

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE ONLY WAY

WHEN Deryck Brand alighted at the little northern wayside station, he looked up and down the gravelled platform, more than half expecting to see Jane. The hour was early, but she invariably said: "So much the better" to any plan which involved rising earlier than usual. Nothing was to be seen, however, but his portmanteau in the distance — looking as if it had taken up a solitary and permanent position where the guard had placed it — and one slow porter, who appeared to be overwhelmed by the fact that he alone was on duty to receive the train.

There were no other passengers descending; there was no other baggage to put out. The guard swung up into his van as the train moved off.

The old porter, shading his eyes from the slanting rays of the morning sun, watched the train glide round the curve and disappear from sight; then slowly turned and looked the other way, — as if to make sure there was not another coming, — saw the portmanteau, and shambled towards it. He stood looking down upon it pensively, then moved slowly round, apparently reading the names and particulars of all the various continental hotels at which the portmanteau had recently stayed with its owner.

Dr. Brand never hurried people. He always said: "It answers best, in the long run, to let them take

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their own time. The minute or two gained by hurrying them is lost in the final results." But this applied chiefly to patients in the consulting-room; to anxious young students in hospital; or to nurses, too excitedly conscious at first of the fact that he was talking to them, to take in fully what he was saying. His habit of giving people, even in final moments, the full time they wanted, had once lost him an overcoat, almost lost him a train, and won him the thing in life he most desired. But that belongs to another story.

Meanwhile he wanted his breakfast on this fresh spring morning. And he wanted to see Jane. Therefore, as porter and portmanteau made no advance towards him, the doctor strode down the platform.

"Now then, my man!" he called.

"I beg your pardon?" said the Scotch porter.

"I want my portmanteau."

"Would this be your portmanteau?" inquired the porter doubtfully.

"It would," said the doctor. "And it and I would be on our way to Castle Gleneesh, if you would be bringing it out and putting it into the motor, which I see waiting outside."

"I will be fetching a truck," said the porter. But when he returned, carefully trundling it behind him, the doctor, the portmanteau, and the motor were all out of sight.

The porter shaded his eyes and gazed up the road. "I will be hoping it *was* his portmanteau," he said, and went back to his porridge.

Meanwhile the doctor sped up into the hills, his mind alight with eagerness to meet Jane and to learn the developments of the last few days. Her non appearance at the railway station filled him with an



undefinable anxiety. It would have been so like Jane to have been there, prompt to seize the chance of a talk with him alone before he reached the house. He had called up, in anticipation, such a vivid picture of her, waiting on the platform, — bright, alert, vigorous, with that fresh and healthy vigour which betokens a good night's rest, a pleasant early awakening, and a cold tub recently enjoyed, — and the disappointment of not seeing her had wrought in him a strange foreboding. What if her nerve had given way under the strain?

They turned a bend in the winding road, and the grey turrets of Gleneesh came in sight, high up on the other side of the glen, the moor stretching away behind and above it. As they wound up the valley to the moorland road which would bring them round to the house, the doctor could see, in the clear morning light, the broad lawn and terrace of Gleneesh, with its gay flower-beds, smooth gravelled walks, and broad stone parapet, from which was a drop almost sheer down into the glen below.

Simpson received him at the hall door; and he just stopped himself in time, as he was about to ask for Miss Champion. This perilous approach to a slip reminded him how carefully he must guard words and actions in this house, where Jane had successfully steered her intricate course. He would never forgive himself if he gave her away.

"Mr. Dalmain is in the library, Sir Deryck," said Simpson; and it was a very alert, clear-headed doctor who followed the man across the hall.

Garth rose from his chair and walked forward to meet him, his right hand outstretched, a smile of welcome on his face, and so direct and unhesitating a

course that the doctor had to glance at the sightless face to make sure that this lithe, graceful, easy-moving figure was indeed the blind man he had come to see. Then he noticed a length of brown silk cord stretched from an arm of the chair Garth had quitted to the door. Garth's left hand had slipped lightly along it as he walked.

The doctor put his hand into the one outstretched, and gripped it warmly.

"My dear fellow! What a change!"

"Isn't it?" said Garth delightedly. "And it is entirely she who has worked it, — the capital little woman you sent up to me. I want to tell you how first-rate she is." He had reached his chair again, and found and drew forward for the doctor the one in which Jane usually sat. "This is her own idea." He unhitched the cord, and let it fall to the floor, a fine string remaining attached to it and to the chair, by which he could draw it up again at will. "There is one on this side leading to the piano, and one here to the window. Now how should you know them apart?"

"They are brown, purple, and orange," replied the doctor.

"Yes," said Garth. "You know them by the colours, but I distinguish them by a slight difference in the thickness and in the texture, which you could not see, but which I can feel. And I enjoy thinking of the colours, too. And sometimes I wear ties and things to match them. You see, I know exactly how they look; and it was so like her to remember that. An ordinary nurse would have put red, green, and blue, and I should have sat and hated the thought of them, knowing how vilely they must be clashing with my Persian carpet. But she under-



stands how much colours mean to me, even though I cannot see them."

"I conclude that by 'she' you mean Nurse Rosemary," said the doctor. "I am glad she is a success."

"A success!" exclaimed Garth. "Why, she helped me to live again! I am ashamed to remember how at the bottom of all things I was when you came up before, Brand,—just pounding the wall, as old Robbie expresses it. You must have thought me a fool and a coward."

"I thought you neither, my dear fellow. You were coming through a stiffer fight than any of us have been called to face. Thank God, you have won."

"I owe a lot to you, Brand, and still more to Miss Gray. I wish she were here to see you. She is away for the week-end."

"Away! J—just now?" exclaimed the doctor, almost surprised into another slip.

"Yes; she went last night. She is week-ending in the neighbourhood. She said she was not going far, and should be back with me early on Monday morning. But she seemed to want a change of scene, and thought this a good opportunity, as I shall have you here most of the time. I say, Brand, I do think it is extraordinarily good of you to come all this way to see me. You know, from such a man as yourself it is almost overwhelming."

"You must not be overwhelmed, my dear chap; and, though I very truly came to see you, I am also up, about another old friend in the near neighbourhood in whom I am interested. I only mention this in order to be quite honest, and to lift from off you any possible burden of feeling yourself my only patient."

"Oh, thanks!" said Garth. "It lessens my com-

punction without diminishing my gratitude. And now you must be wanting a brush up and breakfast, and here am I selfishly keeping you from both. And I say, Brand," — Garth coloured hotly, boyishly, and hesitated, — "I am awfully sorry you will have no companion at your meals, Miss Gray being away. I do not like to think of you having them alone, but I — I always have mine by myself. Simpson attends to them."

He could not see the doctor's quick look of comprehension, but the understanding sympathy of the tone in which he said: "Ah yes. Yes, of course," without further comment, helped Garth to add: "I couldn't even have Miss Gray with me. We always take our meals apart. You cannot imagine how awful it is chasing your food all round your plate, and never sure it is not on the cloth, after all, or on your tie, while you are hunting for it elsewhere."

"No, I can't imagine," said the doctor. "No one could who had not been through it. But can you bear it better with Simpson than with Nurse Rosemary? She is trained to that sort of thing, you know."

Garth coloured again. "Well, you see, Simpson is the chap who shaves me, and gets me into my clothes, and takes me about; and, though it will always be a trial, it is a trial to which I am growing accustomed. You might put it thus: Simpson is eyes to my body; Miss Gray is vision to my mind. Simpson's is the only touch which comes to me in the darkness. Do you know, Miss Gray has never touched me, — not even to shake hands. I am awfully glad of this. I will tell you why presently, if I may. It makes her just a *mind* and *voice* to me, and nothing more; but



a wonderfully kind and helpful voice. I feel as if I could not live without her."

Garth rang the bell and Simpson appeared.

"Take Sir Deryck to his room; and he will tell you what time he would like breakfast. And when you have seen to it all, Simpson, I will go out for a turn. Then I shall be free, Brand, when you are. But do not give me any more time this morning if you ought to be resting, or out on the moors having a holiday from minds and men."

The doctor tubbed and got into his knickerbockers and an old Norfolk jacket; then found his way to the dining-room, and did full justice to an excellent breakfast. He was still pondering the problem of Jane, and at the same time wondering in another compartment of his mind in what sort of machine old Margery made her excellent coffee, when that good lady appeared, enveloped in an air of mystery, and the doctor immediately propounded the question.

"A jug," said old Margery. "And would you be coming with me, Sir Deryck, — and softly, — whenever you have finished your breakfast?"

"Softly," said Margery again, as they crossed the hall, the doctor's tall figure closely following in her portly wake. After mounting a few stairs she turned to whisper impressively: "It is not what ye make it *in*; it is *how* ye make it." She ascended a few more steps, then turned to say: "It all hangs upon the word *fresh*," and went on mounting. "Freshly roasted — freshly ground — water — freshly — boiled —" said old Margery, reaching the topmost stair somewhat breathless; then turning, bustled along a rather dark passage, thickly carpeted, and hung with old armour and pictures.

"Where are we going, Mistress Margery?" asked the doctor, adapting his stride to her trot — one to two.

"You will be seeing whenever we get there, Sir Deryck," said Margery. "And never touch it with metal, Sir Deryck. Pop it into an earthenware jug, pour your boiling water straight upon it, stir it with a wooden spoon, set it on the hob ten minutes to settle; the grounds will all go to the bottom, though you might not think it, and you pour it out — fragrant, strong, and clear. But the secret is, fresh, fresh, fresh, and don't stint your coffee."

Old Margery paused before a door at the end of the passage, knocked lightly; then looked up at the doctor with her hand on the door-handle, and an expression of pleading earnestness in her faithful Scotch eyes.

"And you will not forget the wooden spoon, Sir Deryck?"

The doctor looked down into the kind old face raised to his in the dim light. "I will not forget the wooden spoon, Mistress Margery," he said, gravely. And old Margery, turning the handle whispered mysteriously into the half-opened doorway: "It will be Sir Deryck, Miss Gray," and ushered the doctor into a cosy little sitting-room.

A bright fire burned in the grate. In a high-backed arm-chair in front of it sat Jane, with her feet on the fender. He could only see the top of her head, and her long grey knees; but both were unmistakably Jane's.

"Oh, Dicky!" she said, and a great thankfulness was in her voice, "is it you? Oh, come in, Boy, and shut the door. Are we alone? Come round here quick



and shake hands, or I shall be plunging about trying to find you."

In a moment the doctor had reached the hearth-rug, dropped on one knee in front of the large chair, and took the vaguely groping hands held out to him.

"Jeanette?" he said. "Jeanette!" And then surprise and emotion silenced him.

Jane's eyes were securely bandaged. A black silk scarf, folded in four thicknesses, was firmly tied at the back of her smooth coils of hair. There was a pathetic helplessness about her large capable figure, sitting alone, in this bright little sitting-room, doing nothing.

"Jeanette!" said the doctor, for the third time. "And you call this week-ending?"

"Dear," said Jane, "I have gone into Sightless Land for my week-end. Oh, Deryck, I had to do it. The only way really to help him is to know exactly what it means, in all the small, trying details. I never had much imagination, and I have exhausted what little I had. And he never complains, or explains how things come hardest. So the only way to find out, is to have forty-eight hours of it one's self. Old Margery and Simpson quite enter into it, and are helping me splendidly. Simpson keeps the coast clear if we want to come down or go out; because with two blind people about, it would be a complication if they ran into one another. Margery helps me with all the things in which I am helpless; and, oh Dicky, you would never believe how many they are! And the awful, awful dark — a black curtain always in front of you, sometimes seeming hard and firm, like a wall of coal, within an inch of your face; sometimes sinking away into soft depths of blackness — miles and miles of distant, silent, horrible darkness; until you feel you

must fall forward into it and be submerged and overwhelmed. And out of that darkness come voices. And if they speak loudly, they hit you like tapping hammers; and if they murmur indistinctly, they madden you because you can't *see* what is causing it. You can't see that they are holding pins in their mouths, and that therefore they are mumbling; or that they are half under the bed, trying to get out something which has rolled there, and therefore the voice seems to come from somewhere beneath the earth. And, because you cannot see these things to account for it, the variableness of sound torments you. Ah! — and the waking in the morning to the same blackness as you have had all night! I have experienced it just once, — I began my darkness before dinner last night, — and I assure you, Deryck, I dread to-morrow morning. Think what it must be to wake to that always, with no prospect of ever again seeing the sunlight! And then the meals —"

"What! You keep it on?" The doctor's voice sounded rather strained.

"Of course," said Jane. "And you cannot imagine the humiliation of following your food all round the plate, and then finding it on the table-cloth; of being quite sure there was a last bit somewhere, and when you had given up the search and gone on to another course, discovering it, eventually, in your lap. I do not wonder my poor boy would not let me come to his meals. But after this I believe he will, and I shall know exactly how to help him and how to arrange so that very soon he will have no difficulty. Oh, Dicky, I had to do it! There was no other way."

"Yes," said the doctor quietly, "you had to do it." And Jane in her blindness could not see the working



of his face, as he added below his breath: "You being *you*, dear, there was no other way."

"Ah, how glad I am you realise the necessity, Deryck! I had so feared you might think it useless or foolish. And it was now or never; because I trust — if he forgives me — this will be the only week-end I shall ever have to spend away from him. Boy, do you think he will forgive me?"

It was fortunate Jane was blind. The doctor swallowed a word, then: "Hush, dear," he said. "You make me sigh for the duchess's parrot. And I shall do no good here, if I lose patience with Dalmain. Now tell me; you really never remove that bandage?"

"Only to wash my face," replied Jane, smiling. "I can trust myself not to peep for two minutes. And last night I found it made my head so hot that I could not sleep; so I slipped it off for an hour or two, but woke and put it on again before dawn."

"And you mean to wear it until to-morrow morning?"

Jane smiled rather wistfully. She knew what was involved in that question.

"Until to-morrow night, Boy," she answered gently.

"But, Jeanette," exclaimed the doctor, in indignant protest; "surely you will see me before I go! My dear girl, would it not be carrying the experiment unnecessarily far?"

"Ah no," said Jane, leaning towards him with her pathetic bandaged eyes. "Don't you see, dear, you give me the chance of passing through what will in time be one of his hardest experiences, when his dearest friends will come and go, and be to him only voice and touch; their faces unseen and but dimly remembered? Deryck, just because this hearing and

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not seeing you *is* so hard, I realise how it is enriching me in what I can share with him. He must not have to say: 'Ah, but you saw him before he left.' I want to be able to say: 'He came and went, — my greatest friend, — and I did not see him at all.'"

The doctor walked over to the window and stood there, whistling softly. Jane knew he was fighting down his own vexation. She waited patiently. Presently the whistling stopped and she heard him laugh. Then he came back and sat down near her.

"You always were a *thorough* old thing!" he said. "No half measures would do. I suppose I must agree."

Jane reached out for his hand. "Ah, Boy," she said, "now you will help me. But I never before knew you so nearly selfish."

"The 'other man' is always a problem," said the doctor. "We male brutes, by nature, always want to be first with all our women; not merely with the one, but with all those in whom we consider, sometimes with egregious presumption, that we hold a right. You see it everywhere, — fathers towards their daughters, brothers as regards their sisters, friends in a friendship. The 'other man,' when he arrives, is always a pill to swallow. It is only natural, I suppose; but it is fallen nature and therefore to be surmounted. Now let me go and forage for your hat and coat, and take you out upon the moors. No? Why not? I often find things for Flower, so really I know likely places in which to search. Oh, all right! I will send Margery. But don't be long. And you need not be afraid of Dalmain hearing us, for I saw him just now walking briskly up and down the terrace, with only an occasional touch of his cane



against the parapet. How much you have already accomplished! We shall talk more freely out on the moor; and, as I march you along, we can find out tips which may be useful when the time comes for you to lead the 'other man' about. Only do be careful how you come downstairs with old Margery. Think if you fell upon her, Jane! She does make such excellent coffee!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

## THE MAN'S POINT OF VIEW

A DEEP peace reigned in the library at Gleneesh. Garth and Deryck sat together and smoked in complete fellowship, enjoying that sense of calm content which follows an excellent dinner and a day spent in moorland air.

Jane, sitting upstairs in her self-imposed darkness, with nothing to do but listen, fancied she could hear the low hum of quiet voices in the room beneath, carrying on a more or less continuous conversation.

It was a pity she could not see them as they sat together, each looking his very best, — Garth in the dinner jacket which suited his slight upright figure so well; the doctor in immaculate evening clothes of the latest cut and fashion, which he had taken the trouble to bring, knowing Jane expected the men of her acquaintance to be punctilious in the matter of evening dress, and little dreaming she would have, literally, no eyes for him.

And indeed the doctor himself was fastidious to a degree where clothes were concerned, and always well groomed and unquestionably correct in cut and fashion, excepting in the case of his favourite old Norfolk jacket. This he kept for occasions when he intended to be what he called "happy and glorious," though Lady Brand made gentle but persistent attempts to dispose of it.

The old Norfolk jacket had walked the moors that