

CHAPTER XVI

THE DOCTOR FINDS A WAY

"AND now as to ways and means," said the doctor, when Jane felt better. "You must leave by the night mail from Euston, the day after tomorrow. Can you be ready?"

"I am ready," said Jane.

"You must go as Nurse Rosemary Gray."

"I don't like that," Jane interposed. "I should prefer a fictitious name. Suppose the real Rosemary Gray turned up, or some one who knows her."

"My dear girl, she is half way to Australia by now, and you will see no one up there but the household and the doctor. Any one who turned up would be more likely to know *you*. We must take these risks. Beside, in case of complications arising, I will give you a note, which you can produce at once, explaining the situation, and stating that in agreeing to fill the breach you consented at my request to take the name in order to prevent any necessity for explanations to the patient, which at this particular juncture would be most prejudicial. I can honestly say this, it being even more true than appears. So you must dress the part, Jane, and endeavour to look the part, so far as your five foot eleven will permit; for please remember that I have described you to Dr. Mackenzie as 'a pretty, dainty little thing, refined and elegant, and considerably more capable than she looks.'"

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"Dicky! He will instantly realise that I am not the person mentioned in your letter."

"Not so, dear. Remember we have to do with a Scotchman, and a Scotchman never realises anything 'instantly.' The Gaelic mind works slowly, though it works exceeding sure. He will be exceeding sure, when he has contemplated you for a while, that I am a 'verra poor judge o' women,' and that Nurse Gray is a far finer woman than I described. But he will have already created for Dalmain, from my letter, a mental picture of his nurse; which is all that really matters. We must trust to Providence that old Robbie does not proceed to amend it by the original. Try to forestall any such conversation. If the good doctor seems to mistrust you, take him on one side, show him my letter, and tell him the simple truth. But I do not suppose this will be necessary. With the patient, you must remember the extreme sensitiveness of a blind man's hearing. Tread lightly. Do not give him any opportunity to judge of your height. Try to remember that you are not supposed to be able to reach the top shelf of an eight-foot bookcase without the aid of steps or a chair. And when the patient begins to stand and walk, try to keep him from finding out that his nurse is slightly taller than himself. This should not be difficult; one of his fixed ideas being that in his blindness he will not be touched by a woman. His valet will lead him about. And, Jane, I cannot imagine any one who has ever had your hand in his, failing to recognise it. So I advise you, from the first, to avoid shaking hands. But all these precautions do not obviate the greatest difficulty of all, — your voice. Do you suppose, for a moment, he will not recognise that?"

"I shall take the bull by the horns in that case," said Jane, "and you must help me. Explain the fact to me now, as you might do if I were really Nurse Rosemary Gray, and had a voice so like my own."

The doctor smiled. "My dear Nurse Rosemary," he said, "you must not be surprised if our patient detects a remarkable similarity between your voice and that of a mutual friend of his and mine. I have constantly noticed it myself."

"Indeed, sir," said Jane. "And may I know whose voice mine so closely resembles?"

"The Honourable Jane Champion's," said the doctor, with the delightful smile with which he always spoke to his nurses. "Do you know her?"

"Slightly," said Jane, "and I hope to know her better and better as the years go by."

Then they both laughed. "Thank you, Dicky. Now I shall know what to say to the patient. — Ah, but the misery of it! Think of it being possible thus to deceive Garth, — Garth of the bright, keen, all-perceiving vision! Shall I ever have the courage to carry it through?"

"If you value your own eventual happiness and his, you will, dear. And now I must order the brougham and speed you to Portland Place, or you will be late for dinner, a thing the duchess cannot overlook, 'as you very well know,' even in a traveller returned from round the world. And if you take my advice, you will tell your kind, sensible old aunt the whole story, omitting of course all moonlight details, and consult her about this plan. Her shrewd counsel will be invaluable, and you may be glad of her assistance later on."

They rose and faced each other on the hearth-rug.

"Boy," said Jane with emotion, "you have been so good to me, and so faithful. Whatever happens, I shall be grateful always."

"Hush," said the doctor. "No need for gratitude when long-standing debts are paid. — To-morrow I shall not have a free moment, and I foresee the next day as very full also. But we might dine together at Euston at seven, and I will see you off. Your train leaves at eight o'clock, getting you to Aberdeen soon after seven the next morning, and out to Gleneesh in time for breakfast. You will enjoy arriving in the early morning light; and the air of the moors braces you wonderfully. — Thank you, Stoddart. Miss Champion is ready. Hullo, Flower! Look up, Jane. Flower, and Dicky, and Blossom, are hanging over the topmost banisters, dropping you showers of kisses. Yes, the river you mentioned does produce a veritable 'garden of the Lord.' God send you the same, dear. And now, sit well back, and lower your veil. Ah, I remember, you don't wear them. Wise girl! If all women followed your example it would impoverish the opticians. Why? Oh, constant focussing on spots, for one thing. But lean back, for you must not be seen if you are supposed to be still in Cairo, waiting to go up the Nile. And, look here" — the doctor put his head in at the carriage window — "very plain luggage, mind. The sort of thing nurses speak of as 'my box'; with a very obvious R.G. on it!"

"Thank you, Boy," whispered Jane. "You think of everything."

"I think of *you*," said the doctor. And in all the hard days to come, Jane often found comfort in remembering those last quiet words.

CHAPTER XVII

ENTER — NURSE ROSEMARY

NURSE ROSEMARY GRAY had arrived at Gleneesh.

When she and her "box" were deposited on the platform of the little wayside railway station, she felt she had indeed dropped from the clouds; leaving her own world, and her own identity, on some far-distant planet.

A motor waited outside the station, and she had a momentary fear lest she should receive deferential recognition from the chauffeur. But he was as solid and stolid as any other portion of the car, and paid no more attention to her than he did to her baggage. The one was a nurse; the other, a box; both common nouns, and merely articles to be conveyed to Gleneesh according to orders. So he looked straight before him, presenting a sphinx-like profile beneath the peak of his leather cap, while a slow and solemn porter helped Jane and her luggage into the motor. When she had rewarded the porter with threepence, conscientiously endeavouring to live down to her box, the chauffeur moved foot and hand with the silent precision of a machine, they swung round into the open, and took the road for the hills.

Up into the fragrant heather and grey rocks; miles of moor and sky and solitude. More than ever Jane felt as if she had dropped into another world; and so small an incident as the omission of the usual

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respectful salute of a servant, gave her a delightful sense of success and security in her new rôle.

She had often heard of Garth's old castle up in the north, an inheritance from his mother's family, but was hardly prepared for so much picturesque beauty or such stateliness of archway and entrance. As they wound up the hillside and the grey turrets came into view, with pine woods behind and above, she seemed to hear Garth's boyish voice under the cedar at Overdene, with its ring of buoyant enjoyment, saying: "I should like you to see Castle Gleneesh. You would enjoy the view from the terrace; and the pine woods, and the moor." And then he had laughingly declared his intention of getting up a "best party" of his own, with the duchess as chaperon; and she had promised to make one of it. And now he, the owner of all this loveliness, was blind and helpless; and she was entering the fair portals of Gleneesh, unknown to him, unrecognised by any, as a nurse-secretary sort of person. Jane had said at Overdene: "Yes, ask us, and see what happens." And now this was happening. What would happen next?

Garth's man, Simpson, received her at the door, and again a possible danger was safely passed. He had entered Garth's service within the last three years and evidently did not know her by sight.

Jane stood looking round the old hall, in the leisurely way of one accustomed to arrive for the first time as guest at the country homes of her friends; noting the quaint, large fireplace, and the shadowy antlers high up on the walls. Then she became aware that Simpson, already half way up the wide oak staircase, was expecting the nurse to hurry after him. This she did, and was received at the top of the staircase by old

Margery. It did not require the lawn kerchief, the black satin apron, and the lavender ribbons, for Jane to recognise Garth's old Scotch nurse, housekeeper, and friend. One glance at the grave, kindly face, wrinkled and rosy, — a beautiful combination of perfect health and advancing years, — was enough. The shrewd, keen eyes, seeing quickly beneath the surface, were unmistakable. She conducted Jane to her room, talking all the time in a kindly effort to set her at her ease, and to express a warm welcome with gentle dignity, not forgetting the cloud of sadness which hung over the house and rendered her presence necessary. She called her "Nurse Gray" at the conclusion of every sentence, with an upward inflection and pretty rolling of the *r*'s, which charmed Jane. She longed to say: "You old dear! How I shall enjoy being in the house with you!" but remembered in time that a remark which would have been gratifying condescension on the part of the Honourable Jane Champion, would be little short of impertinent familiarity from Nurse Rosemary Gray. So she followed meekly into the pretty room prepared for her; admired the chintz; answered questions about her night journey; admitted that she would be very glad of breakfast, but still more of a bath if convenient.

And now bath and breakfast were both over, and Jane was standing beside the window in her room, looking down at the wonderful view, and waiting until the local doctor should arrive and summon her to Garth's room.

She had put on the freshest-looking and most business-like of her uniforms, a blue print gown, linen collar and cuffs, and a white apron with shoulder straps and large pockets. She also wore the becoming

cap belonging to one of the institutions to which she had once been for training. She did not intend wearing this later on, but just this morning she omitted no detail which could impress Dr. Mackenzie with her extremely professional appearance. She was painfully conscious that the severe simplicity of her dress tended rather to add to her height, notwithstanding her low-heeled ward shoes with their noiseless rubber soles. She could but hope Deryck would prove right as to the view Dr. Mackenzie would take.

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

Jane fell upon her knees, at the window, and prayed for strength, wisdom, and courage. She could realise absolutely nothing. She had thought so much and so continuously, that all mental vision was out of focus and had become a blur. Even his dear face had faded and was hidden from her when she frantically strove to recall it to her mental view. Only the actual fact remained clear, that in a few short minutes she would be taken to the room where he lay. She would see the face she had not seen since they stood together at the chancel step — the face from which the glad confidence slowly faded, a horror of chill disillusion taking its place.

"Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of Thy grace."

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

The gig had turned the last bend of the road, and passed out of sight on its way to the front of the house.

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

A tap came at her door. Jane walked across the room, and opened it.

Simpson stood on the threshold.

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

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

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NAPOLEON OF THE MOORS

ON the bear-skin rug, with his back to the fire, stood Dr. Robert Mackenzie, known to his friends as "Dr. Rob" or "Old Robbie," according to their degrees of intimacy.

Jane's first impression was of a short, stout man, in a seal-skin waistcoat which had seen better days, a light box-cloth overcoat three sizes too large for him, a Napoleonic attitude, — little spindle legs planted far apart, arms folded on chest, shoulders hunched up, — which led one to expect, as the eye travelled upwards, an ivory-white complexion, a Roman nose, masterful jaw, and thin lips folded in a line of conscious power. Instead of which one found a red, freckled face, a nose which turned cheerfully skyward, a fat pink chin, and drooping sandy moustache. The only striking feature of the face was a pair of keen blue eyes, which, when turned upon any one intently, almost disappeared beneath bushy red eyebrows and became little points of turquoise light.

Jane had not been in his presence two minutes before she perceived that, when his mind was working, he was entirely unconscious of his body, which was apt to do most peculiar things automatically; so that his friends had passed round the remark: "Robbie chews up dozens of good pen-holders, while Dr. Mackenzie is thinking out excellent prescriptions."

When Jane entered, his eyes were fixed upon an open

letter, which she instinctively knew to be Deryck's, and he did not look up at once. When he did look up, she saw his unmistakable start of surprise. He opened his mouth to speak, and Jane was irresistibly reminded of a tame goldfish at Overdene, which used to rise to the surface when the duchess dropped crumbs. He closed it without uttering a word, and turned again to Deryck's letter; and Jane felt herself to be the crumb, or rather the camel, which he was finding it difficult to swallow.

She waited in respectful silence, and Deryck's words passed with calming effect through the palpitating suspense of her brain. "The Gaelic mind works slowly, though it works exceeding sure. He will be exceeding sure that I am a verra poor judge o' women."

At last the little man on the hearth-rug lifted his eyes again to Jane's; and, alas, how high he had to lift them!

"Nurse — er?" he said inquiringly, and Jane thought his searching eyes looked like little bits of broken blue china in a hay-stack.

"Rosemary Gray," replied Jane meekly, with a curtsey in her voice; feeling as if they were rehearsing amateur theatricals at Overdene, and the next minute the duchess's cane would rap the floor and they would be told to speak up and not be so slow.

"Ah," said Dr. Robert Mackenzie, "I see."

He stared hard at the carpet in a distant corner of the room, then walked across and picked up a spline broken from a bass broom; brought it back to the hearth-rug; examined it with minute attention; then put one end between his teeth and began to chew it.

Jane wondered what was the correct thing to do

at this sort of interview, when a doctor neither sat down himself nor suggested that the nurse should do so. She wished she had asked Deryck. But he could not possibly have enlightened her, because the first thing he always said to a nurse was: "My dear Nurse *So-and-So*, pray sit down. People who have much unavoidable standing to do should cultivate the habit of seating themselves comfortably at every possible opportunity."

But the stout little person on the hearth-rug was not Deryck. So Jane stood at attention, and watched the stiff bit of bass wag up and down, and shorten, inch by inch. When it had finally disappeared, Dr. Robert Mackenzie spoke again.

"So you have arrived, Nurse Gray," he said.

"Truly the mind of a Scotchman works slowly," thought Jane, but she was thankful to detect the complete acceptance of herself in his tone. Deryck was right; and oh the relief of not having to take this unspeakable little man into her confidence in this matter of the deception to be practised on Garth.

"Yes, sir, I have arrived," she said.

Another period of silence. A fragment of the bass broom reappeared and vanished once more, before Dr. Mackenzie spoke again.

"I am glad you have arrived, Nurse Gray," he said.

"I am glad to have arrived, sir," said Jane gravely, almost expecting to hear the duchess's delighted "Ha, ha!" from the wings. The little comedy was progressing.

Then suddenly she became aware that during the last few minutes Dr. Mackenzie's mind had been concentrated upon something else. She had not filled it at all. The next moment it was turned upon her,

and two swift turquoise gleams from under the shaggy brows swept over her, with the rapidity and brightness of search-lights. Dr. Mackenzie commenced speaking quickly, with a wonderful rolling of *r*'s.

"I understand, Miss Gray, you have come to minister to the patient's mind rather than to his body. You need not trouble to explain. I have it from Sir Deryck Brand, who prescribed a nurse-companion for the patient, and engaged you. I fully agreed with his prescription; and, allow me to say, I admire its ingredients."

Jane bowed, and realised how the duchess would be chuckling. What an insufferable little person! Jane had time to think this, while he walked across to the table-cloth, bent over it, and examined an ancient spot of ink. Finding a drop of candle grease near it, he removed it with his thumb nail; brought it carefully to the fire, and laid it on the coals. He watched it melt, fizzle, and flare, with an intense concentration of interest; then jumped round on Jane, and caught her look of fury.

"And I think there remains very little for me to say to you about the treatment, Miss Gray," he finished calmly. "You will have received minute instructions from Sir Deryck himself. The great thing now is to help the patient to take an interest in the outer world. The temptation to persons who suddenly become totally blind, is to form a habit of living entirely in a world within; a world of recollection, retrospection, and imagination; the only world, in fact, in which they can see."

Jane made a quick movement of appreciation and interest. After all she might learn something useful from this eccentric little Scotchman. Oh to keep his

attention off rubbish on the carpet, and grease spots on the table-cloth!

"Yes?" she said. "Do tell me more."

"This," continued Dr. Mackenzie, "is our present difficulty with Mr. Dalmain. There seems to be no possibility of arousing his interest in the outside world. He refuses to receive visitors; he declines to hear his letters. Hours pass without a word being spoken by him. Unless you hear him speak to me or to his valet, you will easily suppose yourself to have a patient who has lost the power of speech as well as the gift of sight. Should he express a wish to speak to me alone when we are with him, do not leave the room. Walk over to the fireplace and remain there. I desire that you should hear, that when he chooses to rouse and make an effort, he is perfectly well able to do so. The most important part of your duties, Nurse Gray, will be the aiding him day by day to resume life, — the life of a blind man, it is true; but not therefore necessarily an inactive life. Now that all danger of inflammation from the wounds has subsided, he may get up, move about, learn to find his way by sound and touch. He was an artist by profession. He will never paint again. But there are other gifts which may form reasonable outlets to an artistic nature."

He paused suddenly, having apparently caught sight of another grease spot, and walked over to the table; but the next instant jumped round on Jane, quick as lightning, with a question.

"Does he play?" said Dr. Rob.

But Jane was on her guard, even against accidental surprises.

"Sir Deryck did not happen to mention to me,

Dr. Mackenzie, whether Mr. Dalmain is musical or not."

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

"A little," said Jane.

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

Jane acquiesced.

"In that case, my dear lady, I leave most explicit orders that you neither sing a little nor play a little to Mr. Dalmain. We, who have our sight, can just endure while people who 'play a little' show us how little they can play; because we are able to look round about us and think of other things. But to a blind man, with an artist's sensitive soul, the experience might culminate in madness. We must not risk it. I regret to appear uncomplimentary, but a patient's welfare must take precedence of all other considerations."

Jane smiled. She was beginning to like Dr. Rob.

"I will be most careful," she said, "neither to play nor to sing to Mr. Dalmain."

"Good," said Dr. Mackenzie. "But now let me tell you what you most certainly may do, by-and-by. Lead him to the piano. Place him there upon a seat where he will feel secure; none of your twirly, rickety stools. Make a little notch on the key-board by which he can easily find middle C. Then let him relieve his pent-up soul by the painting of sound-pictures. You will find this will soon keep him happy for hours. And, if he is already something of a musician, — as that huge grand piano, with no knick-knacks on it,

indicates, — he may begin that sort of thing at once, before he is ready to be worried with the Braille system, or any other method of instructing the blind. But contrive an easy way — a little notch in the wood-work below the note — by means of which, without hesitation or irritation, he can locate himself instantly at middle C. Never mind the other notes. It is all the *seeing* he will require when once he is at the piano. Ha, ha! Not bad for a Scotchman, eh, Nurse Gray?"

But Jane could not laugh; though somewhere in her mental background she seemed to hear laughter and applause from the duchess. This was no comedy to Jane, — her blind Garth at the piano, his dear beautiful head bent over the keys, his fingers feeling for that pathetic little notch, to be made by herself, below middle C. She loathed this individual who could make a pun on the subject of Garth's blindness, and, in the back of her mind, Tommy seemed to join the duchess, flapping up and down on his perch and shrieking: "Kick him out! Stop his jaw!"

"And now," said Dr. Mackenzie unexpectedly, "the next thing to be done, Nurse Gray, is to introduce you to the patient."

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

Dr. Mackenzie rang the bell. Simpson appeared.

"A decanter of sherry, a wine-glass, and a couple of biscuits," said Dr. Rob.

Simpson vanished.

"Little beast!" thought Jane. "At eleven o'clock in the morning!"

Dr. Rob stood, and waited; tugging spitefully at

his red moustache, and looking intently out of the window.

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

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

Jane protested. "But, indeed, doctor, I never —"
 "I have no doubt you 'never,'" said Dr. Rob, "especially at eleven o'clock in the morning. But you will to-day; so do not waste any time in discussion. You have had a long night journey; you are going upstairs to a very sad sight indeed, a strain on the nerves and sensibilities. You have come through a trying interview with me, and you are praising Heaven it is over. But you will praise Heaven with more fervency when you have drunk the sherry. Also you have been standing during twenty-three minutes and a half. I always stand to speak myself, and I prefer folk should stand to listen. I can never talk to people while they loll around. But you will walk upstairs all the more steadily, Nurse Rosemary Gray, if you sit down now for five minutes at this table."

Jane obeyed, touched and humbled. So, after all, it was a kind, comprehending heart under that old seal-skin waistcoat; and a shrewd understanding of men and matters, in spite of the erratic, somewhat objectionable exterior. While she drank the wine and finished the biscuits, he found busy occupation on the other side of the room, polishing the window with his silk pocket-handkerchief; making a queer humming noise all the time, like a bee buzzing up the

pane. He seemed to have forgotten her presence; but, just as she put down the empty glass, he turned and, walking straight across the room, laid his hand upon her shoulder.

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

There was a dignity of conscious knowledge and power, in the small quaint figure which preceded Jane up the staircase. As she followed, she became aware that her spirit leaned on his and felt sustained and strengthened. The unexpected conclusion of his sentence, old-fashioned in its wording, yet almost a prayer, gave her fresh courage. "May God Almighty give you tact and wisdom," he had said, little guessing how greatly she needed them. And now another voice, echoing through memory's arches to organ-music, took up the strain: "Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come." And with firm though noiseless step, Jane followed Dr. Mackenzie into the room where Garth was lying, helpless, sightless, and disfigured.