

"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.

His very pain seemed to cool him, from the molten lover, to the bar of steel.

As Jane knelt at her window that morning, she had not the least idea whether the evening would find her travelling to Aberdeen, to take the night mail south; or at home forever in the heaven of Garth's love.

And down below he passed again, still singing:

"But mine it is to follow in her train;
Do her behests in pleasure or in pain.
Burn at her altar love's sweet frankincense,
And worship her in distant reverence."

"Ah, beloved!" whispered Jane, "not 'distant.' If you want her, and call her, it will be to the closest closeness love can devise. No more distance between you and me."

And then, in the curious way in which inspired words will sometimes occur to the mind quite apart from their inspired context, and bearing a totally different meaning from that which they primarily bear, these words came to Jane: "For He is our peace, Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us . . . that He might reconcile both . . . by the cross." "Ah, dear Christ!" she whispered. "If Thy cross could do this for Jew and Gentile, may not my boy's heavy cross, so bravely borne, do it for him and for me? So shall we come at last, indeed, to 'kiss the cross.'"

The breakfast gong boomed through the house. Simpson loved gongs. He considered them "harris-tocratic." He always gave full measure.

Nurse Rosemary went down to breakfast.

Garth came in, through the French window, humming: — "*the thousand beauties that I know so well.*" He was in his gayest most inconsequent mood. He

had picked a golden rosebud in the conservatory and wore it in his buttonhole. He carried a yellow rose in his hand.

"Good morning, Miss Rosemary," he said. "What a May Day! Simpson and I were up with the lark; weren't we, Simpson? Poor Simpson felt like a sort of 'Queen of the May,' when my electric bell trilled in his room, at 5 A.M. But I couldn't stay in bed. I woke with my something-is-going-to-happen feeling; and when I was a little chap and woke with that, Margery used to say: 'Get up quickly then, Master Garth, and it will happen all the sooner.' You ask her if she didn't, Simpson. Miss Gray, did you ever learn: 'If you're waking call me early, call me early, mother dear'? I always hated that young woman! I should think, in her excited state, she would have been waking long before her poor mother, who must have been worn to a perfect rag, making all the hussy's May Queen-clothes, over night."

Simpson had waited to guide him to his place at the table. Then he removed the covers, and left the room.

As soon as he had closed the door behind him, Garth leaned forward, and with unerring accuracy laid the opening rose upon Nurse Rosemary's plate.

"Roses for Rosemary," he said. "Wear it, if you are sure the young man would not object. I have been thinking about him and the aunt. I wish you could ask them both here, instead of going away on Thursday. We would have the 'maddest merriest time!' I would play with the aunt, while you had it out with the young man. And I could easily keep the aunt away from nooks and corners, because my hearing is sharper than any aunt's eyes could be; and

if you gave a gentle cough, I would promptly clutch hold of auntie, and insist upon being guided in the opposite direction. And I would take her out in the motor; and you and the young man could have the gig. And then when all was satisfactorily settled, we could pack them off home, and be by ourselves again. Ah, Miss Gray, do send for them, instead of leaving me on Thursday."

"Mr. Dalmain," said Nurse Rosemary, reprovingly, as she leaned forward and touched his right hand with the rim of his saucer; "this May day morning has gone to your head. I shall send for Margery. She may have known the symptoms, of old."

"It is not that," said Garth. He leaned forward and spoke confidentially. "Something is going to happen to-day, little Rosemary. Whenever I feel like this, something happens. The first time it occurred, about twenty-five years ago, there was a rocking-horse in the hall, when I ran downstairs! I have never forgotten my first ride on that rocking-horse. The fearful joy when he went backward; the awful plunge when he went forward; and the proud moment when it was possible to cease clinging to the leather pommel. I nearly killed the cousin who pulled out his tail. I thrashed him, then and there, *with* the tail; which was such a silly thing to do; because, though it damaged the cousin, it also spoiled the tail. The next time — ah, but I am boring you!"

"Not at all," said Nurse Rosemary, politely; "but I want you to have some breakfast; and the letters will be here in a few minutes."

He looked so brown and radiant, this dear delightful boy, with his gold-brown tie, and yellow rose.

She was conscious of her pallor, and oppressive earnestness, as she said: "The letters will be here."

"Oh, bother the letters!" cried Garth. "Let's have a holiday from letters on May Day! You shall be Queen of the May; and Margery shall be the old mother. I will be Robin, with the breaking heart, leaning on the bridge beneath the hazel-tree; and Simpson can be the 'bolder lad.' And we will all go and 'gather knots of flowers, and buds, and garlands gay.'"

"Mr. Dalmain," said Nurse Rosemary, laughing, in spite of herself; "you really must be sensible, or I shall go and consult Margery. I have never seen you in such a mood."

"You have never seen me, on a day when something was going to happen," said Garth; and Nurse Rosemary made no further attempt to repress him.

After breakfast, he went to the piano, and played two-steps, and rag-time music, so infectiously, that Simpson literally tripped as he cleared the table; and Nurse Rosemary sitting pale and preoccupied, with a pile of letters before her, had hard work to keep her feet still.

Simpson had two-stepped to the door with the cloth, and closed it after him. Nurse Rosemary's remarks about the postbag, and the letters, had remained unanswered. "Shine little glowworm glimmer" was peeling gaily through the room, like silver bells, — when the door opened, and old Margery appeared; in a black satin apron, and a blue print sunbonnet. She came straight to the piano, and laid her hand gently on Garth's arm.

"Master Garthie," she said, "on this lovely May morning, will you take old Margery up into the woods?"

Garth's hands dropped from the keys. "Of course I will, Margie," he said. "And, I say Margie, *something is going to happen.*"

"I know it, laddie," said the old woman, tenderly; and the expression with which she looked into the blind face, filled Jane's eyes with tears. "I woke with it too, Master Garthie; and now we will go into the woods, and listen to the earth, and trees, and flowers, and they will tell us whether it is for joy, or for sorrow. Come, my own laddie."

Garth rose, as in a dream. Even in his blindness he looked so young, and so beautiful, that Jane's watching heart stood still.

At the window he paused. "Where is that secretary person?" he said, vaguely. "She kept trying to shut me up."

"I know she did, laddie," said old Margery, curtseying apologetically towards Jane. "You see she does not know the 'something-is-going-to-happen-to-day' awakening."

"Ah, doesn't she?" thought Jane, as they disappeared through the window. "But as my Garth has gone off his dear head, and been taken away by his nurse, the thing that is going to happen, can't happen just yet." And Jane sat down to the piano, and very softly ran through the accompaniment of "The Rosary." Then,—after shading her eyes on the terrace, and making sure that a tall white figure leaning on a short dark one, had almost reached the top of the hill,—still more softly, she sang it.

Afterwards she went for a tramp on the moors, and steadied her nerve by the rapid swing of her walk, and the deep inbreathing of that glorious air. Once or twice she took a telegram from her pocket, stood still

and read it; then tramped on, to the wonder of the words: "Special license easily obtained." Ah, the license might be easy to obtain; but how about his forgiveness? That must be obtained first. If there were only this darling boy to deal with, in his white flannels and yellow roses, with a May Day madness in his veins, the license might come at once; and all he could wish should happen without delay. But this is a passing phase of Garth. What she has to deal with is the white-faced man, who calmly said: "I accept the cross," and walked down the village church leaving her—for all these years. Loving her, as he loved her; and yet leaving her, without word or sign, for three long years. To him, was the confession; his would be the decision; and, somehow, it did not surprise her, when she came down to luncheon, a little late, to find *him* seated at the table.

"Miss Gray," he said gravely, as he heard her enter; "I must apologise for my behaviour this morning. I was what they call up here 'fey.' Margery understands the mood; and together she and I have listened to kind Mother Earth, laying our hands on her sympathetic softness, and she has told us her secrets. Then I lay down under the fir trees and slept; and awakened calm and sane, and ready for what to-day must bring. For it *will* bring something. That is no delusion. It is a day of great things. That much, Margery knows, too.

"Perhaps," suggested Nurse Rosemary, tentatively, "there may be news of interest in your letters."

"Ah," said Garth, "I forgot. We have not even opened this morning's letters. Let us take time for them immediately after lunch. Are there many?"

"Quite a pile," said Nurse Rosemary.

"Good. We will work soberly through them."

Half an hour later Garth was seated in his chair calm and expectant; his face turned towards his secretary. He had handled his letters, and amongst them he had found one sealed; and the seal was a plumed helmet, with visor closed. Nurse Rosemary saw him pale, as his fingers touched it. He made no remark; but, as before, slipped it beneath the rest, that it might come up for reading, last of all.

When the others were finished, and Nurse Rosemary took up this letter, the room was very still. They were quite alone. Bees hummed in the garden. The scent of flowers stole in at the window. But no one disturbed their solitude.

Nurse Rosemary took up the envelope.

"Mr. Dalmain, here is a letter, sealed with scarlet wax. The seal is a helmet with visor —"

"I know," said Garth. "You need not describe it further. Kindly open it."

Nurse Rosemary opened it. "It is a very long letter, Mr. Dalmain."

"Indeed? Will you please read it to me, Miss Gray."

A tense moment of silence followed. Nurse Rosemary lifted the letter; but her voice suddenly refused to respond to her will. Garth waited without further word.

Then Nurse Rosemary said: "Indeed, sir, it seems a most private letter. I find it difficult to read it to you."

Garth heard the distress in her voice, and turned to her kindly.

"Never mind, my dear child. It in no way concerns you. It is a private letter to me; but my only

means of hearing it, is through your eyes, and from your lips. Besides, the lady whose seal is a plumed helmet, can have nothing of a very private nature to say to me."

"Ah, but she has," said Nurse Rosemary, brokenly. Garth considered this in silence.

Then: "Turn over the page," he said, "and tell me the signature."

"There are many pages," said Nurse Rosemary.

"Turn over the pages then," said Garth, sternly.

"Do not keep me waiting. How is that letter signed?"

"Your wife," whispered Nurse Rosemary.

There was a petrifying quality about the silence which followed. It seemed as if those two words, whispered into Garth's darkness, had turned him to stone.

At last he stretched out his hand. "Will you give me that letter, if you please, Miss Gray? Thank you. I wish to be alone for a quarter of an hour. I shall be glad if you will be good enough to sit in the dining-room, and stop any one from coming into this room. I must be undisturbed. At the end of that time kindly return."

He spoke so quietly that Jane's heart sank within her. Some display of agitation would have been reassuring. This was the man who, bowing his dark head towards the crucifixion window, said: "I accept the cross." This was the man, whose footsteps never once faltered as he strode down the aisle, and left her. This was the man, who had had the strength, ever since, to treat that episode between her and himself, as completely closed; no word of entreaty; no sign of remembrance; no hint of reproach. And this was the man to whom she had signed herself: "Your wife."

In her whole life, Jane had never known fear. She knew it now.

As she silently rose and left him, she stole one look at his face. He was sitting perfectly still; the letter in his hand. He had not turned his head toward her as he took it. His profile might have been a beautiful carving in white ivory. There was not the faintest tinge of colour in his face; just that ivory pallor, against the ebony lines of his straight brows, and smooth dark hair.

Jane softly left the room, closing the door behind her.

Then followed the longest fifteen minutes she had ever known. She realised what a tremendous conflict was in progress in that quiet room. Garth was arriving at his decision without having heard any of her arguments. By the strange fatality of his own insistence, he had heard only two words of her letter, and those the crucial words; the two words to which the whole letter carefully led up. They must have revealed to him instantly, what the character of the letter would be; and what was the attitude of mind towards himself, of the woman who wrote them.

Jane paced the dining-room in desperation, remembering the hours of thought which had gone to the compiling of sentences, cautiously preparing his mind to the revelation of the signature.

Suddenly, in the midst of her mental perturbation, there came to her the remembrance of a conversation between Nurse Rosemary and Garth over the pictures. The former had said: "Is she a wife?" And Garth had answered: "Yes." Jane had instantly understood what that answer revealed and implied. Because Garth had so felt her his, during those wonderful

moments on the terrace at Shenstone, that he could look up into her face and say: "My wife" — not as an interrogation, but as an absolute statement of fact, — he still held her this, as indissolubly as if priest, and book, and ring, had gone to the welding of their union. To him, the union of souls came before all else; and if that had taken place, all that might follow was but the outward indorsement of an accomplished fact. Owing to her fear, mistrust, and deception, nothing had followed. Their lives had been sundered; they had gone different ways. He regarded himself as being no more to her than any other man of her acquaintance. During these years he had believed, that her part in that evening's wedding of souls, had existed in his imagination, only; and had no binding effect upon her. But his, remained. Because those words were true to him then, he had said them; and, because he had said them, he would consider her his wife, through life, — and after. It was the intuitive understanding of this, which had emboldened Jane so to sign her letter. But how would he reconcile that signature, with the view of her conduct which he had all along taken, without ever having the slightest conception that there could be any other?

Then Jane remembered, with comfort, the irresistible appeal made by Truth to the soul of the artist; truth of line; truth of colour; truth of values; and, in the realm of sound, truth of tone, of harmony, of rendering, of conception. And when Nurse Rosemary had said of his painting of "The Wife": "It is a triumph of art"; Garth had replied: "It is a triumph of truth." And Jane's own verdict on the look he had seen and depicted was: "It is true — yes, it is true!" Will he not realise now the truth of that signature;

and, if he realises it, will he not be glad in his loneliness, that his wife should come to him; unless the confessions and admissions of the letter cause him to put her away as wholly unworthy?

Suddenly Jane understood the immense advantage of the fact that he would hear every word of the rest of her letter, knowing the conclusion, which she herself could not possibly have put first. She saw a Higher Hand in this arrangement; and said, as she watched the minutes slowly pass: "He hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us"; and a sense of calm assurance descended, and garrisoned her soul with peace.

The quarter of an hour was over.

Jane crossed the hall with firm, though noiseless step; stood a moment on the threshold relegating herself completely to the background; then opened the door; and Nurse Rosemary re-entered the library.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"LOVE NEVER FAILETH"

GARTH was standing at the open window, when Nurse Rosemary re-entered the library; and he did not turn, immediately.

She looked anxiously for the letter, and saw it laid ready on her side of the table. It bore signs of having been much crumpled; looking almost as a letter might appear which had been crushed into a ball; flung into the waste-paper basket; and afterwards retrieved. It had however been carefully smoothed out; and lay ready to her hand.

When Garth turned from the window and passed to his chair, his face bore the signs of a great struggle. He looked as one who, sightless, has yet been making frantic efforts to see. The ivory pallor was gone. His face was flushed; and his thick hair, which grew in beautiful curves low upon his forehead and temples, and was usually carefully brushed back in short-cropped neatness, was now ruffled and disordered. But his voice was completely under control, as he turned towards his secretary.

"My dear Miss Gray," he said, "we have a difficult task before us. I have received a letter, which it is essential I should hear. I am obliged to ask you to read it to me, because there is absolutely no one else to whom I can prefer such a request. I cannot but know that it will be a difficult and painful task for you, feeling yourself an intermediary between two wounded