

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."

Neither had Jane any idea that she always talked with a poker, if possible; building up the fire while she built up her own argument; or attacking it vigorously, while she demolished her opponent's; that she stirred the fire with her toe, but her very smart boots never seemed any the worse; that when pondering a difficult problem, she usually stood holding her chin in her right hand, until she had found the solution. All these small characteristics Garth described with vivid touch, and dwelt upon with a tenacity of remembrance, which astonished Jane, and revealed him, in his relation to herself three years before, in a new light.

His love for her had been so suddenly disclosed, and had at once had to be considered as a thing to be either accepted or put away; so that when she decided to put it away, it seemed not to have had time to become in any sense part of her life. She had viewed it; realised all it might have meant; and put it from her.

But now she understood how different it had been for Garth. During the week which preceded his declaration, he had realised, to the full, the meaning of their growing intimacy; and, as his certainty increased, he had more and more woven her into his life; his vivid imagination causing her to appear as his beloved from the first; loved and wanted, when as yet they were merely acquaintances; kindred spirits; friends.

To find herself thus shrined in his heart and memory, was infinitely touching to Jane; and seemed to promise, with sweet certainty, that it would not be difficult to come home there to abide, when once all barriers between them were removed.

After dinner, Garth sat long at the piano, filling the

room with harmony. Once or twice the theme of "The Rosary" crept in, and Jane listened anxiously for its development; but almost immediately it gave way to something else. It seemed rather to haunt the other melodies, than to be actually there itself.

When Garth left the piano, and, guided by the purple cord, reached his chair, Nurse Rosemary said gently: "Mr. Dalmain, can you spare me for a few days at the end of this week?"

"Oh, why?" said Garth. "To go where? And for how long? Ah, I know I ought to say: 'Certainly! Delighted!' after all your goodness to me. But I really cannot! You don't know what life was without you, when you week-ended! That week-end seemed months, even though Brand was here. It is your own fault for making yourself so indispensable."

Nurse Rosemary smiled. "I daresay I shall not be away for long," she said. "That is, if you want me, I can return. But, Mr. Dalmain, I intend tonight, to write that letter of which I told you. I shall post it to-morrow. I must follow it up almost immediately. I must be with him when he receives it, or soon afterwards. I think—I hope—he will want me at once. This is Monday. May I go on Thursday?"

Poor Garth looked blankly dismayed.

"Do nurses, as a rule, leave their patients, and rush off to their young men in order to find out how they have liked their letters?" he inquired, in mock protest.

"Not as a rule, sir," replied Nurse Rosemary, demurely. "But this is an exceptional case."

"I shall wire to Brand."

"He will send you a more efficient and more dependable person."

"Oh you wicked little thing!" cried Garth. "If Miss Champion were here, she would shake you! You know perfectly well that nobody could fill your place!"

"It is good of you to say so, sir," replied Nurse Rosemary, meekly. "And is Miss Champion much addicted to shaking people?"

"Don't call me, sir"! Yes; when people are tiresome she often says she should like to shake them; and one has a mental vision of how their teeth would chatter. There is a certain little lady of our acquaintance whom we always call 'Mrs. Do-and-don't.' She isn't in our set; but she calls upon it; and sometimes it asks her to lunch, for fun. If you inquire whether she likes a thing, she says: 'Well I do, and I don't.' If you ask whether she is going to a certain function, she says: 'Well, I am, and I'm not.' And if you send her a note, imploring a straight answer to a direct question, the answer comes back: 'Yes *and* no.' Miss Champion used to say she would like to take her up by the scruff of her feather boa, and shake her, asking at intervals: 'Shall I stop?' so as to wring from Mrs. Do-and-don't a definite affirmative, for once."

"Could Miss Champion carry out such a threat? Is she a very massive person?"

"Well, she could, you know; but she wouldn't. She is most awfully kind, even to little freaks she laughs at. No, she isn't massive. That word does not describe her at all. But she is large, and very finely developed. Do you know the Venus of Milo? Yes; in the Louvre. I am glad you know Paris. Well, just imagine the Venus of Milo in a tailor-made coat and skirt, — and you have Miss Champion."

Nurse Rosemary laughed, hysterically. Either the

Venus of Milo, or Miss Champion, or this combination of both, proved too much for her.

"Little Dicky Brand summed up Mrs. Do-and-don't rather well," pursued Garth. "She was calling at Wimpole Street, on Lady Brand's 'at home' day. And Dicky stood talking to me, in his black velvets and white waistcoat, a miniature edition of Sir Deryck. He indicated Mrs. Do-and-don't on a distant lounge, and remarked: '*That lady never knows; she always thinks.*' I asked her if her little girl might come to my party, and she said: "I think so." Now if she had asked *me* if I was coming to *her* party, I should have said: "Thank you; I am." It is very trying when people only *think* about important things, such as little girls and parties; because their thinking never amounts to much. It does not so much matter what they think about other things — the weather, for instance; because that all happens, whether they think or not. Mummie asked that lady whether it was raining when she got here; and she said: "I *think* not." I can't imagine why Mummie always wants to know what her friends think about the weather. I have heard her ask seven ladies this afternoon whether it is raining. Now if father or I wanted to know whether it was raining we should just step over to the window, and look out; and then come back and go on with really interesting conversation. But Mummie asks them whether it is raining, or whether they think it has been raining, or is going to rain; and when they have told her, she hurries away and asks somebody else. I asked the thinking lady in the feather thing, whether she knew who the father and mother were, of the young lady whom Cain married; and she said: "Well, I do; and I don't." I said: "If you *do*, perhaps you

will tell me. And if you *don't*, perhaps you would like to take my hand, and we will walk over together and ask the Bishop — the one with the thin legs, and the gold cross, talking to Mummie." But she thought she had to go, quite in a hurry. So I saw her off; and then asked the Bishop alone. Bishops are most satisfactory kind of people; because they are *quite sure* about *everything*; and you feel safe in quoting them to Nurse. Nurse told Marsdon that this one is in "sheep's clothing," because he wears a gold cross. I saw the cross; but I saw no sheep's clothing. I was looking out for the kind of woolly thing our new curate wears on his back in church. Should you call that "sheep's clothing"? I asked father, and he said: "No. Bunny-skin." And mother seemed as shocked as if father and I had spoken *in* church, instead of just as we came out. And she said: "It is a B. A. hood." Possibly she thinks "baa" is spelled with only one "a." Anyway father and I felt it best to let the subject drop."

Nurse Rosemary laughed. "How exactly like Dicky," she said. "I could hear his grave little voice, and almost see him pull down his small waistcoat!"

"Why, do you know the little chap?" asked Garth.

"Yes," replied Nurse Rosemary; "I have stayed with them. Talking to Dicky is an education; and Baby Blossom is a sweet romp. Here comes Simpson. How quickly the evening has flown. Then may I be off on Thursday?"

"I am helpless," said Garth. "I cannot say 'no.' But suppose you do not come back?"

"Then you can wire to Dr. Brand."

"I believe you want to leave me," said Garth, reproachfully.

"I do, and I don't!" laughed Nurse Rosemary; and fled from his outstretched hands.

When Jane had locked the letter-bag earlier that evening, and handed it to Simpson, she had slipped in two letters of her own. One was addressed to

Georgina, Duchess of Meldrum

Portland Place

the other, to

Sir Deryck Brand

Wimpole Street

Both were marked: *Urgent. If absent, forward immediately.*

CHAPTER XXXII

AN INTERLUDE

TUESDAY passed uneventfully, to all outward seeming.

There was nothing to indicate to Garth that his secretary had sat up writing most of the night; only varying that employment by spending long moments in silent contemplation of his pictures, which had found a temporary place of safety, on their way back to the studio, in a deep cupboard in her room, of which she had the key.

If Nurse Rosemary marked, with a pang of tender compunction, the worn look on Garth's face, telling how mental suffering had chased away sleep; she made no comment thereupon.

Thus Tuesday passed, in uneventful monotony.

Two telegrams had arrived for Nurse Gray in the course of the morning. The first came while she was reading a *Times* leader aloud to Garth. Simpson brought it in, saying: "A telegram for you, miss."

It was always a source of gratification to Simpson afterwards, that, almost from the first, he had been led, by what he called his "unhaided intuition," to drop the "nurse," and address Jane with the conventional "miss." In time he almost convinced himself that he had also discerned in her "a Honourable"; but this, Margery Graem firmly refused to allow. She herself had had her "doots," and kept them to herself; but all Mr. Simpson's surmisings had

been freely expressed and reiterated in the house-keeper's room; and never a word about any honourable had passed Mr. Simpson's lips. Therefore Mrs. Graem berated him for being so ready to "go astray and speak lies." But Maggie, the housemaid, had always felt sure Mr. Simpson knew more than he said. "Said more than he knew, you mean," prompted old Margery. "No," retorted Maggie, "I know what I said; and I said what I meant." "You may have said what you meant, but you did not mean what you knew," insisted Margery; "and if anybody says another word on the matter, I shall say grace and dismiss the table," continued old Margery, exercising the *clôture*, by virtue of her authority, in a way which Simpson and Maggie, who both wished for cheese, afterwards described as "mean."

But this was long after the uneventful Tuesday, when Simpson entered, with a salver; and, finding Jane enveloped in the *Times*, said: "A telegram for you, miss."

Nurse Rosemary took it; apologised for the interruption, and opened it. It was from the duchess, and ran thus:

Most inconvenient, as you very well know; but am leaving Euston to-night. Will await further orders at Aberdeen.

Nurse Rosemary smiled, and put the telegram into her pocket. "No answer, thank you, Simpson."

"Not bad news, I hope?" asked Garth.

"No," replied Nurse Rosemary; "but it makes my departure on Thursday imperative. It is from an old aunt of mine, who is going to my 'young man's' home. I must be with him before she is, or there will be endless complications."

"I don't believe he will ever let you go again, when once he gets you back," remarked Garth, moodily.

"You think not?" said Nurse Rosemary, with a tender little smile, as she took up the paper, and resumed her reading.

The second telegram arrived after luncheon. Garth was at the piano, thundering Beethoven's "Funeral March on the death of a hero." The room was being rent asunder by mighty chords; and Simpson's smug face and side-whiskers appearing noiselessly in the doorway, were an insupportable anticlimax. Nurse Rosemary laid her finger on her lips; advanced with her firm noiseless tread, and took the telegram. She returned to her seat and waited until the hero's obsequies were over, and the last roll of the drums had died away. Then she opened the orange envelope. And as she opened it, a strange thing happened. Garth began to play "The Rosary." The string of pearls dropped in liquid sound from his fingers; and Nurse Rosemary read her telegram. It was from the doctor, and said: *Special license easily obtained. Flower and I will come whenever you wish. Wire again.*

"The Rosary" drew to a soft melancholy close.

"What shall I play next?" asked Garth, suddenly.

"Veni, Creator Spiritus," said Nurse Rosemary; and bowed her head in prayer.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN!"

WEDNESDAY dawned; an ideal First of May. Garth was in the garden before breakfast. Jane heard him singing, as he passed beneath her window:

"It is not mine to sing the stately grace,
The great soul beaming in my lady's face."

She leaned out.

He was walking below in the freshest of white flannels; his step so light and elastic; his every movement so lithe and graceful; the only sign of his blindness the Malacca cane he held in his hand, with which he occasionally touched the grass border, or the wall of the house. She could only see the top of his dark head. It might have been on the terrace at Shenstone, three years before. She longed to call from the window: "Darling — my Darling! Good morning! God bless you to-day."

Ah what would to-day bring forth; — the day when her full confession, and explanation, and plea for pardon, would reach him? He was such a boy in many ways; so light-hearted, loving, artistic, poetic, irrepressible; ever young, in spite of his great affliction. But where his manhood was concerned; his love; his right of choice and of decision; of maintaining a fairly-formed opinion, and setting aside the less competent judgment of others; she knew him rigid, inflexible.