

## CHAPTER XX

### JANE REPORTS PROGRESS

LETTER from the Honourable Jane Champion to Sir Deryck Brand.

CASTLE GLENEESH, N. B.

MY DEAR DERYCK: My wires and post-cards have not told you much beyond the fact of my safe arrival. Having been here a fortnight, I think it is time I sent you a report. Only you must remember that I am a poor scribe. From infancy it has always been difficult to me to write anything beyond that stock commencement: "I hope you are quite well;" and I approach the task of a descriptive letter with an effort which is colossal. And yet I wish I might, for once, borrow the pen of a ready writer; because I cannot help knowing that I have been passing through experiences such as do not often fall to the lot of a woman.

Nurse Rosemary Gray is getting on capitally. She is making herself indispensable to the patient, and he turns to her with a completeness of confidence which causes her heart to swell with professional pride.

Poor Jane has got no further than hearing, from his own lips, that she is the very last person in the whole world he would wish should come near him in his blindness. When she was suggested as a possible visitor, he said: "Oh my God, *no!*" and his face was one wild, horrified protest. So Jane is getting her horsewhipping, Boy, and — according to the method

of a careful and thoughtful judge, who orders thirty lashes of the "cat," in three applications of ten — so is Jane's punishment laid on at intervals; not more than she can bear at a time; but enough to keep her heart continually sore, and her spirit in perpetual dread. And you, dear, clever doctor, are proved perfectly right in your diagnosis of the sentiment of the case. He says her pity would be the last straw on his already heavy cross; and the expression is an apt one, her pity for him being indeed a thing of straw. The only pity she feels is pity for herself, thus hopelessly caught in the meshes of her own mistake. But how to make him realise this, is the puzzle.

Do you remember how the Israelites were shut in, between Migdol and the sea? I knew Migdol meant "towers," but I never understood the passage, until I stood upon that narrow wedge of desert, with the Red Sea in front and on the left; the rocky range of Gebel Attaka on the right, towering up against the sky, like the weird shapes of an impregnable fortress; the sole outlet or inlet behind, being the route they had just travelled from Egypt, and along which the chariots and horsemen of Pharaoh were then thundering in hot pursuit. Even so, Boy, is poor Jane now tramping her patch of desert, which narrows daily to the measure of her despair. Migdol is *his* certainty that *her* love could only be pity. The Red Sea is the confession into which she must inevitably plunge, to avoid scaling Migdol; in the chill waters of which, as she drags him in with her, his love is bound to drown, as waves of doubt and mistrust sweep over its head, — doubts which he has lost the power of removing; mistrust which he can never hope to prove to have been false and mistaken. And behind come

galloping the hosts of Pharaoh; chance, speeding on the wheels of circumstance. At any moment some accident may compel a revelation; and instantly *he* will be scaling rocky Migdol, with torn hands and bleeding feet; and she — poor Jane — floundering in the depths of the Red Sea. O for a Moses, with divine commission, to stretch out the rod of understanding love, making a safe way through; so that together they might reach the Promised Land! Dear wise old Boy, dare you undertake the role of Moses?

But here am I writing like a page of Baedeker, and failing to report on actual facts.

As you may suppose, Jane grows haggard and thin in spite of old Margery's porridge—which is "put on" every day after lunch, for the next morning's breakfast, and anybody passing "gives it a stir." Did you know that was the right way to make porridge, Deryck? I always thought it was made in five minutes, as wanted. Margery says that must be the English stuff which profanely goes by the name. (N.B. Please mark the self-control with which I repeat Scotch remarks, without rushing into weird spelling; a senseless performance, it seems to me. For if you know already how old Margery pronounces "porridge," you can read her pronunciation into the sentence; and if you do not know it, no grotesque spelling on my part could convey to your mind any but a caricatured version of the pretty Scotch accent with which Margery says: "Stir the porridge, Nurse Gray." In fact, I am agreeably surprised at the ease with which I understand the natives, and the pleasure I derive from their conversation; for, after wrestling with one or two modern novels dealing with the Highlands, I had expected to find the language an

unknown tongue. Instead of which, lo! and behold, old Margery, Maggie the house-maid, Macdonald the gardener, and Macalister the game-keeper, all speak a rather purer English than I do; far more carefully pronounced, and with every *r* sounded and rolled. Their idioms are more characteristic than their accent. They say "whenever" for "when," and use in their verbs several quaint variations of tense.)

But what a syntactical digression! Oh, Boy, the wound at my heart is so deep and so sore that I dread the dressings, even by your delicate touch. Where was I? Ah, the porridge gave me my loophole of escape. Well, as I was saying, Jane grows worn and thin, old Margery's porridge notwithstanding; but Nurse Rosemary Gray is flourishing, and remains a pretty, dainty little thing, with the additional charm of fluffy, fly-away floss-silk, for hair, — Dr. Rob's own unaided contribution to the fascinating picture. By the way, I was quite unprepared to find him such a character. I learn much from Dr. Mackenzie, and I love Dr. Rob, excepting on those occasions when I long to pick him up by the scruff of his fawn overcoat and drop him out of the window.

On the point of Nurse Rosemary's personal appearance, I found it best to be perfectly frank with the household. You can have no conception how often awkward moments arose; as, for instance, in the library, the first time Garth came downstairs; when he ordered Simpson to bring the steps for Miss Gray, and Simpson opened his lips to remark that Nurse Gray could reach to the top shelf on her own tiptoes with the greatest ease, he having just seen her do it. Mercifully, the perfect training of an English manservant saved the situation, and he merely said:

"Yessir; certainly sir," and looked upon me, standing silently by, as a person who evidently delighted in giving unnecessary trouble. Had it been dear old Margery with her Scotch tongue, which starts slowly, but gathers momentum as it rolls, and can never be arrested until the full flood of her thought has been poured forth, I should have been constrained to pick her up bodily in my dainty arms and carry her out.

So I sent for Simpson and Margery to the dining-room that evening, when the master was safely out of ear-shot, and told them that, for reasons which I could not fully explain, a very incorrect description of my appearance had been given him. He thought me small and slim; fair and very pretty; and it was most important, in order to avoid long explanations and mental confusion for him, that he should not at present be undeceived. Simpson's expression of polite attention did not vary, and his only comment was: "Certainly, miss. Quite so." But across old Margery's countenance, while I was speaking, passed many shades of opinion, fortunately, by the time I had finished, crystallized into an approving smile of acquiescence. She even added her own commentary: "And a very good thing, too, I am thinking. For Master Garth, poor laddie, was always so set upon having beauty about him. 'Master Garthie,' I would say to him, when he had friends coming, and all his ideas in talking over the dinner concerned the cleaning up of the old silver, and putting out of Valentine glass and Worstered china; 'Master Garthie,' I would say, feeling the occasion called for the apt quoting of Scripture, 'it appears to me your attention is given entirely to the outside of the cup and platter, and you care nothing for all the good things that lie within.'

So it is just as well to keep him deceived, Miss Gray." And then, as Simpson coughed tactfully behind his hand, and nudged her very obviously with his elbow, she added, as a sympathetic after-thought: "For, though a homely face may indeed be redeemed by its kindly expression, you cannot very well explain expression to the blind." So you see, Deryck, this shrewd old body, who has known Garth from boyhood, would have entirely agreed with the decision of three years ago.

Well, to continue my report. The voice gave us some trouble, as you foresaw, and the whole plan hung in the balance during a few awful moments; for, though he easily accepted the explanation we had planned, he sent me out, and told Dr. Mackenzie my voice in his room would madden him. Dr. Rob was equal to the occasion, and won the day; and Garth, having once given in, never mentioned the matter again. Only, sometimes I see him listening and remembering.

But Nurse Rosemary Gray has beautiful hours when poor anxious, yearning Jane is shut out. For her patient turns to her, and depends on her, and talks to her, and tries to reach her mind, and shows her his, and is a wonderful person to live with and know. Jane, marching about in the cold, outside, and hearing them talk, realises how little she understood the beautiful gift which was laid at her feet; how little she had grasped the nature and mind of the man whom she dismissed as "a mere boy." Nurse Rosemary, sitting beside him during long sweet hours of companionship, is learning it; and Jane, ramping up and down her narrowing strip of desert, tastes the sirocco of despair.

And now I come to the point of my letter, and, though I am a woman, I will not put it in a postscript.

Deryck, can you come up soon, to pay him a visit, and to talk to me? I don't think I can bear it, unaided, much longer; and he would so enjoy having you, and showing you how he had got on, and all the things he had already learned to do. Also you might put in a word for Jane; or at all events, get at his mind on the subject. Oh, Boy, if you *could* spare forty-eight hours! And a breath of the moors would be good for you. Also I have a little private plan, which depends largely for its fulfilment on your coming. Oh, Boy — come!

Yours, needing you,

JEANETTE.

From Sir Deryck Brand to Nurse Rosemary Gray,  
Castle Gleneesh, N. B.

WIMPOLE STREET.

MY DEAR JEANETTE: Certainly I will come. I will leave Euston on Friday evening. I can spend the whole of Saturday and most of Sunday at Gleneesh, but must be home in time for Monday's work.

I will do my best, only, alas! I am not Moses, and do not possess his wonder-working rod. Moreover, latest investigations have proved that the Israelites could not have crossed at the place you mention, but further north at the Bitter Lakes; a mere matter of detail, in no way affecting the extreme appositeness of your illustration, rather, adding to it; for I fear there are bitter waters ahead of you, my poor girl.

Still I am hopeful, nay, more than hopeful, — confident. Often of late, in connection with you, I have thought of the promise about all things working

together for good. Anyone can make *good* things work together for good; but only the Heavenly Father can bring good out of evil; and, taking all our mistakes and failings and foolishnesses, cause them to work out to our most perfect well-being. The more intricate and involved this problem of human existence becomes, the greater the need to take as our own clear rule of life: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Ancient marching orders, and simple; but true, and therefore eternal.

I am glad Nurse Rosemary is proving so efficient, but I hope we may not have to face yet another complication in our problem. Suppose our patient falls in love with dainty little Nurse Rosemary, where will Jane be then? I fear the desert would have to open its mouth and swallow her up. We must avert such a catastrophe. Could not Rosemary be induced to drop an occasional *h*, or to confess herself as rather "gone" on Simpson?

Oh, my poor old girl! I could not jest thus, were I not coming shortly to your aid.

How maddening it is! And you so priceless! But most men are either fools or blind, and one is both. Trust me to prove it to him, — to my own satisfaction and his, — if I get the chance.

Yours always devotedly,

DERYCK BRAND.

From Sir Deryck Brand to Dr. Robert Mackenzie.

DEAR MACKENZIE: Do you consider it to be advisable that I should shortly pay a visit to our patient at Gleneesh and give an opinion on his progress?

## The Rosary

I find I can make it possible to come north this week-end.

I hope you are satisfied with the nurse I sent up.  
Yours very faithfully,

DERYCK BRAND.

From Dr. Robert Mackenzie to Sir Deryck Brand.

DEAR SIR DERYCK: Every possible need of the patient's is being met by the capable lady you sent to be his nurse. I am no longer needed. Nor are you — for the patient. But I deem it exceedingly advisable that you should shortly pay a visit to the nurse, who is losing more flesh than a lady of her proportions can well afford.

Some secret care, besides the natural anxiety of having the responsibility of this case, is wearing her out. She may confide in you. She cannot quite bring herself to trust in

Your humble servant,  
ROBERT MACKENZIE.

## CHAPTER XXI

## HARD ON THE SECRETARY

NURSE ROSEMARY sat with her patient in the sunny library at Gleneesh. A small table was between them, upon which lay a pile of letters — his morning mail — ready for her to open, read to him, and pass across, should there chance to be one among them he wished to touch or to keep in his pocket.

They were seated close to the French window opening on to the terrace; the breeze, fragrant with the breath of spring flowers, blew about them, and the morning sun streamed in.

Garth, in white flannels, wearing a green tie and a button-hole of primroses, lay back luxuriously, enjoying, with his rapidly quickening senses, the scent of the flowers and the touch of the sunbeams.

Nurse Rosemary finished reading a letter of her own, folded it, and put it in her pocket with a feeling of thankful relief. Deryck was coming. He had not failed her.

"A man's letter, Miss Gray," said Garth unexpectedly.

"Quite right," said Nurse Rosemary. "How did you know?"

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

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

"Because you gave a little sigh of relief after reading the first line, and another as you folded it and replaced it in the envelope."

Nurse Rosemary laughed. "You are getting on so fast, Mr. Dalmain, that soon we shall be able to keep no secrets. My letter was from—"

"Oh, don't tell me," cried Garth quickly, putting out his hand in protest. "I had no idea of seeming curious as to your private correspondence, Miss Gray. Only it is such a pleasure to report progress to you in the things I manage to find out without being told."

"But I meant to tell you anyway," said Nurse Rosemary. "The letter is from Sir Deryck, and, amongst other things, he says he is coming up to see you next Saturday."

"Ah, good!" said Garth. "And what a change he will find! And I shall have the pleasure of reporting on the nurse, secretary, reader, and unspeakably patient guide and companion he provided for me." Then he added, in a tone of suddenly awakened anxiety: "He is not coming to take you away, is he?"

"No," said Nurse Rosemary, "not yet. But, Mr. Dalmain, I was wanting to ask whether you could spare me just during forty-eight hours; and Dr. Brand's visit would be an excellent opportunity. I could leave you more easily, knowing you would have his companionship. If I may take the week-end, leaving on Friday night, I could return early on Monday morning, and be with you in time to do the morning letters. Dr. Brand would read you Saturday's and Sunday's— Ah, I forgot; there is no

Sunday post. So I should miss but one; and he would more than take my place in other ways."

"Very well," said Garth, striving not to show disappointment. "I should have liked that we three should have talked together. But no wonder you want a time off. Shall you be going far?"

"No; I have friends near by. And now, do you wish to attend to your letters?"

"Yes," said Garth, reaching out his hand. "Wait a minute. There is a newspaper among them. I smell the printing ink. I don't want that. But kindly give me the rest."

Nurse Rosemary took out the newspaper; then pushed the pile along, until it touched his hand.

Garth took them. "What a lot!" he said, smiling in pleasurable anticipation. "I say, Miss Gray, if you profit as you ought to do by the reading of so many epistles written in every possible and impossible style, you ought to be able to bring out a pretty comprehensive 'Complete Letter-writer.' Do you remember the condolences of Mrs. Parker Bangs? I think that was the first time we really laughed together. Kind old soul! But she should not have mentioned blind Bartimæus dipping seven times in the pool of Siloam. It is always best to avoid classical allusions, especially if sacred, unless one has them accurately. Now—" Garth paused.

He had been handling his letters, one by one; carefully fingering each, before laying it on the table beside him. He had just come to one written on foreign paper, and sealed. He broke off his sentence abruptly, held the letter silently for a moment, then passed his fingers slowly over the seal.

Nurse Rosemary watched him anxiously. He

made no remark, but after a moment laid it down and took up the next. But when he passed the pile across to her, he slipped the sealed letter beneath the rest, so that she should come to it last of all.

Then the usual order of proceedings commenced. Garth lighted a cigarette — one of the first things he had learned to do for himself — and smoked contentedly, carefully placing his ash-tray, and almost unflinching locating the ash, in time and correctly.

Nurse Rosemary took up the first letter, read the postmark, and described the writing on the envelope. Garth guessed from whom it came, and was immensely pleased if, on opening, his surmise proved correct. There were nine to-day, of varying interest, — some from men friends, one or two from charming women who professed themselves ready to come and see him as soon as he wished for visitors, one from a blind asylum asking for a subscription, a short note from the doctor heralding his visit, and a bill for ties from a Bond Street shop.

Nurse Rosemary's fingers shook as she replaced the eighth in its envelope. The last of the pile lay on the table. As she took it up, Garth with a quick movement flung his cigarette-end through the window, and lay back, shading his face with his hand.

"Did I shoot straight, nurse?" he asked.

She leaned forward and saw the tiny column of blue smoke rising from the gravel.

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

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

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

"Will you kindly open it, nurse, and tell me the signature before reading the rest of the letter."

Nurse Rosemary fought with her throat, which threatened to close altogether and stifle her voice. She opened the letter, turned to the last page, and found the signature.

"It is signed 'Jane Champion,' Mr. Dalmain," said Nurse Rosemary.

"Read it, please," said Garth quietly. And Nurse Rosemary began.

DEAR DAL: What *can* I write? If I were with you, there would be so much I could say; but writing is so difficult, so impossible.

I know it is harder for you than it would have been for any of us; but you will be braver over it than we should have been, and you will come through splendidly, and go on thinking life beautiful, and making it seem so to other people. I never thought it so until that summer at Overdene and Shenstone when you taught me the perception of beauty. Since then, in every sunset and sunrise, in the blue-green of the Atlantic, the purple of the mountains, the spray of Niagara, the cherry blossom of Japan, the golden deserts of Egypt, I have thought of you, and understood them better, because of you. Oh, Dal! I should like to come and tell you all about them, and let you see them through my eyes; and then you would widen out my narrow understanding of them, and show them again to me in greater loveliness.

I hear you receive no visitors; but cannot you make just one exception, and let me come?

I was at the Great Pyramid when I heard. I was sitting on the piazza after dinner. The moonlight called up memories. I had just made up my mind to give up the Nile, and to come straight home, and write asking you to come and see me; when General Loraine turned up, with an English paper and a letter from Myra, and — I heard.

Would you have come, Garth?

And now, my friend, as you cannot come to me, may I come to you? If you just say: "*Come*," I will come from any part of the world where I may chance to be when the message reaches me. Never mind this Egyptian address. I shall not be there when you are hearing this. Direct to me at my aunt's town house. All my letters go there, and are forwarded unopened.

*Let me come.* And oh, do believe that I know something of how hard it is for you. But God can 'enable."

Believe me to be,  
Yours, more than I can write,  
JANE CHAMPION.

Garth removed the hand which had been shielding his face.

"If you are not tired, Miss Gray, after reading so many letters, I should like to dictate my answer to that one immediately, while it is fresh in my mind. Have you paper there? Thank you. May we begin? — Dear Miss Champion. . . . I am deeply touched by your kind letter of sympathy. . . . It was especially good of you to write to me from so far away,

amid so much which might well have diverted your attention from friends at home."

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

"I am glad you did not give up the Nile trip, but—"

An early bee hummed in from the hyacinths and buzzed against the pane. Otherwise the room was very still.

—"but, of course, if you had sent for me I should have come."

The bee fought the window angrily, up and down, up and down, for several minutes; then found the open glass and whirled out into the sunshine, joyfully.

Absolute silence in the room, until Garth's quiet voice broke it as he went on dictating.

"It is more than kind of you to suggest coming to see me, but —"

Nurse Rosemary dropped her pen. "Oh, Mr. Dalmain," she said, "let her come."

Garth turned upon her a face of blank surprise.

"I do not wish it," he said, in a tone of absolute finality.

"But think how hard it must be for any one to want so much to be near a—a friend in trouble, and to be kept away."

"It is only her wonderful kindness of heart makes her offer to come, Miss Gray. She is a friend and comrade of long ago. It would greatly sadden her to see me thus."

"It does not seem so to her," pleaded Nurse Rosemary. "Ah, cannot you read between the lines? Or does it take a woman's heart to understand a

woman's letter? Did I read it badly? May I read it over again?"

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

"You read it quite well," he said, "but you do not do well to discuss it. I must feel able to dictate my letters to my secretary, without having to explain them."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Nurse Rosemary humbly. "I was wrong."

Garth stretched his hand across the table, and left it there a moment; though no responsive hand was placed within it.

"Never mind," he said, with his winning smile, "my kind little mentor and guide. You can direct me in most things, but not in this. Now let us conclude. Where were we? Ah — 'to suggest coming to see me.' Did you put 'It is most kind' or 'It is more than kind'?"

"More than kind," said Nurse Rosemary, brokenly.

"Right, for it is indeed more than kind. Only she and I, can possibly know how much more. Now let us go on. . . . But I am receiving no visitors, and do not desire any until I have so mastered my new circumstances that the handicap connected with them shall neither be painful nor very noticeable to other people. During the summer I shall be learning step by step to live this new life, in complete seclusion at Gleneesh. I feel sure my friends will respect my wish in this matter. I have with me one who most perfectly and patiently is helping — Ah, wait!" cried Garth suddenly. "I will not say that. She might

think — she might misunderstand. Had you begun to write it? No? What was the last word? 'Matter?' Ah yes. That is right. Full stop after 'matter.' Now let me think."

Garth dropped his face into his hands, and sat for a long time absorbed in thought.

Nurse Rosemary waited. Her right hand held the pen poised over the paper. Her left was pressed against her breast. Her eyes rested on that dark bowed head, with a look of unutterable yearning and of passionate tenderness.

At last Garth lifted his face. "Yours very sincerely, Garth Dalmain," he said. And, silently, Nurse Rosemary wrote it.