

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.

nobility came first, in stately pose, in uplifted brow, in breadth of dignity. Then — as you marked the grandly massive figure, too well-proportioned to be cumbersome, but large and full, and amply developed; the length of limb; the firmly planted feet; the large capable hands, — you realised the second impression conveyed by the picture, to be strength; — strength to do; strength to be; strength to continue. Then you looked into the face. And there you were confronted with a great surprise. The third thought expressed by the picture was Love — love, of the highest, holiest, most ideal, kind; yet, withal, of the most tenderly human order; and you found it in that face.

It was a large face, well proportioned to the figure. It had no pretensions whatever to ordinary beauty. The features were good; there was not an ugly line about them; and yet, each one just missed the beautiful; and the general effect was of a good-looking plainness; unadorned, unconcealed, and unashamed. But the longer you looked, the more desirable grew the face; the less you noticed its negations; the more you admired its honesty, its purity, its immense strength of purpose; its noble simplicity. You took in all these outward details; you looked away for a moment, to consider them; you looked back to verify them; and then the miracle happened. Into the face had stolen the "light that never was on sea or land." It shone from the quiet grey eyes, — as, over the head of the man who knelt before her, they looked out of the picture — with an expression of the sublime surrender of a woman's whole soul to an emotion which, though it sways and masters her, yet gives her the power to be more truly herself than ever before. The startled joy in them; the marvel at a mystery not yet under-

stood; the passionate tenderness; and yet the almost divine compassion for the unrestrained violence of feeling, which had flung the man to his knees, and driven him to the haven of her breast; the yearning to soothe, and give, and content; — all these were blended into a look of such exquisite sweetness, that it brought tears to the eyes of the beholder.

The woman was seated on a broad marble parapet. She looked straight before her. Her knees came well forward, and the long curve of the train of her black gown, filled the foreground on the right. On the left, slightly to one side of her, knelt a man, a tall slight figure in evening dress, his arms thrown forward around her waist; his face completely hidden in the soft lace at her bosom; only the back of his sleek dark head, visible. And yet the whole figure denoted a passion of tense emotion. She had gathered him to her with what you knew must have been an exquisite gesture, combining the utter self-surrender of the woman, with the tender throb of maternal solicitude; and now her hands were clasped behind his head, holding him closely to her. Not a word was being spoken. The hidden face was obviously silent; and her firm lips above his dark head, were folded in a line of calm self-control; though about them hovered the dawning of a smile of bliss ineffable.

A crimson rambler rose climbing some woodwork faintly indicated on the left, and hanging in a glowing mass from the top left-hand corner, supplied the only vivid colour in the picture.

But, from taking in these minor details, the eye returned to that calm tender face, alight with love; to those strong capable hands, now learning for the first

time to put forth the protective passion of a woman's tenderness; and the mind whispered the only possible name for that picture: *The Wife*.

Jane gazed at it long, in silence. Had Garth's little bear been anything less solid than Early Victorian brass, it must have bent and broken under the strong pressure of those clenched hands.

She could not doubt, for a moment, that she looked upon herself; but, oh, merciful heavens! how unlike the reflected self of her own mirror! Once or twice as she looked, her mind refused to work, and she simply gazed blankly at the minor details of the picture. But then again, the expression of the grey eyes drew her, recalling so vividly every feeling she had experienced when that dear head had come so unexpectedly to its resting-place upon her bosom. "It is true," she whispered; and again: "Yes; it is true. I cannot deny it. It is as I felt; it must be as I looked."

And then, suddenly, she fell upon her knees before the picture. "Oh, my God! Is that as I looked? And the next thing that happened was my boy lifting his shining eyes and gazing at me in the moonlight. Is *this* what he saw? Did *I* look *so*? And did the woman who looked so; and who, looking so, pressed his head down again upon her breast, refuse next day to marry him, on the grounds of his youth, and her superiority? . . . Oh, Garth, Garth! . . . O God, help him to understand! . . . help him to forgive me!"

In the work-room just below, Maggie the housemaid was singing as she sewed. The sound floated through the open window, each syllable distinct in the clear Scotch voice, and reached Jane where she knelt. Her mind, stunned to blankness by its pain, took eager

hold upon the words of Maggie's hymn. And they were these.

"O Love, that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

"O Light, that followest all my way,  
I yield my flick'ring torch to Thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day  
May brighter, fairer be."

Jane took the second picture, and placed it in front of the first.

The same woman, seated as before; but the man was not there; and in her arms, its tiny dark head pillowed against the fulness of her breast, lay a little child. The woman did not look over that small head, but bent above it, and gazed into the baby face.

The crimson Rambler had grown right across the picture, and formed a glowing arch above mother and child. A majesty of tenderness was in the large figure of the mother. The face, as regarded contour and features, was no less plain; but again it was transfigured, by the mother-love thereon depicted. You knew "The Wife" had more than fulfilled her abundant promise. The wife was there in fullest realisation; and, added to wifeness, the wonder of motherhood. All mysteries were explained; all joys experienced; and the smile on her calm lips, bespoke ineffable content.

A Rambler rose had burst above them, and fallen in a shower of crimson petals upon mother and child. The baby-fingers clasped tightly the soft lace at her

bosom. A petal had fallen upon the tiny wrist. She had lifted her hand to remove it; and, catching the baby-eyes, so dark and shining, paused for a moment, and smiled.

Jane, watching them, fell to desperate weeping. The "mere boy" had understood her potential possibilities of motherhood far better than she understood them herself. Having had one glimpse of her as "The Wife," his mind had leaped on, and seen her as "The Mother." And again she was forced to say: "It is true — yes; it is true."

And then she recalled the old line of cruel reasoning: "It was not the sort of face one would have wanted to see always in front of one at table." Was this the sort of face — this, as Garth had painted it, after a supposed year of marriage? Would any man weary of it, or wish to turn away his eyes?

Jane took one more long look. Then she dropped the little bear, and buried her face in her hands; while a hot blush crept up to the very roots of her hair, and tingled to her finger-tips.

Below, the fresh young voice was singing again.

"O Joy, that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to Thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be."

After a while Jane whispered: "Oh, my darling, forgive me. I was altogether wrong. I will confess; and, God helping me, I will explain; and, oh, my darling, you will forgive me?"

Once more she lifted her head and looked at the picture. A few stray petals of the crimson Rambler lay upon the ground; reminding her of those crushed

roses, which, falling from her breast, lay scattered on the terrace at Shenstone, emblem of the joyous hopes and glory of love which her decision of that night, had laid in the dust of disillusion. But crowning this picture, in rich clusters of abundant bloom, grew the Rambler rose. And through the open window came the final verse of Maggie's hymn.

"O cross, that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be."

Jane went to the western window, and stood, with her arms stretched above her, looking out upon the radiance of the sunset. The sky blazed into gold and crimson at the horizon; gradually as the eye lifted, paling to primrose, flecked with rosy clouds; and, overhead, deep blue — fathomless, boundless, blue.

Jane gazed at the golden battlements above the purple hills, and repeated, half aloud: "And the city was of pure gold; — and had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it. And there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Ah, how much had passed away since she stood at that western window, not an hour before. All life seemed readjusted; its outlook altered; its perspective changed. Truly Garth had "gone behind his blindness."

Jane raised her eyes to the blue; and a smile of unspeakable anticipation parted her lips. "Life, that

shall endless be," she murmured. Then, turning, found the little bear, and restored him to his place upon the mantel-piece; put back the chair; closed the western window; and, picking up the two canvases, left the studio, and made her way carefully downstairs.

## CHAPTER XXX

## "THE LADY PORTRAYED"

"IT has taken you long, Miss Gray. I nearly sent Simpson up, to find out what had happened."

"I am glad you did not do that, Mr. Dalmain. Simpson would have found me weeping on the studio floor; and to ask his assistance under those circumstances, would have been more humbling than inquiring after the fly in the soup!"

Garth turned quickly in his chair. The artist-ear had caught the tone which meant comprehension of his work.

"Weeping!" he said. "Why?"

"Because," answered Nurse Rosemary, "I have been entranced. These pictures are so exquisite. They stir one's deepest depths. And yet they are so pathetic — ah, so pathetic; because you have made a plain woman, beautiful."

Garth rose to his feet, and turned upon her a face which would have blazed, had it not been sightless.

"A *what?*" he exclaimed.

"A plain woman," repeated Nurse Rosemary, quietly. "Surely you realised your model to be that. And therein lies the wonder of the pictures. You have so beautified her by wifhood, and glorified her by motherhood, that the longer one looks the more one forgets her plainness; seeing her as loving and loved; lovable, and therefore lovely. It is a triumph of art."

Garth sat down, his hands clasped before him.

"It is a triumph of truth," he said. "I painted what I saw."

"You painted her soul," said Nurse Rosemary, "and it illuminated her plain face."

"I saw her soul," said Garth, almost in a whisper; "and that vision was so radiant that it illumined my dark life. The remembrance lightens my darkness, even now."

A very tender silence fell in the library.

The twilight deepened.

Then Nurse Rosemary spoke, very low. "Mr. Dalmain, I have a request to make of you. I want to beg you not to destroy these pictures."

Garth lifted his head. "I must destroy them, child," he said. "I cannot risk their being seen by people who would recognise my — the — the lady portrayed."

"At all events, there is one person who must see them, before they are destroyed."

"And that is?" queried Garth.

"The lady portrayed," said Nurse Rosemary, bravely.

"How do you know she has not seen them?"

"Has she?" inquired Nurse Rosemary.

"No," said Garth, shortly; "and she never will."

"She must."

Something in the tone of quiet insistence, struck Garth.

"Why?" he asked; and listened with interest for the answer.

"Because of all it would mean to a woman who knows herself plain, to see herself thus beautified."

Garth sat very still for a few moments. Then. "A woman who — knows — herself — plain?" he

repeated, with interrogative amazement in his voice.

"Yes," proceeded Nurse Rosemary, encouraged. "Do you suppose, for a moment, that that lady's mirror has ever shown her a reflection in any way approaching what you have made her in these pictures? When we stand before our looking-glasses, Mr. Dalmain, scowling anxiously at hats and bows, and partings, we usually look our very worst; and that lady, at her very worst, would be of a most discouraging plainness."

Garth sat perfectly silent.

"Depend upon it," continued Nurse Rosemary, "she never sees herself as 'The Wife'—'The Mother.' Is she a wife?"

Garth hesitated only the fraction of a second. "Yes," he said, very quietly.

Jane's hands flew to her breast. Her heart must be held down, or he would hear it throbbing.

Nurse Rosemary's voice had in it only a slight tremor, when she spoke again.

"Is she a mother?"

"No," said Garth. "I painted what might have been."

"If — ?"

"If it *had* been," replied Garth, curtly.

Nurse Rosemary felt rebuked. "Dear Mr. Dalmain," she said, humbly; "I realise how officious I must seem to you, with all these questions, and suggestions. But you must blame the hold these wonderful paintings of yours have taken on my mind. Oh, they are beautiful — beautiful!"

"Ah," said Garth, the keen pleasure of the artist springing up once more. "Miss Gray, I have some-

what forgotten them. Have you them here? That is right. Put them up before you, and describe them to me. Let me hear how they struck you, as pictures."

Jane rose, and went to the window. She threw it open; and as she breathed in the fresh air, breathed out a passionate prayer that her nerve, her voice, her self-control might not fail her, in this critical hour. She herself had been convicted by Garth's pictures. Now she must convince Garth, by her description of them. He must be made to believe in the love he had depicted.

Then Nurse Rosemary sat down; and, in the gentle, unemotional voice, which was quite her own, described to the eager ears of the blind artist, exactly what Jane had seen in the studio.

It was perfectly done. It was mercilessly done. All the desperate, hopeless, hunger for Jane, awoke in Garth; the maddening knowledge that she had been his, and yet not his; that, had he pressed for her answer that evening, it could not have been a refusal; that the cold calculations of later hours, had no place in those moments of ecstasy. Yet — he lost her — lost her! Why? Ah, why? Was there any possible reason other than the one she gave?

Nurse Rosemary's quiet voice went on, regardless of his writhings. But she was drawing to a close. "And it is such a beautiful crimson Rambler, Mr. Dalmain," she said. "I like the idea of its being small and in bud, in the first picture; and blooming in full glory, in the second."

Garth pulled himself together and smiled. He must not give way before this girl.

"Yes," he said; "I am glad you noticed that. And,

look here. We will not destroy them at once. Now they are found, there is no hurry. I am afraid I am giving you a lot of trouble; but will you ask for some large sheets of brown paper, and make a package, and write upon it: 'Not to be opened,' and tell Margery to put them back in the studio. Then, when I want them, at any time, I shall have no difficulty in identifying them."

"I am so glad," said Nurse Rosemary. "Then perhaps the plain lady —"

"I cannot have her spoken of so," said Garth, hotly. "I do not know what she thought of herself — I doubt if she ever gave a thought to self at all. I do not know what you would have thought of her. I can only tell you that, to me, hers is the one face which is visible in my darkness. All the loveliness I have painted, all the beauty I have admired, fades from my mental vision, as wreaths of mist; flutters from memory's sight, as autumn leaves. Her face alone abides; calm, holy, tender, beautiful, — it is always before me. And it pains me that one who has only seen her as *my* hand depicted her, should speak of her as plain."

"Forgive me," said Nurse Rosemary, humbly. "I did not mean to pain you, sir. And, to show you what your pictures have done for me, may I tell you a resolution I made in the studio? I cannot miss what they depict — the sweetest joys of life — for want of the courage to confess myself wrong; pocket my pride; and be frank and humble. I am going to write a full confession to my young man, as to my share of the misunderstanding which has parted us. Do you think he will understand? Do you think he will forgive?"

Garth smiled. He tried to call up an image of a

pretty troubled face, framed in a fluffy setting of soft fair hair. It harmonised so little with the voice; but it undoubtedly was Nurse Rosemary Gray, as others saw her.

"He will be a brute if he doesn't, child," he said.

## CHAPTER XXXI

## IN LIGHTER VEIN

DINNER that evening, the first at their small round table, was a great success. Nurse Rosemary's plans all worked well; and Garth delighted in arrangements which made him feel less helpless.

The strain of the afternoon brought its reaction of merriment. A little judicious questioning drew forth further stories of the duchess and her pets; and Miss Champion's name came in with a frequency which they both enjoyed.

It was a curious experience for Jane, to hear herself described in Garth's vivid word-painting. Until that fatal evening at Shenstone, she had been remarkably free from self-consciousness; and she had no idea that she had a way of looking straight into people's eyes when she talked to them, and that that was what muddled up "the silly little minds of women who say they are afraid of her, and that she makes them nervous! You see she looks right into their shallow shuffling little souls, full of conceited thoughts about themselves, and nasty ill-natured thoughts about her; and no wonder they grow panic-stricken, and flee; and talk of her as 'that formidable Miss Champion.' I never found her formidable; but, when I had the chance of a real talk with her, I used to be thankful I had nothing of which to be ashamed. Those clear eyes touched bottom every time, as our kindred over the water so expressively put it."