

Thus matters stood when Tuesday arrived and the Overdene party broke up. 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 meet Miss Lister, and her aunt, Mrs. Parker Bangs. Jane was due at Shenstone on Friday for the week-end.

CHAPTER IX

LADY INGLEBY'S HOUSE PARTY

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. Somehow these days in town had seemed insufferably long. Jane reviewed them thoughtfully, and sought the reason. They had been filled with interests and engagements; and the very fact of being in town, as a rule contented her. Why had she felt so restless and dissatisfied and lonely?

From force of habit she had just stopped at the railway book-stall for her usual pile of literature. Her friends always said Jane could not go even the shortest journey without at least half a dozen papers. But now they lay unheeded on the seat in front of her. Jane was considering her Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and wondering why they had merely been weary stepping-stones to Friday. And here was Friday at last, and once in the train en route for Shenstone, she began to feel happy and exhilarated. What had been the matter with these three days? Flower had been charming; Deryck, his own friendly, interesting self; little Dicky, delightful; and Baby Blossom, as sweet as only Baby Blossom could be. What was amiss?

"I know," said Jane. "Of course! Why did I not realise it before? I had too much music during those last days at Overdene; and *such* music! I have been suffering from a surfeit of music, and the miss of it has

given me this blank feeling of loneliness. No doubt we shall have plenty at Myra's, and Dal will be there to clamour for it if Myra fails to suggest it."

With a happy little smile of pleasurable anticipation, Jane took up the *Spectator*, and was soon absorbed in an article on the South African problem.

Myra met her at the station, driving ponies tandem. A light cart was also there for the maid and baggage; and, without losing a moment, Jane and her hostess were off along the country lane 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. There was an ecstasy in the songs of the birds and a transporting sense of sweetness about all the sights and scents of the country, such as Jane had never experienced so vividly before. She drew a deep breath and exclaimed, almost involuntarily: "Ah! it is good to be here!"

"You dear!" said Lady Ingleby, twirling her whip and nodding in gracious response to respectful salutes from the hay-field. "It is a comfort to have you! I always feel you are like the bass of a tune—something so solid and satisfactory and beneath one in case of a crisis. I hate crises. They are so tiring. As I say: Why can't things always go on as they are? They are as they were, and they were as they will be, if only people wouldn't bother. However, I am certain nothing could go far wrong when *you* are anywhere near."

Myra flicked the leader, who was inclined to "sugar," and they flew along between the high hedges, brushing lightly against overhanging masses of honeysuckle and wild clematis. Jane snatched a spray of the clematis, in passing. "'Traveller's Joy,'" she said,

with that same quiet smile of glad anticipation, and put the white blossoms in her button-hole.

"Well," continued Lady Ingleby, "my house party is going on quite satisfactorily. Oh, and, Jane, there seems no doubt about Dal. How pleased I shall be if it comes off under my wing! The American girl is simply exquisite, and so vivacious and charming. And Dal has quite given up being silly—not that *I* ever thought him silly, but I know *you* did—and is very quiet and pensive; really were it any one but he, one would almost say 'dull.' And they roam about together in the most approved fashion. I try to get the aunt to make all her remarks to me. I am so afraid of her putting Dal off. He is so fastidious. I have 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, answer her questions, and keep her away from Dal. Billy is being so abjectly devoted in his attentions to Mrs. Parker Bangs that I begin to have fears lest he intends asking me to kiss him; in which case I shall hand him over to you to chastise. You manage these boys so splendidly. I fully believe Dal will propose to Pauline Lister to-night. I can't imagine why he didn't last night. There was a most perfect moon, and they went on the lake. What more *could* Dal want?—a lake, and a moon, and that lovely girl! Billy took Mrs. Parker Bangs in a double canoe and nearly upset her through laughing so much at the things she said about having to sit flat on the bottom. But he paddled her off to the opposite side of the lake from Dal and her niece, which was all we wanted. Mrs. Parker Bangs asked me afterwards whether Billy is a widower. Now what do you suppose she meant by that?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said 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 loveliness, and really he gets it there."

"He does indeed," said Myra. "You should have seen her last night, in white satin, with wild roses in her hair. I cannot imagine why Dal did not rave. But perhaps it is a good sign that he should take things more quietly. I suppose he is making up his mind."

"No," said Jane. "I believe he did that at Overdene. But it means a lot to him. He takes marriage very seriously. Whom have you at Shenstone?"

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

"Delightful!" she said. "Oh! how glad I am to be here! London has been so hot and so dull. I never thought it hot or dull before. I feel a renegade. Ah! there is the lovely little church! I want to hear the new organ. I was glad your nice parson remembered me and let me have a share in it. 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 judged it wiser to leave them alone when I played for the children's service one Sunday. You never know quite 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. "Those things underneath, like foot-rests, which startle you horribly if you accidentally kick them."

Jane smiled at the thought of how Garth would

throw back his head and shout, if she told him of this conversation. Lady Ingleby's musical remarks always amused her friends.

They passed the village church on the green, ivy-clad, picturesque, and, half a minute later, swerved in at the park gates. Myra saw Jane glance at the gatepost they had just shaved, and laughed. "A miss is as good as a mile," she said, as they dashed up the long drive between the elms, "as I told dear mamma when she expostulated wrathfully with me for what she called my 'furious driving' the other day. By the way, Jane, dear mamma has been quite *cordial* lately. By the time I am seventy and she is ninety-eight I think she will begin to be almost fond of me. Here we are. Do notice Lawson. He is new, and such a nice man. He sings so well, and plays the concertina a little, and teaches in the Sunday school, and speaks really quite excellently at temperance meetings. He is extremely fond of mowing the lawns, and my maid tells me he is studying French with her. The only thing he seems really incapable of being, is an efficient butler; which is so unfortunate, as I like him far too well ever to part with him. Michael says I have a perfectly fatal habit of *liking people*, and of encouraging them to do the things they do well and enjoy doing, instead of the things they were engaged to do. 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 her ponies, but rather suggested stepping from a comfortable seat in a barouche. Jane looked with interest at the man-servant who came forward and deftly assisted them. He had not quite the air of a butler, but neither could she imagine

him playing a concertina or haranguing a temperance meeting, and he acquitted himself quite creditably.

"Oh, that was not Lawson," explained Myra, as she led the way upstairs. "I had forgotten. He had to go to the vicarage this afternoon to see the vicar about a 'service of song' they are getting up. That was Tom, but we call him 'Jephson' in the house. He was one of Michael's stud grooms, but he is engaged to one of the house-maids, and I found he so very much preferred being in the house, so I have arranged for him to under-study Lawson, and he is growing side whiskers. I shall have to break it to Michael on his return from Norway. This way, Jane. We have put you in the Magnolia room. I knew you would enjoy the view of the lake. Oh, I forgot to tell you, a tennis tournament is in progress. I must hasten to the courts. Tea will be going on there, under the chestnuts. Dal and Ronnie are to play the final for the men's singles. It ought to be a fine match. It was to come on at about half past four. Don't wait to do any changings. Your maid and your luggage can't be here just yet."

"Thanks," said Jane; "I always travel in country clothes, and have done so to-day, as you see. I will 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 set was in progress. As she approached, Jane could distinguish Garth's slim, agile figure, in white flannels and the violet shirt; and young Ronnie,

huge and powerful, trusting to the terrific force of his cuts and drives to counterbalance Garth's keener eye and swifter turn of wrist.

It was a fine game. Garth had won the first set by six to four, and now the score stood at five to four in Ronnie's favour; but this game was Garth's service, and he was almost certain to win it. The score would then be "games all."

Jane walked along the line of garden chairs to where she saw a vacant one near Myra. She was greeted with delight, but hurriedly, by the eager watchers of the game.

Suddenly a howl went up. Garth had made two faults.

Jane found her chair, and turned her attention to the game. Almost instantly shrieks of astonishment and surprise again arose. Garth had served *into* the net and *over* the line. Game and set were Ronnie's.

"One all," remarked Billy. "Well! I never saw Dal do *that* before. However, it gives us the bliss of watching another set. They are splendidly matched. Dal is lightning, and Ronnie thunder."

The players crossed over, Garth rather white beneath his tan. He was beyond words vexed with himself for failing in his service, at that critical juncture. 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 tail 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 net and lines. As a matter of fact, only one of the onlookers connected Garth's loss of the game with Jane's arrival, and she 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 set proved the most exciting of the three. Nine hard-fought games, five to Garth, four to Ronnie. And now Ronnie was serving, and fighting hard to make it games-all. Over and over enthusiastic partisans of both shouted "Deuce!" and then when Garth had won the "vantage," a slashing over-hand service from Ronnie beat him, and it was "deuce" again.

"Don't it make one giddy?" said Mrs. Parker Bangs to Billy, who reclined on the sward at her feet. "I should say it has gone on long enough. And they must both be wanting their tea. It would have been kind in Mr. Dalmain to have let that ball pass, anyway."

"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 those over-hand balls of his pass long ago."

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

Slash went Ronnie's racket. "Deuce! deuce!" shouted half a dozen voices.

"They shouldn't say that," remarked Mrs. Parker Bangs, "even if they are mad about it."

Billy hugged his knees, delightedly; looking up at her with an expression of seraphic innocence.

"No. Isn't it sad?" he murmured. "I never say naughty words when I play. I always say 'Game, love.' It sounds so much nicer, I think."

Jane pinched again, but Billy's rapt gaze at Mrs. Parker Bangs continued.

"Billy," said Myra sternly, "go into the hall and fetch my scarlet sunshade. Yes, I dare say you *will* miss the finish," she added in a stern whisper, as he leaned over her chair, remonstrating; "but you richly deserve it."

"I have made up my mind what to ask, dear queen," whispered Billy as he returned, breathless, three minutes later and laid the parasol in Lady Ingleby's lap. "You promised me anything, up to the half of your kingdom. I will have the head of Mrs. Parker Bangs in a charger."

"Oh, shut up, Billy!" exclaimed Jane, "and get out of the light! We missed that last stroke. What is the score?"

Once again it was Garth's vantage, and once again Ronnie's arm swung high for an untakable smasher.

"Play up, Dal!" cried a voice, 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 ground on Ronnie's side of the net and shot the length of the court without 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. It had been so near a thing that both could sense the thrill of victory.

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?"

His eyes sought hers eagerly; and the welcoming gladness he saw in them, filled him with certainty and 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. And yet how perfect that it should be so; and that they should both realise it, now the day had come when he intended to tell her how desperately he wanted her always. Yes, that they should *both* realise it — for he felt certain Jane had also experienced the blank. A thing so complete and overwhelming as the miss of her had been to him could not be one-sided. And how well worth the experience of these lonely days if they had thereby learned something of what *together* meant, now the words were to be spoken which should insure forever no more such partings.

All this sped through Garth's mind as he greeted Jane with that most commonplace of English greetings, the everlasting question which never receives an answer. But from Garth, at that moment, it did not sound commonplace to Jane, and she answered it quite frankly and fully. She wanted above all things to tell him exactly how she did; to hear all about himself, and compare notes on the happenings of these three interminable **days**; and to take up their close comradeship again, exactly where it had left off. Her hand went home to his with that firm completeness of clasp, which always made a hand shake with Jane such a satisfactory and really friendly thing.

"Very fit, thank you, Dal," she answered. "At least I am every moment improving in health and spirits, now I have arrived here at last."

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

"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 was wrong with London," replied Jane frankly; "it was hot and dusty of course, but delightful as usual. Something was wrong with *me*; and you will be ashamed of me, Dal, if I confess what it was."

Garth did not look up, but assiduously 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?" inquired Mrs. Parker Bangs suddenly.

"Muffins!" exclaimed Billy instantly, and, rushing for them, almost shot them into her lap in the haste with which he handed them, stumbling headlong over Garth's legs at the same moment.

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.

"I was dull," she said, "intolerably dull. And Dal always says 'only a dullard is dull.' But I diagnosed my dulness in the train just now and found it was largely his 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 there was a deep flush on his sunburned face, his voice was quietly interrogative.

"Because, during those last days at Overdene, you led me on into a time of musical dissipation such as I had never known before, and I missed it to a degree which was positively alarming. I began to fear for the balance of my well-ordered mind."

"Well," said Myra, coming out from behind her red parasol, "you and Dal can have orgies of music here if you want them. You will find a piano in the drawing-room and another in the hall, and a Bechstein grand in the billiard-room. That is where I hold the practices for the men and maids. I could not make up my mind which makers I really preferred, Erard, Broadwood, Collard, or Bechstein; so by degrees I collected one of each. And after all I think I play best upon the little cottage piano we had in the school-room at home. It stands in my boudoir now. I seem more accustomed to its notes, or it lends itself better to my way of playing."

"Thank you, Myra," said Jane. "I fancy Dal and I will like the Bechstein."

"And if you want something really exciting in the way of music," continued Lady Ingleby, "you might attend some of the rehearsals for this 'service of song' they are getting up in aid of the organ deficit fund. I believe they are attempting great things."

"I would sooner pay off the whole deficit, than go within a mile of a 'service of song,'" said Jane emphatically.

"Oh no," put in Garth quickly, noting Myra's look of disappointment. "It is so good for people to work

off their own debts and earn the things they need in their churches. And 'services of song' are delightful if well done, as I am sure this will be if Lady Ingleby's people are in it. Lawson outlined it to me this morning, and hummed all the principal airs. It is highly dramatic. Robinson Crusoe — no, of course not! What's the beggar's name? — 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'? Yes, I knew it was something black. Lawson is Uncle Tom, and the vicar's small daughter is to be little Eva. 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 Overdené when she felt so inclined to say to him: "Tell me just what you want me to do, and I will do it."

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

"Rubbish, aunt!" said Miss Lister, who had slipped into an empty chair near Myra. "I agree with Miss Champion about 'services of song,' and I don't care for any music but the best."

Jane turned to her quickly, with a cordial smile and her most friendly manner. "Ah, but you must come," she said. "We will be victimised together. And perhaps Dal and Lawson will succeed in converting us to the cult of the 'service of song.' And anyway it will be amusing to have Dal explain it to us. He will need the courage of his convictions."

"Talking of something 'really exciting in the way of music,'" said Pauline Lister, "we had it on board when we came over. There was a nice friendly crowd on board the 'Arabic,' and they arranged a concert for half past eight on the Thursday evening. We

were about two hundred miles off the coast of Ireland, and when we came up from dinner we had run into a dense fog. At eight o'clock they started blowing the fog-horn every half minute, and while the fog-horn was sounding you couldn't hear yourself speak. However, all the programmes were printed, and it was our last night on board, so they concluded to have the concert all the same. Down we all trooped into the saloon, and each item of that programme was punctuated by the stentorian *boo* of the fog-horn every thirty seconds. You never heard anything so cute as the way it came in, right on time. A man with a deep bass voice sang 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep,' and each time he reached the refrain, 'And calm and peaceful is my sle-eep,' *BOO* went the fog-horn, casting a certain amount of doubt on our expectations of peaceful sleep that night, anyway. Then a man with a sweet tenor sang 'Oft in the Stilly Night,' and the fog-horn showed us just how oft, namely, every thirty seconds. But the queerest effect of all was when a girl had to play a pianoforte solo. It was something of Chopin's, full of runs and trills and little silvery notes. She started all right, but when she was half-way down the first page, *BOO* went the fog-horn, a longer blast than usual. We saw her fingers flying, and the turning of the page, but not a note could we hear; and when the old horn stopped and we could hear the piano again, she had reached a place half-way down the second page, and we hadn't heard what led to it. My! it was funny. That went on all through. She was a plucky girl to stick to it. We gave her a good round of applause when she had finished, and the fog-horn joined in and drowned us. It was the queerest concert experience I ever had. But we all enjoyed it.

Only we didn't enjoy that noise keeping right on until five o'clock next morning."

Jane had turned in her chair, and listened with appreciative interest while the lovely American girl talked, watching, with real delight, her exquisite face and graceful gestures, and thinking how Dal must enjoy looking at her when she talked 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 broguing of her shoe 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 working on a canvas; then she suddenly withdrew her foot, feeling almost vexed with him for his inattention and apparent indifference.

Garth sat up instantly. "It must have been awfully funny," he said. "And how well you told it. One could hear the fog-horn, and see the dismayed faces of the performers. Like an earthquake, a fog-horn is the sort of thing you don't ever get used to. It sounds worse every time. Let's each tell the funniest thing we remember at a concert. I once heard a youth recite Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' with much dramatic action. But he was extremely nervous, and got rather mixed. In describing the attitude of mind of the noble six hundred, he told us impressively that it was

"Theirs not to make reply;
Theirs not to do or die;
Theirs but to reason why."

The tone and action were all right, and I doubt whether many of the audience noticed anything wrong with the words."

"That reminds me," said Ronald Ingram, "of quite the funniest thing I ever heard. It was at a Thanksgiving service when some of our troops returned from South Africa. The proceedings concluded by the singing of the National Anthem right through. You recollect how recently we had had to make the change of pronoun, and how difficult it was to remember not to shout: 'Send *Her* victorious'? Well, there was a fellow just behind me, with a tremendous voice, singing lustily, and taking special pains to get the pronouns correct throughout. And when he reached the fourth line of the second verse he sang with loyal fervour.

"Confound *his* politics,
Frustrate *his* knavish tricks!"

"That would amuse the King," said Lady Ingleby. "Are you sure it is a fact, Ronnie?"

"Positive! I could tell you the church, and the day, and call a whole pewful of witnesses who were convulsed by it."

"Well, I shall tell his Majesty at the next opportunity, and say you heard it. But how about the tennis? What comes next? Final for couples? Oh, yes! Dal, you and Miss Lister play Colonel Loraine and Miss Vermont; and I think you ought to win fairly easily. You two are so well matched. Jane, this will be worth watching."

"I am sure it will," said Jane warmly, looking at the two, who had risen and stood together in the evening sunlight, examining their rackets and discussing possible tactics, while awaiting their opponents. They made such a radiantly beautiful couple; it was as if nature had put her very best and loveliest into every detail of each. The only

rault 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; but this was not a fault which occurred to Jane. Her whole-hearted 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 said, simply: "Dal, you will not mind if I ask? Is it settled yet?"

"I mind nothing you ask," Garth replied; "only be more explicit. Is what settled?"

"Are you and Miss Lister engaged?"

"No," Garth answered. "What made you suppose we should be?"

"You said at Overdene on Tuesday — *Tuesday!* oh! doesn't it seem weeks ago? — you said we were to take you seriously."

"It seems years ago," said Garth; "and I sincerely hope you will take me — seriously. All the same I have not proposed to Miss Lister; and I am anxious for an undisturbed talk with you on the subject. Miss Champion, after dinner to-night, when all the games and amusements are in full swing, and we can escape unobserved, will you come out on to the terrace with me, where I shall be able to speak to you without fear of interruption? The moonlight on the lake is worth seeing from the terrace. I spent an hour out there last night — ah, no; you are wrong for once — I spent it alone, when the boating was over, and

thought of — how — to-night — we might be talking there together.”

“Certainly I will come,” said Jane; “and you must feel free to tell me anything you wish, and promise to let me advise or help in any way I can.”

“I will tell you everything,” said Garth very low, “and you shall advise and help as *only* you can.”

Jane sat on her window-sill, enjoying the sunset and the exquisite view, and glad of a quiet half hour before she need think of summoning her maid. Immediately below her ran the terrace, wide and gravelled, bounded by a broad stone parapet, behind which was a drop of eight or ten feet to the old-fashioned garden, with quaint box-bordered flower-beds, winding walks, and stone fountains. Beyond, a stretch of smooth lawn sloping down to the lake, which now lay, a silver mirror, in the soft evening light. The stillness was so perfect; the sense of peace, so all-pervading. Jane held a book on her knee, but she was not reading. She was looking away to the distant woods beyond the lake; then to the pearly sky above, flecked with rosy clouds and streaked with gleams of gold; and a sense of content, and gladness, 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 smoking-room and walked briskly to and fro, once or twice. Then he threw himself into a wicker seat just beneath her window, and sat there, smoking meditatively. The fragrance of his cigarette reached Jane, up among the magnolia blossoms. “‘Zenith,’ Marcovitch,” she said to herself, and smiled. “Packed in jolly green boxes, twelve shillings a hundred! I must remember in case I want to give

him a Christmas present. By then it will be difficult to find anything which has not already been showered upon him.”

Garth flung away the end of his cigarette, and commenced humming below his breath; then gradually broke into words and sang softly, in his sweet barytone:

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

The tones, though quiet, were so vibrant with passionate feeling, that Jane felt herself an eavesdropper. She hastily picked a large magnolia leaf and, leaning out, let it fall upon his head. Garth started, and looked up. “Hullo!” he said. “*You* — up there?”

“Yes,” said Jane, laughing down at him, and speaking low lest other casements should be open, “*I* — up here. You are serenading the wrong window, dear ‘devout lover.’”

“What a lot you know about it,” remarked Garth rather moodily.

“Don't I?” whispered Jane. “But you must not mind, Master Garthie, because you know how truly I care. In old Margery's absence, you must let me be mentor.”

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

“Shall I climb the magnolia?” he said. “I have heaps to say to you which cannot be shouted to the whole front of the house.”

“Certainly not,” replied Jane. “I don't want any Romeos coming in at my window. ‘Hoity-toity! What next?’ as Aunt ‘Gina would say. Run along and change your pinafore, Master Garthie. The ‘heaps of

things' must keep until to-night, or we shall both be late for dinner."

"All right," said Garth, "all right. But you will come out here this evening, Miss Champion? And you will give me as long as I want?"

"I will come as soon as we can possibly escape," replied Jane; "and you cannot be more anxious to tell me everything than I am to hear it. Oh! the scent of these magnolias! And just look at the great white trumpets! Would you like one for your button-hole?"

He gave her a wistful, whimsical little smile; then turned and went indoors.

"Why do I feel so inclined to tease him?" mused Jane, as she moved from the window. "Really it is I who have been silly this time; and he, staid and sensible. Myra is quite right. He is taking it very seriously. And how about her? Ah! I hope she cares enough, and in the right way. — Come in, Matthews! And you can put out the gown I wore on the night of the concert at Overdene, and we must make haste. We have just twenty minutes. What a lovely evening! Before you do anything else, come and see this sunset on the lake. Ah! it is good to be here!

CHAPTER X

THE REVELATION

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 on to 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 had been really alone since these days apart, which had seemed so long to both.

They walked silently, side by side, to the wide stone parapet overlooking the old-fashioned garden. The silvery moonlight flooded the whole scene with radiance. They could see the stiff box-borders, the winding paths, the queerly shaped flower-beds, and, beyond, the lake, like a silver mirror, reflecting the calm loveliness of the full moon.

Garth spread the rug on the coping, and Jane sat down. He stood beside her, one foot on the coping, his arms folded across his chest, his head erect. Jane had seated herself sideways, turning towards him, her back to an old stone lion mounting guard upon the parapet; but she turned her head still further, to look down upon the lake, and she thought Garth was looking in the same direction.

But Garth was looking at Jane.