

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

morning with Jane. She had recognised the feel of it as he drew her hand within his arm, and they had laughed over its many associations. But now Simpson was folding it and putting it away, and a very correctly clad doctor sat in an arm-chair in front of the library fire, his long legs crossed the one over the other, his broad shoulders buried in the depths of the chair.

Garth sat where he could feel the warm flame of the fire, pleasant in the chill evening which succeeded the bright spring day. His chair was placed sideways, so that he could, with his hand, shield his face from his visitor should he wish to do so.

"Yes," Dr. Brand was saying thoughtfully, "I can easily see that all things which reach you in that darkness assume a different proportion and possess a greatly enhanced value. But I think you will find, as time goes on, and you come in contact with more people, there will be a great readjustment, and you will become less consciously sensitive to sound and touch from others. At present your whole nervous system is highly strung, and responds with an exaggerated vibration to every impression made upon it. A highly strung nervous system usually exaggerates. And the medium of sight having been taken away, the other means of communication with the outer world, hearing and touch, draw to themselves an overplus of nervous force, and have become painfully sensitive. Eventually things will right themselves, and they will only be usefully keen and acute. What was it you were going to tell me about Nurse Rosemary not shaking hands?"

"Ah yes," said Garth. "But first I want to ask, is it a rule of her order, or guild, or institution, or

whatever it is to which she belongs, that the nurses should never shake hands with their patients?"

"Not that I have ever heard," replied the doctor.

"Well, then, it must have been Miss Gray's own perfect intuition as to what I want, and what I don't want. For from the very first she has never shaken hands, nor in any way touched me. Even in passing across letters, and handing me things, as she does scores of times daily, never once have I felt her fingers against mine."

"And this pleases you?" inquired the doctor, blowing smoke rings into the air, and watching the blind face intently.

"Ah, I am so grateful for it," said Garth earnestly. "Do you know, Brand, when you suggested sending me a lady nurse and secretary, I felt I could not possibly stand having a woman touch me."

"So you said," commented the doctor quietly.

"No! Did I? What a bear you must have thought me."

"By no means," said the doctor, "but a distinctly unusual patient. As a rule, men —"

"Ah, I dare say," Garth interposed half impatiently. "There was a time when I should have liked a soft little hand about me. And I dare say by now I should often enough have caught it and held it, perhaps kissed it — who knows? I used to do such things, lightly enough. But, Brand, when a man has known the touch of *The Woman*, and when that touch has become nothing but a memory; when one is dashed into darkness, and that memory becomes one of the few things which remain, and, remaining, brings untold comfort, can you wonder if one fears another touch which might in any

way dim that memory, supersede it, or take away from its utter sacredness?"

"I understand," said the doctor slowly. "It does not come within my own experience, but I understand. Only — my dear boy, may I say it? — if the One Woman exists — and it is excusable in your case to doubt it, because there were so many — surely her place should be here; her actual touch, one of the things which remain."

"Ah, say it," answered Garth, lighting another cigarette. "I like to hear it said, although as a matter of fact you might as well say that if the view from the terrace exists, I ought to be able to see it. The view is there, right enough, but my own deficiency keeps me from seeing it."

"In other words," said the doctor, leaning forward and picking up the match which, not being thrown so straight as usual, had just missed the fire; "in other words, though She was the One Woman, you were not the One Man?"

"Yes," said Garth bitterly, but almost beneath his breath. "I was 'a mere boy.'"

"Or you thought you were not," continued the doctor, seeming not to have heard the last remark. "As a matter of fact, you are always the One Man to the One Woman, unless another is before you in the field. Only it may take time and patience to prove it to her."

Garth sat up and turned a face of blank surprise towards the doctor. "What an extraordinary statement!" he said. "Do you really mean it?"

"Absolutely," replied the doctor in a tone of quiet conviction. "If you eliminate all other considerations, such as money, lands, titles, wishes of friends,

attraction of exteriors — that is to say, admiration of mere physical beauty in one another, which is after all just a question of comparative anatomy; if, freed of all this social and habitual environment, you could place the man and the woman in a mental Garden of Eden, and let them face one another, stripped of all shams and conventionalities, soul viewing soul, naked and unashamed; if under those circumstances she is so truly his mate, that all the noblest of the man cries out: 'This is the One Woman!' then I say, so truly is he her mate, that he cannot fail to be the One Man; only he must have the confidence required to prove it to her. On him it bursts, as a revelation; on her it dawns slowly, as the breaking of the day."

"Oh, my God," murmured Garth brokenly, "it was just that! The Garden of Eden, soul to soul, with no reservations, nothing to fear, nothing to hide. I realised her my *wife*, and called her so. And the next morning she called *me* 'a mere boy,' whom she could not for a moment think of marrying. So what becomes of your fool theory, Brand?"

"Confirmed," replied the doctor quietly. "Eve, afraid of the immensity of her bliss, doubtful of herself, fearful of coming short of the marvel of his ideal of her, fleeing from Adam, to hide among the trees of the garden. Don't talk about fool theories, my boy. The fool-fact was Adam, if he did not start in prompt pursuit."

Garth sat forward, his hands clutching the arms of his chair. That quiet, level voice was awakening doubts as to his view of the situation, the first he had had since the moment of turning and walking down the Shenstone village church three years ago. His face was livid, and as the fire-light played upon it

the doctor saw beads of perspiration gleam on his forehead.

"Oh, Brand," he said, "I am blind. Be merciful. Things mean so terribly much in the dark."

The doctor considered. Could his nurses and students have seen the look on his face at that moment, they would have said that he was performing a most critical and delicate operation, in which a slip of the scalpel might mean death to the patient. They would have been right; for the whole future of two people hung in the balance; depending, in this crisis, upon the doctor's firmness and yet delicacy of touch. This strained white face in the firelight, with its beads of mental agony and its appealing "I am blind," had not entered into the doctor's calculations. It was a view of "the other man" upon which he could not look unmoved. But the thought of that patient figure with bandaged eyes sitting upstairs in suspense, stretching dear helpless hands to him, steadied the doctor's nerve. He looked into the fire.

"You may be blind, Dalmain, but I do not want you to be a fool," said the doctor quietly.

"Am I — was I — a fool?" asked Garth.

"How can I judge?" replied the doctor. "Give me a clear account of the circumstances from your point of view, and I will give you my opinion of the case."

His tone was so completely dispassionate and matter-of-fact, that it had a calming effect on Garth, giving him also a sense of security. The doctor might have been speaking of a sore throat, or a tendency to sciatica.

Garth leaned back in his chair, slipped his hand into the breast-pocket of his jacket, and touched a letter lying there. Dare he risk it? Could he, for once,

take for himself the comfort of speaking of his trouble to a man he could completely trust, and yet avoid the danger of betraying her identity to one who knew her so intimately?

Garth weighed this, after the manner of a chess-player looking several moves ahead. Could the conversation become more explicit, sufficiently so to be of use, and yet no clue be given which would reveal Jane as the One Woman?

Had the doctor uttered a word of pressure or suggestion, Garth would have decided for silence. But the doctor did not speak. He leaned forward and reached the poker, mending the fire with extreme care and method. He placed a fragrant pine log upon the springing flame, and as he did so he whistled softly the closing bars of "Veni Creator Spiritus."

Garth, occupied with his own mental struggle, was, for once, oblivious to sounds from without, and did not realise why, at this critical moment, these words should have come with gentle insistence into his mind:

"Keep far our foes; give peace at home;
Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come."

He took them as an omen. They turned the scale.

"Brand," he said, "if, as you are so kind as to suggest, I give myself the extreme relief of confiding in you, will you promise me never to attempt to guess at the identity of the One Woman?"

The doctor smiled; and the smile in his voice as he answered, added to Garth's sense of security.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I never guess at other people's secrets. It is a form of mental recreation which does not appeal to me, and which I should find neither entertaining nor remunerative. If I know

them already, I do not require to guess them. If I do not know them, and their possessors wish me to remain in ignorance, I would as soon think of stealing their purse as of filching their secret."

"Ah, thanks," said Garth. "Personally, I do not mind what you know. But I owe it to her, that her name should not appear."

"Undoubtedly," said the doctor. "Except in so far as she herself chooses to reveal it, the One Woman's identity should always remain a secret. Get on with your tale, old chap. I will not interrupt."

"I will state it as simply and as shortly as I can," began Garth. "And you will understand that there are details of which no fellow could speak. — I had known her several years in a friendly way, just staying at the same houses, and meeting at Lord's and Henley and all the places where those in the same set do meet. I always liked her, and always felt at my best with her, and thought no end of her opinion, and so forth. She was a friend and a real chum to me, and to lots of other fellows. But one never thought of love-making in connection with her. All the silly things one says to ordinary women she would have laughed at. If one had sent her flowers to wear, she would have put them in a vase and wondered for whom they had really been intended. She danced well, and rode straight; but the man she danced with had to be awfully good at it, or he found himself being guided through the giddy maze; and the man who wanted to be in the same field with her, must be prepared for any fence or any wall. Not that I ever saw her in the hunting-field; her love of life and of fair play would have kept her out of that. But I use it as a descriptive illustration. One was always glad

to meet her in a house party, though one could not have explained why. It is quite impossible to describe her. She was just — well, just —"

The doctor saw "just *Jane*" trembling on Garth's lips, and knew how inadequate was every adjective to express this name. He did not want the flood of Garth's confidences checked, so he supplied the needed words. "Just a good sort. Yes, I quite understand. Well?"

"I had had my infatuations, plenty of them," went on the eager young voice. "The one thing I thought of in women was their exteriors. Beauty of all kinds — of any kind — crazed me for the moment. I never wanted to marry them, but I always wanted to paint them. Their mothers, and aunts, and other old dowagers in the house parties used to think I meant marriage, but the girls themselves knew better. I don't believe a girl now walks this earth who would accuse me of flirting. I admired their beauty, and they knew it, and they knew that was all my admiration meant. It was a pleasant experience at the time, and, in several instances, helped forward good marriages later on. Pauline Lister was apportioned to me for two whole seasons, but she eventually married the man on whose jolly old staircase I painted her. Why didn't I come a cropper over any of them? Because there were too many, I suppose. Also, the attraction was skin-deep. I don't mind telling you quite frankly: the only one whose beauty used to cause me a real pang was Lady Brand. But when I had painted it and shown it to the world in its perfection, I was content. I asked no more of any woman than to paint her, and find her paintable. I could not explain this to the husbands and mothers and chap-

erons, but the women themselves understood it well enough; and as I sit here in my darkness not a memory rises up to reproach me."

"Good boy," said Deryck Brand, laughing. "You were vastly misunderstood, but I believe you."

"You see," resumed Garth, "that sort of thing being merely skin-deep, I went no deeper. The only women I really knew were my mother, who died when I was nineteen, and Margery Graem, whom I always hugged at meeting and parting, and always shall hug until I kiss the old face in its coffin, or she straightens me in mine. Those ties of one's infancy and boyhood are among the closest and most sacred life can show. Well so things were until a certain evening in June several years ago. She — the One Woman — and I were in the same house party at a lovely old place in the country. One afternoon we had been talking intimately, but quite casually and frankly. I had no more thought of wanting to marry her than of proposing to old Margery. Then — something happened, — I must not tell you what; it would give too clear a clue to her identity. But it revealed to me, in a few marvellous moments, the woman in her; the wife, the mother; the strength, the tenderness; the exquisite perfection of her true, pure soul. In five minutes there awakened in me a hunger for her which nothing could still, which nothing ever will still, until I stand beside her in the Golden City, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; and there shall be no more darkness, or depending upon sun, moon, or candle, for the glory of God shall lighten it; and there shall be no more sorrow, neither shall there be any more pain, for former things shall have passed away."

The blind face shone in the firelight. Garth's retrospection was bringing him visions of things to come.

The doctor sat quite still and watched the vision fade. Then he said: "Well?"

"Well," continued the young voice in the shadow, with a sound in it of having dropped back to earth and finding it a mournful place; "I never had a moment's doubt as to what had happened to me. I knew I loved her; I knew I wanted her; I knew her presence made my day and her absence meant chill night; and every day was radiant, for she was there."

Garth paused for breath and to enjoy a moment of silent retrospection.

The doctor's voice broke in with a question, clear, incisive. "Was she a pretty woman; handsome, beautiful?"

"A pretty woman?" repeated Garth, amazed. "Good heavens, no! Handsome? Beautiful? Well you have me there, for, 'pon my honour, I don't know."

"I mean, would you have wished to paint her?"

"I *have* painted her," said Garth very low, a moving tenderness in his voice; "and my two paintings of her, though done in sadness and done from memory, are the most beautiful work I ever produced. No eye but my own has ever seen them, and now none ever will see them, excepting those of one whom I must perforce trust to find them for me and bring them to me for destruction."

"And that will be — ?" queried the doctor.

"Nurse Rosemary Gray," said Garth.

The doctor kicked the pine log, and the flames darted up merrily. "You have chosen well," he said, and had to make a conscious effort to keep the mirth in his face from passing into his voice. "Nurse

Rosemary will be discreet. Very good. Then we may take it the One Woman was beautiful?"

But Garth looked perplexed. "I do not know," he answered slowly. "I cannot see her through the eyes of others. My vision of her, in that illuminating moment, followed the inspired order of things,—spirit, soul, and body. Her spirit was so pure and perfect, her soul so beautiful, noble, and womanly, that the body which clothed soul and spirit partook of their perfection and became unutterably dear."

"I see," said the doctor, very gently. "Yes, you dear fellow, I see." (Oh, Jane, Jane! You were blind, without a bandage, in those days!)

"Several glorious days went by," continued Garth. "I realise now that I was living in the glow of my own certainty that she was the One Woman. It was so clear and sweet and wonderful to me, that I never dreamed of it not being equally clear to her. We did a lot of music together for pure enjoyment; we talked of other people for the fun of it; we enjoyed and appreciated each other's views and opinions; but we did not talk of ourselves, because we *knew*, — at least *I* knew, and, before God, I thought she did. Every time I saw her she seemed more grand and perfect. I held the golden key to trifling matters not understood before. We young fellows, who all admired her, used nevertheless to joke a bit about her wearing collars and stocks, top boots and short skirts; whacking her leg with a riding-whip, and stirring the fire with her toe. But after that evening, I understood all this to be a sort of fence behind which she hid her exquisite womanliness, because it was of a deeper quality than any man looking upon the mere surface of her had ever fathomed or understood. And when she came

trailing down in the evening, in something rich and clinging and black, with lots of soft old lace covering her bosom and moving with the beating of her great tender heart; ah, then my soul rejoiced and my eyes took their fill of delight! I saw her, as all day long I had known her to be, — perfect in her proud, sweet womanliness."

"Is he really unconscious," thought the doctor, "of how unmistakable a word-picture of Jane he is painting?"

"Very soon," continued Garth, "we had three days apart, and then met again at another house, in a weekend party. One of the season's beauties was there, with whom my name was being freely coupled, and something she said on that subject, combined with the fearful blankness of those three interminable days, made me resolve to speak without delay. I asked her to come out on to the terrace that evening. We were alone. It was a moonlight night."

A long silence. The doctor did not break it. He knew his friend was going over in his mind all those things of which a man does not speak to another man.

At last Garth said simply, "I told her."

No comment from the doctor, who was vividly reminded of Jane's 'Then — it happened,' when *she* had reached this point in the story. After a few moments of further silence, steeped in the silver moonlight of reminiscence for Garth; occupied by the doctor in a rapid piecing in of Jane's version; the sad young voice continued:

"I thought she understood completely. Afterwards I knew she had not understood at all. Her actions led me to believe I was accepted, taken into her great love, even as she was wrapped around by mine. Not

through fault of hers, — ah, no; she was blameless throughout; but because she did not, could not, understand what any touch of hers must mean to me. In her dear life, there had never been another man; that much I knew by unerring instinct and by her own admission. I have sometimes thought that she may have had an ideal in her girlish days, against whom, in after years, she measured others, and, finding them come short, held them at arm's length. But, if I am right in this surmise, he must have been a blind fool, unconscious of the priceless love which might have been his, had he tried to win it. For I am certain that, until that night, no man's love had ever flamed about her; she had never felt herself enveloped in a cry which was all one passionate, inarticulate, inexplicable, boundless need of herself. While I thought she understood and responded, — Heaven knows I *did* think it, — she did not in the least understand, and was only trying to be sympathetic and kind."

The doctor stirred in his chair, slowly crossed one leg over the other, and looked searchingly into the blind face. He was finding these confidences of the "other man" more trying than he had expected.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked rather huskily.

"Quite sure," said Garth. "Listen. I called her — what she was to me just then, what I wanted her to be always, what she *is* forever, so far as my part goes, and will be till death and beyond. That one word, — no, there were two, — those two words made her understand. I see that now. She rose at once and put me from her. She said I must give her twelve hours for quiet thought, and she would come to me in the village church next morning with her answer. Brand,

you may think me a fool; you cannot think me a more egregious ass than I now think myself; but I was absolutely certain she was mine; so sure that, when she came, and we were alone together in the house of God, instead of going to her with the anxious haste of suppliant and lover, I called her to me at the chancel step as if I were indeed her husband and had the right to bid her come. She came, and, just as a sweet formality before taking her to me, I asked for her answer. It was this: 'I cannot marry a mere boy.'"

Garth's voice choked in his throat on the last word. His head was bowed in his hands. He had reached the point where most things stopped for him; where all things had ceased forever to be as they were before.

The room seemed strangely silent. The eager voice had poured out into it such a flow of love and hope and longing; such a revealing of a soul in which the true love of beauty had created perpetual youth; of a heart held free by high ideals from all playing with lesser loves, but rising to volcanic force and height when the true love was found at last.

The doctor shivered at that anticlimax, as if the chill of an empty church were in his bones. He knew how far worse it had been than Garth had told. He knew of the cruel, humiliating question: "How old are you?" Jane had confessed to it. He knew how the outward glow of adoring love had faded as the mind was suddenly turned inward to self-contemplation. He had known it all as abstract fact. Now he saw it actually before him. He saw Jane's stricken lover, bowed beside him in his blindness, living again through those sights and sounds which no merciful curtain of oblivion could ever hide or veil.

The doctor had his faults, but they were not Peter's. He never, under any circumstances, spoke *because* he wist not what to say.

He leaned forward and laid a hand very tenderly on Garth's shoulder. "Poor chap," he said. "Ah, poor old chap."

And for a long while they sat thus in silence.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DOCTOR'S DIAGNOSIS

"SO you expressed no opinion? explained nothing? let him go on believing that? Oh, Dicky! And you might have said so much!"

In the quiet of the Scotch Sabbath morning, Jane and the doctor had climbed the winding path from the end of the terrace, which zigzagged up to a clearing amongst the pines. Two fallen trees at a short distance from each other provided convenient seats in full sunshine, facing a glorious view, — down into the glen, across the valley, and away to the purple hills beyond. The doctor had guided Jane to the sunnier of the two trunks, and seated himself beside her. Then he had quietly recounted practically the whole of the conversation of the previous evening.

"I expressed no opinion. I explained nothing. I let him continue to believe what he believes, because it is the only way to keep you on the pinnacle where he has placed you. Let any other reason for your conduct than an almost infantine ignorance of men and things be suggested and accepted, and down you will come, my poor Jane, and great will be the fall. Mine shall not be the hand thus to hurl you headlong. As you say, I might have said so much, but I might also have lived to regret it."

"I should fall into his arms," said Jane recklessly, "and I would sooner be there than on a pinnacle."

"Excuse me, my good girl," replied the doctor.