

wanted to take it up professionally. He had promised, one Christmas vacation, to sing at a charity concert in town, and went out, when only just recovering from influenza, to fulfil this engagement. He had a relapse, double pneumonia set in, and he died in five days from heart failure. My poor aunt was frantic with grief; and since then any mention of my love of music makes her very bitter. I, too, wanted to take it up professionally, but she put her foot down heavily. I scarcely ever venture to sing or play here."

"Why not elsewhere?" asked Garth Dalmain. "We have stayed about at the same houses, and I had not the faintest idea you sang."

"I do not know," said Jane slowly. "But — music means so much to me. It is a sort of holy of holies in the tabernacle of one's inner being. And it is not easy to lift the veil."

"The veil will be lifted to-night," said Myra Ingleby.

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

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

CHAPTER V

CONFIDENCES

THE shadows silently lengthened on the lawn. The home-coming 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 artist noted every graceful line of her willowy figure.

"Ah, bah!" 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 your 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 know nothing of the process."

"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 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."

"You would always look sweet," said Jane, with frank sincerity; "and why mind looking the age you are?"

"My dear, a man is as old as he feels; 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.' And, dear lady, if curtailing this mysterious process is going to make you one whit less lovely to-night, I do beseech you to hasten to your maid, or you will spoil my whole evening. I shall burst into tears at dinner, and the duchess hates scenes, as you very well know!"

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

"Be quiet, you ridiculous child!" she said. "You had no business to listen to what I was saying to Jane. You shall paint me this autumn. And after that I will give up facial massage, and go abroad, 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 suppose, Miss Champion?"

"I have not the slightest idea," replied Jane. "I am completely ignorant on the subject of facial massage."

"Not much, I should think," continued Garth, "or she would not have told us."

"Ah, you are wrong there," replied Jane quickly. "Myra is extraordinarily 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, not so much by her brothers and sisters, as by her mother. Nothing

she was, or said, or did, was ever right. When Lord Ingleby met her, and I suppose saw her incipient possibilities, she was a tall, gawky girl, with lovely eyes, a sweet, sensitive mouth, and a what-on-earth-am-I-going-to-do-next expression on her face. He was twenty years her senior, but fell most determinedly in love with her and, though her mother pressed upon him all her other daughters in turn, he would have Myra or nobody. When he proposed to her it was impossible at first to make her understand what he meant. His meaning dawned on her at length, and he was not kept waiting long for her answer. I have often heard him tease her about it. She looked at him with an adorable smile, her eyes brimming over with tears, and said: 'Why, of course. I'll marry you *gratefully*, and I think it is perfectly sweet of you to like me. But what a blow for mamma!' They were married with as little delay as possible, and he took her off to Paris, Italy, and Egypt, had six months abroad, and brought her back — this! I was staying with them once, and her mother was also there. We were sitting in the morning room, — no men, just half a dozen women, — and her mother began finding fault about something, and said: 'Has not 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 perfect.' 'Your husband is a fool!' snapped her mother. 'From *your* point of view, dear mamma,' said Myra, sweetly."

"Old curmudgeon!" remarked Garth. "Why are people of that sort allowed to be called 'mothers'? We, who have had tender, perfect mothers, would like to make it law that the other kind should always

be called 'she-parents,' or 'female progenitors, or any other descriptive title, but not 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 did not wish to check 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 allowed to that appeal its right proportion in her estimation of her friends. Garth Dalmain by no means came first among her particular chums. He was older than most of them, and yet in some ways younger than any, and his remarkable youthfulness of manner and exuberance of spirits sometimes made him appear foolish to Jane, whose sense of humour was of a more sedate kind. 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.

"Oh, I say, Miss Champion!" he cried, boyishly. "Isn't it nice that they have all gone in? I have been wanting a good jaw with you. Really, when we all get together we do drivel sometimes, to keep the ball

rolling. It is like patting up air-balls; and very often they burst, and one realises that an empty, shrivelled little skin is all that is left after most conversations. Did you ever buy air-balls at Brighton? Do you remember the wild excitement of seeing the man coming along the parade, with a huge bunch of them — blue, green, red, white, and yellow, all shining in the sun? And one used to wonder how he ever contrived to pick them all up — I don't know now! — and what would happen if he put them all down. I always knew exactly which one I wanted, and it was generally on a very inside string and took a long time to disentangle. And how maddening it was if the grown-ups grew tired of waiting, and walked on with the penny. Only I would rather have had none, than not have *the* one on which I had fixed my heart. Wouldn't you?"

"I never bought air-balls 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 am so tired of doing nothing. Let us go down to the river and find a boat for two. Dinner is not until eight o'clock, and I am certain you can dress, even for the *rôle* of Velma, in half an hour. I have known you do it in ten minutes, at a pinch. There is ample time for me to row you within sight of the minster, and we can talk as we go. Ah, fancy! the grey old minster with this sunset behind it, and a field of cowslips in the foreground!"

But Jane did not rise.

"My dear Dal," she said, "you would not feel much enthusiasm for the minster or the sunset, after you had pulled my twelve stone odd up the river. You would drop exhausted among the cowslips. Surely you might know by now that I am not the sort of person to be told off to sit in the stern of a tiny skiff and steer. If I am in a boat, I like to row; and if I row, I prefer rowing stroke. But I do not want to row now, because I have been playing golf the whole afternoon. And you know perfectly well it would be no pleasure to you to 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 and marking the careless way you feathered."

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 chap," he said, gently. "What is the matter?"

Jane laughed and held out her hand. "Oh, you dear boy! I think 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. "But, that being so, why did you offer?"

"Ah, I had to," said Jane. "Poor old dear! She so rarely asks me anything, and her eyes besought. Don't you know how one longs to have something to do for some one who belongs to one? I would black her boots if she wished it. But it is so hard to stay here, week after week, and be kept at arm's length. This one thing she asked of me, and her proud old eyes pleaded. Could I refuse?"

Garth was all sympathy. "No, dear," he said thoughtfully; "of course you couldn't. And don't bother over that silly joke about the 'surprise packet.' You see, you won't be that. 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 as these sit up. They will think 'The Rosary' a pretty song, and give you a mild clap, and there the thing will end. So don't worry."

Jane sat and considered this. Then: "Dal," she said, "I do hate singing before that sort of audience. It is 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 daren't do less than my best. When the moment comes, I shall live in the song, and forget the audience. Let me tell you a lesson I once had from 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, mi.*' 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. *Écoutez!*' And she lifted her head and sang: '*Brahma! Dieu des croyants! Maître des cités 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 also 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, "your 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; and, perhaps, if you wedded 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, and admire it. I desire it, and paint it. 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 things she wished to discuss were other women's souls.

"There is just one who seems to me perfect," continued Garth. "I am to paint her this autumn. I believe I shall find her soul as exquisite as her body."

"And she is —?" inquired Jane.

"Lady Brand."

"Flower!" exclaimed Jane. "Are *you* so taken with Flower?"

"Ah, she is lovely," said Garth, with reverent enthusiasm. "It positively is not right for any one 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 do not think other people's wives ought to have that effect upon 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 to 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, let me see it at a moment which lets one penetrate beneath the surface, and I can paint that face from memory weeks after. Lots of my best studies have been done that way. Ah, the delight of it! 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. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.' I once met an old freak who said all sickness came from the devil. I never could believe that, for my mother was an invalid during the last years of her life, and I can testify that her sickness was a blessing to many, and borne to the glory of God. But I am convinced all true beauty is God-given, and that is why the worship of beauty is to me a religion. 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 thus to the plainest woman of his acquaintance, held a vein of humour which diverted Jane. It appealed to her more than buying coloured air-balls, or screaming because the duchess wore a mushroom hat.

"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 quite a small boy. My mother took me to hear a famous preacher. As he sat on the platform during the preliminaries he seemed to me quite the ugliest man I had ever seen. He reminded me of a grotesque gorilla, and I dreaded the moment when he should rise up and face us and give out a text. It seemed to me there ought to be bars between, and that we should want to throw nuts and oranges. But when he rose to speak, his face was transfigured. Goodness and inspiration

shone from it, making it as the face of an angel. I never again thought him ugly. The beauty of his soul shone through, transfiguring his body. Child though I was, I could differentiate even then between ugliness and plainness. When he sat down at the close of his magnificent sermon, I no longer thought him a complicated form of chimpanzee. 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 table. But then one was not called to that sort of discipline, which would have been martyrdom to me. And he has always stood to my mind since as a proof of the truth that goodness is never ugly; and 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. "It must have often helped you to a right view to have realised that so long ago. But now let us return to the important question of the face which you *are* to have daily opposite you at 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 girls' names being mentioned in this sort of conversation."

"Very well, dear boy. I understand and respect your objection. 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.' 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, unite with it a freshness and a piquancy which place them beyond compare. In some ways you are so unique yourself that you ought to have a wife with a certain amount of originality. Now, I hardly know how far the opinion of your friends would influence you in such a matter, but you may like to hear how fully they approve 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," said Jane.

"Thanks," said Garth. He struck a match and very deliberately lighted his cigarette. As he flung away the vesta the breeze caught it and it fell on the lawn, flaming brightly. Garth sprang up and extinguished it, then drew his chair more exactly opposite to Jane's and lay back, smoking meditatively, and watching the little rings he blew, mount into the cedar branches, expand, fade, and vanish.

Jane was watching him. The varied and characteristic ways in which her friends lighted and smoked their cigarettes always interested Jane. There were at least a dozen young men of whom she could have given the names upon hearing a description of their method. Also, she had learned from Deryck Brand the value of silences in an important conversation, and the art of not weakening a statement by a postscript.

At last Garth spoke.

"I wonder why the smoke is that lovely pale blue as it curls up from the cigarette, and a greyish white if one blows it out."

Jane knew it was because it had become impreg-

nated with moisture, but she did not say so, having no desire to contribute her quota of pats to this air-ball, or to encourage the superficial workings of his mind just then. She quietly awaited the response to her appeal to his deeper nature which she felt certain would be forthcoming. Presently it came.

"It is awfully good of you, Miss Champion, to take the trouble to think all this and to say it to me. May I prove my gratitude by explaining for once where my difficulty lies? I have scarcely defined it to myself, and yet I believe I can express it to you."

Another long silence. Garth smoked and pondered. Jane waited. It was a very comprehending, very companionable silence. Garth found himself parodying 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 cigarette, or the chair, or Jane, or perhaps all three combined, 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, my mother, a sacred and ideal memory; the other, old Margery Graem, my childhood's friend and nurse, now my housekeeper and general tender and mender. Her faithful heart and constant remembrance help to keep me true to the ideal of that sweet presence which faded from beside me when I stood on the threshold of manhood. Margery lives at Castle Gleneesh. When I return home,

the sight which first meets my eyes as the hall door opens is old Margery in her black satin apron, lawn kerchief, 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; the faithful old heart will yearn to love and serve. And yet I shall know she knows the standard, just as I know it; I shall know she remembers the ideal of gentle, tender, Christian womanhood, just as I remember it; and I must not, I dare not, fall short. Believe me, Miss Champion, more than once, when physical attraction has been strong, and I have been tempted in the worship of the outward loveliness to disregard or forget the essentials, — the things which are unseen but eternal, — then, all unconscious of exercising any such influence, old Margery's clear eyes look into mine, old Margery's mittened hand seems to rest upon my coat sleeve, and the voice which has guided me from infancy says, 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 set and our sentiments, and the way we racket round, that I should sit here on the duchess's lawn and confess 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 you must remember her opinion is formed by a memory, and that memory is the memory of my dead mother. Moreover, Margery voices my best self, and expresses my own judgment 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 Paul's sublime paradoxes, she looks at the things that are not seen. It seems queer that I can tell you all this, Miss Champion, and really it is the first time I have actually formulated it in my own mind. But I think it so extremely friendly of you to have troubled to give me good advice in the matter."

Garth Dalmain ceased speaking, and the silence which followed suddenly assumed alarming proportions, seeming to Jane like a high fence which she was vainly trying to scale. She found herself mentally rushing hither and thither, seeking a gate or any possible means of egress. And still she was confronted by the difficulty of replying adequately to the totally unexpected. And what added to her dumbness was the fact that 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 chaperons; 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 set would say could they realise the situation. It revealed Garth 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 frame was: "I wish I knew old Margery."

Garth's brown eyes flashed with pleasure.

"Ah, 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 should not I get up a 'best party' in September, and implore the duchess to come and chaperon it? And then you could come, and any one else you would like asked. And — and, perhaps — we might ask — the beautiful 'Stars and Stripes,' and her aunt, Mrs. Parker Bangs of Chicago; and then we should see what Margery thought of her!"

"Delightful!" said Jane. "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."

"I wish Miss Lister and her aunt were here," remarked Garth. "But they are to be at Lady Ingleby's, where I am due next Tuesday. Do you come on there, Miss Champion?"

"I do," replied Jane. "I go to the Brands for a few days on Tuesday, but I have promised Myra to turn

Carlos Pérez Maldonado

up at Shenstone for the week-end. 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 am glad you think so highly of Myra. She is a dear! Only do 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 us go in," said Jane, rising. "I am glad we have had this talk," she added, as he walked beside her across the lawn.

"Yes," said Garth. "Air-balls weren't in it! It was a football this time — good solid leather. And we each kicked one goal, — a tie, you know. For your advice went home to me, and I think my reply showed you the true lie of things; eh, Miss Champion?"

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; "we will consider it a tie, and surely it will prove a tie to our friendship. 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.