

Jane had been sitting with her arms folded upon the table, her yearning eyes fixed upon Garth's bowed head. When he wished her a thousand miles away she buried her face upon them. She was so near him that had Garth stretched out his right hand again, it would have touched the heavy coils of her soft hair. But Garth did not raise his head, and Jane still sat with her face buried.

There was silence in the library for a few moments after Garth's question and appeal. Then Jane lifted her face.

"There is no one in the room, Mr. Dalmain," said Nurse Rosemary, "but *you* — and *me*."

## CHAPTER XXVII

## THE EYES GARTH TRUSTED

"SO you enjoy motoring, Miss Gray?"

They had been out in the motor together for the first time, and were now having tea together in the library, also for the first time; and, for the first time, Nurse Rosemary was pouring out for her patient. This was only Monday afternoon, and already her week-end experience had won for her many new privileges.

"Yes, I like it, Mr. Dalmain; particularly in this beautiful air."

"Have you had a case before in a house where they kept a motor?"

Nurse Rosemary hesitated. "Yes, I have stayed in houses where they had motors, and I have been in Dr. Brand's. He met me at Charing Cross once with his electric brougham."

"Ah, I know," said Garth. "Very neat. On your way to a case, or returning from a case?"

Nurse Rosemary smiled, then bit her lip. "To a case," she replied quite gravely. "I was on my way to his house to talk it over and receive instructions."

"It must be splendid working under such a fellow as Brand," said Garth; "and yet I am certain most of the best things you do are quite your own idea. For instance, he did not suggest your week-end plan, did he? I thought not. Ah, the difference it has made! Now tell me. When we were motoring we



never slowed up suddenly to pass anything, or tooted to make something move out of the way, without your having already told me what we were going to pass or what was in the road a little way ahead. It was: 'We shall be passing a hay cart at the next bend; there will be just room, but we shall have to slow up'; or, 'An old red cow is in the very middle of the road a little way on. I think she will move if we hoot.' Then, when the sudden slow down and swerve came, or the toot toot of the horn, I knew all about it and was not taken unawares. Did you know how trying it is in blindness to be speeding along and suddenly alter pace without having any idea why, or swerve to one side and not know what one has just been avoiding? This afternoon our spin was pure pleasure, because not once did you let these things happen. I knew all that was taking place, as soon as I should have known it had I had my sight."

Jane pressed her hand over her bosom. Ah, how able she was always to fill her boy's life with pure pleasure. How little of the needless suffering of the blind should ever be his if she won the right to be beside him always.

"Well, Mr. Dalmain," said Nurse Rosemary, "I motored to the station with Sir Deryck yesterday afternoon, and I noticed all you describe. I have never before felt nervous in a motor, but I realised yesterday how largely that is owing to the fact that all the time one keeps an unconscious look-out; measuring distances, judging speed, and knowing what each turn of the handle means. So when we go out you must let me be eyes to you in this."

"How good you are!" said Garth, gratefully. "And did you see Sir Deryck off?"

"No. I did not *see* Sir Deryck at all. But he said good-bye, and I felt the kind, strong grip of his hand as he left me in the car. And I sat there and heard his train start and rush away into the distance."

"Was it not hard to you to let him come and go and not to see his face?"

Jane smiled. "Yes, it was hard," said Nurse Rosemary; "but I wished to experience that hardness."

"It gives one an awful blank feeling, doesn't it?" said Garth.

"Yes. It almost makes one wish the friend had not come."

"Ah — " There was a depth of contented comprehension in Garth's sigh; and the brave heart, which had refused to lift the bandage to the very last, felt more than recompensed.

"Next time I reach the Gulf of Partings in Sightless Land," continued Garth, "I shall say: 'A dear friend has stood here for my sake.'"

"Oh, and one's meals," said Nurse Rosemary, laughing. "Are they not grotesquely trying?"

"Yes, of course; I had forgotten you would understand all that now. I never could explain to you before why I must have my meals alone. You know the hunt and chase?"

"Yes," said Nurse Rosemary, "and it usually resolves itself into 'gone away,' and turns up afterwards unexpectedly! But, Mr. Dalmain, I have thought out several ways of helping so much in that and making it all quite easy. If you will consent to have your meals with me at a small table, you will see how smoothly all will work. And later on, if I am still here, when you begin to have visitors, you must let me sit at your left, and all my little ways of help-



ing would be so unobtrusive, that no one would notice."

"Oh, thanks," said Garth. "I am immensely grateful. I have often been reminded of a silly game we used to play at Overdene, at dessert, when we were a specially gay party. Do you know the old Duchess of Meldrum? Or anyway, you may have heard of her? Ah yes, of course, Sir Deryck knows her. She called him in once to her macaw. She did not mention the macaw on the telephone, and Sir Deryck, thinking he was wanted for the duchess, threw up an important engagement and went immediately. Luckily she was at her town house. She would have sent just the same had she been at Overdene. I wish you knew Overdene. The duchess gives perfectly delightful 'best parties,' in which all the people who really enjoy meeting one another find themselves together, and are well fed and well housed and well mounted, and do exactly as they like; while the dear old duchess tramps in and out, with her queer beasts and birds, shedding a kindly and exciting influence wherever she goes. Last time I was there she used to let out six Egyptian jerboas in the drawing-room every evening after dinner, awfully jolly little beggars, like miniature kangaroos. They used to go skipping about on their hind legs, frightening some of the women into fits by hiding under their gowns, and making young footmen drop trays of coffee cups. The last importation is a toucan, — a South American bird, with a beak like a banana, and a voice like an old sheep in despair. But Tommy, the scarlet macaw, remains prime favourite, and I must say he is clever and knows more than you would think.

"Well, at Overdene we used to play a silly game at

dessert with muscatels. We each put five raisins at intervals round our plates, then we shut our eyes and made jabs at them with forks. Whoever succeeded first in spiking and eating all five was the winner. The duchess never would play. She enjoyed being umpire, and screaming at the people who peeped. Miss Champion and I — she is the duchess's niece, you know — always played fair, and we nearly always made a dead heat of it."

"Yes," said Nurse Rosemary, "I know that game. I thought of it at once when I had my blindfold meals."

"Ah," cried Garth, "had I known, I would not have let you do it!"

"I knew that," said Nurse Rosemary. "That was why I week-ended."

Garth passed his cup to be refilled, and leaned forward confidentially.

"Now," he said, "I can venture to tell you one of my minor trials. I am always so awfully afraid of there being a *fly* in things. Ever since I was a small boy I have had such a horror of inadvertently eating flies. When I was about six, I heard a lady visitor say to my mother: 'Oh, one *has* to swallow a fly about once a year! I have just swallowed mine, on the way here!' This terrible idea of an annual fly took possession of my small mind. I used to be thankful when it happened, and I got it over. I remember quickly finishing a bit of bread in which I had seen signs of legs and wings, feeling it was an easy way of taking it and I should thus be exempt for twelve glad months; but I had to run up and down the terrace with clenched hands while I swallowed it. And when I discovered the fallacy of the annual fly, I was just as particular in my dread of an accidental



one. I don't believe I ever sat down to sardines on toast at a restaurant without looking under the toast for my bugbear, though as I lifted it I felt rather like the old woman who always looks under the bed for a burglar. Ah, but since the accident this foolishly small thing *has* made me suffer! I cannot say: 'Simpson, are you sure there is not a fly in this soup?' Simpson would say: 'No-sir; no fly-sir,' and would cough behind his hand, and I could never ask him again."

Nurse Rosemary leaned forward and placed his cup where he could reach it easily, just touching his right hand with the edge of the saucer. "Have all your meals with me," she said, in a tone of such complete understanding, that it was almost a caress; "and I can promise there shall never be any flies in anything. Could you not trust my eyes for this?"

And Garth replied, with a happy, grateful smile: "I could trust your kind and faithful eyes for anything. Ah! and that reminds me: I want to intrust to them a task I could confide to no one else. Is it twilight yet, Miss Gray, or is an hour of daylight left to us?"

Nurse Rosemary glanced out of the window and looked at her watch. "We ordered tea early," she said, "because we came in from our drive quite hungry. It is not five o'clock yet, and a radiant afternoon. The sun sets at half past seven."

"Then the light is good," said Garth. "Have you finished tea? The sun will be shining in at the west window of the studio. You know my studio at the top of the house? You fetched the studies of Lady Brand from there. I dare say you noticed stacks of canvases in the corners. Some are unused; some

contain mere sketches or studies; some are finished pictures. Miss Gray, among the latter are two which I am most anxious to identify and to destroy. I made Simpson guide me up the other day and leave me there alone. And I tried to find them by touch; but I could not be sure, and I soon grew hopelessly confused amongst all the canvases. I did not wish to ask Simpson's help, because the subjects are — well, somewhat unusual, and if he found out I had destroyed them it might set him wondering and talking, and one hates to awaken curiosity in a servant. I could not fall back on Sir Deryck because he would have recognised the portraits. The principal figure is known to him. When I painted those pictures I never dreamed of any eye but my own seeing them. So you, my dear and trusted secretary, are the one person to whom I can turn. Will you do what I ask? And will you do it now?"

Nurse Rosemary pushed back her chair. "Why of course, Mr. Dalmain. I am here to do anything and everything you may desire; and to do it when you desire it."

Garth took a key from his waistcoat pocket, and laid it on the table. "There is the studio latch-key. I think the canvases I want are in the corner furthest from the door, behind a yellow Japanese screen. They are large — five feet by three and a half. If they are too cumbersome for you to bring down, lay them face to face, and ring for Simpson. But do not leave him alone with them."

Nurse Rosemary picked up the key, rose, and went over to the piano, which she opened. Then she tightened the purple cord, which guided Garth from his chair to the instrument.



"Sit and play," she said, "while I am upstairs, doing your commission. But just tell me one thing. You know how greatly your work interests me. When I find the pictures, is it your wish that I give them a mere cursory glance, just sufficient for identification; or may I look at them, in the beautiful studio light? You can trust me to do whichever you desire."

The artist in Garth could not resist the wish to have his work seen and appreciated. "You may look at them of course, if you wish," he said. "They are quite the best work I ever did, though I painted them wholly from memory. That is — I mean, that used to be — a knack of mine. And they are in no sense imaginary. I painted exactly what I saw — at least, so far as the female face and figure are concerned. And they make the pictures. The others are mere accessories."

He stood up, and went to the piano. His fingers began to stray softly amongst the harmonies of the "Veni."

Nurse Rosemary moved towards the door. "How shall I know them?" she asked, and waited.

The chords of the "Veni" hushed to a murmur. Garth's voice from the piano came clear and distinct, but blending with the harmonies as if he were reciting to music.

"A woman and a man . . . alone, in a garden — but the surroundings are only indicated. She is in evening dress; soft, black, and trailing; with lace at her breast. It is called: '*The Wife*.'"

"Yes?"

"The same woman; the same scene; but without the man, this time. No need to paint the man; for now — visible or invisible — to her, he is always

there. In her arms she holds" — the low murmur of chords ceased; there was perfect silence in the room — "a little child. It is called: '*The Mother*.'"

The "Veni" burst forth in an unrestrained upbearing of confident petition:

"*Keep far our foes; give peace at home*" — and the door closed behind Nurse Rosemary.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### IN THE STUDIO

JANE mounted to the studio; unlocked the door; and, entering, closed it after her.

The evening sun shone through a western window, imparting an added richness to the silk screens and hangings; the mauve wistaria of a Japanese embroidery; or the golden dragon of China on a deep purple ground, wound up in its own interminable tail, and showing rampant claws in unexpected places.

Several times already Jane had been into Garth's studio, but always to fetch something for which he waited eagerly below; and she had never felt free to linger. Margery had a duplicate key; for she herself went up every day to open the windows, dust tenderly all special treasures; and keep it exactly as its owner had liked it kept, when his quick eyes could look around it. But this key was always on Margery's bunch; and Jane did not like to ask admission, and risk a possible refusal.

Now, however, she could take her own time; and she seated herself in one of the low and very deep wicker lounge-chairs, comfortably upholstered; so exactly fitting her proportions, and supporting arms, knees, and head, just rightly, that it seemed as if all other chairs would in future appear inadequate, owing to the absolute perfection of this one. Ah, to be just that to her beloved! To so fully meet his need, at every point, that her presence should be to him

always a source of strength, and rest, and consolation.

She looked around the room. It was so like Garth; every detail perfect; every shade of colour enhancing another, and being enhanced by it. The arrangements for regulating the light, both from roof and windows; the easels of all kinds and sizes; clean bareness, where space, and freedom from dust, were required; the luxurious comfort round the fireplace, and in nooks and corners; all were so perfect. And the plain brown wall-paper, of that beautiful quiet shade which has in it no red, and no yellow; a clear nut-brown. On an easel near the further window stood an unfinished painting; palette and brushes beside it, just as Garth had left them when he went out on that morning, nearly three months ago; and, vaulting over a gate to protect a little animal from unnecessary pain, was plunged himself into such utter loss and anguish.

Jane rose, and took stock of all his quaint treasures on the mantel-piece. Especially her mind was held and fascinated by a stout little bear in brass, sitting solidly yet jauntily on its haunches, its front paws clasping a brazen pole; its head turned sideways; its small, beady, eyes, looking straight before it. The chain, from its neck to the pole denoted captivity and possible fierceness. Jane had no doubt its head would lift, and its body prove a receptacle for matches; but she felt equally certain that, should she lift its head and look, no matches would be within it. This little bear was unmistakably Early Victorian; a friend of childhood's days; and would not be put to common uses. She lifted the head. The body was empty. She replaced it gently on the mantel-piece, and realised



that she was deliberately postponing an ordeal which must be faced.

Deryck had told her of Garth's pictures of the One Woman. Garth, himself, had now told her even more. But the time had come when she must see them for herself. It was useless to postpone the moment. She looked towards the yellow screen.

Then she walked over to the western window, and threw it wide open. The sun was dipping gently towards the purple hills. The deep blue of the sky began to pale, as a hint of lovely rose crept into it. Jane looked heavenward and, thrusting her hands deeply into her pockets, spoke aloud. "Before God" she said, — "in case I am never able to say or think it again, I will say it now — *I believe I was right*. I considered Garth's future happiness, and I considered my own. I decided as I did for both our sakes, at terrible cost to present joy. But, before God, I believed I was right; and — *I believe it still.*"

Jane never said it again.

## CHAPTER XXIX

## JANE LOOKS INTO LOVE'S MIRROR

BEHIND the yellow screen, Jane found a great confusion of canvases, and unmistakable evidence of the blind hands which had groped about in a vain search, and then made fruitless endeavours to sort and rearrange. Very tenderly, Jane picked up each canvas from the fallen heap; turning it the right way up, and standing it with its face to the wall. Beautiful work, was there; some of it finished; some, incomplete. One or two faces she knew, looked out at her in their pictured loveliness. But the canvases she sought were not there.

She straightened herself, and looked around. In a further corner, partly concealed by a Cairo screen, stood another pile. Jane went to them.

Almost immediately she found the two she wanted; larger than the rest, and distinguishable at a glance by the soft black gown of the central figure.

Without giving them more than a passing look, she carried them over to the western window, and placed them in a good light. Then she drew up the chair in which she had been sitting; took the little brass bear in her left hand, as a talisman to help her through what lay before her; turned the second picture with its face to the easel; and sat down to the quiet contemplation of the first.

The noble figure of a woman, nobly painted, was the first impression which leapt from eye to brain. Yes.