked up at her with pleased possessive eyes, as an achievement of their own. Jane stood there, sound in wind and limb and wholly exhilarated.

She was looking her best in her Norfolk coat and skirt of brown tweed with hints of green and orange, plenty of useful pockets piped with leather and a broad band of leather round the bottom of the skirt. But Schehati was no connoisseur of clothing though a pretty shrewd judge of ways and manners.

He summed up Jane as 'Nice gentleman lady!'

Jane was deeply tanned by the Eastern sun, enjoying the process and had no need of veils or parasols. Her strong eyes faced the golden light of the desert without the aid of sunglasses. The heavy coils of her brown hair remained where she placed them each morning, with a few well-directed hairpins. She had never looked better than she did on this March day, standing on the summit of the Pyramid. Strong and well-built, the plainness of her face redeemed by her pleasant smile. If she had heard Schehati's compound noun she would not have been offended and attributed it to the fact that she was well-groomed. She knew she was not a masculine woman and held that only one degree less in abhorrence than an effeminate man. She knew herself now to be deeply womanly and the doctor's prescription was working admirably.

That look of falling to pieces and ageing prematurely which had grieved and startled him to see in Jane as she sat before him on the music-stool, was gone completely.

She looked a calm, pleasant thirty, ready to go happily on, year by year, towards an equally agreeable and delighted forty and not afraid of fifty when that time should come. She was now considering the view and finding it very good. Its strong contrasts held her. On one side lay the fertile Delta with its groves of waving palm, orange, and olive trees, growing in rich profusion on the banks of the Nile. On the other, the Desert, with its far-distant horizon stretching away in undulations of golden sand. The sun was setting and the sky flamed in colour.

'A parting of the ways,' said Jane, 'a place of choices. How difficult to know which to choose, the liberty of the desert, not a blade of grass to be seen or the fruitfulness on the other side. I shall have to consult the Sphinx, wise old guardian of the ages, silent keeper of time's secrets. Come Schehati, yes I'll certainly sit on the stone the King sat on when he was Prince of Wales, thank you for mentioning it!'

Jane laughed as they descended carefully, the stones of so many years crumbling in places from bearing the weight of so many ardent climbers.

Jane ordered her after-dinner coffee on the white veranda of the hotel. It was moonlight and Jane had promised herself a stroll at this time of the evening. Meanwhile she lay back in a low wicker chair, comfortably upholstered, slipping her coffee and giving herself up to the sense of dreamy content following her vigorous exertion of the day.

Very tender and quiet thoughts of Garth came to her this evening, perhaps brought about by the associations of moonlight.

'The moon shines bright, in such a night as this,  
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,

And they did make no noise.'

The poet knew the effect upon the heart of a vivid reminder to the senses. Jane now passed beneath the spell. To begin with Garth's voice seemed singing everywhere:

'Enable with perpetual light

The dullness of our blinded sight.'

Then from out the deep blue and silvery light, Garth's dear adoring eyes seemed watching her. Jane closed her own to see them better. Tonight she did not feel like shrinking from them, they were so full of love.

No shade of criticism was there. Had she wronged him with her fears for the future? Her heart seemed full of trust tonight, full of confidence in him and in herself. It seemed to her that if he were here she could go out with him into this brilliant moonlight, seat herself upon some ancient stone and let him kneel in front of her and gaze and gaze in his persistent way, as much as he pleased.

In thought there seemed tonight no shrinking from those dear eyes. She felt she would say; 'It's all your own, to look at when you will. For your sake I could wish it beautiful, but if it is as you like it, my own dear, why should I hide it from you?'

What had brought about this change of mind? Had Deryck's prescription done its full work? Was this a saner point of view? Instead of going up the Nile and then to Constantinople and Athens, should she take the steamer which sailed from Alexandria tomorrow, be in London a week from today, send for Garth, make a full confession and let him decide their future?

That he loved her still, it never occurred to Jane to doubt. At the very thought of sending for him and telling him the simple truth he seemed so near she could almost feel the clasp of his arms and his head on her heart. And those dear, shining eyes. Oh, Garth!

'One thing is clear tonight,' thought Jane. 'If he needs, wants or will have me, I cannot live any longer away from him. I must go to him.'

'I'll risk it,' she said out loud and deep joy awoke within her heart.

An hour later she was being driven down the long straight road to Cairo, embarked at Alexandria the next day, landed at Brindisi and this night and day travelling had brought her at last within the sight of the shores of England. The white cliffs of Dover gradually became more solid and distinct, until at length they rose from the sea, a strong white wall, undeniably England to Jane and all that held England dear. Then Dover Castle caught her eye, so beautiful in the pearly light of that spring afternoon. Her mind leaped to enjoyment. She was going to the man she loved. But she knew she must see Sir Deryck first. An unbiassed judgement, steadier than her own, must come before, and her surest way to Garth lay through the doctor's consulting-room. So she telegraphed to Deryck from Paris and at present her mind saw no further than Wimpole Street.

At Dover she bought a paper and hastily scanned its pages, walking behind the capable porter who had taken her luggage. The personal column caught her eye and she stood quite still. Her mind said 'No - no - no' as she read.

'We regret to announce that Mr. Garth Dalmain still lies in a most precarious condition at his house on Deeside, Aberdeenshire, as a result of the shooting accident a fortnight ago. His sight is hopelessly gone, but all other complications seem over, seem over, Jane said aloud, seem over whatever does it mean seem over.

'A serious reaction from shock has set in and it has been considered necessary to summon Sir Deryck Brand, the well-known nerve specialist, for consultation with the oculist and the local practitioner at Deeside.

There is a feeling of widespread regret and sympathy in those social and artistic circles where Mr. Dalmain was so well known and so deservedly popular.'

Jane hardly saw the smile of grateful thankfulness from the young porter who stood quietly at the door of her compartment while she accepted the coffee he felt she was in need of and looked down at her large tip.

'Thank you so much. No, never mind the change. You've done so well for me.' She choked back the tears of relief as she read the telegram he had bought her.

'Welcome home. Just back from Scotland. Will meet you at Charing Cross and give you all the time you want.'

Deryck.

Jane gave one hard, tearless sob of thankfulness and relief.

Coffee was the last thing she wanted but she drank it and felt more revived than she could have thought possible.

Above all else she needed just now a wise, strong, helpful friend and Deryck had not failed her. She read his telegram through once more and smiled. How like him to think of coming to the station.

She took off her hat and leaned back against the cushions. She had been travelling night and day, in one feverish whirl of haste and now she was brought within reach of Deryck's hand and Deryck's safe control. The turmoil of her soul was stilled, as great calm took its place and Jane dropped quietly off to sleep. 'Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things.'

Washed and brushed and greatly refreshed, Jane stood at the window of her compartment as the train steamed into Charing Cross.

The doctor was exactly opposite the door when her carriage came to a standstill. Mere chance, but to Jane it seemed so like him to have taken up his position precisely at the right spot on that long platform. This characteristic of being always there had made him to many a very present help in time of trouble.

He was through the line of porters and had his hand on the handle of Jane's door in a moment. Standing at the window she took one look at the firm lean face, now alight with welcome and read in the kind, steadfast eyes of her childhood's friend a perfect sympathy and comprehension.

Then she saw behind him her aunt's footman and her own maid. In another moment she was on the platform and her hand's in Deryck's.

'That's right, dear, all fit and well I see,' he said, 'now hand over your key's and we will deal with everything. Nothing to declare, I take it. I telephoned the Duchess to send some of her people to meet your luggage but not to expect you herself until dinner time as you would be with us. Was that right? This way.'

The doctor, talking all the time piloted Jane through the crowd, opened the door of his neat electric brougham, helped her in, took his seat beside her and they glided swiftly out into the Strand and turned towards Trafalgar Square.

'Well,' said the doctor, 'isn't Niagara something. And how was the Little Mother, I hope she sent me her love, and New York harbour. Did you ever see anything to equal it as you steam away in the sunset?'

Jane gave a little sob. 'Oh, Deryck, please tell me. Is there no hope?'

The doctor laid his hand on hers. 'He will always be blind, dear, if that is what you mean. But life holds other things beside sight. We must never give up hope.'

'Will he live?'

'Of course, my dear,' the doctor spoke very gently. 'Of course he will live but how far life will be worth living depends upon what can be done for him, poor chap, during the next few months. He is more shattered mentally than physically.'

Jane pulled off her gloves and swallowed hard.

'Deryck, I - I love him!'

The doctor remained silent for a few moments as if pondering this tremendous fact. Then he lifted the fine, capable hand she had rested on his knee and kissed it with a beautiful reverence. He wanted to express his homage to her brave truthfulness.

'In that case, dear,' he said, 'the future holds in store so great a good for Garth Dalmain that I think he may dispense with sight. Meanwhile you have much to say to me, and it is, of course, your right to hear every detail of his case that I can give you. And here we are at Wimpole Street. Now come into my consulting-room. Stoddart has orders that we are on no account to be disturbed. Tea will be waiting for us.'

## Chapter Eleven

The doctor's room was very quiet. Jane leaned back in his dark green leather armchair, her feet on a footstool, her hands gripping the arms on either side. The doctor sat at his table, in the round pivot-chair he always used, a chair which enabled him to swing round suddenly and face a patient or to turn away very quietly and bend over his table.

Just now he was not looking at Jane. He had been giving her a detailed account of his visit to Castle Gleneesh where he had spent five hours with Garth. It seemed kindest to tell her all but he knew that at last the tears were running unchecked down Jane's cheeks and he wished her to think he did not notice them. 'You understand, dear,' he continued, 'the actual wounds are going on well and although both eyes were, erm, pierced,' he hesitated, 'there was very little actual damage done to the surrounding areas. The present danger arises from the shock to the nervous system and from the extreme mental anguish caused by the realisation of his loss. The poor fellow looks shattered by it. Sight has meant so much to him but his physical constitution is excellent and his life has been so clean and healthy that he has every chance of making a good recovery. I would think that as the pain abated so the realisation that blindness was to be daily and hourly, the artist in him was so all-pervading, beauty of form and colour,'

The doctor paused, straightened a few books lying on the table and drew a small bowl of violets closer to him. He studied these attentively for a few moments then put them back where his wife had placed them and went on speaking. 'He needed a friendly voice to tell him, by God's grace you will come through this. It would be easier to die but you need to live to win. I had to speak to try and penetrate the darkness. I'm satisfied on the whole but when his temperature began to vary alarmingly it seemed to the local doctor that he was showing symptoms of mental trouble so they put him in my hands. I said a good deal more, Jeanette, but a very beautiful thing happened which I could tell Flower and, of course, you, but no-one else. The difficulty had been to obtain from him any response whatever. He didn't seem able to rouse sufficiently to notice anything going on around him. But those words, 'by God's grace,' appeared to take hold of him and find immediate echo in his consciousness. I heard him repeat them once or twice and then change them to 'with the abundance of Thy grace,' and his face was transformed. His hands moved on the cover as forming chords. Then very softly he repeated the second verse of 'Veni, Creator Spiritus.' You will know them -

'Enable with perpetual light  
The dullness of our blinded sight,  
Anoint and cheer our soiled face

With the abundance of Thy grace.'

Before he could really finish, the doctor had broken the floodgates of grief held in check so long and Jane sobbed convulsively.

'You see,' his quiet voice continued, 'you see, this gave me something to go on. When a crash such as this happens, all a man has left to hold on to is his religion. According as his spiritual side has been developed, will his physical side stand the strain. Garth Dalmain has more of the real thing than anyone would think who only knew him superficially.

'I knew him,' said Jane, simply, lifting her head at last.

'Ah,' said the doctor, 'I see. Well, after that we talked and I persuaded him to agree to one or two important arrangements. You know, he has no relations of his own to speak of and is really quite alone up there. Dr. MacKenzie, the local medical man, would not, of course, allow Lady Ingleby in, although she soon got around him. He would only allow her to let Dal's old housekeeper weep on her beautiful shoulder. He has his own valet, of course but he won't hear of a nurse. He says he couldn't bear being touched by a woman!" He absolutely refused one of our London hospital nurses who might have brought a little gentle comfort and womanly sympathy to his sickroom. I have, however, insisted on finding a lady nurse of my own choosing. This is not so much to wait on him or do the normal sickroom duties. His own man can do that and he is very capable, but someone to sit with him, read to him, attend to his correspondence, there are piles of unopened letters he ought to hear, in fact help him to take up life again in his blindness. It will need training and tact.

I think I've found somebody. She has nursed for me before and knows a good deal about mental illness. Also she is a pretty, dainty little thing, just the kind of elegant young woman poor Dal would have liked to have about him when he could see. He was such a fastidious chap about appearances and such a connoisseur of good looks. I've written a descriptive account of her to Dr. MacKenzie and he will prepare his patient for her arrival. She is going up, I hope, the day after tomorrow. So you see, Jane, all is beginning to shape up well. Now, dear, you have a lot to tell me but first we'll have our tea quietly down here.

Later it seemed so natural to Jane to think she poured the doctor's tea and watched him putting a liberal allowance of salt on the thin bread and butter and fold it over with the careful accuracy which had always characterised his smallest action. In the essentials he had changed so little since the days when as a youth of twenty spending his vacations at the rectory he used to give the lonely girl at the manor so much pleasure by coming up to her schoolroom teas.

By the time the kettle had boiled they had both remembered the days of roasting chestnuts by the fire and laughing about Jane's poor old tutor trying to keep them in order.

In those early years he had seemed so much older than she but then she had shot up rapidly into young womanhood and their eyes were on a level and their ages seemed the same. Then came Flower and complications and Jane had watched the doctor's face grow thin and worn and she had yearned over him but couldn't help. Then things came right for him and all the highest good seemed his.

Jane's faithful heart was generous and loyal to both though in sight of their perfect happiness her loneliness grew. But now in her own hour of need, it had to be Deryck only and the doctor knew this and had arranged accordingly. His chance had come to repay the faithful devotion of a lifetime. There was one moment of tension and then, as they settled into old familiar and characteristic attitude in easy-chairs on either side of the fireplace, the silence between them was like a deep, calm pool.

Jane now wanted to tell him all that was in her heart and he waited. 'Deryck, mine has been a very lonely existence. I have never been essential to the life of another person and no one has ever touched the real depths in me.' The doctor opened his lips as if to speak then closed them firmly and merely nodded his head silently.

'I had never loved or been loved with the kind of love that makes a person absolutely first. I had, I had cared very much, but caring is not loving. Deryck, dear, I know that now.' The doctor's face showed white against the dark green background of his chair but he smiled as he answered, 'No, quite true, dear, there is a difference.'

Jane continued until she came to the revelation to Garth of The Rosary. Not of the music only, but of herself and how the veil between them had been lifted and he knew that the woman he found then was his ideal of womanhood. 'From that hour he wanted me for his own.'

Jane had paused and looked into the glowing heart of the fire. The doctor turned at that point and looked at Jane. He himself had experienced the intense attraction of her womanliness, all the more overpowering when it was realised because it did not appear on the surface. 'You must think it odd, Deryck.' 'No, dear, I do not think it odd.'

He had sensed the strong mother-tenderness lying dormant within her and had known that her arms would prove a haven of refuge and her love a consolation unspeakable.

In his own days of loneliness and disappointment, the doctor had had to flee from this in Jane, a precious gift so easy to have taken because of her very ignorance of it but a gift to which he had no right. So he could well understand the hold it would gain on a man who had discovered it and who was free to win it for his own. 'I can't tell you all the details but Garth's love just poured over

me for days and in the end, Deryck, he made me realise what it all meant. Garth Dalmain actually wanted me to marry him.'

'What else could it have meant, my dear?'

The doctor had passed his hand over his lips knowing that they trembled a little. Jane's confessions were giving him a stiffer time than he had expected. 'Well, Jeannette, so you ?'

'Well, I was overcome by it all. But some instinct told me that if I were to be someone's wife it would have to be 'spirit, soul and body' and not the other way round, so my reason must say yes before the rest of me . . .'

The doctor made a quick movement of interest and interrupted with 'Good heavens, Jane. You've got hold of a truth from the Bible there. It is so often misquoted to be 'body, soul and spirit.'

She looked into his eager eyes and smiled sadly.

'Have I, dear boy?' she said. 'Well, it has cost me dear. I put Garth from me and I, oh, dear, I refused him point blank, giving a reason he could not possibly question. He turned away from me in the little church at Shenstone and hasn't spoken to me since.'

There was a long silence in the consulting room. The doctor's manly heart was entering into the pain of another but without complete understanding.

At last he spoke. He looked at her searchingly and held her eyes. And once more, as in that fateful hour, Jane thought herself to have done rightly.

'And why did you refuse him, Jane?' The kind voice was stern. Jane put out her hands to him appealingly. 'Deryck, Deryck, you know Garth so well. You know how dependent he is on beauty. Before this unaccountable need of each other came to us he had talked to me quite freely on this point. He told me about a plain person whose character and gifts he greatly admired and whose face he grew to like in consequence. 'Bit, of course,' he said, 'it was not the sort of face one would have wanted to live with or to have day after day opposite at the table.' Deryck, how could I have tied him to that sort of discipline. It would be martyrdom to him. But, day by day, through no fault of my own, I would have grown plainer and plainer. I know they say love is blind but that is until bitterness and disappointment come into a relationship.'

The doctor was looking at Jane with keen professional interest. 'How well I diagnosed the case,' he murmured.

'Don't speak to me as if I were a patient, Deryck,' she said, a little angrily. 'You know my face is plain.'

The doctor laughed. He was quite glad to make Jane a little angry. 'My dear girl,' he said, 'if you were a man I should have a few very strong things to say to you. As it is I know a good many men who would kick me into the street if I called you plain. I would have to pretend I said, she is just Jane, which is all they would consider mattered. At the same time, I may add, while this dear

face is under discussion, I can look back to times when I have felt that I would gladly walk twenty miles for a sight of it.'

'Oh, Deryck you didn't have to sit opposite to it for years, without relief.'

'Unfortunately not'

'And Deryck, you did not have to kiss it.'

The doctor threw back his head and shouted with laughter. Passing up the stairs, Flower wondered what turn the conversation could be taking.

Jane was quite serious and saw in it no laughing matter.

'Well, dear, what did you give as your reason for refusing him?'

'I asked him how old he was and told him how old I was and said I couldn't marry a mere boy. It sounds terrible now.'

'And he acquiesced?'

'He seemed stunned at first but then said he hadn't really given any thought to himself but, of course, he bowed to my decision if I thought him that.'

'Jane,' said the doctor, leaning forward and shaking his head, 'I wonder he didn't see through it. You are so unused to lying and on the chancel steps too, and to the man you loved. How could you have done it and with conviction.'

A dull red crept up beneath Jane's tan.

'Jane,' said the doctor, 'of all that you have suffered since that hour, you deserve every minute.'

After awhile Jane squared her shoulders and lifted her head. 'You have whipped me a bit with your tongue and I do deserve that. But I must tell you what happened while I was away. Your prescription was right and I felt I had come to my senses and I was living for myself alone so I resolved to go to him and admit it all and ask him to let us both begin again just where we were three years ago in the moonlight on the terrace at Shenstone. But on the way home I heard about the accident.'

The doctor shaded his face with his hand. 'The wheels of time,' he said in a low voice, 'move forward, always, backward, never.'

'Oh, Deryck,' cried Jane, 'sometimes they do. You and Flower know that sometimes they do.'

The doctor smiled sadly and very tenderly. 'I know,' he said, 'that there is always one exception. So, so, before you knew of Dalmain's blindness you admitted to yourself that you were wrong and decided to trust him?'

'Erm, I don't know that I was altogether clear about having been wrong,' said Jane, 'but I was quite convinced that I couldn't live any longer without him and so I was prepared to risk it. But now, of course, all questions are swept away, now that I know of my poor boy's accident, it simplifies matters.'

The doctor looked at Jane with a sudden raising of his level brows. 'Simplifies matters?' he said. 'Suppose you tell me what you intend doing.' He had risen and stirred the fire for a few moments in silent thought. 'Doing?' said Jane. 'Why, of course, I shall go straight to Garth. I only want you to advise me how best to let him know I am coming and whether it is safe for him

emotionally and also for you to let the doctor and nurse know I'm coming. I don't want to risk being turned away. A wire from you will make it all clear.'

'I see,' said the doctor slowly. 'Yes, undoubtedly, a wire from me will open a way for you to go to Garth Dalmain's bedside. And arrived there, what then?' 'Well, love will know best, all barriers will be swept away and Garth and I will be together.'

The doctor's fingertips met very exactly before he spoke again and when he did speak, his tone was very level and very kind.

'Dear Jane,' he said, 'that is the woman's point of view. But at Garth's bedside you will be confronted with the man's point of view. I would be failing in the trust you have placed in me if I did not tell you that. Your own mistaken action three years ago has placed you now in an almost impossible position. If you go to Garth with the simple offer of your love, the treasure he asked three years ago and failed to win he will naturally conclude the love now given is mainly pity. Garth Dalmain is not the man to be content with pity. And he would never allow a woman, least of all his crown of womanhood, to be tied to his blindness. How could you expect him to believe that a binding of you both together, now, would be your highest joy. If you explain the reason for your refusal, your apparent plainness of face, he could only say one thing. 'You could not trust me to be faithful when I had my sight. Blind, you come to me, when it is no longer in my power to prove my fidelity.' My dear girl, that is how matters stand from a man's point of view. The woman who owned him mate the evening before refused on the score of inadequacy the next morning. There is no question of the view he would take.'

Jane's pale, startled face went to the doctor's heart.

'Oh, Deryck, help me. Tell me what to do.'

The doctor considered long in silence.

'If Dal could somehow be brought to realise your point of view, if you could be in close contact somehow ,'

'Deryck, send me as his nurse-companion. He hasn't heard my voice for three years, he would never dream it was who it was. Nobody knows I'm home. Everyone thinks I'm still in Egypt. You could safely recommend me. I've been a nurse in the war. Oh, Deryck, please, I can't bear it, I must go to him. I'll go as anything, I'll eat in the kitchen and I could be ready in twenty-four hours. I'd go as sister something.' Jane stopped breathlessly.

'But my dear girl,' said the doctor with emphasis, 'you cannot go as sister anything unfortunately. I've already sent the name and description and you could only go as Nurse Rosemary Gray. He will hear of her description from Dr. MacKenzie.'

He paused and gave her a long look.

'I don't believe in chance. But I do believe in a Higher Control, which makes and unmakes our plans. You shall go and I shall employ Nurse Rosemary Gray elsewhere.

## Chapter Twelve.

Nurse Rosemary Gray had arrived at Gleneesh. Her very plain box that the doctor had advised was deposited on the little wayside railway station and she felt she had dropped from the clouds, leaving her own world and her own identity on some far-distant planet. 'Put a very obvious R.G. on your box,' the doctor had said. 'Thank you, dear boy,' Jane had whispered, 'you think of everything.' 'I think of you,' said Deryck. And in all the hard days to come, Jane often found comfort in remembering those last quiet words.

A motor waited outside the station and Jane had a momentary fear lest she should be recognised but she soon realised that she was merely a nurse with a box and both were just articles to be conveyed to Gleneesh according to orders. So small an incident as the omission of the usual respectful salute gave her a delightful sense of success and security in her new role. They swung silently round into the open and took to the road for the hills. Up into the fragrant heather and grey rocks, miles of moor and sky and solitude. More than ever Jane felt as if she had dropped into another world.

She had often heard of Garth's old castle up in the north, an inheritance from his mother's family but was hardly prepared for so much picturesque beauty or such stateliness of the archway and entrance. As they wound up the hillside and the grey turrets came into view, with pine woods behind and above, she seemed to hear Garth's voice under the cedar at Overdene, with its ring of boyish

enjoyment, saying, 'I'd like to show you Castle Gleneesh and we will make up a party and ask the Duchess as chaperon.' And she had promised to come. Now he, the owner of all this loveliness was blind and helpless and she was entering the fair portals of Gleneesh, unknown to him, unrecognised by any, as a nurse-secretary sort of person.

Jane has said at Overdene, 'Yes, ask us, and see what happens.' And now this was happening. Whatever would happen next? Garth's man, Simpson, received her at the door and again a possible danger was safely passed. He evidently did not know her by sight.

Jane stood looking round the old hall, leisurely, as a guest arriving at a friend's for the first time. Then she became aware of Simpson half way up the stairs, a wide oak stairway, expecting the nurse to hurry after him. This she did and was received at the top of the stairs by old Margery. It did not require the lawn kerchief, the black satin apron and the lavender ribbons for Jane to recognise Garth's old Scots nurse, housekeeper and friend. One glance at the grave, kindly face, wrinkled and rosy, a beautiful combination of perfect health and advancing years, was enough. The shrewd, keen eyes, seeing quickly beneath the surface, were unmistakable.

She conducted Jane to her room, talking all the time in a kindly effort to set her at her ease and to express a warm welcome with gentle dignity. She called her Nurse Gray at the conclusion of every sentence with a rolling of the 'r's' which charmed Jane. She longed to say how much she would enjoy being in the house with her but a remark like that would have been little short of impertinent and too familiar from Nurse Rosemary Gray. So she followed meekly into the pretty room prepared for her. She admired the chintz, answered questions about her night journey and admitted that she would be very glad of breakfast but still more of a bath if convenient.

And now bath and breakfast were both over and Jane was standing beside the window in her room, looking down at the wonderful view and waiting until the local doctor should arrive and summon her to Garth's room. She had put on the most businesslike of her uniforms and a blue print gown with linen collar and cuffs with a white apron. Her very becoming cap belonged to one of the institutions to which she had once been for training.

She did not intend wearing this later but just this morning she wanted to omit no detail that would impress Dr. Robert MacKenzie with her professional appearance. She hoped Deryck would have approved.

Then far away in the distance along the white ribbon of road, winding up from the valley she saw a high gig, trotting swiftly, one man in it and small groom seated behind. Her hour had come.

Jane fell on her knees, at the window, and prayed for strength, wisdom and courage. She could realise nothing. She had thought so long and so continuously that her mental vision was out of focus. Only the actual fact remained clear that in a few short minutes she would be taken to the room where Garth lay. She would see the face she had not seen since they stood together at the chancel step, the face from which the glad confidence slowly faded, a horror of chill disillusion taking its place.

'Anoint and cheer our soiled face

With the abundance of Thy grace.'

She would see that dear face and he, sightless, would not see hers but would be easily deluded into believing her to be some one else.

Jane rose and stood waiting. Suddenly she remembered two sentences of her conversation with Deryck. She had said, 'Shall I ever have the courage to carry it through?' And Deryck had answered earnestly, 'If you value your own eventual happiness and his, you will.'

A tap came at her door. Jane walked across the room and opened it. Simpson stood on the threshold.

'Dr. MacKenzie is in the library, nurse,' he said, 'and wishes to see you there.'

'Then will you kindly take me to the library, Mr. Simpson,' said Nurse Rosemary Gray.

On the bear-skin rug, with his back to the fire, stood Dr. Robert MacKenzie, known to his friends as Dr. Rob or Old Robbie, according to their degree of intimacy. Jan's first impression was of a short, stout man, in a seal-skin waistcoat which had seen better days, arms folded on chest and Napoleonic attitude.

But she also saw, when he turned them upon her, a pair of keen blue eyes, a red, freckled face and a nose which turned cheerfully skyward. Jane had not been in his presence two minutes before she perceived that, when his mind was working, he was entirely unconscious of his body, so that he did things automatically. His friends spoke of this as 'Robbie chews up dozens of good pen-holders while Dr. MacKenzie is thinking out excellent prescriptions.'

When Jane entered his eyes had been fixed on an open letter which she knew instinctively to be Deryck's. When he did look up, she saw his unmistakable start of surprise. He opened his mouth to speak but closed it without uttering a word, turning back to the letter. She waited in respectful silence and Deryck's words passed with calming effect through the palpitating suspense of her brain. 'The Gaelic mind works slowly but it works exceeding sure. He will be exceeding sure that I am a very poor judge of women.'

At last the little man on the hearth-rug lifted his eyes, and it had to be quite high, to look into Jane's again.

'Nurse, .er?' he said enquiringly and Jane thought his eyes were very searching. 'Rosemary Gray,' replied Jane meekly, with a curtesy in her voice, feeling as if they were rehearsing amateur theatricals at Overdene and the next minute the Duchess's cane would rap on the floor and they would be told to speak up and not be so slow.

'Ah,' said Dr. Robert MacKenzie, 'I see.' He stared hard at the carpet in a distant corner of the room. Jane wondered what was the correct thing to do when a doctor neither sat down himself nor suggested that the nurse should do so. She wished she had asked Deryck. But he could not possibly have enlightened her because the first thing he always said to a nurse was; 'My dear nurse, pray sit down. People who have much unavoidable standing to do should cultivate the habit of seating themselves comfortably at every possible opportunity.'

But the stout little person on the hearth-rug was not Deryck. So Jane stood at attention and watched the stiff little pencil he was chewing wag up and down.

'So you have arrived, Nurse Gray,' he said, eventually. Truly the mind of a Scotsman works slowly, thought Jane. She was thankful, however, to detect the complete acceptance of herself in his tone. Deryck was right. It was unspeakable relief not to have to take this strange man into her confidence about the deception to be practised on Garth. 'Yes, sir, I have arrived,' she said. There was another period of silence. Dr. MacKenzie chewed again. 'I'm glad you've arrived, Nurse Gray,' he said. 'I am glad to have arrived, sir,' said Jane gravely. She almost expected to hear the Duchess's delighted, 'Ha, ha!' The little comedy was progressing.

Suddenly Jane became aware that during the last few minutes Dr. MacKenzie's mind had not been concentrated on her at all. The two swift turquoise gleams from under the shaggy brows swept over her and he commenced speaking quickly with a wonderful rolling of r's.

'I understand, Miss Gray, you have come to minister to the patient's mind rather than to his body. You need not trouble to explain. I have it from Sir Deryck Brand, who prescribed a nurse-companion for the patient and engaged you.

I fully agreed with his prescription and allow me to say, I admire its ingredients.' Jane bowed and realised how the Duchess would be chuckling. 'What an insufferable little person!'

Jane had time to think this while he walked to the table and found a spot of candle-grease needing examination. He turned suddenly on Jane and caught her look of fury. 'And I think there remains very little for me to say to you about the treatment, Miss Gray,' he continued, calmly. 'You will have received minute instructions from Sir Deryck himself. The great thing now is to help the patient to take an interest in the outer world. The temptation to

persons who suddenly become totally blind is to form a habit of living entirely in a world within; a world of recollection, and imagination; the only world, in fact, in which they can see.'

Jane made a quick movement of appreciation and interest. After all she might learn something useful from this eccentric little Scot. Oh, to keep his attention off the rubbish on the carpet and the grease spots on the tablecloth!

'This,' continued Dr. MacKenzie, 'is our present difficulty with Mr. Dalmain. There seems to be no possibility of arousing his interest in the outside world. He refuses to receive visitors; he declines to hear his letters read. Hours pass without a word being spoken by him. Now, should he express a wish to speak to me alone when we are with him, do not leave the room. Walk over to the fireplace and remain there. I desire that you should hear, that when he chooses to rouse himself and make an effort, he is perfectly well able to do so. Now that all danger of inflammation from the wounds has subsided, he may get up, move about, learn to find his way by sound and touch. He was an artist by profession. He will never paint again. But there are other gifts which may form reasonable outlets to an artistic nature.' He paused suddenly, 'Does he play?' said Dr. Rob. Jane was on her guard against accidental surprises. 'Sir Deryck did not happen to mention to me, Dr. MacKenzie, whether Mr. Dalmain is musical or not.'

'Ah, well,' said the little doctor, resuming his Napoleonic attitude in the centre of the hearth-rug, 'you must make it your business to find out. And, by the way, Nurse, do you play yourself?'

'A little,' said Jane.

'Ah,' said Dr. Rob. 'And I dare say you sing a little, too?'

Jane acquiesced.

'In that case, my dear lady, I leave most explicit orders that you neither sing a little nor play a little to Mr. Dalmain. We, who have our sight, can just endure while people who play a little show us how little they can play but to a blind person with an artist's sensitive soul, the experience would be intolerable. So we must not risk it. I regret to appear uncomplimentary but a patient's welfare must take precedence.'

Jane smiled. She was beginning to like Dr. Rob. 'I will be most careful,' she said, 'to neither play nor to sing to Mr. Dalmain.'

'Good,' said Dr. MacKenzie. 'But now let me tell you what you most certainly may do, by and by. Lead him to the piano. Place him there on a seat where he will feel secure, one of your twirly, rickety stools. Make a little notch on the keyboard by which he can easily find middle C. Then let him relieve his pent-up soul by painting word pictures. It seems he may be something of a musician as the huge grand piano indicates. We don't want to worry him with the Braille system or any other method of instruction. Not at the moment. Make it easy for him. Make a little notch under the C. That's all the seeing he may need at the beginning. Ha! Ha! Not bad for a Scotsman, eh? Miss Gray?' But Jane could not laugh, though somewhere in her mental

background she seemed to hear the Duchess applaud. This was no comedy to Jane. Her blind Garth at the piano, his dear, beautiful head bent over the keys, his fingers feeling for that pathetic little notch. She loathed this individual who could make a pun like that.

‘And now,’ said Dr. MacKenzie unexpectedly, ‘the next thing to be done, Nurse Gray, is to introduce you to the patient.’

Jane felt the blood slowly leave her face and concentrate in a terrible pounding at her heart. But she stood her ground and waited silently.

Dr. MacKenzie rang the bell. Simpson appeared. ‘A decanter of sherry, a wineglass, and a couple of biscuits,’ said Dr. Rob. Simpson vanished.

‘Good heavens,’ thought Jane, ‘he is going to drink at this time of the day!’

Dr. Rob stood and waited, tugging spitefully at his red moustache and looking intently out of the window.

Simpson reappeared, placed a small tray on the table, went out quietly, closing the door behind him.

Dr. Rob poured out a glass of sherry, drew up a chair to the table and said, ‘Now, Nurse, sit down and drink that, and take a biscuit with it.’

Jane protested. ‘But indeed, doctor, I, I don’t, I never . . .’

‘I have no doubt you ‘never’ and ‘don’t,’ said Dr. Rob, ‘especially at eleven o’clock in the morning. But you will today so do not waste any time in discussion. You have had a long journey at night, you are going upstairs to a very sad sight indeed and you have come through a trying interview with me and you are praising heaven it is over. But will praise heaven with more fervency when you have drunk the sherry. Also you have been standing during twenty-three minutes and a half. I prefer people to stand while I talk. I can’t talk to people while they loll around. But you will walk upstairs all the more steadily, Nurse Rosemary Gray if you sit down now for five minutes at this table.’

Jane obeyed, touched and humbled. So, after all, it was a kind, comprehending heart under that old waistcoat. While she drank the wine and finished the biscuits, he found busy occupation on the other side of the room, polishing the window with his silk pocket-handkerchief. He seemed to have forgotten her presence but just as she put down the empty glass, he turned and, walking straight across the room, laid his hand on her shoulder.

‘Now, Nurse,’ he said, ‘follow me upstairs and, just at first, speak as little as possible. Every fresh voice intruding into the still depths of that utter blackness, causes an agony of bewilderment and disquiet to the patient. Speak little and speak low, and may God almighty give you tact and wisdom.’

The unexpected conclusion of his sentence, old-fashioned in its wording, yet almost a prayer, gave her fresh courage. Another voice, echoing through memory's arches to organ music took up the strain, 'Where Thou art guide, no ill can come.'

Her spirit leaned on Dr. Rob's and she felt sustained and strengthened.

## Chapter Thirteen.

Jane followed Dr. MacKenzie into the room where Garth was lying, helpless, sightless and disfigured. All Jane saw at first was just the dark head on the pillow but she saw it in sunshine.

Somehow she had always pictured a darkened room, forgetting that to him darkness and light were both alike and there was no need to keep out the sunlight with its invigorating, purifying and healing powers.

Garth had requested to have his bed moved into a corner farthest from the door, the window and the fireplace, knowing it would keep him from all prying eyes. This was how he now lay and he didn't turn when they came in. Jane put her hands behind her. The impulse was so strong to fall on her knees beside the bed and take that poor hand groping towards the wall, in her strong ones and cover it with kisses.

But Deryck's warning voice sounded, grave and persistent, 'If you value your happiness and his,' so Jane put her hand behind her back. Dr. Mackenzie advanced to the side of the bed and laid his hand on Garth's shoulder. Then, with an incredible softening of his rather strident voice, he spoke so slowly and quietly that Jane could hardly believe this was the same man who had jerked out questions, comments and orders to her during the last half hour.

'Good morning, Mr. Dalmain. Simpson tells me it has been an excellent night, the best you have yet had. Now that is good. No doubt you were glad to be rid of your trained attendants. They always want to do a little more than is needed. Now I have brought you today one who is prepared to do all you need and who will never annoy you by attempting more than you desire. This is Sir Deryck's prescription. Nurse Rosemary Gray is here. I believe she is prepared to be companion, secretary, reader, anything you want, in fact a new pair of eyes for you, Mr. Dalmain, with a clever brain behind them and a kind,

sympathetic, womanly heart directing and controlling that brain. Nurse Gray arrived this morning, Mr. Dalmain.'

There was no response from the bed. Jane could not realise that she was Nurse Rosemary Gray. She only longed that her poor boy need not be bothered with the woman. Dr. MacKenzie spoke again. 'Nurse Rosemay Gray is in the room, Mr. Dalmain.'

Garth's instinctive courtesy struggled up through his blackness. He did not turn his head but his right hand made a little sign of greeting and he said in a low voice, 'How do you do? I'm sure it is most kind of you to come. I hope you had an easy journey.'

Jane's lips moved but no sound came.

Dr. Rob made answer quickly without looking at her. 'Miss Gray had a very good journey and looks as fresh this morning as if she had spent the night in bed I can see she is a cold-water young lady.'

'I hope my housekeeper will make her comfortable. Please give orders,' said the tired voice and Garth turned even closer to the wall as if the conversation were at an end. Dr. Rob attacked his moustache and stood looking down at the blue silk shoulder of Garth's sleeping suit. Then he turned and spoke to Jane 'Come over to the window, Nurse Gray. I want to show you a special chair we have obtained for Mr. Dalmain. He'll be most comfortable when he feels inclined to sit up. You see? Here is an adjustable support for the head if necessary and these trays and stands and movable tables can be swung round into any position by a touch. Sir Deryck approved it. Have you seen one like it before, Nurse Gray?'

'We had one like it at the hospital but not quite so complete as this one,' said Jane. In the stillness of that sunlit room the voice from the bed broke on them with startling suddenness. It was appealing to them with a frantic demand. It was the cry of one lost in an abyss of darkness.

'Who is in the room?' cried Garth Dalmain.

He had risen on his left elbow in an attitude of intent listening. Dr. MacKenzie answered. 'No one is in the room, Mr. Dalmain, but myself and Nurse Gray.' 'There is someone else. Don't lie. Who was speaking?'

Then Jane came quickly to the side of the bed. Her hands were trembling but her voice was perfectly under control. 'It was I who spoke, sir,' she said, 'Nurse Gray. And I feel sure I know why my voice startled you. Dr. Brand warned me I might sound like a mutual friend of yours and his. He said he had often notice it.'

Garth remained quite still, listening and considering. At length he asked slowly, 'Did he say whose voice?' 'Yes, he did. I asked him. But I

must tell you he also wondered if it were wise to send me. He said it was a Miss erm Champion.'

Garth's head dropped back on the pillow. Then without turning he said in a tone which Jane recognised meant he smiled. 'You must forgive me, Miss Gray, for being so startled and so stupidly, unpardonably agitated. But, you know, being blind is still such a new experience, and every fresh voice breaking through this black curtain means much more than the speaker realises. I know the lady is in Egypt but I could scarcely believe she wasn't in the room. Please accept my apologies.' He stretched out his right hand towards Jane. Jane clasped her shaking hands behind her.

'Now, Nurse, if you please,' broke in Dr. MacKenzie's rasping voice from the window. 'I have a few more details to explain to you over here.' They talked together for awhile then Dr. MacKenzie said, 'I think I better be going now.'

'I wish to speak to you alone, doctor, for a few minutes,' said Garth. 'I'll wait for you downstairs, Dr. MacKenzie,' said Jane, moving towards the door. An imperious gesture from Dr. Rob stopped her and she turned silently to the fireplace. She could not see any need now for this subterfuge and it annoyed her. But the freckled little Napoleon of the moors was not a man to be lightly disobeyed.

He walked to the door, opened and closed it and then returned to the bedside, drew up a chair and sat down.

'Now, Mr Dalmian,' he said, 'what is it?' Garth sat up and turned towards him eagerly. Then for the first time, Jane saw his face.

'Doctor,' he said, 'tell me about this nurse. Describe her to me.'

The tension in his tone and attitude was extreme. His hands were clasped in front of him as if imploring sight through the eyes of another. His thin white face, worn with suffering, looked so eager and yet so blank. 'Describe her to me, doctor,' he said, 'this Nurse Rosemary Gray, as you call her.'

'This is not a pet name of mine, my dear sir,' said Dr. Rob, deliberately, 'It's the young lady's own name. A pretty one too, don't you think. Rosemary, for remembrance. That's Shakespeare, isn't it?'

'Describe her to me, exactly,' repeated Garth for the third time, very patiently indeed.

Dr. MacKenzie glanced at Jane. But she had turned her back to hide the tears which were streaming down her cheeks. Oh, Garth. Oh beautiful Garth of the shining eyes,

Dr. Rob drew Deryck's letter from his pocket and studied it. 'Well,' he said, slowly, 'she is a pretty, dainty little thing, just the sort of elegant young woman you would like to have about you, could you see her.'

'Dark or fair?' asked Garth.

The doctor glanced at what he could see of Jane's cheek and at the brown hands holding on to the mantelpiece.

'Fair,' said Dr. Rob, without a moment's hesitation.

Jane started and glanced round. Why should this little man be lying on her account?

'Hair?' queried the strained voice from the bed.

'Well,' said Dr. Rob deliberately, 'It is mostly tucked away under a modest little cap but were it not restrained, I should say it might be that kind of fluffy, fly-away, floss-silk which puts the finishing touch to a dainty, pretty woman.'

Garth lay back and pressed his hands over his face.

'Doctor,' he said, 'I know I have given you so much trouble and today you must think me a complete fool. But please, if you don't wish me to go mad in my blindness, please send that girl away. Don't let her come into my room again.'

'Now, Mr. Dalmain, let's consider this thing. Can we take it that you have nothing against Nurse Rosemary Gray but the sound of her voice? It reminds you of another. Was this other person not a pleasant person?'

Garth laughed suddenly, bitterly, a laugh like a hard sob. 'Oh, yes,' he said, 'she was quite a pleasant person.'

'Rosemary for remembrance,' quoted Dr. Rob. 'Then why should not Nurse Rosemary call up a pleasant remembrance? Also it seems to me to be a kind, sweet, womanly voice, which is something to be thankful for nowadays, when so many women talk fit to scare the crows, cackle, cackle, like stones rattling in a tin.'

'But can't you understand, doctor,' said Garth wearily, 'that it is just the remembrance and the resemblance which, in my blindness, I can't bear? But I - I thought, for a moment it was the , the other lady come to me, here, and. '

Garth's voice ceased suddenly.

'The pleasant lady?' suggested Dr. Rob. 'I see. Well, now, Mr. Dalmain, Sir Deryck said the best thing that could happen would be if you came to wish for visitors. Why not let me send for this pleasant lady? I've no doubt she would come. Then, when she sat beside you, the nurse's voice would trouble you no longer.'

Garth sat up, his face wild with protest.

Jane turned on the hearth-rug and stood watching.

'No, doctor,' he said. 'No, no, oh God, no. In the whole world she is the last person .

Dr. MacKenzie bent forward to examine minutely a microscopic darn in the sheet. 'And why?' he asked in a low voice.

‘Because,’ said Garth, ‘the pleasant lady, as you rightly call her, has such a kind, generous heart she would be full of pity for me. It would be the last straw, it would be the last straw for me to bear with this cross. I hope one day to bear it more manfully, and then at last when God calls me to lay it down at His feet. But her pity would break me.’ His voice faltered. ‘I just couldn’t bear it.’

‘I see,’ said Dr. Rob gently. ‘Poor laddie. The pleasant person must not come then.’

He waited silently for a few minutes then pushed back his chair and stood up. ‘Meanwhile,’ he said, ‘I must rely on you, Mr. Dalmain, to be agreeable to Nurse Rosemary Gray. I dare not send her back. She is Dr. Brand’s choice. Besides think of the cruel blow to her profession, sent back at a moment’s notice because her voice offended the patient. Can you be generous enough to face this extra trial in a little bit of a coincidence?’

Garth hesitated. ‘Can you swear to me your description was accurate?’

‘Swear not at all,’ quoted Dr. Rob unctuously, ‘I had a pious mother, laddie. Besides, it was also Dr. Brand’s description and you will allow he is a fine judge of women. Have you seen Lady Brand?’

‘Seen her,’ said Garth, eagerly, ‘I’ve painted her, standing at a table with the sunlight in her hair, arranging golden daffodils in an old Venetian vase. Did you see it, doctor, in the New Gallery?’

‘No,’ said Dr. Rob. ‘No, no, I’m not finding myself in galleries, new or old, but,’ here he turned to Jane who nodded, ‘Nurse Gray was telling me she had seen it.’

‘Really,’ said Garth, ‘I hadn’t connected nurses with going to picture galleries.’

‘Well, they must go somewhere for their outings. Besides, Sir Deryck assures me she is a gentlewoman by birth, well read and intelligent. Now, laddie, what’s it to be?’

Jane turned away and gripped the mantelpiece. So much hung in the balance during that quiet minute while Garth considered.

‘If, if I could be quite sure, if I could disassociate that voice from the other. . .’  
‘Well,’ said Dr. Rob, ‘I’m thinking we can manage that for you. These nurses know their patients must be humoured. I’ll call her in and you can feel her hair and run your hands over her face and her tiny waist.’

Garth burst out laughing, and his voice had a lighter tone than Dr. Rob had yet heard. ‘Good heavens! What an ass you must think me. I think I must have been exaggerating. In a day or two I shall cease to notice it, I’m sure, where are you going?’

‘Just moving a chair to the fireplace and pouring out a glass of water, it’s all right, sir, what were you saying?’

‘Well, if she’s interested, I could show her some paintings, couldn’t I? She might care to see some studies in the studio. But, I say, doctor, I can’t have young ladies in here while I’m in bed. Why shouldn’t I try out that chair of yours? Would you be kind enough to send Simpson along with my brown suit and a suitable tie? And please tell Miss Gray to make herself at home, go out in the pine wood or use the motor or rest or anything she likes but not to come up here until Simpson reports me ready.’

‘You can rely on Nurse Gray to be most discreet,’ said Dr. Rob whose voice had suddenly become husky. ‘And don’t go too fast for your strength, laddie, but there’s nothing to keep you in bed if you want to get up.’

‘Goodbye, doctor,’ said Garth, groping for his hand, ‘and I’m sorry I shall never be able to offer to paint Mrs. MacKenzie!’

‘You’d have to paint her with a shaggy head, four paws and soft amber eyes, looking out for me with the most faithful, loving dog-heart in all creation. In all the years we have kept house together she has never failed to meet me with a welcome, never contradicted or wanted the last word. There’s a woman for you! Now, goodbye, laddie, and God Almighty bless you. Don’t be surprised if I look in again on you quite soon.’

Dr. MacKenzie held open the door. Jane passed out noiselessly before him.

Once in the library he sat her down again by the fire and his bright blue eyes were moist, beneath the shaggy brows.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘I feel myself somewhat of a blundering old fool. You must forgive me. I never contemplated putting you through such an ordeal. I perfectly understand while he hesitated, you must have felt your whole career at stake. I see you have been weeping but don’t take it too much to heart. He’ll forget all about it in a day or two and you will become worth a dozen Miss Champions. Now, I recommend that you go for a blow on the moor and I must get hold of Simpson. Only put on something warmer than that. You will have no sickroom work to do and having duly impressed me with your washableness and serviceableness you may as well wear something comfortable to protect you from our Highland nip. I shall return in an hour or two to see how he has stood the moving. Now, don’t let me keep you.’

‘Dr. MacKenzie,’ said Jane quietly, ‘may I ask why you described me as fair and my very straight, heavy, plain hair as fluffy, fly-away floss silk?’

Dr. Rob had already reached the bell but he stayed his hand and turning, met Jane’s steadfast eyes with the shrewd turquoise gleam of his own.

‘Why certainly you may ask, Nurse Rosemary Gray,’ he said. ‘Though I wonder you should think it necessary. It was perfectly evident to me that, for reasons of his own, Sir Deryck wished to paint an imaginary portrait of you to the patient. As the description was so different from the reality, I felt that I better make the portrait complete and it was left to me to add the final touches.’

I gather it was representing some known ideal of his to help the patient. And now, if you will be good enough ‘

Dr. Rob rang the bell violently.

‘And why did you take the risk of suggesting that he should feel me?’

‘Because I knew he was a gentleman,’ shouted Dr. Rob, angrily. ‘Oh come in, Simpson, come in my good fellow, and God be praised that He made you and me men and not women!’

A quarter of an hour later, Jane watched him drive away, thinking to herself that Deryck had been right. What a queer mixture of shrewdness and blunt kindness. But she would have been more than a little surprised could she have overheard Dr. Rob’s muttered remarks to himself as he gathered up the reins and cheered on his sturdy cob. ‘Now what has brought the Honourable Jane up here?’ said Dr. Rob to himself.

‘Dashed if I know,’ said Dr. MacKenzie.

‘You must not swear, laddie,’ said Dr. Rob, ‘you had a pious mother.’

## Chapter Fourteen

Nurse Rosemary sat with her patient in the sunny library at Gleneesh. A small table was between them on which lay a pile of letters, his morning mail, ready for her to open, read to him and pass across. There may be one among them he wished to touch or to keep in his pocket.

They were seated close to the French window opening on to the terrace; the breeze, fragrant with the breath of spring flowers, blew about them and the morning sun streamed in. Garth, in white flannels, wearing a green tie and a buttonhole of primroses, lay back, enjoying with his rapidly quickening sense, the scent of flowers and the touch of the sunbeams.

Jane had written to Deryck to encourage him to come and see his patient and, although she was not aware of the fact, so had Dr. MacKenzie, in answer to Dr. Brand saying he found it possible to come north this weekend.

From Dr. Robert MacKenzie to Sir Deryck Brand.

Dear Sir Deryck. Every possible need of the patient's is being met by the capable lady you sent to be his nurse. I am no longer needed. Nor are you - for the patient. But I deem it exceedingly advisable that you should shortly pay a visit to the nurse, who is losing more flesh than a lady of her proportions can well afford. Some secret care, besides the natural anxiety of having the responsibility of this case, is wearing her out. She may confide in you. She cannot quite bring herself to trust in

Your humble servant, Robert MacKenzie.

'A man's letter, Miss Gray,' said Garth unexpectedly. 'Quite right,' said Nurse Rosemary. 'How did you know?'

'Because it was on one sheet. A woman's letter on a matter of great importance would have run to two, if not three. And that letter was on a matter of importance.'

'Right again,' said Nurse Rosemary, smiling. 'And how did you know that?'

'Because you gave a little sigh of relief after reading the first line.'

'My letter was from - '

'Don't tell me, I didn't mean to pry into your affairs but it is such a pleasure I'm learning to know things without being told.'

'The letter is from sir Deryck Brand and amongst other things, he says he is coming up to see you next Saturday.'

'Oh, good, what a change he will see. And I shall have pleasure of reporting on the nurse, secretary, reader and unspeakably patient guide and companion he provided for me.' Then he added with sudden anxiety, 'He's not coming to take you away, is he?'

'No, no,' said Nurse Rosemary, 'not yet. But I did want to ask whether you could spare me just during forty-eight hours and Dr. Brand's visit would be an excellent opportunity. If I could take the weekend off when he is here I should be more at ease knowing that. He could read the morning's mail and he would more than take my place in other ways.'

'Very well,' said Garth with disappointment. 'I should have liked that we three should have talked together, however, where will you be going?'

Jane pushed the pile of letters towards him. 'I have friends in the neighbourhood,' she said. 'What a lot of letters. Miss Gray, you should be profiting by reading all these epistles. You'll be able to write a book entitled

'The Art of Complete Letter Writing.' Garth pushed away the newspaper, smelling the print. 'Do you remember when we laughed together for the first time? It was when Mrs. Parker Bangs wrote about the poor, blind Bartemaus dipping seven times in the pool of Siloam. It's best not to quote things, especially if they are sacred, unless you have them accurately. Now,' Garth paused.

He had been handling his letters, one by one, carefully fingering each before laying it on the table beside him. He had just come to one written on foreign paper and sealed. He broke off his sentence abruptly, held the letter silently for a moment, then passed his fingers slowly over the seal. Nurse Rosemary watched him anxiously. He made no remark but after a moment laid it down and took up the next. He slipped the sealed letter underneath the rest and passed the pile over to her.

Garth leant back, smoking a pipe contentedly, carefully placing the ashtray and had learnt never to miss. There were nine letters, some from charming women professing to be quite ready to come and see him as soon as he wished for visitors, a bill for ties from Bond Street and a short note from the doctor speaking of his visit.

Nurse Rosemary's fingers shook as she replaced the eighth in its envelope. The last of the pile lay on the table. As she took it up Garth with a quick movement flung the ash into the garden and turned towards the open windows, shading his face with his hand.

'Did I manage that right, nurse?'

'Quite right, Mr. Dalmain,' she said. 'Mr. Dalmain, this letter has an Egyptian stamp, and the postmark is Cairo. It is sealed with scarlet sealing-wax, and the engraving on the seal is a plumed helmet with the visor closed.'

'And the writing?' asked Garth, mechanically and very quietly.

'The handwriting is rather bold and very clear, with no flourishes. It is written with a broad nib.'

'Will you kindly open it, nurse, tell me the signature before you read the rest of the letter.'

Nurse Rosemary fought with her throat which threatened to close altogether and stifle her voice. She opened the letter, turned to the last page and found the signature. 'It is signed 'Jane Champion,' Mr. Dalmain,' said Nurse Rosemary Gray. 'Read it, please,' said Garth quietly and Nurse Rosemary began.

Dear Dal, 'What can I write? If I were with you there would be so much I could say but writing is so difficult, almost impossible. I know it is harder for you than for any of us but you will be braver over it than we would. And you will go on thinking life beautiful and making it seem so to others. I never thought it beautiful until that summer at Shenstone and Overdene when you taught me the perception of beauty. Since then, in every sunset and sunrise, in the blue-green of the Atlantic, the purple of the mountains, the spray of Niagara, the cherry blossom of Japan, the golden deserts of Egypt, I have thought of you and understood them better.

Dal, I hear you receive no visitors but could you make one exception and let me come?

I was at the Great Pyramid when I heard. The moonlight spoke of all the memories. I had just made up my mind to give up the Nile and to come straight home and write to you asking you to come and see me.

Would you have come, Garth?

Now, my dear friend, as you cannot come to me, can I come to you. All my letters go to my aunt's town house and are redirected unopened.

Let me come. Please believe me that I know how hard it is for you but God can give strength and help.

And please believe me to be yours more than I can write, Jane Champion.

Garth removed the hand which had been shielding his face.

'I'll answer that straight away, Miss Gray.'

Dear Miss Champion . . . I am deeply touched by your kind letter of sympathy . . . It was especially good of you to write to me from so far away.'

A long pause. Nurse Rosemary Gray waited, pen in hand, and hoped the beating of her heart was only in her own ears and not audible across the small table.

'I am glad you did not give up the Nile trip but,' the room was very still.

'But, of course, if you had sent for me I should have come.'

A bee fought its way around the window and then out into the sunshine. There was absolute silence in the room until Garth's voice broke it as he went on dictating. 'It is more than kind of you to suggest coming to see me, but ,'

'Oh, Mr. Dalmain,' said Nurse Rosemary, dropping her pen, 'please let her come.'

Garth turned upon her a face of blank surprise. 'Think how hard it must be for anyone to want so much to be near a friend in trouble and to be kept away,' she went on.

'It's only her kindness of heart, Miss Gray and I don't wish her to come.'

'Please, can you read between the lines,' pleaded Nurse Rosemary, 'or does it take a woman's heart to understand. Did I read it badly? Shall I read it again?'

A look of real annoyance gathered on Garth's face. He spoke with quiet sternness, a frown bending his straight black brows.

'You read it quite well,' he said, 'but you do not do well to discuss it. I must feel able to dictate my letters without explanations.'

'I beg your pardon, sir, I was wrong.'

Garth stretched his hand across the table and left it there a moment but no responsive hand was placed within it. Jane knew instinctively that her hands in his would be instantly recognised.

‘Never mind,’ said Garth with his winning smile, ‘you can direct me in most things but not in this. Now, where were we?’

‘More than kind,’ said Nurse Gray brokenly.

‘Yes er right. Only she and I will know how much more than kind it is. Now ‘I am receiving no visitors and must master my circumstances during the summer. I have with me one who most perfectly and patiently is helping, no, wait, I will not say that. She might think, she might misunderstand. Full stop after summer.

Now let me think.’ Garth dropped his face into his hands and sat for a long time absorbed in thought. Nurse Rosemary waited. Her right hand held the pen and her left was pressed against her breast. Her eyes rested on that dark bowed head with a look of unutterable yearning and of passionate tenderness. At last Garth lifted his face. ‘Yours very sincerely, Garth Dalmain,’ he said. And silently, Nurse Rosemary wrote it.

Into the somewhat oppressive silence which followed the addressing and closing of the envelope, broke the cheery voice of Dr. Rob.

‘Which is the patient today?’ The lady or the gentleman? Ah, neither, I see. Both flaunt the bloom of perfect health,’ Dr. Rob ran on gaily. ‘I see you have discarded your own warm clothes and returned to the pretty blue washable nurse ones, only, don’t take cold and be sure you feed up well, Nurse Gray. You have been losing weight lately and we don’t want too airy-fairy dimensions.’

‘Why do you always chide Miss Gray about being small, Dr. Rob?’ asked Garth in a vexed tone.

Dr. Rob looked at them both and wondered why both faces were so white and perturbed and why there was in the air a sense of hearts in torment.

‘I’ll chaff her about being tall if you like,’ he said, looking at her with a wicked twinkle, as she stood in the window, drawn up to her full height and regarding him with cold disapproval.

‘Well, I had rather no comments of any kind were made about her personal appearance.’ said Garth, shortly. Then he added more pleasantly, ‘You see, she is just a voice to me, a kind, guiding voice and I don’t want to imagine any more. At present she is the only person I have had near me that I have never seen. In time, of course, there will be many but I want to get used to this one voice first without knowing anything else.’

Dr. Rob’s observant eye had been darting about during this explanation looking for something to focus on, worthy of minute examination. Suddenly he spied the foreign letter.

‘Hello’ he said. This has an Egyptian stamp. That’s interesting. Have you friends out there, Mr. Dalmain?’

‘That letter came from Cairo,’ Garth replied, ‘but I think Miss Champion has probably moved on from there by now.’

Dr. Rob attacked his moustache, ‘Champion? It’s an uncommon name. Would it, by any chance, be the Honourable Jane Champion?’

‘Yes, yes,’ replied Garth, surprised. ‘Do you know her?’ His voice vibrated eagerly.

‘Well,’ answered Dr. Rob, with slow deliberation, ‘I know her face and I know her voice, I know her figure and I’ve a pretty good idea of her character. I’ve seen her under fire which is more than most men of her acquaintance can claim. But one thing I don’t know is her handwriting. May I examine it?’ He turned to the window with a question in his eyes. Nurse Rosemary was studying the view.

‘Yes,’ Dr. Rob studied the envelope. ‘Yes, it is like her. Knowing what it means to say and saying it, going where it means to go and getting there. Ay, lad, it’s a grand woman that and if you have the Honourable Jane for your friend, you can be doing with out a few other things, I would say.’

A tinge of eager colour rose in Garth’s thin cheeks. He had been so starved in his darkness for want of some word concerning her, from that outer light in which she moved. He had felt so hopelessly cut off from all chance of hearing of her. And all the while, if only he had known it, old Robby could have talked of her. He had had to question Brand so cautiously, fearing to betray his secret and hers but with Dr. Rob and Nurse Gray no such precautions were needed.

‘Where, .when?’ asked Garth.

‘I’ll tell you where and when if you are inclined for a story about the war.’

‘Have you both a comfortable chair?’

‘I shall stand,’ said Dr. Rob, ‘and Miss Gray has apparently ceased to pay any attention to you. You will very rarely find one woman take much interest in tales about another. Well, now, you lean back in yours and enjoy my story. I’ll tell you where I first saw the Honourable Jane. It was out in South Africa in the very thick of the Boer war. I had volunteered for the sake of the surgery experience. She was out there nursing, but the real thing mind you. None of your dabbling in eau-de-cologne with lace handkerchiefs and washing handsome faces when the orderlies had washed them already. Anyway, she was the sister in charge of the particular hospital where I was still a sergeant but with a heavy beard so I doubt if she would recognise me now. Only then there was no time for socialising and anyway she did the work of ten others. The doctors and the orderlies adored her and everyone called her the Honourable Jane. I came across her at different centres throughout the war but I doubt whether we spoke more than once. I used to hear stories of her talking to the wounded and dying as a mother or sister would talk to them. Only once did I hear she broke down when a mere boy as she called him died in her arms. She had held him while he

had an operation which was his only chance and then it proved no good, the surgeon told me she gathered him to her and wept over him.'

Garth shielded his face with his hand. His half-smoked cigarette fell unheeded to the floor. Dr. Rob picked it up and rubbed the scorched spot on the carpet carefully with his foot. He glanced towards the window.

Nurse Rosemary had turned and was leaning against the frame but her eyes dwelt with troubled anxiety on Garth. Once she shook her head slightly at the doctor but he pretended not to see.

'Now,' said Dr. Rob, 'having kept you so long, I must be off to see your gardener's good wife who has had what he calls an increase. I should think a decrease would have better suited the size of the household! So, by your leave, Nurse Gray will see me out and we can have a word or two about our patient.'

Jane reached the dining-room and Dr. Robert MacKenzie stood immediately on the hearth-rug in a Napoleonic attitude, just as on the morning of their first interview. He looked at her uncertainly.

'Well?' he said.

Jane came straight to him with both hands extended.

'Ah, you dear faithful serjeant, but see what comes of not wearing a proper surgeon's coat. And my dilemma comes from taking another woman's name. So you knew me all the time, from the first moment I came into the room?'

'From the first moment you entered the room,' assented the doctor.

'Why did you not say so?' asked Jane.

'Well, I concluded you had your reasons for being Nurse Rosemary Gray, and it didn't come within my province to question your identity.'

Oh, dear doctor,' said Jane. 'Was there ever anything so shrewd and so wise and so bewilderingly farseeing standing on a hearth-rug. But, tell me, why now?'

Dr. Rob laid his hand on her arm. 'My dear, I am an old fellow and all my life I have made it my business to know, without being told. You have been coming through a strain, a prolonged period of strain, sometimes harder, sometimes easier, but never quite relaxed. A strain such as few women could have borne. You had to have the relief of someone with whom to share the secret. I gathered from your faces that he had refused to let you come to see him, when I came in. But can you tell me why?'

Jane looked at him, her eyes full of gratitude. For a moment she couldn't speak. 'Doctor MacKenzie,' she said at last, 'thereby hangs a tale of sad mistrust and mistake which were wholly mine. While you are visiting the gardener's wife I'll make myself ready and walk a little way with you and try to tell you the woeful thing which came between him and me and placed our lives

so far apart. We seem at the moment to be between Pharaoh and the Red Sea. Your wise advice will help me and your knowledge of men and of the human heart may find us a way out.'

As Jane crossed the hall and was about to mount the stairs, she looked towards the closed door where Garth sat. A sudden fear seized her lest the strain of listening to that tale of Dr. Rob's had been too much for him. None but she could know all it must have awakened of memory to be told of the dying soldier pillowed in her arms and on her breast. 'A mere boy,' he had said, a strange coincidence of words. She could not leave the house without being sure he was safe and well. And yet she instinctively feared to intrude when he imagined himself alone for an hour.

Then Jane, in her anxiety, did a thing she had never done before. She opened the front door noiselessly, passed round the house to the terrace where she knew the windows would be open.

She had not done this because she knew how he hated and dreaded the thought of an unseen intrusion on his privacy.

But now, just this once, Jane looked in at the window.

Garth sat sideways in the chair, his arms folded on the table beside him and his face buried in them. He was sobbing as she had sometimes heard men sob after prolonged agony when the worst was over and borne without a sound.

Garth's sob of agony was 'Oh, my wife, my wife.'

Jane knew better than to reveal herself then, taking him at a disadvantage but maybe the recent letter could somehow be rewritten and he would say 'Come,' and the next minute he would be in her arms.

Jane turned noiselessly away. Coming in, an hour later, from her walk with Dr. Rob, her heart filled with glad anticipation, she found him standing in the window, listening to the countless sounds he was learning to distinguish. He looked so slim and tall and straight in his white flannels, both hands thrust deep into the pockets, that when he turned at her approach it seemed to her as if the shining eyes must be there.

'Was it lovely in the woods?' he asked. 'Simpson must take me up there after lunch. Meanwhile, is there time, Miss Gray, to finish our morning's work?'

Five letters were dictated and a cheque written. Then Jane noticed that hers to him had gone but his to her lay on the table ready for stamping. She hesitated.

'And about the letter to Miss Champion?' she said. 'Do you wish it to go as it is, Mr. Dalmain?'

'Why certainly,' he said. 'Did we not finish it?'

'I er I thought perhaps after Dr. Rob's visit you might - '

'Dr. Rob's story could make no possible difference. It only reminded me, ' he paused. 'Of what?' said Nurse Gray.

‘Of what a glorious woman she is,’ said Garth Dalmain.

## Chapter Fifteen

When Deryck Brand alighted at the little northern wayside station, he looked up and down the gravelled platform, more than half expecting to see Jane. The hour was early but she had always said, ‘so much the better,’ but there was no-one to be seen.

The old porter, shading his eyes from the slanting rays of the morning sun, watched the train glide away and disappear from sight, then slowly turned and saw that there were no other passengers alighting, shambled slowly towards the doctor’s portmanteau.

Dr. Brand never hurried people but this applied chiefly to patients in the consulting room or young students in the hospital. His habit of giving people all the time they wanted had once lost him an overcoat, almost lost him a train and won him the thing in life he most desired. But that belongs to another story. Meanwhile he wanted his breakfast on this fresh spring morning and most of all, he wanted to see Jane.

So he picked up his own luggage, swung out of the station and was out of sight in the motor that waited for him while the doubtful porter ambled away to fetch a truck. Meanwhile the doctor sped up into the hills, his mind alight with eagerness to meet Jane and to learn the developments of the last few days. Her non appearance, however, filled him with an indefinable anxiety. It would have been like her to seize the chance of a talk with him alone before he reached the house. The disappointment of not seeing her wrought a strange foreboding. What if her nerve had given way under the strain?

They turned a bend in the winding road, the chauffeur had wasted no time, and Simpson received him at the hall door. He just stopped himself in time, as he was about to ask for Miss Champion. He must guard his words and actions in

this house where Jane had successfully steered her intricate course. He would never forgive himself if he gave her away.

‘Mr. Dalmain is in the library, Sir Deryck,’ said Simpson and it was a very alert, clear-headed doctor who followed the man across the hall.

Garth rose from his chair and walked forward to meet him, his right hand outstretched, a smile of welcome on his face and so direct and unhesitating a course that the doctor had to glance at the sightless face to make sure that this lithe, graceful, easy-moving figure was indeed the blind man he had come to see. Then he noticed a length of brown silk cord stretched from an arm of the chair Garth had been sitting on. Garth’s left hand had slipped lightly along it as he walked. ‘My dear fellow! What a change!’ He said.

‘Isn’t it?’ said Garth delightedly. ‘And it is entirely the work of the little woman you sent up to me. How first-rate she is. This is her own idea.’ He unhitched the cord and let it fall to the floor, a fine string remaining attached to it so that he could draw it up at will. ‘There’s one on this side leading to the piano and one here to the window. Now how should you know them apart?’ ‘They are brown, purple, and orange,’ replied the doctor. ‘Yes, yes,’ you know them by the colours,’ said Garth, ‘but I know them by a difference in the thickness and the texture which you can’t see but I can feel. I sometimes think of the colours and wear ties and things to match. An ordinary nurse would have put colours I didn’t like knowing that they clashed with the carpet but she understood how much colours mean to me even though I can’t see them’

‘I’m glad she’s a success. I conclude you must mean Nurse Rosemary Gray?’

‘A success,’ exclaimed Garth. ‘Why, she has helped me to live again. I’m ashamed to remember how low I was when you came up before, Brand - just pounding the wall as old Robbie puts it.’

‘Thank God you are winning, Garth. My dear fellow, you are coming through a stiffer fight than any of us have been called to face.’

‘I owe a lot to you, Brand and still more to Miss Gray.’ Garth explained that she was away for the weekend. ‘Away? J, just now?’ exclaimed the doctor, almost surprised into another slip.

‘Yes, she went last night. She wanted a change of scene and thought this weekend would be a good opportunity while you were here. But ‘ said Garth apologetically, ‘I am sorry you will have to take your meals alone. I can’t even have Miss Gray with me. Simpson helps with that while I chase my food around on the plate. I’m afraid that’s a bit embarrassing for me still. It’s difficult to imagine.’

He couldn’t see the understanding look of quick comprehension. ‘Yes, yes, of course. No, I don’t think anyone can imagine who hasn’t been through it.’

Garth coloured slightly. ‘Although Miss Gray is trained to that sort of thing, Simpson’s is the only touch I allow. Miss Gray has never come near enough, not even to shake hands. I prefer it that way then she can remain vision to my

mind while Simpson is eyes to the rest of me. She has a wonderfully kind voice too, I feel as if I could not live without her.'

Here Garth stopped abruptly and rang the bell.

'Take Sir Deryck to his room, Simpson, there's a good chap. We'll go out onto the moors soon so don't give me anymore time this morning if you would rather be resting or having a holiday from minds and from men.'

The doctor did full justice to an excellent breakfast and was still puzzling the problem of Jane when old Margery appeared again, full of mystery.

'Would you be coming with me, Sir Deryck, and softly, whenever you have finished your breakfast?' she said. 'Softly,' said Margery again, as they crossed the hall, the doctor's tall figure closely following in her portly wake.

'Where are we going, Mistress Margery?' asked the doctor matching his stride to her trot - one to two.

'You will be seeing whenever we get there, Sir Deryck,' said Margery. And old Margery paused before a door at the end of the passage, knocking lightly.

She turned the handle and whispered mysteriously into the half-opened doorway, 'It will be Sir Deryck, Miss Gray,' and she ushered the doctor into a cosy little sitting-room.

A bright fire burned in the grate. In a high-backed chair in front of it sat Jane, with her feet on the fender.

He could only see the top of her head and her long grey legs but both were unmistakably Jane's.

'Oh, Dicky!' she said with a great thankfulness in her voice. 'Is it you? Oh, come in, dear boy and shut the door. Are we alone? Come round here quick and shake hands or I shall be plunging about trying to find you.'

The doctor dropped to his knees in front of the chair. 'Jeanette?' he said, questioningly, 'Jeanette!' And then surprise and emotion silenced him.

Jane's eyes were securely bandaged. A black, silk scar, folded in four thicknesses was firmly tied at the back of her smooth coils of hair. There was a pathetic helplessness about her large capable figure, sitting alone in this bright little sitting-room, doing nothing.

'Jeanette.' said the doctor, for the third time. 'And you call this going away for the weekend?'

'Dear,' said Jane, 'I've gone into as much sightlessness as I can manage for my weekend. I had to do it. The only way to really help him is to know exactly what it means in all the small, trying details. I never had much imagination and I've exhausted all I had. And he never complains so this is the only way to find out what it is really like. Old Margery and Simpson are helping me out. Simpson keeps the coast clear if I want to go out and Margery helps me with things I can't manage. You would never believe how many there are. But it is the awful blackness. sometimes it seems like a real wall in front of me.

And then people seem to murmur indistinctly and I don't know where the sounds are all coming from and then the meals,'

'What! You keep it on?' The doctor's voice sounded rather strained.

'Of course,' said Jane. 'It's humiliating finding you food on the table. But I have to. There's no other way.'

'Yes,' said the doctor quietly, 'you had to do it.'

You, being you, he thought, you had to do it. It was fortunate Jane was blind. The doctor swallowed hard. 'Deryck dear, do you think he will forgive me?'

'Hush, dear Jeanette, I shall do no good here if I lose patience with Dalmain. Now, tell me, do you never remove that bandage?'

Jane smiled wistfully. She knew what was involved in the question. 'I shall wear it, save for washing, until tomorrow night.'

'But, Jeanette,' exclaimed the doctor in protest, 'surely you will see me before I go! My dear girl, won't that be carrying the experiment too far?'

'No,' said Jane, leaning towards him with her pathetic bandaged eyes. 'You see, dear, you give me the chance of passing through what will, in time, be one of his hardest experiences, when his dearest friends will come and go, and be to him only a voice and a touch. Their faces will not be seen and only dimly remembered. I want to be able to say some time in the future to Garth 'He came and went, my dearest friend and I didn't see him at all.'

The doctor walked over to the window and stood there, whistling softly. Jane knew he was fighting with his own vexation. She waited patiently. Then he

came back and sat down near her. 'You always were a thorough old thing!' he said. 'I suppose I must agree.'

Jane reached out for his hand. 'Dear Deryck, now you will please help me? But I never knew you to be, so erm perhaps a little selfish.'

'The 'other man' is always a problem,' said the doctor. 'We male brutes, by nature, always want to be first with all our women. You see it everywhere - fathers with their daughters, brothers with sisters. Now, we will go out onto the moors and talk. I'll send old Margery but do be careful how you come down stairs. What if fell on old Margery and she does make such excellent coffee.'

Jane and Deryck walked the moors in perfect harmony. She had recognised the feel of the old Norfolk jacket as he drew her hand within his arm and they laughed over its many associations. He had kept the jacket for occasions when he intended to be what he called happy and glorious, although Lady Brand made gentle but persistent attempts to dispose of it. Jane was happy to be able to laugh. The doctor was fastidious to a degree where clothes were concerned and always well groomed and unquestionably correct in cut and fashion except in this one case.

But now Jane was sitting upstairs in her self-imposed darkness with nothing to do but listen, fancying she could hear the low hum of quiet voices in the room beneath. It was a pity she could not see them now as they sat together each looking his very best. Garth in a dinner jacket and the doctor in his immaculate evening clothes which he had taken the trouble to bring, knowing Jane expected the men of her acquaintance to be punctilious in the matter of dress, little dreaming she would have no eyes for him.

Garth sat sideways so that he could shield his face if necessary but still feel the warmth of the fire in the chill evening which had succeeded the bright spring day. 'Yes,' Dr. Brand was saying thoughtfully, 'I can easily see that all things which reach you in that darkness assume a different proportion and greatly enhanced value. I think you will find as you come in contact with more people, you will become less consciously sensitive to sound and touch from others. What was it you were saying about Nurse Rosemary not shaking hands?' 'Ah, yes,' said Garth. 'I don't know whether it is a rule of her guild or institution or whatever she belongs to but she seems to have the perfect intuition as to what I want and what I don't want. From the very first she has never touched me.'

'And this pleases you? You're a very unusual patient. As a rule, men . . .'

'I dare say,' Garth interrupted half impatiently. 'There was a time when I should have liked a soft little hand about me and I should probably have caught and kissed it. Who knows? I used to do such things lightly enough. But, Brand, when a man has known the touch of the woman and the touch has become a memory and that memory becomes one of the few things which remain and brings comfort, can you wonder why any other touch might take something away from its sacredness.'

'I understand,' said the doctor slowly. 'It doesn't come within my own experience but only, my dear boy, may I say if the one woman exists, and it is excusable in your case to doubt it, because there were so many, surely her place should be here, her actual touch one of the things which remain.'

'Well you might as well say that because the view exists from here, I ought to be able to see it.'

'Er - in other words,' said the doctor, carefully, 'in other words, although she was the one woman you were not the one man.'

'Yes,' said Garth bitterly, but almost beneath his breath. 'I was a mere boy.'

'Or you thought you were not the one man,' continued the doctor, seeming not to have heard the last remark. 'As a matter of fact, you are always the one man to the one woman, unless another is there before you in the picture. Only it may take time and patience to prove it to her.'

Garth sat up and turned a face of blank surprise towards the doctor. 'What an extraordinary statement! Do you really mean it?'

‘Absolutely,’ replied the doctor in quiet conviction. ‘If you eliminate all other considerations, money, lands, titles, wishes of friends, admiration of mere physical beauty, which is really just a question of comparative anatomy. Freed from all this you could place the man and the woman in a mental Garden of Eden, stripped of all shams, soul facing soul. If, under those circumstances, she is truly his mate then he cannot fail to be the one man. Only he must have the confidence to prove it to her. On him it bursts, as a revelation but on her it dawns slowly, like the breaking of the day.’

‘Oh, my God,’ murmured Garth brokenly, ‘it was just like that! There was nothing to hide and I called her my wife! I realised she was but the next morning she called me a mere boy and she couldn’t for a moment think of marrying me. What becomes of your fool theory, Brand?’

‘Absolutely confirmed, my dear boy,’ said the doctor, quietly. ‘Eve, afraid of the immensity of her bliss, doubtful of herself and fearful of coming short of the ideal he has of her, flees from Adam to hide among the trees of the garden. Don’t talk about fool theories, Dalmain. The fool-fact was Adam, if he did not start in prompt pursuit.’

Beads of perspiration gleamed on Garth’s forehead. He clutched the arms of his chair. The quiet voice awoke doubts in his mind - the first he had had since walking down the Shenstone village church three years ago. ‘Brand,’ he said, ‘please have a little mercy, you know I am blind.’

The doctor considered. If his nurses and students had seen the look on his face at that moment, they would have said that he was performing a most critical and delicate operation. A slip of the scalpel might mean death to the patient. They would have been right, for the whole future of two people hung in the balance. He steadied his nerve and looked into the fire, remembered the other patient stretching dear helpless hands to him, sitting upstairs. He was viewing ‘the other man’ but he could not look on his blind eyes without a great deal of compassion. ‘You may be blind, Dalmain, but I don’t want you to be a fool,’ said the doctor. ‘I have no intention of guessing at your secret but tell me the circumstances if you can and I’ll give you my opinion of the case.’

His tone was so completely dispassionate and matter-of-fact it had a calming effect on Garth, giving him a sense of security. The doctor might have been speaking of a sore throat or a tendency to sciatica.

Garth leaned back in his chair again but occupied, as he was, with his own mental struggle he was, for once, oblivious to most sounds without. When the doctor took up some logs, poking the fire and placing a certain fragrant pine log onto a springing flame, whistling softly the closing bars of ‘Veni Creator Spiritus,’ Garth did not realise why, at this critical moment, these words should have come with gentle insistence into his mind;

‘Keep far our foes; give peace at home;  
Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come.’

It gave him peace at once and caused him to decide to speak freely. He spoke of his memories which could never be forgotten until he came to 'Something happened one day, Brand, I can't tell you what, it would give you a clue as to her identity. But it revealed to me, in a few marvellous moments, the real woman in her, the wife, the mother, the strength and the tenderness - her exquisite perfection. In that five minutes there awakened in me a hunger for her which nothing will ever still, until I stand beside her in the Golden City, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; and there shall be no more darkness or depending on the sun or moon. The glory of God shall be its light. There shall be no more sorrow or pain for all the former will have passed away.'

The blind face shone in the firelight. Garth's retrospection was bringing him visions of things to come and the doctor sat quite still and watched the vision fade. Then he said, 'Well?' He had a question to ask and he was determined to ask it. 'Was she a pretty woman, handsome, beautiful?' 'A pretty woman?' repeated Garth, amazed and brought back to earth. 'Good heavens, you have me there. Beautiful? Handsome?' he repeated. 'I've no idea.' 'I mean,' said the doctor, carefully, 'would you have wanted to paint her?'

'I have painted her,' said Garth very low, a moving tenderness in his voice, 'and my two paintings of her, done in great sadness and from memory are the most beautiful work I ever produced. No-one has ever seen them and no-one will except someone who will bring them to me to destroy.'

'And who will that be?'

'That will be Nurse Rosemary Gray,' said Garth.

'Good,' said the doctor, kicking the logs and making a conscious effort to keep the smile out of his voice. 'She will be very discreet. Then we may take it the one woman was beautiful?'

But Garth still looked perplexed. 'I don't know. I can't see her through the eyes of others. My vision of her followed the inspired order of things, spirit, soul and body. Her spirit was so pure and perfect, her soul so beautiful and noble that the body which clothed it all partook of their perfection and became unutterably dear.'

'I see,' said the doctor, very gently. 'Yes, dear fellow, I see.' (oh, Jane, Jane, you were blind without a bandage in those days.) Is he really unconscious, thought the doctor, of how unmistakable a word-picture of Jane he is painting in all this?

'I was absolutely certain she was mine,' continued Garth, 'so certain that there was no haste to hear her answer when I called her . . . what she was to me. I called her to me at the chancel step as if I were indeed her husband and had the right to bid her come. She came, and just as a sweet formality before taking her to me, I asked for her answer. It was this, I cannot marry a mere boy.'

Garth's voice choked in his throat on the last word. He bowed his head in his hands. He had reached the point where most things stopped for him and all things had ceased to be as they were before.

The room seemed strangely silent. The doctor stirred in his chair. He was finding these confidences of 'the other man' more trying than he had expected. He knew it had been far worse than Garth had told.

He knew of the cruel, humiliating question; 'How old are you?' Jane had confessed to it. He knew how the outward glow of adoring love had faded as the mind was suddenly turned inward to self-contemplation. He had known it all as abstract fact. Now he saw it actually before him.

He saw Jane's stricken lover, bowed beside him in his blindness, living again through those sights and sounds which no merciful curtain of oblivion could ever hide or veil. The doctor had his faults but they were not Peter's.

He never, under any circumstances, spoke because he didn't know what to say.

He leaned forward and laid a hand very tenderly on Garth's shoulder.

'Poor old chap,' he said.

And for a long while they sat thus in silence.

## Chapter Sixteen

It will be absolutely impossible, Miss Gray, for me ever to tell you what I think of this that you have done for my sake. Garth stood at the open library window with a new look of strength and hopefulness apparent in every line of his erect figure. He smiled. 'Did you feel a little bit of a deceiver, Miss Gray?'

Jane found it hard to begin this fresh morning with the tone she had practised, half a tone higher, once again. Poor Jane, she had always felt a deceiver.

'Yes. And yet I told you I wasn't going far. And Margery and Simpson helped me. I'm afraid they were the friends I mentioned. And what a different world that land of darkness is. You almost dread the coming of friends because the darkness is worse when they are gone.'

‘Do you know,’ said Garth, laughing with almost boyish pleasure, ‘I wont be finding it such a place of solitude now. I shall be able to say, a dear and faithful friend has been there, too.’

Jane’s mother-love rose up in her and demanded one supreme effort. She looked at the slight figure, so manly, so beautiful still and yet so helpless and so needing the wealth of tenderness which was hers to give.

Then, standing facing him, she opened her arms, as if the great preparedness of that place of rest so close to him must, magnet-like, draw him to her. Standing thus, in the sunlight, Jane spoke.

‘Mr. Dalmain, there are many small details but before we talk of those I want to tell you the greatest of all the lessons I learned without my sight.’ She paused. She was suddenly again conscious that her emotion was producing in her voice a resonant depth which might remind him too vividly of notes in The Rosary. She continued in the high, soft edition of her own voice which it had become second nature to her to use as Nurse Rosemary.

‘It seems to me I learned to understand how that which is loneliness unspeakable to one might be Paradise of a very perfect kind for two. The dark might become a wonderful meeting-place for souls. If I loved a man who lost his sight, I should be glad to have mine in order to be eyes for him, just as, if I were rich and he poor, I should value my money simply as a thing which might be useful to him. I should long to say, ‘Let’s put out the lights and shut away the moonlight and sit together in the sweet soft darkness which is more uniting than the light.’

While Jane was speaking, Garth paled and his face grew set. He visibly shrank from the voice which was saying these things to him and fumbled with his right hand for the orange cord to guide him to his chair. A boyish flush spread to his hair. Jane’s arms dropped at the sound of his voice.

‘Nurse Rosemary, it is kind of you to tell me these lovely thoughts you had in the darkness. But I hope the man who is happy enough to possess your love or who is going to win it will not be so unfortunate as to lose his sight. It would be better for you to live with him in the light than to prove your love for him by adapting to his darkness.’

He slipped his hand onto the orange cord and walked to his chair. ‘Now, how about opening our letters?’ he finished abruptly.

With a sense of unutterable dismay, Jane saw what she had done. She had completely forgotten Nurse Rosemary, using her only as a means of awakening in Garth an understanding of how much her own love might mean to him. She had forgotten that, to Garth, Nurse Rosemary’s was the only personality which counted in this conversation. O poor, dear Garth! O bold, brazen Nurse Rosemary!

He very naturally concluded she was making love to him. She took a very prompt and characteristic plunge. Sitting down at her side of the table, she said, 'I believe it was the thought of him made me realise this, but just now I and my young man have fallen out. He doesn't know I am here, even.'

'Ah, Miss Gray,' said Garth, unbending at once, 'I have wondered whether there was a happy man.' Nurse Rosemary laughed. 'Well, we can't call him a happy man just now,' she said, 'so far as his thoughts of me are concerned. My whole heart is his if only he can be brought to believe it.' Jane paused, hoping she sounded casual enough, and also trying for a moment to remember Deryck's words of gentle admonition, 'If only you yourself, dear Jane, can believe the whole matter is entirely your fault.' She knew, if she could just say the words, she would believe them.

'A misunderstanding has grown up between us. I, I erm it is my fault entirely.' There she had said it and it didn't seem to hurt as much as she had expected. 'But he wont allow me to put it right.'

'What a fool.' cried Garth. 'Are you and he engaged?'

Nurse Rosemary hesitated. 'It practically amounts to that. Neither of us would give a thought to any one else.'

Garth knew there was a class of people whose first step to marriage was called 'keeping company,' a stage above the housemaid's 'walking out', yet somehow Garth had never thought of Nurse Rosemary Gray as belonging to any other class than his own. Perhaps this ass of a fellow, whom he already cordially disliked, came of a lower stratum than nurses. Or perhaps the rules of her nursing guild forbade a definite engagement but allowed an understanding. Anyway the fact remained that the kind-hearted, clever, delightful little lady, who had done so much for him, had a young man of her own.

This admitted fact lifted a weight from Garth's mind. He had been so afraid lately of not being quite honest with her and with himself. She had become so necessary to him, so essential, and by her skill and devotion had won so deep a place in his gratitude. Their relation was of so intimate a nature and their companionship so close and continuous. Into this rather ideal state of things also, Dr. Rob had heavily trodden with a suggestion.

'I fear they don't let nurses go on indefinitely at one case,' he had explained to the doctor, 'do you think Sir Deryck can arrange that this should be an exception? I really dread a recall from her Matron.'

'Oh hang the Matron and blow Sir Deryck,' said Dr. Rob breezily. 'If you want her as a permanency, make sure of her. Marry her, my boy! I'll warrant she would have you.'

Garth had tried to put the suggestion out of his mind and failed. He began to notice thoughts and plans of Nurse Rosemary's for his benefit which far

exceeded her professional duties. He put the thought away again and again, calling Dr. Rob an old fool and himself a conceited ass. But again and again there came about him, with Nurse Rosemary's presence, the subtle surrounding atmosphere of a watchful love.

Then one night, he faced and fought a great temptation. After all why should he not do as Dr. Rob suggested? Why not marry this charming, capable, devoted nurse, have her constantly about him in his blindness? She did not consider him a mere boy. What had he to offer her? A beautiful home, every luxury, abundant wealth - a companionship she seemed to find congenial. But then the Tempter overreached himself, because he whispered; 'And the voice would be always Jane's. You have never seen the nurse's face, you never will see it. You can go on putting the voice to the face you adore. Marry the little nurse and go on loving Jane.' Then Garth cried out in horror 'get behind me, Satan.' And the temptation was over.

'Miss Gray,' he said, leaning towards her with that delightful smile of boyish candour which many women had found irresistible. 'It is good of you to have told me about yourself and although I confess to feeling unreasonably jealous of the fortunate fellow who possesses your whole heart, I am glad he exists because we all miss something unless we have in our lives the wonderful experience of the one woman or the one man. Before we continue, could you put your hand in mine? Now you have had hours of time without sight you will know what a handclasp means.'

Garth stretched out his hand across the table and his whole attitude was tense with expectation.

'I, I can't do that, Mr. Dalmain,' said Nurse Rosemary, in a voice which shook a little. 'I've burned my hands a bit, don't look so startled, just with a match when I was blindfolded. It's all right with a bandage or two.' Oh, dear, she thought. Do I lie so convincingly and so easily, now.

Garth withdrew his hand immediately and clasped both around his knee. He leaned back in his chair with an expression so pure, the exaltation of a spirit so lifted above the temptations of the lower nature, that Jane's eyes filled with tears. She realised what his love for her, with the discipline of suffering, had done to him. He began to speak softly.

'Tell me,' he said, 'is he, erm, very much to you?'

Jane's eyes could not leave the dear face and figure in the chair. Jane's emotion trembled in Nurse Rosemary's voice.

'He is all the world to me.' she said.

'Does he love you as you deserve to be loved?'

Jane bent and laid her lips on the table where his outstretched hand had rested. Then Nurse Rosemary answered, 'He loved me far, far more than I ever deserved.'

‘Why do you say loved?’

‘I’m afraid I have lost his love by my own mistrust and my own wrongdoing!’

‘Never!’ said Garth. ‘Love never fails. It may appear to be dead, even buried. But Easter morning comes and love rises again. Love grieved is like a bird with wet wings. It can’t fly, it can’t rise up. It hops on the ground, chirping anxiously. But every flutter shakes away more drops and very soon the sunshine dries the tiny feathers and it soars up again into the tree.’

‘I’m afraid I did more than wet his wings, Mr. Dalmain, I’m afraid I clipped them badly.’

‘Does he know you feel in the wrong?’

‘No, he will give me no chance to explain.’

‘Poor girl!’ said Garth with much sympathy and understanding. ‘Look, take my advice, I’ve been through the same thing, write him a full confession. Keep nothing back. Tell him just how it all happened. Any man who truly loves would believe you and accept it and be thankful. Only, I hope he would not come tearing up here and take you away from me!’

Jane smiled through a mist of tears.

‘If he wanted me, Mr. Dalmain, I should have to go to him,’ said Nurse Gray.

‘How I dread the day!’ continued Garth. ‘But I know what real love means.

You know, all other faces are gradually fading. I can hardly recall the lovely faces I have painted but that one face will be with me through life. I can’t say loved or love, because she never really loved me but, nevertheless, I could never bring myself to love another. It would only remind me of her. It would be dishonest. But she has refused my best.’

Garth dropped his face in his hands. ‘Oh, God,’ he murmured, ‘what it means to appear inadequate to the woman you love.’

Silence unbroken reigned in the library.

Suddenly Garth began to speak, low and quickly, without lifting his head.

‘Now, now I feel it, just as I told Brand when he was here. Miss Gray! Don’t move or stir. Look around the room and tell me whether you see anything.

The window, the door, look behind the screen. I can’t believe we are alone. O God, she is so near and it is terrible because I don’t want her near. Is it psychic? Is it real or am I going mad? Miss Gray! You wouldn’t deceive me. Look around for God’s sake and tell me. Are we alone? And if not, who is in the room besides you and me?’

Jane had been sitting with her arms folded on the table. When he said he didn’t want her near she buried her face on them. Garth was so near he could have reached out his hand and placed it on the thick coils of her brown hair but he didn’t move. There was silence in the library for a few moment’s then Jane lifted her face.

‘There is no-one in the library, Mr. Dalmain but you and me.’

Tea came early. It was a radiant afternoon. Nurse Rosemary leaned forward and placed his cup where he could reach it easily just touching his right hand with the edge of the saucer. 'The light is good now, Miss Gray?' said Garth. 'Yes, it's not quite five o'clock yet and the sun sets at half past seven.' 'Then the sun will be shining in at the west window of the studio. You know my studio at the top of the house? There is something I would like you to do for me. Do you remember a stack of canvases when you fetched the studies of Lady Brand. Among the finished pictures are two I would like to identify and destroy. I couldn't ask sir Deryck because the principal figures are known to him. When I painted them I never dreamed of any eye but my own seeing them so you, my dear trusted friend and secretary are the one person to whom I can turn. Would you bring those to me now, please?'

'Of course,' said Nurse Rosemary Gray. Then she picked up the key, rose and went over to the piano which she opened. She tightened the purple cord which guided Garth from his chair to the instrument. 'Sit and play while I'm upstairs. May I look at them properly in the beautiful studio light?'

The artist in Garth could not resist the wish to have his work seen and appreciated. 'Of course, if you wish. They are quite the best work I ever did although I painted them entirely from memory. It's a knack of mine so they are not imaginary.'

He stood up and went to the piano. His fingers began to stray softly among the 176

harmonies of the 'Veni, Creator Spiritus.'

Nurse Rosemary moved to the door. 'How shall I know them?' she asked and waited. The chords of the music hushed to a murmur. Garth's voice from the piano came clear and distinct but blending with the harmonies as if he were reciting to music.

'A woman and a man . . . Alone in a garden. She is in evening dress; soft, black and trailing; with lace at the breast. It is called - 'The Wife.'

'Yes?'

'The same woman; the same scene; but without the man this time. No need to paint the man because visible or invisible to her - he's always there. In her arms she holds - the murmur of chords ceased, there was perfect silence in the room - 'a little child. It is called - 'The Mother.'

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Upstairs in the studio, Jane walked over to the west window and threw it wide open. The sun was dipping gently towards the purple hills. She looked heavenward and spoke aloud. 'Before God' she said, 'in case I am never able to say or think it again, I will say it now - I believe I was right. I considered

Garth's future happiness and I considered my own. And it was at great cost to our present happiness but I believed it right then and I believe it now.' Jane never said it again.

## Chapter Seventeen

Almost immediately Jane found the two pictures she wanted. The noble figure of a woman on the first canvas was the immediate impression, distinguishable at a glance by the soft, black gown. She carried them both to the western window and drew up a chair. She gazed at the very stately pose. It had a great breadth of dignity. She marked the ample proportions, the large and capable hands. Then she realised the impression conveyed one of strength - strength of body, strength to continue. She looked into the face where there were no pretensions of beauty and saw the expression was that of love. Love of the highest, holiest, most ideal kind. It was a tender, human look but suddenly Jane saw something she had never seen before. A glorious light shone from the quiet grey eyes, over the head of the man who knelt before her. There was an expression of sublime surrender of a woman's whole soul to an emotion which swayed and mastered her. She saw a passionate tenderness but a violence of feeling which had flung the man to his knees. It had driven him to the haven of her breast. The woman's look yearned to give and soothe and make content. It brought tears to Jane's eyes. The woman was seated on a broad marble parapet looking straight before her. On the left, slightly to one side of her, knelt a man, a tall slight figure in evening dress, his arms thrown forward around her waist and his face completely hidden. The whole scene was one of intense emotion and not a word was being spoken. A crimson rambler rose climbing some woodwork hung in a glowing mass and provided the only vivid colour in the picture. Taking in all the minor details, the eye must return to that calm, tender face, alight with love, and the strong hands learning for the first time to put a protective passion of a woman's tenderness, the mind whispered the only possible name for the picture - 'The Wife.'

Jane gazed at it long in silence. She could not doubt for a moment that she looked at herself. But, oh, merciful heaven! How unlike the reflection in her own mirror. Once or twice here mind refused to work then she began to

experience vividly all the emotions she had felt then, when that dear head had come to rest so unexpectedly.

‘It’s true,’ she whispered, ‘I can’t deny it. It is as I felt, it must be as I looked.’ She fell on her knees. ‘Oh, God, is that how I looked? And the next thing that happened was my boy lifting his shining eyes and gazing at me in the moonlight. Is that what he saw? The woman who refused to marry him the next day on the grounds of his youth and her superiority? Oh, God, help me to understand! Help him to forgive me.’

In the workroom just below, Maggie the housemaid was singing as she sewed. The sound floated through the open window and reached Jane. Her mind, stunned to blankness by its pain, took an eager hold on the words.

O Love, that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

O Light, that followest all my way,  
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in Thy sunshine’s blaze its day  
May brighter, fairer be.’

She took the second picture and placed it in front of the first. The same woman, seated as before but the man was not there. In her arms, its tiny dark head pillowed against the fullness of her breast, lay a little child. She was gazing into the baby face.

The crimson Rambler had grown right across the picture and arched over the mother and child. There was majesty of tenderness in the figure of the mother and again the plain face was transfigured by the mother-love. The Wife of the first picture had more than fulfilled her abundant promise. She was in the fullest realisation of the wonder of motherhood - all mysteries were explained and all joys experienced and the smile on her calm lips spoke complete content.

A Rambler rose had burst above them and fallen in a shower of crimson petals on mother and child. The baby fingers clasped tightly the soft lace at her bosom. Jane, watching them, fell to a desperate weeping. The mere boy downstairs had understood and seen her as the mother too. And again she was forced to say, ‘It is true - yes it’s true.’

She buried her face in her hands and a hot flush crept to the roots of her hair. Below, the fresh young voice was singing again.

O Joy, that seekest me through pain,

I cannot close my heart to Thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be.

Once more she lifted her head and looked at the picture. A few stray petals of the crimson rambler lay on the ground. It reminded her of those crushed roses which fell that night at Shenstone and lay scattered on the terrace - the emblem of the joyous hope and the glory of love which by her decision had caused such disillusion.

And through the open window came the final verse of Maggie's hymn.

O cross, that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.'

Jane went to the western window and stood, gazing at the golden battlements and beyond to the purple hills and repeated, half aloud, 'And the city was of pure gold - and had no need of the sun . . . And there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.'

How much, she thought, had passed away since she stood at that western window, not an hour before. All life seemed to be readjusted, its outlook altered, its perspective changed.

She closed the window, restored everything to its place, picked up the two canvases and made her way carefully downstairs.

When Jane had locked the letter-bag earlier that evening and handed it to Simpson, she had slipped in two letters of her own. One was addressed to

Georgina, Duchess of Meldrum, Portland Place. The other, to  
Sir Deryck Brand, Wimpole Street.

Both were marked 'Urgent'. If absent, forward immediately.

Tuesday passed uneventfully, to all outward seeming. There was nothing to indicate to Garth that his secretary had sat up writing most of the night, only varying the time by spending long moments in silent contemplation of his pictures which had found a temporary place of safety in a deep cupboard in her room. Two telegrams had arrived for Nurse Gray in the course of the morning. The first came while she was reading the paper to Garth. Simpson brought it in, saying; 'A telegram for you, miss.'

It was always a source of gratification to Simpson afterwards, that, almost from the first he had been led, by what he called his 'unhaided hintuhition,' to drop the nurse, and address Jane with the conventional title 'miss.' Margery herself had had her 'doots' but kept them to herself. Maggie had always felt sure Mr. Simpson knew more than he said. 'Said more than he knew, you mean, and if anyone says any more on the subject, I shall say grace and dismiss the table,' said old Margery, exercising her authority.

Nurse Rosemary took it, apologised for the interruption and opened it. It was from the Duchess.

'Most inconvenient, as you very well know but am leaving Euston tonight. Will await further orders at Aberdeen.'

Nurse Rosemary smiled and put the telegram into her pocket.

'Not bad news, I hope?' asked Garth.

'No,' replied Nurse Rosemary, 'but it makes my departure on Thursday imperative. An elderly aunt of mine is going to my young man's home and I must be with him before she is or there will be endless complications.'

'I don't believe he will ever let you go again, when once he gets you back,' remarked Garth, moodily.

'You think not?' said Nurse Rosemary, with a tender little smile as she took up the paper and resumed her reading. The second telegram arrived after lunch.

Garth was at the piano, thundering Beethoven's Funeral March on the death of a hero.' The room was being rent asunder by mighty chords and Nurse Rosemary laid her finger on her lips as Simpson's smug face appeared in the doorway. She waited until the last roll of the drums had died away then she opened the orange envelope. And as she opened it, as strange thing happened. Garth began to play The Rosary. The string of pearls dropped in liquid sound from his fingers and Nurse Rosemary read her telegram. It was from the doctor and said, 'Special license easily obtained. Flower and I will come whenever you wish. Wire again.'

The Rosary drew to a soft melancholy close. 'What shall I play next?' asked Garth, suddenly. 'Veni, Creator Spiritus,' said Nurse Rosemary and bowed her head in prayer.

Wednesday dawned an ideal First of May. Garth was in the garden before breakfast. Jane heard him singing as he passed beneath her window -

'It is not mine to sing the stately grace,  
The great soul beaming in my lady's face.'

Jane leaned out.

He was walking below with a step so light and elastic, his every movement so lithe and graceful, the only sign of his blindness, the cane in his hand. She could only see the top of his dark head. It might have been the terrace at

Shenstone, three years before. She longed to call from the window, 'Good-morning, darling, God bless you today.'

Ah, she thought, what would today bring forth. The day when her full confession and explanation and plea for pardon, would reach him? He was such a boy in many ways, so light-hearted, loving, artistic, poetic, irrepressible, very young in spite of his great affliction.

But where his manhood was concerned, his love, his right of choice and of decision, of maintaining a fair opinion, she knew him rigid, inflexible. His very pain had seemed to cool him from the molten lover to the bar of steel. As Jane knelt at her window that morning, she had not the least idea whether the evening would find her travelling to Aberdeen to take the night mail south or at home forever in the heaven of Garth's love.

And down below he passed again, still singing;

But mine it is to follow in her train;

Do her behests in pleasure or in pain.

Burn at her altar love's sweet frankincense,

And worship her in distant reverence.

'Ah, dear Christ,' whispered Jane, 'if Thy cross broke down walls of partition between Jew and Gentile, cannot my boy's heavy cross do it for him and for me? Then we could indeed come to 'kiss the cross' of The Rosary.'

The breakfast gong boomed through the house. Simpson loved it and always gave full measure.

Garth came in through the French windows, humming. He was in his happiest mood and had picked a golden rosebud which was in his buttonhole.

'Good-morning, Miss Rosemary,' he said. 'What a beautiful May morning. I couldn't stay in bed. I woke up with a feeling that something was going to happen. I've picked you a rose, I'm sure your young man will not object.'

He placed it unerringly on Nurse Rosemary's plate. She was glad she had persuaded him to allow them both to eat together since her time of sightlessness.

'Send for your young man and the aunt and bring them both here. My hearing is very sharp and I could walk with the aunt and guide her in the opposite direction to you both. Then when all was satisfactorily settled, we could pack them off home and be by ourselves again.'

'Mr. Dalmain,' said Nurse Rosemary, reprovingly, 'the May morning has gone to your head. I shall send for Margery. She may know the symptoms of old.'

'It's not that,' said Garth. He leaned forward and spoke confidentially. 'Something is going to happen today, little Rosemary. Whenever I feel like this, something happens. The first time it occurred, about twenty-five years ago, I came downstairs, it was my birthday, and there was a rocking horse in the hall. I've never forgotten my first ride on that rocking horse. I nearly killed

the cousin who pulled out the tail. And the way it used to go backwards and forwards - ah, but I'm boring you!

'Not at all,' said Nurse Rosemary, politely, 'but I want you to have some breakfast and the letters will be here in a few moments.'

'Oh, bother the letters!' cried Garth. 'Let's have a holiday from letters on May Day. We'll all go and gather buds and flowers and garlands and you shall be Queen of the May.' Nurse Rosemary was conscious of her own pallor and oppressive earnestness when she said 'the letters will be here.' But in spite of herself, she laughed and said, 'Mr. Dalmain, you really must be sensible or I shall go and consult Margery. 'I've never seen you in such a mood.' 'You've never seen me on a day when something is going to happen.'

After breakfast he went to the piano and play two-step and ragtime music so infectiously that, Nurse Rosemary, sitting pale and preoccupied, had hard work to keep her feet still.

Margery appeared in a black satin apron and a blue sunbonnet. She came to the piano and laid a hand on Garth's arm. 'Master Garthie,' she said, 'on this lovely May morning, will you take old Margery up into the woods?'

Garth's hands dropped from the piano keys instantly. 'Of course I will, Margie,' he said. 'And Margie, something is going to happen today.'

'I know it, laddie,' said the old woman, tenderly, and the expression with which she looked into the blind face, filled Jane's eyes with tears. 'I woke with it, too, Master Garthie. And now we will go into the woods and listen to the earth and the trees and flowers and they will tell us whether it is for joy or for sorrow. Come, my own laddie.'

Garth rose as in a dream. He looked so young and so beautiful, Jane's heart stood still. As they passed the window, he said 'Where is that secretary person? She kept trying to shut me up.'

'I know she did, laddie,' said old Margery, curtsying apologetically towards Jane. 'You see she doesn't know the something-is-going-to-happen feeling.'

'Ah, doesn't she?' thought Jane, as they disappeared.

After making sure the two figures had almost reached the top of the hill, Jane sat down at the piano and played and sang softly The Rosary. And afterwards she went for a long tramp on the moors, steadying her nerve by walking rapidly in the glorious air. Once or twice she read her telegrams again. She knew this May Day madness of Garth's would pass but what she had to deal with was the white-faced man, who had calmly said, 'I accept the cross,' and had left her for three long years without a word or a sign. To him she had written the confession and his would be the decision.

She was not surprised to find him sitting at the desk when she returned. 'Miss Gray,' he said gravely, as he heard her enter, 'I must apologise for my behaviour this morning. I was, what they call up here 'fey' and Margery understood. Together she and I have listened to kind mother earth and lay down under the fir trees and slept. We woke calm and sane and ready for what today will bring. It will bring something - that's no delusion. It's a day of great things, that much Margery knows too. So let's take time, shall we, after lunch, to open the letters. I've even forgotten those. Are there many?' 'Quite a pile,' said Nurse Rosemary.

'Good. We will work soberly through them.'

Immediately after lunch he handled his letters and found one sealed. The seal was a plumed helmet with visor closed. Nurse Rosemary saw him pale as his fingers touched it but he made no remark. He placed it at the bottom of the pile as before so that it might come up last for reading. When the others were finished and Nurse Rosemary took up the letter the room was very still. They were quite alone. Bees hummed in the garden and the scent of flowers stole in at the window. Nurse

Rosemary took up the envelope. 'Mr. Dalmain here is a letter, sealed with scarlet wax. The seal is . . .'

'I know,' said Garth, 'kindly open it.'

'It's quite a long letter Mr. Dalmain.'

'Indeed? Will you please read it to me, Miss Gray.'

A tense moment of silence followed. Nurse Rosemary's voice suddenly refused to respond to her will. 'It . . ., it seems a very private letter, sir.'

'Ever mind, dear girl, it in no way concerns you. You are the voice, however, which must read it to me. Turn over the page and tell me the signature. Although I am sure I know it, the lady whose seal is a plumed helmet can have nothing of a very private nature to say to me.'

Nurse Rosemary tried to speak again.

'Turn over the pages then,' said Garth, sternly. 'You needn't keep me waiting. How is it signed?'

'Your wife,' whispered Nurse Rosemary.

There was a petrifying quality about the silence which followed. It seemed as if those two words, whispered into Garth's darkness, had turned him to stone.

At last he stretched out his hand. 'Will you give me that letter, if you please, Miss Gray? Thank you. I wish to be alone for a quarter of an hour. I shall be glad if you will be good enough to sit in the dining-room and stop anyone coming in. I must be undisturbed. At the end of that time kindly return.'

He spoke so quietly that Jane's heart sank. Some display of agitation would have been reassuring. This was the man who, bowing his dark head towards the crucifixion window, said, 'I accept the cross.'

This was the man, whose footsteps never once faltered as he strode down the aisle and left her. The man who had had the strength ever since to treat that episode as completely closed, no word of entreaty, no sign of remembrance, no hint of reproach. And this was the man to whom she had signed herself, 'Your wife.'

In her whole life Jane had never known fear. She knew it now.

As she silently rose and left him, she stole one last look at his face. He was sitting perfectly still, the letter in his hand. His face might have been carved in white ivory. Jane softly left the room, closing the door behind her. Then followed the longest fifteen minutes she had ever known. She realised what a tremendous conflict was in progress in that quiet room. Garth was arriving at a decision without ever hearing her arguments. He had heard only two words but they were crucial. This must have revealed to him instantly what the character

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of the letter would be and what was the attitude of mind of the woman who wrote it. Jane paced the dining-room in desperation, remembering the hours of thought which had gone into the compiling of that letter, cautiously trying to prepare his mind towards the signature.

Suddenly, in the midst of her mental anguish, there came to Jane an understanding of the immense advantage of the fact that he would hear every word of the rest of her letter, knowing how it would end. Those two words which she could not possibly have put first. She saw a Higher Hand in this arrangement and a sense of calm assurance descended and garrisoned her soul with peace. Jane crossed the hall with a firm step and Nurse Rosemary entered the library.

## Chapter Eighteen

Garth was standing at the open window when Nurse Rosemary re-entered the library and did not turn immediately. She looked

anxiously for the letter and saw it laid ready on her side of the table. It bore much signs of being crumpled, looking as though it has been crushed into a ball, flung into the waste paper basket and finally retrieved. When Garth turned his face it looked as though it had borne the signs of a great struggle and as one, though sightless, had been asking a frantic effort to see. The ivory pallor was gone and his face was flushed.

‘My dear Miss Gray,’ he said, ‘we have a difficult task. I’ve received a letter and I’m obliged to ask you to read it to me. There’s no one else I can ask. I will have to trust you, and I do, to forget all that may not be intended for a third person to read.’

Then Garth leaned back in his chair and shielded his face with his hand. ‘Now, please,’ he said. And very quietly Nurse Rosemary began to read.

‘Dear Garth, I must write freely because the whole of your future life and mine will depend on your reply to this letter. So if, therefore, you cannot completely trust your secretary with the private history of your heart and mine, Please leave the rest of this without turning over a page and let me come myself, Garth, and tell you all the rest.’ Nurse Rosemary waited.

‘I do trust you and she must not come.’

Nurse rosemary went on reading.

‘I want you to remember Garth, that every word I write is the simple unvarnished truth. You will have to admit that I am a truthful person and don’t prevaricate. Look back over all the years we have known one another and know that is true. But, Garth, I told you one lie. And that fatal exception proves the rule. You must realise it is very humbling for me and my pride to have to force you to hear a confession like this when you wont see me even in simple friendship.

You will remember that I am not naturally humble so you can gauge the greatness of my love. God help you to do so, my darling, my darling boy, my beloved.’

Nurse Rosemary stopped abruptly as, at those unexpected words of tenderness and love, Garth had risen to his feet and taken steps towards the windows as if to escape from something too immense to face. In a moment he recovered and sat down. Nurse Rosemary continued. ‘Ah, what wrong I have done to both of us. Do you remember the evening on the terrace when you called me - when I was - your wife? Garth, I am leaving that sentence as it stands because that is the truth and I have finally arrived at it. But I didn’t understand it then. I was unbelievably inexperienced in matters of feeling. I was bewildered by the flood of sensation which swept me off my feet and almost engulfed me. But even then I knew that my soul arose and proclaimed you mate and master. And when you held me, I knew, for the first time, the meaning of the word ecstasy. I wanted to prolong those moments into hours.’

Nurse Rosemary’s quiet voice broke suddenly and the reading ceased. Garth’s head was buried in his hands but he recovered first.

'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I wish it had come when Brand was here. I'm afraid you must go on.'

'I know it must seem incredible to you, Garth, but when I realised it meant marriage, I felt more like an eighteen year old emotionally than a woman of thirty. Although there was a strangely sweet tie that had grown between us since the concert, I did not realise it was love. Don't forget, dear King of my heart, that, until one short week before, you had been among the boys who called me 'good old Jane' and things like that. My dear, when you left me and kissed the hem of my gown, it was a revelation of the way a man such as you exalts the woman on whom he pours his love. That garment's hem has been a sacred thing to me ever since.

It is always with me but I never wear it. Some day, my dearest I will give you a detailed account of the hours that followed. But let me tell you, in all its crude ugliness, the miserable fact which parted us, turning our dawning joy to disillusion and sadness.

Garth, it was this, I did not believe your love would stand the test of my plainness. I knew what a worshipper of beauty you were, how you must have it, in one form or another, around you. I remembered our conversation, which I had recorded word for word in my diary, about the ugly preacher, whose face became illumined into beauty by the inspired glory within. You said you never thought him ugly again but nevertheless, it was not the sort of face you wanted always opposite to you at meals. I read those words over and over until they took a morbid hold on me and Garth - I did not trust your love to stand that test. It seemed to me, I was saving both of us from future disappointment and misery and putting away present joy to avoid certain disenchantment in the years to come. Beloved - it will seem to you so coldly calculating. So unworthy of the great love you were even then lavishing upon me. But remember, for years, your remarkable personal grace and beauty had been a source of pleasure to me and I had pictured you wedded to Pauline Lister, for instance, in all her dazzling whiteness and soft, radiant youthfulness.

Then came the question, how to refuse you. I knew the true reason would be argued away, you would prove me wrong with glowing words and I would have to yield.

So - as I really meant not to let you run the risk, I had to lie. I lied - to you who were already the master of my heart and will - supreme to me, in love and in life. Ah, Garth, I do not excuse what I said, I merely confess it and it truly left your poor Jane, desolate.

If you could have seen her in the little church calling you back . . . And all these lonely years since until, at last, my nerve broke and Deryck told me I was going to pieces and sent me abroad.

All I can say is, that if your dear, shining eyes could see, they would see, now, a woman who is, trustfully and unquestioningly all your own. If she is doubtful of her face and figure, she says quite simply 'They please him and they

are just his so I have no further right to criticise them. If he wants them now they are not mine, but his.'

I cannot tell you now, how I have arrived at this assurance but I have had proofs beyond words of your faithfulness and love. The question now is, quite simply, can you forgive me? If you can forgive me, I can come to you at once. If this thing is past forgiveness, dearest, then I must make up my mind to stay away. Write me one word by your own hand: 'Forgiven.' It is all I ask. Please don't dictate anything to your secretary, I'm afraid I couldn't bear it. If you can truly write that one word Forgiven, just write and send it to -

Your wife.

The room was very still as Nurse Rosemary finished reading. She lay down the letter and silently waited. She wondered for a moment whether she could get herself a glass of water without disturbing him but decided to do without it.

Garth lifted his head. 'She has asked me to do a thing impossible,' he said and a slow smile illumined his drawn face. Jane clasped her hands on her breast.

'Can you not write, forgiven?' she asked, brokenly.

'No,' said Garth. 'I cannot. Little girl, give me a sheet of paper and a pencil.'

Nurse Rosemary placed them close to his hand.

Garth took up the pencil. He groped for the paper, felt the edges with his left hand, found the centre with his fingers and, in large firm letters, wrote one word. 'Is that legible?' he asked, passing it across to Nurse Rosemary.

'Quite legible,' she said and answered quickly before it was blotted by her tears.

Instead of 'forgiven,' Garth had written; 'Loved.'

'Can you post it at once?' Garth asked in a low, eager voice, half rising. 'And she will come - oh, my God, she will come! If we catch tonight's mail, she may be here the day after tomorrow!'

Nurse Rosemary took up the letter and, by an almost superhuman effort, spoke steadily.

'Mr. Dalmain,' she said, 'there is a postscript to this letter. It says; 'Write to The Palace Hotel, Aberdeen.'

Garth sprang upright, his whole face and figure alive with excitement.

'In Aberdeen?' he cried. 'Jane, in Aberdeen! If she gets this tomorrow morning, she could be here any time in the day. Oh, Jane! Jane! Dear little Rosemary, do you hear? Jane will come tomorrow! Didn't I tell you something was going to happen. You and Simpson are too British to understand but Margery knew. Can that be posted at once, Miss Gray?'

'I will go to the post office myself, Mr. Dalmain.'

At the post office she did not post the word in Garth's handwriting. That lay hidden in her bosom. But she sent off two telegrams. The first to The Duchess of Meldrum,, Palace Hotel, Aberdeen.

'Come here by 5.50 train without fail this evening.'

The second to Sir Deryck Brand, Wimpole street, London.

‘All is right.’

Mr. Dalmain,’ said Nurse Rosemary, with patient insistence, ‘I really do want you to sit down and give your mind to the tea table. How can you remember where each thing is, if you keep jumping up and moving your chair?’

Garth laughed joyously.

‘What a cheeky little thing you are becoming and you used to be so oppressively polite. I shall have to say ‘please nurse, can I say my grace and get down.’ Do you know the story of Tommy the Duchess’s macaw who was told ‘Tommy, you should say Your Grace?’

‘You have told it to me twice in the last forty-eight hours. But of course you may tell me again.’ said Nurse Rosemary, patiently.

‘Oh, what a pity. I feel like telling you now. Now you will say, I should so love to hear it!’

‘No, you haven’t told me and I should so love to hear it.’ said Nurse Rosemary.

‘Too late! and Tommy says, Oh, my wig! And we all try not to look at it because it is usually awry.’

‘Please pass me the cake, no, that’s the bread and butter and please stop telling me naughty stories about the Duchess.’

‘Cake, Miss Gray?’

‘Thank you. Right, this time.’

‘That’s exactly how Jane would say - have said, right this time. Isn’t it strange how I have thought your voice exactly like hers and this time tomorrow I shall be thinking hers is like yours.’

‘Oh, no, you will not,’ said Nurse Rosemary. ‘When she is with you, you will have not thoughts for other people.’

‘No, I shall miss you horribly. No-one, not even she, could take your place. Do you know, I’m getting a little anxious about it. She hasn’t seen me since the accident. I’m afraid it will give her a shock. Do you think she will find me much changed?’

Jane looked at the sightless face, turned so anxiously toward her. She remembered that that morning in his room, when he thought himself alone with Dr. Rob and leaving the shelter of the wall, she saw his face for the first time. She realised he was now growing conscious for the first time of his slight disfigurement only for her sake.

Almost an overwhelming tenderness gripped her heart. She glanced at the clock. She could not hold out much longer. ‘Is it very bad?’ said Garth and his voice shook. ‘I cannot answer for another woman,’ replied Nurse

Rosemary, 'but I should think your face, just as it is, will always give her the utmost joy.'

Garth flushed. Pleased and relieved but slightly surprised. There was a quality in Nurse Rosemary's voice for which he could not altogether account. 'But then, she will not be accustomed to my blind ways,' he continued. 'I'm afraid I shall seem so helpless and blundering. Promise not to go until she comes. You see she won't know our plans of cords and notches and things. I want her - only God knows how much I want her but I begin to be half afraid. Having her will be wonderful but it won't be the same as having you.'

Nurse Rosemary Gray was receiving her reward. She appeared to find it overwhelming. As soon as she could speak, she said, 'Don't alarm yourself, Mr. Dalmain. When you have been with her for five minutes, you will find it just the same as being with me - in the little things. And how do you know she hasn't tried out being sightless. A nurse would do it for her profession but the woman who loves you, would do it for love of you.' 'It would be like her,' said Garth, relaxing and a look of deep contentment gathered on his face. 'Oh, Jane! Jane! She's coming. She's coming.' Nurse Rosemary looked at the clock again. 'Yes, she is coming.' Her voice was steady but her hands trembled. 'And as it is our last evening together could you possibly dress a little early and be down in the library by half past six, we might have some music before dinner.'

'Why, certainly, I'm always ready for music and I don't mind what time dinner is. But you promise not to go until she comes?'

'I will not go - until she comes.'

'And you will tell her all the things she ought to know?'

'She shall know all I know, which could add to your comfort.'

'And you will not leave me, until I am really - well, getting on all right?'

'I will never leave you, while you need me,' she said. And again Garth detected that peculiar quality in Nurse Rosemary's voice. He rose and took a step towards her. 'You really are good.' Then he held out both hands towards her. 'Put your hands in mine just for once, little Rosemary. I want to try to thank you.'

There was a moment of hesitation. Two strong capable hands - although they trembled - nearly went home to his. They were withdrawn just in time. Jane's hour was not yet. This was Nurse Rosemary's moment of triumph and success. It should not be taken from her.

'This evening,' she said, softly, 'after the music, we will - shake hands. Now be careful, sire, you haven't any cords nearby. Take a little air on the terrace, sir, and sing that lovely song I heard under my window this morning. And now that you know what it is that is going to happen, this lovely May Day evening will fill you with tender expectation. Goodbye, sir - for an hour.'

'What has come over little Rosemary?' he mused, as he felt for his cane. We could not have gone on definitely as we have been since she came in from the post office.' He walked on slightly troubled.

'What a conceited duffer I am. She's thinking of her young man she is going to tomorrow. I hope he knows he is not worthy of her. I hate letting her go.'

## Chapter Nineteen

Simpson was crossing the hall just before half past six. He had left his master in the library and heard a rustle just above him. He looked up and saw a tall figure descending the wide oak staircase. He stood transfixed. The soft black evening gown, with its trailing folds and old lace at the bosom, did not impress him so much as the quiet look of certainty and power on the calm face above them. 'Simpson,' said Jane, 'my aunt, the Duchess of Meldrum and her maid and her footman and a rather large quantity of luggage will be arriving from Aberdeen at about half past seven. Mrs. Graem knows about preparing rooms and I have given James orders to meet the train. When Her Grace arrives, you can show her into the library. Meanwhile, Mr. Dalmain and myself are particularly engaged just now and must not be disturbed on any account until the Duchess's arrival. You quite understand?'

'Yes, miss - m'lady,' stammered Simpson. He had been a boot-boy in a Duke's household in his younger days and considered a Duchess's niece to be very high up in the social hierarchy.

'Jane smiled. 'Miss is quite sufficient, Simpson,' she said and swept towards the library.

Garth heard her enter and close the door and his quick ear caught the rustle of a train.

'Hello, Miss Gray,' he said. 'Packed your uniform?'

'Yes,' said Jane, 'I've packed.'

She came slowly across the room and stood on the hearth-rug looking down at him. He was in full evening-dress, just as at Shenstone on that memorable night and, as he sat well back in his deep armchair, one knee crossed over the other, she saw the crimson line of his favourite silk socks, just as then. Jane stood

quite still. Her hour had come at last. But even now she must, for his sake, be careful and patient. 'I did not hear the song.' she said.

'No,' replied Garth. 'At first, I forgot. And then, when I remembered, I had been thinking of other things and somehow - er, Miss Gray - I cannot sing tonight. My soul is dumb with longing.'

'I know,' said Jane, gently, 'and I am going to sing to you.'  
A faint look of surprise crossed Garth's face. 'Do you sing?' he asked. 'Then why have you not sung before?'  
'When I arrived, Dr. Rob asked me if I played and sung at all and when I said 'a little' he asked me not to do as it might drive you quite mad.'

Garth burst out laughing. 'How like old Robbie,' he said. 'And, in spite of his orders, you are going to take the risk and sing a little to me tonight?'  
'No,' said Jane. 'I take no risks. I am going to sing you one song. Here is the purple cord, at your right hand. There is nothing between you and the piano, you are facing towards it. If you want to stop me you can.'

She walked to the instrument and sat down. Over the top of the grand piano she could see him a slightly amused smile on his lips. The Rosary had but one opening chord. She struck it her eyes on his face. She saw him sit up instantly, a look of surprise, expectation, bewilderment gathering there. Then she began to sing. The deep rich voice, low and vibrant, as the softest tone of 'cello, thrilled into the startled silence.

'The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,  
Are as a string of pearls to me;  
I count them over, every one apart,  
My rosary; my rosary.  
Each hour a pearl -'

Jane got no further. Garth had risen. He spoke no words but he was coming blindly over to the piano. She turned on the music stool, her arms held out to receive him. Now he had found the woodwork and his hand crashed down on the bass. Now he had found her and was on his knees, his arms around her. Hers enveloped him yearning, tender, hungry with the repressed longing of all those hard weeks. He lifted his face to hers for one moment.

'You?' he said. 'You? You - all the time?'

Then he hid his face in the soft lace at her breast. 'Oh, my darling boy,' said Jane, tenderly, holding the dear head close. 'What it is to touch you, hold you close. Yes, it is Jane, all the time - all the time, near and helping in his loneliness and pain. Could I have stayed away? My beloved - are you not quite sure? Who else could hold you like this. Take care, my darling Garth, you frighten me. Come over to the couch and sit beside me.'

Garth rose and raised her without loosing hold and she guided them both to a safer seat close by. But there again he flung himself on his knees and held her, his arms around her waist and his face hidden in the shelter of the lace.

'Ah, darling, darling,' said Jane softly, and her hands stole up behind his head with a touch of unspeakable tenderness. 'It has been so sweet to wait on you and help you and shield you from unnecessary pain and be always there to meet every need. But I couldn't come myself until you knew and understood and had forgiven - no, not forgiven, - understood and yet still loved. Oh, hush, dearest one, no I will never, never leave you. Can you understand? Then I must tell you more plainly. Darling do be still, and listen. Just for a few days we must be - as we have been, only you will know it is I who am near you. Aunt Gina is coming this evening. She will be here in half an hour. Then, as soon as possible, we will get a special license and we will be married, Garth and then - Jane paused and the man who knelt beside her held his breath to listen - 'and then,' continued Jane in a low tender voice, which gathered in depth as she spoke of the sacred longing but did not falter - 'then it will be my highest joy, to be always with my husband, night and day.'

A long sweet silence followed. The tempest of emotion in her arms was hushed to rest. The eternal voice of perfect love had whispered,

'Peace be still' and there was a great calm.

When Simpson, pale with importance, flung open the library door and announced; 'Her Grace, the Duchess of Meldrum,' Jane was seated at the piano, playing soft dreamy chords and a slim young man, in evening dress, advanced with eager hospitality to greet his guest.

The Duchess either did not see, or chose to ignore the guiding cord. She took his outstretched hand warmly in both her own.

'Goodness gracious, my dear Dal! How you surprise me! I expected to find you blind. And here you are, striding about just your old handsome self!'

'Dear Duchess,' said Garth, and stooping, kissed the kind old hands still holding his. 'I cannot see you, I am sorry to say, but I don't feel very blind tonight. My darkness has been lightened with a joy beyond expression.'

'Ho! So that's the way the land lies! Now which are you going to marry? The most respectable young person, the nurse, who I understand is highly recommended, or that hussy, Jane, who, without the smallest compunction orders her poor aunt from one end of the kingdom to the other to suit her own convenience?'

Jane came over from the piano and slipped her hand through her lover's arm.

'Dear Aunt Gina, he is going to marry them both - he seems to think he can't do without either.'

The Duchess looked at the two radiant faces and her own filled with tears.

'Hoity, toity!' she said. 'Well, we always thought one girl would not do for

Dal. He would need the combined perfections of several. He appears to think he has found them. Now God bless you both and I will bless you, too, but not until I have had my dinner and found where that absurd person Simpson has put my bags.'

## Chapter Twenty

The society paragraphs would have described it as a very quiet wedding when Garth and Jane, a few days later, were pronounced man and wife together in the little Episcopal church among the hills. To Garth and Jane the essential thing was to be married and left to themselves with as little delay as possible. They could not be induced to pay any attention to details and when asked by her aunt what she intended to wear she said, 'My dear aunt Gina, whatever you would like to put out for me that morning is what I shall wear.'

Perhaps the most truly bridal figure in the church was Flower in her pale primrose gown, with daffodils at her waist and sunbeams in her golden hair. The doctor thought his wife had never looked so entrancingly lovely. Flower at last, felt certain that the look he gave her had never been given to Jane.

Afterwards the solitude was perfect. They sat together, Garth and Jane, man and wife, in moonlight on the terrace. Long, tender silences fell between them. Thoughts too deep and joys too sacred for words, trembled about them. Only Garth could not bear Jane to be for a moment out of reach of his hand. Jane fully understood it was the same as 'I cannot bear her out of my sight.'

And it was as though the hunger in her heart, caused by those long weeks of waiting, when her arms ached for him and yet she dared not even touch his hand, would never be appeased. 'Sweet, sweet, sweet - thrill,' sang a nightingale in the wood and Garth whistled an exact imitation. 'Darling, that reminds me,' said Jane, 'there is something I want you to sing to me. I don't know what it is but you will remember. You played many things I

know but then one day there was a tune I didn't recognise and great pathos in the words.'

'What were they Jane?' he said.

'Lead us, O Christ, when all is gone,  
Safe home at last.'

Someone must have suffered who wrote those words. Where did you hear it? Would you sing it to me now, I can't wait to hear it now that I've remembered it.'

Garth sat up and laughed. 'Jane can't wait! I like to hear you say that. It's so unlike you.' So, sitting in the moonlight, with his back to Jane, his face uplifted, Garth sang. He rendered perfectly the exquisite melody to which the words were set.

Jane listened with an overflowing heart.

'The radiant morn has passed away,  
And spent too soon her golden store;  
The shadows of departing day  
Creep on once more.

And life is but a fading dawn,  
Its glorious noon, how quickly past!  
Lead us, O Christ, when all is gone,  
Safe home at last.

Where saints are clothed in spotless white,  
And evening shadows never fall;  
Where Thou, Eternal Light of Light,  
Art Lord of All.'

The triumphant worship of the last line rang out into the night and died away.

'Beautiful!' she said, at last. 'Beautiful! Garthie, perhaps it is because you sang it but it seems to me the most beautiful thing I have ever heard.'

Garth felt for her hand once again. 'Well, my wife,' he said, 'I thank God I can say 'Thou, Eternal Light of Light; Art Lord of all.'

'Yes, but the music, Garth. That exquisite setting. Whose is it? Where did you hear it?'

'I'm glad you like it Jane,' he said, 'because I plead guilty - it's my own. If you remember that awful - to me - night when you described again the pictures you had brought down from the studio and I realised that all was gone from me, it seemed there was no hope left in the world. Then, suddenly, I began to recite those words, not knowing any tune, and it was as though I saw it - I saw a picture in sound! Just like I used to see a sunset and transfer it to canvas so I had the same kind of tingling in my fingers when inspiration came. I saw the theme .for life fading and what one feels when darkness comes and then the prayer. And then I heard a vision of heaven instead of seeing it, where shadows never fall. And after that came the end, just certainty and worship and peace. It was like making studies for a picture. Do you understand, Jane. It would mean such a lot to me if you thought it was worth singing.'

'O Garth, dear, darling Garth. Don't you realise what this means. You are creating now by ear instead of sight. The power is still the same but through another channel. The whole world lies before you once more.'

Garth laughed and put up his hand to the dear face, now close and wet with thankful tears. 'Bother the world, I only want my wife.'

Jane put her arms around him. She felt so much older than he at that moment. She would shield him from the world and help him to make the most of his great gifts. Then suddenly, Jane broke down. 'Take me away from this horrible white moonlight. It reminds me of Shenstone and the wrong I did you.'

Garth sprang to his feet. The sense of manhood and the right of control and mastery, the joy of possession rose within him. Jane must lean on him.

'It seems a separating thing between you and me,' she said, 'this cruel brightness which you can't share.'

'Hush, sweet wife,' he said, 'Neither light nor darkness can separate between you and me. But in the still, sweet darkness you will feel more completely my own, because it will hold nothing we can't share. I will sing you the verse which has been the secret source of peace and the sustaining power of my whole Inner life, through the long, hard years, apart.'

'Now, whispered Jane, 'Now, as we go.'

So Garth drew her hand through his arm and, as they walked, sang softly;

    'Enable with perpetual light,  
    The dullness of our blinded sight;  
    Anoint and cheer our soiled face  
    With the abundance of Thy grace.  
    Keep far our foes; give peace at home;  
    Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come.'

Thus, leaning on her husband yet guiding him as she leaned, Jane passed to the perfect happiness of her wedded home.

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