

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CONSULTATION

THE doctor's room was very quiet. Jane leaned back in his dark green leather arm-chair, 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, which he had left only on the previous evening. He had spent five hours with Garth. It seemed kindest to tell her all; but he was looking straight before him as he talked, because 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 was saying, "the actual wounds are going on well. Strangely enough, though the retina of each eye was pierced, and the sight is irrecoverably gone, there was very little damage done to surrounding parts, and the brain is quite uninjured. 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 physical suffering during the first days and nights must have been terrible. Poor fellow, he looks shattered by it.

## The Consultation

But his constitution is excellent, and his life has been so clean, healthy, and normal, that he had every chance of making a good recovery, were it not that as the pain abated and his blindness became more a thing to be daily and hourly realised, his mental torture was so excessive. Sight has meant so infinitely much to him, — beauty of form, beauty of colour. The artist in him was so all-pervading. They tell me he said very little. He is a brave man and a strong one. But his temperature began to vary alarmingly; he showed symptoms of mental trouble, of which I need not give you technical details; and a nerve specialist seemed more necessary than an oculist. Therefore he is now in my hands."

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.

"I am satisfied on the whole. He needed a friendly voice to penetrate the darkness. He needed a hand to grasp his, in faithful comprehension. He did not want pity, and those who talked of his loss without understanding it, or being able to measure its immensity, maddened him. He needed a fellow-man to come to him and say: 'It is a fight — an awful, desperate fight. But by God's grace you will win through to victory. It would be far easier to die; but to die would be to lose; you must live to win. It is utterly beyond all human strength; but by God's grace you will come through conqueror.' All this I said to him, Jeanette, and a good deal more; and then a strangely beautiful thing happened. I can tell you, and of course I could tell Flower, but to no one else on

earth would I repeat it. The difficulty had been to obtain from him any response whatever. He did not 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 inner consciousness. I heard him repeat them once or twice, and then change them to 'with the abundance of Thy grace.' Then he turned his head slowly on the pillow, and what one could see of his face seemed transformed. He said: 'Now I remember it, and the music is this'; and his hands moved on the bedclothes, as if forming chords. Then, in a very low voice, but quite clearly, he repeated the second verse of the 'Veni Creator Spiritus.' I knew it, because I used to sing it as a chorister in my father's church at home. You remember?

“Enable with perpetual light  
The dulness 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.”

It was the most touching thing I ever heard.”

The doctor paused, for Jane had buried her face in her hands and was sobbing convulsively. When her sobs grew less violent, the doctor's quiet voice continued: "You see, this gave me something to go upon. 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. Dalmain has more of the real thing than any one would think who only knew him superficially. Well, after that we talked quite definitely, and I persuaded him to agree to one or two important

arrangements. You know, he has no relations of his own, to speak of; just a few cousins, who have never been very friendly. He is quite alone up there; for, though he has hosts of friends, this is a time when friends would have to be very intimate to be admitted; and though he seemed so boyish and easy to know, I begin to doubt whether any of us knew the real Garth — the soul of the man, deep down beneath the surface.”

Jane lifted her head. "I did," she said simply.

"Ah," said the doctor, "I see. Well, as I said, ordinary friends could not be admitted. Lady Ingleby went, in her sweet impulsive way, without letting them know she was coming; travelled all the way up from Shenstone with no maid, and nothing but a handbag, and arrived at the door in a fly. Robert Mackenzie, the local medical man, who is an inveterate misogynist, feared at first she was an unsuspected wife of Dal's. He seemed to think unannounced ladies arriving in hired vehicles must necessarily turn out to be undesirable wives. I gather they had a somewhat funny scene. But Lady Ingleby soon got round old Robbie, and came near to charming him — as whom does she not? But of course they did not dare let her into Dal's room; so her ministry of consolation appears to have consisted in letting Dal's old housekeeper weep on her beautiful shoulder. It was somewhat of a comedy, hearing about it, when one happened to know them all, better than they knew each other. But to return to practical details. He has had a fully trained male nurse and his own valet to wait on him. He absolutely refused one of our London hospital nurses, who might have brought a little gentle comfort and womanly sympathy to his

sick-room. He said he could not stand being touched by a woman; so there it remained. A competent man was found instead. But we can now dispense with him, and I have insisted upon sending up a lady nurse of my own choosing; not so much to wait on him, or do any of a sick-nurse's ordinary duties — his own man can do these, and he seems a capable fellow — but 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; it will require tact; and this afternoon I engaged exactly the right person. She is a gentlewoman by birth, has nursed for me before, and is well up in the special knowledge of mental things which this case requires. 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 have written a descriptive account of her to Dr. Mackenzie, and he will prepare his patient for her arrival. She is to go up the day after to-morrow. We are lucky to get her, for she is quite first-rate, and she has only just finished with a long consumptive case, now on the mend and ordered abroad. So you see, Jeanette, all is shaping well. — And now, my dear girl, you have a story of your own to tell me, and my whole attention shall be at your disposal. But first of all I am going to ring for tea, and you and I will have it quietly down here, if you will excuse me for a few minutes while I go upstairs and speak to Flower.”

It seemed so natural to Jane to be pouring out the

doctor's tea, and to watch him putting a liberal allowance of salt on the thin bread-and-butter, and then folding 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 school-room tea; and when it proved possible to dispose of her governess's chaperonage and be by themselves, what delightful times they used to have, sitting on the hearth-rug, roasting chestnuts and discussing the many subjects which were of mutual interest. Jane could still remember the painful pleasure of turning hot chestnuts on the bars with her fingers, and how she hastened to do them herself, lest he should be burned. She had always secretly liked and admired his hands, with the brown thin fingers, so delicate in their touch and yet full of such gentle strength. She used to love watching them while he sharpened her pencils or drew wonderful diagrams in her exercise books; thinking how in years to come, when he performed important operations, human lives would depend upon their skill and dexterity. In those early years he had seemed so much older than she. And then came the time when she shot up rapidly into young womanhood and their eyes were on a level and their ages seemed the same. Then, as the years went on, Jane began to feel older than he, and took to calling him "Boy" to emphasise this fact. And then came — Flower; — and complications. And Jane had to see his face grow thin and worn, and his hair whiten on the temples. And she yearned over him, yet dared not offer sympathy. At last things came right for

the doctor, and all the highest good seemed his; in his profession; in his standing among men; and, above all, in his heart life, which Flower had always held between her two sweet hands. And Jane rejoiced, but felt still more lonely now she had no companion in loneliness. And still their friendship held, with Flower admitted as a third — a wistful, grateful third, anxious to learn from the woman whose friendship meant so much to her husband, how to succeed where she had hitherto failed. And Jane's faithful heart was generous and loyal to both, though in sight of their perfect happiness her loneliness grew.

And now, in her own hour of need, it had to be Deryck only; and the doctor knew this, and had arranged accordingly; for at last his chance had come, to repay the faithful devotion of a lifetime. The conversation of that afternoon would be the supreme test of their friendship. And so, with a specialist's appreciation of the mental effect of the most trivial external details, the doctor had ordered muffins, and a kettle on the fire, and had asked Jane to make the tea.

By the time the kettle boiled, they had remembered the chestnuts, and were laughing about poor old Fräulein's efforts to keep them in order, and the strategies by which they used to evade her vigilance. And the years rolled back, and Jane felt herself very much at home with the chum of her childhood.

Nevertheless, there was a moment of tension when the doctor drew back the tea-table and they faced each other in easy-chairs on either side of the fireplace. Each noticed how characteristic was the attitude of the other.

Jane sat forward, her feet firmly planted on the

hearth-rug, her arms on her knees, and her hands clasped in front of her.

The doctor leaned back, one knee crossed over the other, his elbows on the arms of his chair, the tips of his fingers meeting, in absolute stillness of body and intense concentration of mind.

The silence between them was like a deep, calm pool. Jane took the first plunge.

"Deryck, I am going to tell you everything. I am going to speak of my heart, and mind, and feelings, exactly as if they were bones, and muscles, and lungs. I want you to combine the offices of doctor and confessor in one."

The doctor had been contemplating his finger-tips. He now glanced swiftly at Jane, and nodded; then turned his head and looked into the fire.

"Deryck, mine has been a somewhat lonely existence. I have never been essential to the life of another, and no one has ever touched the real depths of mine. I have known they were there, but I have known they were unsounded."

The doctor opened his lips, as if to speak; then closed them in a firmer line than before, and merely nodded his head silently.

"I had never been loved with that love which makes one absolutely first to a person, nor had I ever so loved. I had — cared very much; but caring is not loving. — Oh, Boy, I know that now!"

The doctor's profile showed rather white against the dark-green background of his chair; but he smiled as he answered: "Quite true, dear. There is a distinction, and a difference."

"I had heaps of friends, and amongst them a good many nice men, mostly rather younger than myself,

who called me 'Miss Champion' to my face, and 'good old Jane' behind my back."

The doctor smiled. He had often heard the expression, and could recall the whole-hearted affection and admiration in the tones of those who used it.

"Men, as a rule," continued Jane, "get on better with me than do women. Being large and solid, and usually calling a spade 'a spade,' and not 'a garden implement,' women consider me strong-minded, and are inclined to be afraid of me. The boys know they can trust me; they make a confidante of me, looking upon me as a sort of convenient elder sister who knows less about them than an elder sister would know, and is probably more ready to be interested in those things which they choose to tell. Among my men friends, Deryck, was Garth Dalmain."

Jane paused, and the doctor waited silently for her to continue.

"I was always interested in him, partly because he was so original and vivid in his way of talking, and partly because" — a bright flush suddenly crept up into the tanned cheeks — "well, though I did not realise it then, I suppose I found his extraordinary beauty rather fascinating. And then, our circumstances were so much alike, — both orphans, and well off; responsible to no one for our actions; with heaps of mutual friends, and constantly staying at the same houses. We drifted into a pleasant intimacy, and of all my friends, he was the one who made me feel most like 'a man and a brother.' We discussed women by the dozen, all his special admirations in turn, and the effect of their beauty upon him, and I watched with interest to see who, at last, would fix his roving fancy. But on one eventful day all this

was changed in half an hour. We were both staying at Overdene. There was a big house party, and Aunt Georgina had arranged a concert to which half the neighbourhood was coming. Madame Velma failed at the last minute. Aunt 'Gina, in a great state of mind, was borrowing remarks from her ma-caw. You know how? She always says she is merely quoting 'the dear bird.' Something had to be done. I offered to take Velma's place; and I sang."

"Ah," said the doctor.

"I sang 'The Rosary' — the song Flower asked for the last time I was here. Do you remember?"

The doctor nodded. "I remember."

"After that, all was changed between Garth and me. I did not understand it at first. I knew the music had moved him deeply, beauty of sound having upon him much the same effect as beauty of colour; but I thought the effect would pass in the night. But the days went on, and there was always this strange sweet difference; not anything others would notice; but I suddenly became conscious that, for the first time in my whole life, I was essential to somebody. I could not enter a room without realising that he was instantly aware of my presence; I could not leave a room without knowing that he would at once feel and regret my absence. The one fact filled and completed all things; the other left a blank which could not be removed. I knew this, and yet — incredible though it may appear — I did not realise it meant *love*. I thought it was an extraordinarily close bond of sympathy and mutual understanding, brought about principally by our enjoyment of one another's music. We spent hours in the music-room. I put it down to

that; yet when he looked at me his eyes seemed to touch as well as see me, and it was a very tender and wonderful touch. And all the while I never thought of love. I was so plain and almost middle-aged; and he, such a beautiful, radiant youth. He was like a young sun-god, and I felt warmed and vivified when he was near; and he was almost always near. Honestly, that was *my* side of the days succeeding the concert. But *his!* He told me afterwards, Deryck, it had been a sudden revelation to him when he heard me sing 'The Rosary,' not of music only, but of *me*. He said he had never thought of me otherwise than as a good sort of chum; but then it was as if a veil were lifted, and he saw, and knew, and felt me as a woman. And — no doubt it will seem odd to you, Boy; it did to me; — but he said, that the woman he found then was his ideal of womanhood, and that from that hour he wanted me for his own as he had never wanted anything before."

Jane paused, and looked into the glowing heart of the fire.

The doctor turned slowly 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 upon the surface. He had sensed the strong mother-tenderness lying dormant within her; had known that her arms would prove a haven of refuge, her bosom a soothing pillow, 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. Thus the doctor could well understand the hold it would gain

upon a man who had discovered it, and who was free to win it for his own.

But he only said, "I do not think it odd, dear."

Jane had forgotten the doctor. She came back promptly from the glowing heart of the fire.

"I am glad you don't," she said. "I did. — Well, we both left Overdene on the same day. I came to you; he went to Shenstone. It was a Tuesday. On the Friday I went down to Shenstone, and we met again. Having been apart for a little while seemed to make this curious feeling of 'togetherness' deeper and sweeter than ever. In the Shenstone house party was that lovely American girl, Pauline Lister. Garth was enthusiastic about her beauty, and set on painting her. Everybody made sure he was going to propose to her. Deryck, I thought so, too; in fact I had advised him to do it. I felt so pleased and interested over it, though all the while his eyes touched me when he looked at me, and I knew the day did not begin for him until we had met, and was over when we had said good-night. And this experience of being first and most to him made everything so golden, and life so rich, and still I thought of it only as an unusually delightful friendship. But the evening of my arrival at Shenstone he asked me to come out on to the terrace after dinner, as he wanted specially to talk to me. Deryck, I thought it was the usual proceeding of making a confidante of me, and that I was to hear details of his intentions regarding Miss Lister. Thinking that, I walked calmly out beside him; sat down on the parapet, in the brilliant moonlight, and quietly waited for him to begin. Then — oh, Deryck! It happened."

Jane put her elbows on her knees, and buried her face in her clasped hands.

"I cannot tell you — details. His love — it just poured over me like molten gold. It melted the shell of my reserve; it burst through the ice of my convictions; it swept me off my feet upon a torrent of wondrous fire. I knew nothing in heaven or earth but that this love was mine, and was for me. And then — oh Deryck! I can't explain — I don't know myself how it happened — but this whirlwind of emotion came to rest upon my heart. He knelt with his arms around me, and we held each other in a sudden great stillness; and in that moment I was all his, and he knew it. He might have stayed there hours if he had not moved or spoken; but presently he lifted up his face and looked at me. Then he said two words. I can't repeat them, Boy; but they brought me suddenly to my senses, and made me realise what it all meant. Garth Dalmain wanted me to marry him."

Jane paused, awaiting the doctor's expression of surprise.

"What else could it have meant?" said Deryck Brand, very quietly. He passed his hand over his lips, knowing they trembled a little. Jane's confessions were giving him a stiffer time than he had expected. "Well, dear, so you —?"

"I stood up," said Jane; "for while he knelt there he was master of me, mind and body; and some instinct told me that if I were to be won to wifeness, my reason must say 'yes' before the rest of me. It is 'spirit, soul, and body' in the Word, not 'body, soul, and spirit,' as is so often misquoted; and I believe the inspired sequence to be the right one."

The doctor made a quick movement of interest. "Good heavens, Jane!" he said. "You have got hold of a truth there, and you have expressed it

exactly as I have often wanted to express it without being able to find the right words. You have found them, Jeanette."

She looked into his eager eyes and smiled sadly. "Have I, Boy?" she said. "Well, they have cost me dear. — I put my lover from me and told him I must have twelve hours for calm reflection. He was so sure — so sure of me, so sure of himself — that he agreed without a protest. At my request he left me at once. The manner of his going I cannot tell, even to you, Dicky. I promised to meet him at the village church next day and give him my answer. He was to try the new organ at eleven. We knew we should be alone. I came. He sent away the blower. He called me to him at the chancel step. The setting was so perfect. The artist in him sang for joy, and thrilled with expectation. The glory of absolute certainty was in his eyes; though he had himself well in hand. He kept from touching me while he asked for my answer. Then — I refused him, point blank, giving a reason he could not question. He turned from me and left the church, and I have not spoken to him from that day to this."

A long silence in the doctor's consulting-room. One manly heart was entering into the pain of another, and yet striving not to be indignant until he knew the whole truth.

Jane's spirit was strung up to the same pitch as in that fateful hour, and once more she thought herself right.

At last the doctor spoke. He looked at her searchingly now, and held her eyes.

"And why did you refuse him, Jane?" The kind voice was rather stern.

Jane put out her hands to him appealingly. "Ah, Boy, I must make you understand! How could I do otherwise, though, indeed, it was putting away the highest good life will ever hold for me? Deryck, you know Garth well enough to realise how dependent he is on beauty; he must be surrounded by it, perpetually. Before this unaccountable need of each other came to us he had talked to me quite freely on this point, saying of a plain person whose character and gifts he greatly admired, and whose face he grew to like in consequence: 'But of course it was not the sort of face one would 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 be martyrdom to me.' Oh, Deryck! Could I have tied Garth to my plain face? Could I have let myself become a daily, hourly discipline to that radiant, beauty-loving nature? I know they say, 'Love is blind.' But that is before Love has entered into his kingdom. Love desirous, sees only that, in the one beloved, which has awakened the desire. But Love content, regains full vision, and, as time goes on, those powers of vision increase and become, by means of daily, hourly, use, — microscopic and telescopic. Wedded love is not blind. Bah! An outsider staying with married people is apt to hear what love sees, on both sides, and the delusion of love's blindness is dispelled forever. I know Garth was blind, during all those golden days, to my utter lack of beauty, because he wanted *me* so much. But when he had had me, and had steeped himself in all I have to give of soul and spirit beauty; when the daily routine of life began, which after all has to be lived in complexions, and with features to the fore; when he sat down to break-

fast and I saw him glance at me and then look away; when I was conscious that I was sitting behind the coffee-pot, looking my very plainest, and that in consequence my boy's discipline had begun; could I have borne it? Should I not, in the miserable sense of failing him day by day through no fault of my own, have grown plainer and plainer; until bitterness and disappointment, and perhaps jealousy, all combined to make me positively ugly? I ask you, Deryck, could I have borne it?"

The doctor was looking at Jane with an expression of keen professional interest.

"How awfully well I diagnosed the case when I sent you abroad," he remarked meditatively. "Really, with so little data to go upon —"

"Oh, Boy," cried Jane, with a movement of impatience, "don't speak to me as if I were a patient. Treat me as a human being, at least, and tell me — as man to man — could I have tied Garth Dalmain to my plain face? For you know it is plain."

The doctor laughed. He was glad to make Jane a little angry. "My dear girl," he said, "were we speaking as man to man, I should have a few very strong things to say to you. As we are speaking as man to woman, — and as a man who has for a very long time respected, honoured, and admired a very dear and noble woman, — I will answer your question frankly. You are not beautiful, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, and no one who really loves you would answer otherwise; because no one who knows and loves you would dream of telling you a lie. We will even allow, if you like, that you are plain; although I know half a dozen young men who, were they here, would want to kick me into the street for



saying so, and I should have to pretend in self-defence that their ears had played them false and I had said, 'You are *Jane*,' which is all they would consider mattered. So long as you are yourself, your friends will be well content. At the same time, I may add, while this dear face is under discussion, that I can look back to times when I have felt that I would gladly walk twenty miles for a sight of it; and in its absence I have always wished it present, and in its presence I have never wished it away."

"Ah, but, Deryck, you did not have to have it always opposite you at meals," insisted Jane gravely.

"Unfortunately not. But I enjoyed the meals more on the happy occasions when it was there."

"And, Deryck — *you did not have to kiss it.*"

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

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

"No, dear," said the doctor when he had recovered; "to my infinite credit be it recorded, that in all the years I have known it I have never once kissed it."

"Dicky, don't tease! Oh, Boy, it is the most vital question of my whole life; and if you do not now give me wise and thoughtful advice, all this difficult confession will have been for nothing."

The doctor became grave immediately. He leaned forward and took those clasped hands between his.

"Dear," he said, "forgive me if I seemed to take it lightly. My most earnest thought is wholly at your disposal. And now let me ask you a few questions

How did you ever succeed in convincing Dalmain that such a thing as this was an insuperable obstacle to your marriage?"

"I did not give it as a reason."

"What then did you give as your reason for refusing him?"

"I asked him how old he was."

"Jane! Standing there beside him in the chancel, where he had come awaiting your answer?"

"Yes. It did seem awful when I came to think it over afterwards. But it worked."

"I have no doubt it worked. What then?"

"He said he was twenty-seven. I said I was thirty, and looked thirty-five, and felt forty. I also said he might be twenty-seven, but he looked nineteen, and I was sure he often felt nine."

"Well?"

"Then I said that I could not marry a mere boy."

"And he acquiesced?"

"He seemed stunned at first. Then he said of course I could not marry him if I considered him that. He said it was the first time he had given a thought to himself in the matter. Then he said he bowed to my decision, and he walked down the church and went out, and we have not met since."

"Jane," said the doctor, "I wonder he did not see through it. You are so unused to lying, that you cannot have lied, on the chancel step, to the man you loved, with much conviction."

A dull red crept up beneath Jane's tan.

"Oh, Deryck, it was not entirely a lie. It was one of those dreadful lies which are 'part a truth,' of which Tennyson says that they are 'a harder matter to fight.'"

“‘A lie which is all a lie  
 May be met and fought with outright;  
 But a lie which is part a truth  
 Is a harder matter to fight.’”

quoted the doctor.

“Yes,” said Jane. “And he could not fight this, just because it was partly true. He is younger than I by three years, and still more by temperament. It was partly for his delightful youthfulness that I feared my maturity and staidness. It was part a truth, but oh, Deryck, it was more a lie; and it was altogether a lie to call him — the man whom I had felt complete master of me the evening before — ‘a mere boy.’ Also he could not fight it because it took him so utterly by surprise. He had been all the time as completely without self-consciousness, as I had been morbidly full of it. His whole thought had been of me. Mine had been of him and — of myself.”

“Jane,” said the doctor, “of all that you have suffered since that hour, you deserved every pang.”

Jane bent her head. “I know,” she said.

“You were false to yourself, and not true to your lover. You robbed and defrauded both. Cannot you now see your mistake? To take it on the lowest ground, Dalmain, worshipper of beauty as he was, had had a surfeit of pretty faces. He was like the confectioner’s boy who when first engaged is allowed to eat all the cakes and sweets he likes, and who eats so many in the first week, that ever after he wants only plain bread-and-butter. You were Dal’s bread-and-butter. I am sorry if you do not like the simile.”

Jane smiled. “I do like the simile,” she said,

“Ah, but you were far more than this, my dear girl. You were his ideal of womanhood. He believed in your strength and tenderness, your graciousness and truth. You shattered this ideal; you failed this faith in you. His fanciful, artistic, eclectic nature, with all its unused possibilities of faithful and passionate devotion, had found its haven in your love; and in twelve hours you turned it adrift. Jane — it was a crime. The magnificent strength of the fellow is shown by the way he took it. His progress in his art was not arrested. All his best work has been done since. He has made no bad mad marriage, in mockery of his own pain; and no grand loveless one, to spite you. He might have done both — I mean either. And when I realise that the poor fellow I was with yesterday — making such a brave fight in the dark, and turning his head on the pillow to say with a gleam of hope on his drawn face: ‘Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come’ — had already been put through all this by you — Jane, if you were a man, I’d horsewhip you!” said the doctor.

Jane squared her shoulders and lifted her head with more of her old spirit than she had yet shown.

“You have lashed me well, Boy,” she said, “as only words spoken in faithful indignation can lash. And I feel the better for the pain. — And now I think I ought to tell you that while I was on the top of the Great Pyramid I suddenly saw the matter from a different standpoint. You remember that view, with its sharp line of demarcation? On one side the river, and verdure, vegetation, fruitfulness, a veritable ‘garden enclosed’; on the other, vast space as far as the eye could reach; golden liberty, away to the horizon, but no sign of vegetation, no hope of cultivation; just

barren, arid loneliness. I felt this was an exact picture of my life as I live it now. Garth's love, flowing through it, as the river, could have made it a veritable 'garden of the Lord.' It would have meant less liberty, but it would also have meant no loneliness. And, after all, the liberty to live for self alone, becomes in time a weary bondage. Then I realised that I had condemned him also to this hard desert life. I came down and took counsel of the old Sphinx. Those calm, wise eyes, looking on into futurity, seemed to say: 'They only live who love.' That evening I resolved to give up the Nile trip, return home immediately, send for Garth, admit all to him, asking him to let us both begin again just where we were three years ago in the moonlight on the terrace at Shensstone. Ten minutes after I had formed this decision, I heard of his 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 which proves every rule." Then he added quickly: "But, unquestionably, it helps to mend matters, so far as your own mental attitude is concerned, that before you knew of Dalmain's blindness you should have admitted yourself wrong, and made up your mind to trust him."

"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 was therefore prepared to risk it. And of

course now, all doubt or need to question is swept away by my poor boy's accident, which simplifies matters, where that particular point is concerned."

The doctor looked at Jane with a sudden raising of his level brows. "Simplifies matters?" he said.

Then, as Jane, apparently satisfied with the expression, did not attempt to qualify it, he rose and stirred the fire; standing over it for a few moments in silent thought. When he sat down again, his voice was very quiet, but there was an alertness about his expression which roused Jane. She felt that the crisis of their conversation had been reached.

"And now, my dear Jeanette," said the doctor, "suppose you tell me what you intend doing."

"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 to have the emotion of my arrival. Also I don't want to risk being kept from him by doctors or nurses. My place is by his side. I ask no better thing of life than to be always beside him. But sick-room attendants are apt to be pig-headed; and a fuss under these circumstances would be unbearable. A wire from you will make all clear."

"I see," said the doctor slowly. "Yes, a wire from me will undoubtedly open a way for you to Garth Dalmain's bedside. And, arrived there, what then?"

A smile of ineffable tenderness parted Jane's lips. The doctor saw it, but turned away immediately. It was not for him, or for any man, to see that look. The eyes which should have seen it were sightless evermore.

"What then, Deryck? Love will know best what

then. All barriers will be swept away, and Garth and I will be together."

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

"Ah, Jane," he said, "that is the woman's point of view. It is certainly the simplest, and perhaps the best. But at Garth's bedside you will be confronted with the man's point of view; and I should be failing the trust you have placed in me did I not put that before you now. — From the man's point of view, 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; and Garth Dalmain is not the man to be content with pity, where he has thought to win love, and failed. Nor would he allow any woman — least of all his crown of womanhood — to tie herself to his blindness unless he were sure such binding was her deepest joy. And how could you expect him to believe this in face of the fact that, when he was all a woman's heart could desire, you refused him and sent him from you? — If, on the other hand, you explain, as no doubt you intend to do, the reason of that refusal, he can but 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. There is no virtue in necessity. I can never feel I possess your trust, because you come to me only when accident has put it out of my power either to do the thing you feared, or to prove myself better than your doubts.' My dear girl, that is how matters stand from the man's

point of view; from his, I make no doubt, even more than from mine; for I recognise in Garth Dalmain a stronger man than myself. Had it been I that day in the church, wanting you as he did, I should have grovelled at your feet and promised to grow up. Garth Dalmain had the iron strength to turn and go, without a protest, when the woman who had owned him mate the evening before, refused him on the score of inadequacy the next morning. I fear there is no question of the view he would take of the situation as it now stands."

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

"But, Deryck — he — loves —"

"Just *because* he loves, my poor old girl, where you are concerned he could never be content with less than the best."

"Oh, Boy, help me! Find a way! Tell me what to do!" Despair was in Jane's eyes.

The doctor considered long, in silence. At last he said: "I see only one way out. If Dal could somehow be brought to realise your point of view at that time as a possible one, without knowing it had actually been the cause of your refusal of him, and could have the chance to express himself clearly on the subject — to me, for instance — in a way which might reach you without being meant to reach you, it might put you in a better position toward him. But it would be difficult to manage. If you could be in close contact with his mind, constantly near him unseen — ah, poor chap, that is easy now — I mean unknown to him; if, for instance, you could be in the shoes of this nurse-companion person I am sending him, and get at his mind on the matter; so that he could feel,

3-040 2  
3-040 3

176

### The Rosary

When you eventually made your confession, he had already justified himself to you, and thus gone behind his blindness, as it were."

Jane bounded in her chair. "Deryck, I have it! Oh, send me as his nurse-companion! He would never dream it was I. It is three years since he heard my voice, and he thinks me in Egypt. The society column in all the papers, a few weeks ago, mentioned me as wintering in Egypt and Syria and remaining abroad until May. Not a soul knows I have come home. You are the best judge as to whether I have had training and experience; and all through the war our work was fully as much mental and spiritual, as surgical. It was not up to much otherwise. Oh, Dicky, you could safely recommend me; and I still have my uniforms stowed away in case of need. I could be ready in twenty-four hours, and I would go as Sister—anything, and eat in the kitchen if necessary."

"But, my dear girl," said the doctor quietly, "you could not go as Sister Anything, unfortunately. You could only go as Nurse Rosemary Gray; for I engaged her this morning, and posted a full and explicit account of her to Dr. Mackenzie, which he will read to our patient. I never take a case from one nurse and give it to another, excepting for incompetency. And Nurse Rosemary Gray could more easily fly, than prove incompetent. She will not be required to eat in the kitchen. She is a gentlewoman, and will be treated as such. I wish indeed you could be in her shoes, though I doubt whether you could have carried it through.—And now I have something to tell you. Just before I left him, Dalmain asked after you. He sandwiched you most carefully in between the duchess

2-040 1  
3-040 2

### The Consultation

and Flower; but he could not keep the blood out of his thin cheeks, and he gripped the bedclothes in his effort to keep his voice steady. He asked where you were. I said, I believed, in Egypt. When you were coming home. I told him I had heard you intended returning to Jerusalem for Easter, and I supposed we might expect you home at the end of April or early in May. He inquired how you were. I replied that you were not a good correspondent, but I gathered from occasional cables and post-cards that you were very fit and having a good time. I then volunteered the statement that it was I who had sent you abroad because you were going all to pieces. He made a quick movement with his hand as if he would have struck me for using the expression. Then he said: 'Going to pieces? *Shel!*' in a tone of most utter contempt for me and my opinions. Then he hastily made minute inquiries for Flower. He had already asked about the duchess all the questions he intended asking about you. When he had ascertained that Flower was at home and well, and had sent him her affectionate sympathy, he begged me to glance through a pile of letters which were waiting until he felt able to have them read to him, and to tell him any of the handwritings known to me. All the world seemed to have sent him letters of sympathy, poor chap. I told him a dozen or so of the names I knew,—a royal handwriting among them. He asked whether there were any from abroad. There were two or three. I knew them all, and named them. He could not bear to hear any of them read; even the royal letter remained unopened, though he asked to have it in his hand, and fingered the tiny crimson crown. Then he said: 'Is there one from the duchess?' There was.

He wished to hear that one, so I opened and read it. It was very characteristic of her Grace; full of kindly sympathy, heartily yet tactfully expressed. Half-way through she said: 'Jane will be upset. I shall write and tell her next time she sends me an address. At present I have no idea in which quarter of the globe my dear niece is to be found. Last time I heard of her she seemed in a fair way towards marrying a little Jap and settling in Japan. Not a bad idea, my dear Dal, is it? Though, if Japan is at all like the paper screens, I don't know where in that Liliputian country they will find a house, or a husband, or a what-do-you-call-'em thing they ride in, solid enough for our good Jane!' With intuitive tact of a very high order, I omitted this entire passage about marrying the Jap. When your aunt's letter was finished, he asked point blank whether there was one from you. I said No, but that it was unlikely the news had reached you, and I felt sure you would write when it did. So I hope you will, dear; and Nurse Rosemary Gray will have instructions to read all his letters to him."

"Oh, Deryck," said Jane brokenly, "I can't bear it! I must go to him!"

The telephone bell on the doctor's table whirred sharply. He went over and took up the receiver.

"Hullo! . . . Yes, it is Dr. Brand. . . . Who is speaking? . . . Oh, is it you, Matron?" — Jane felt quite sorry the matron could not see the doctor's charming smile into the telephone. — "Yes? What name did you say? . . . Undoubtedly. This morning; quite definitely. A most important case. She is to call and see me to-night. . . . What? . . . Mistake on register? Ah, I see. . . . Gone where? . . . Where? . . . Spell it, please. . . . Australia! Oh,

quite out of reach! . . . Yes, I heard he was ordered there. . . . Never mind, Matron. You are in no way to blame. . . . Thanks, I think not. I have some one in view. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . No doubt she might do. . . . I will let you know if I should require her. . . . Good-bye, Matron, and thank you."

The doctor hung up the receiver. Then he turned to Jane; a slow, half-doubtful smile gathering on his lips.

"Jeanette," he said, "I do not believe in chance. But I do believe in a Higher Control, which makes and unmakes our plans. You shall go."