

CHAPTER XXXV

NURSE ROSEMARY HAS HER REWARD

"MR. DALMAIN," said Nurse Rosemary, with patient insistence, "I really do want you to sit down, and give your mind to the tea-table. How can you remember where each thing is placed, if you keep jumping up, and moving your chair into different positions? And last time you pounded the table to attract my attention, which was already anxiously fixed upon you, you nearly knocked over your own tea, and sent floods of mine into the saucer. If you cannot behave better, I shall ask Margery for a pinafore, and sit you up on a high chair!"

Garth stretched his legs in front of him, and his arms over his head; and lay back in his chair, laughing joyously.

"Then I should have to say: 'Please, Nurse, may I get down?' What a cheeky little thing you are becoming! And you used to be quite oppressively polite. I suppose you would answer: 'If you say your grace nicely, Master Garth, you may.' Do you know the story of 'Tommy, you should say Your Grace'?"

"You have told it to me twice in the last forty-eight hours," said Nurse Rosemary, patiently.

"Oh, what a pity! I felt so like telling it now. If you had really been the sort of sympathetic person Sir Deryck described, you would have said: 'No; and I should so *love* to hear it!'"

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"No; and I should so *love* to hear it!" said Nurse Rosemary.

"Too late! That sort of thing, to have any value should be spontaneous. It need not be true; but it *must* be spontaneous. But, talking of a high chair, — when you say those chaffy things in a voice like Jane's, and just as Jane would have said them — oh, my wig! — Do you know, that is the duchess's only original little swear. All the rest are quotations. And when she says: 'My wig!' we all try not to look at it. It is usually slightly awry. The toucan tweaks it. He is so very *loving*, dear bird!"

"Now hand me the buttered toast," said Nurse Rosemary; "and don't tell me any more naughty stories about the duchess. No! That is the thin bread-and-butter. I told you you would lose your bearings. The toast is in a warm plate on your right. Now let us make believe I am Miss Champion, and hand it to me, as nicely as you will be handing it to her, this time to-morrow."

"It is easy to make believe you are Jane, with that voice," said Garth; "and yet — I don't know. I have never really associated you with her. One little sentence of old Rob's made all the difference to me. He said you had fluffy floss-silk sort of hair. No one could ever imagine Jane with fluffy floss-silk sort of hair! And I believe that one sentence saved the situation. Otherwise, your voice would have driven me mad, those first days. As it was, I used to wonder sometimes if I could possibly bear it. You understand why, now; don't you? And yet, in a way, it is *not* like hers. Hers is deeper; and she often speaks with a delicious kind of drawl, and uses heaps of slang; and you are such a very proper little person; and possess

what the primers call 'perfectly correct diction.' What fun it would be to hear you and Jane talk together! And yet — I don't know. I should be on thorns, all the time."

"Why?"

"I should be so awfully afraid lest you should not like one another. You see, *you* have really, in a way, been more to me than any one else in the world; and *she* — well, she *is* my world," said Garth, simply. "And I should be so afraid lest she should not fully appreciate you; and you should not quite understand her. She has a sort of way of standing and looking people up and down, and women hate it; especially pretty fluffy little women. They feel she spots all the things that come off."

"Nothing of mine comes off," murmured Nurse Rosemary, "excepting my patient, when he will not stay on his chair."

"Once," continued Garth, with the gleeful enjoyment in his voice which always presaged a story in which Jane figured; "there was a fearfully silly little woman staying at Overdene, when a lot of us were there. We never could make out why she was included in one of the duchess's 'best parties,' except that the dear duchess vastly enjoyed taking her off, and telling stories about her; and we could not appreciate the cleverness of the impersonation, unless we had seen the original. She was rather pretty, in a fussy, curling-tongs, wax-doll sort of way; but she never could let her appearance alone, or allow people to forget it. Almost every sentence she spoke, drew attention to it. We got very sick of it, and asked Jane to make her shut up. But Jane said: 'It doesn't hurt you, boys; and it pleases her. Let her be.' Jane

was always extra nice to people, if she suspected they were asked down in order to make sport for the duchess afterwards. Jane hated that sort of thing. She couldn't say much to her aunt; but we had to be very careful how we egged the duchess on, if Jane was within hearing. Well — one evening, after tea, a little group of us were waiting around the fire in the lower hall, to talk to Jane. It was Christmas time. The logs looked so jolly on the hearth. The red velvet curtains were drawn right across, covering the terrace door and the windows on either side. Tommy sat on his perch, in the centre of the group, keeping a keen look-out for cigarette ends. Outside, the world was deep in snow; and that wonderful silence reigned; making the talk and laughter within all the more gay by contrast — you know, that *penetrating* silence; when trees, and fields, and paths, are covered a foot thick in soft sparkling whiteness. I always look forward, just as eagerly, each winter to the first sight — ah, I forgot! . . . Fancy never seeing snow again! . . . Never mind. It is something to remember *having* seen it; and I shall hear the wonderful snow-silence more clearly than ever. Perhaps before other people pull up the blinds, I shall be able to say: 'There's been a fall of snow in the night.' What was I telling you? Yes, I remember. About little Mrs. Fussy. Well — all the women had gone up to dress for dinner; excepting Jane, who never needed more than half an hour; and Fussy, who was being sprightly, in a laboured way; and fancied herself the centre of attraction which kept us congregated in the hall. As a matter of fact, we were waiting to tell Jane some private news we had just heard about a young chap in the guards, who was in fearful hot water for ragging.

His colonel was an old friend of Jane's, and we thought she could put in a word, and improve matters for Billy. So Mrs. Fussy was very much 'de trop,' and didn't know it. Jane was sitting with her back to all of us, her feet on the fender, and her skirt turned up over her knees. Oh, there was another one, underneath; a handsome silk thing, with rows of little frills, — which you would think should have gone on outside. But Jane's best things are never paraded; always hidden. I don't mean clothes, now; but her splendid self. Well — little Fussy was 'chatting' — she never talked — about herself and her conquests; quite unconscious that we all wished her at Jericho. Jane went on reading the evening paper; but she felt the atmosphere growing restive. Presently — ah, but I must not tell you the rest. I have just remembered. Jane made us promise never to repeat it. She thought it detrimental to the other woman. But we just had time for our confab; and Jane caught the evening post with the letter which got Billy off scot-free; and yet came down punctually to dinner, better dressed than any of them. We felt it rather hard luck to have to promise; because we had each counted on being the first to tell the story to the duchess. But, you know, you always have to do as Jane says."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know! I can't explain why. If you knew her, you would not need to ask. Cake, Miss Gray?"

"Thank you. Right, this time."

"There! That is exactly as Jane would have said: 'Right, this time.' Is it not strange that after having for weeks thought your voice so like hers, to-morrow I shall be thinking her voice so like yours?"

"Oh no, you will not," said Nurse Rosemary "When she is with you, you will have no thoughts for other people."

"Indeed, but I shall!" cried Garth. "And, dear little Rosemary, I shall miss you, horribly. No one — not even *she* — can take your place. And, do you know," he leaned forward, and a troubled look clouded the gladness of his face; "I am beginning to feel anxious about it. She has not seen me since the accident. I am afraid it will give her a shock. Do you think she will find me much changed?"

Jane looked at the sightless face, turned so anxiously toward her. She remembered that morning in his room, when he thought himself alone with Dr. Rob; and, leaving the shelter of the wall, sat up to speak, and she saw his face for the first time. She remembered turning to the fireplace, so that Dr. Rob should not see the tears raining down her cheeks. She looked again at Garth — now growing conscious for the first time, of his disfigurement; and then, only for her sake — and an almost overwhelming tenderness gripped her heart. She glanced at the clock. She could not hold out much longer.

"Is it very bad?" said Garth; and his voice shook.

"I cannot answer for another woman," replied Nurse Rosemary; "but I should think your face, just as it is, will always be her joy."

Garth flushed; pleased and relieved, but slightly surprised. There was a quality in Nurse Rosemary's voice, for which he could not altogether account.

"But then, she will not be accustomed to my blind ways," he continued. "I am afraid I shall seem so helpless and so blundering. She has not been in Sightless Land, as you and I have been. She does not

know all our plans of cords, and notches, and things. Ah, little Rosemary! Promise not to leave me to-morrow. I want Her — only God, knows how I want her; but I begin to be half afraid. It will be so wonderful, for the great essentials; but, for the little every-day happenings, which are so magnified by the darkness, oh, my kind unseen guide, how I shall need you. At first I thought it lucky you had settled to go, just when she is coming; but now, just because she is coming, I cannot let you go. Having her, will be wonderful beyond words; but it will not be the same as having you."

Nurse Rosemary was receiving her reward, and she appeared to find it rather overwhelming.

As soon as she could speak, she said, gently: "Don't excite yourself over it, Mr. Dalmain. Believe me, when you have been with her for five minutes, you will find it just the same as having me. And how do you know she has not also been in Sightless Land? A nurse would do that sort of thing, because she was very keen on her profession, and on making a success of her case. The woman who loves you, would do it for love of you."

"It would be like her," said Garth; and leaned back, a look of deep contentment gathering on his face. "Oh, Jane! Jane! She is coming! She is coming!"

Nurse Rosemary looked at the clock.

"Yes; she is coming," she said; and though her voice was steady, her hands trembled. "And, as it is our last evening together under quite the same circumstances as during all these weeks, will you agree to a plan of mine? I must go upstairs now, and do some packing, and make a few arrangements. But will you dress early? I will do the same; and if you

could be down in the library by half past six, we might have some music before dinner."

"Why certainly," said Garth. "It makes no difference to me at what time I dress; and I am always ready for music. But, I say: I wish you were not packing, Miss Gray."

"I am not exactly packing up," replied Nurse Rosemary. "I am packing things away."

"It is all the same, if it means leaving. But you have promised not to go until she comes?"

"I will not go — until she comes."

"And you will tell her all the things she ought to know?"

"She shall know all I know, which could add to your comfort."

"And you will not leave me, until I am really — well, getting on all right?"

"I will never leave you, while you need me," said Nurse Rosemary. And again Garth detected that peculiar quality in her voice. He rose, and came towards where he heard her to be standing.

"Do you know, you are no end of a brick," he said, with emotion. Then he held out both hands towards her. "Put your hands in mine just for once, little Rosemary. I want to try to thank you."

There was a moment of hesitation. Two strong capable hands — strong and capable, though, just then, they trembled — nearly went home to his; but were withdrawn just in time. Jane's hour was not yet. This was Nurse Rosemary's moment of triumph and success. It should not be taken from her.

"This evening," she said, softly; "after the music, we will — shake hands. Now be careful, sir. You are stranded. Wait. Here is the garden-cord, just

to your left. Take a little air on the terrace; and sing again the lovely song I heard under my window this morning. And now that you know what it is that is 'going to happen,' this exquisite May-Day evening will fill you with tender expectation. Good-bye, sir — for an hour."

"What has come to little Rosemary?" mused Garth, as he felt for his cane, in its corner by the window. "We could not have gone on indefinitely quite as we have been, since she came in from the post office."

He walked on; a troubled look clouding his face. Suddenly it lifted, and he stood still, and laughed. "Duffer!" he said. "Oh, what a conceited duffer! She is thinking of her 'young man.' She is going to him to-morrow; and her mind is full of him; just as mine is full of Jane. Dear, good, clever, little Rosemary! I hope he is worthy of her. No; that, he cannot be. I hope he knows he is *not* worthy of her. That is more to the point. I hope he will receive her as she expects. Somehow, I hate letting her go to him. Oh, hang the fellow! — as Tommy would say."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE REVELATION OF THE ROSARY

SIMPSON was crossing the hall just before half past six o'clock. He had left his master in the library. He heard a rustle just above him; and, looking up, saw a tall figure descending the wide oak staircase.

Simpson stood transfixed. The soft black evening-gown, with its trailing folds, and old lace at the bosom, did not impress him so much as the quiet look of certainty and power on the calm face above them.

"Simpson," said Jane, "my aunt, the Duchess of Meldrum, and her maid, and her footman, and a rather large quantity of luggage, will be arriving from Aberdeen, at about half past seven. Mrs. Graem knows about preparing rooms; and I have given James orders for meeting the train with the brougham, and the luggage-cart. The duchess dislikes motors. When Her Grace arrives, you can show her into the library. We will dine in the dining-room at a quarter past eight. Meanwhile, Mr. Dalmain and myself are particularly engaged just now, and must not be disturbed on any account, until the duchess's arrival. You quite understand?"

"Yes, miss — m'lady," stammered Simpson. He had been boot-boy in a ducal household early in his career; and he considered duchesses' nieces to be people before whom one should bow down.

Jane smiled. "'Miss' is quite sufficient, Simpson," she said; and swept towards the library.

Garth heard her enter, and close the door; and his quick ear caught the rustle of a train.

"Hullo, Miss Gray," he said. "Packed your uniform?"

"Yes," said Jane. "I told you I was packing."

She came slowly across the room, and stood on the hearth-rug looking down at him. He was in full evening-dress, just as at Shenstone on that memorable night; and, as he sat well back in his deep arm-chair, one knee crossed over the other, she saw the crimson line of his favourite silk socks.

Jane stood looking down upon him. Her hour had come at last. But even now she must, for his sake, be careful and patient.

"I did not hear the song," she said.

"No," replied Garth. "At first, I forgot. And when I remembered, I had been thinking of other things, and somehow — ah, Miss Gray! I cannot sing to-night. My soul is dumb with longing."

"I know," said Jane, gently; "and I am going to sing to you."

A faint look of surprise crossed Garth's face. "Do you sing?" he asked. "Then why have you not sung before?"

"When I arrived," said Jane, "Dr. Rob asked me whether I played. I said: 'A little.' Thereupon he concluded I sang a little, too; and he forbade me, most peremptorily, either to play a little, or sing a little, to you. He said he did not want you driven altogether mad."

Garth burst out laughing.

"How like old Robbie," he said. "And, in spite of his injunctions, are you going to take the risk, and 'sing a little,' to me, to-night?"

"No," said Jane. "I take no risks. I am going to sing you one song. Here is the purple cord, at your right hand. There is nothing between you and the piano; and you are facing towards it. If you want to stop me — you can come."

She walked to the instrument, and sat down.

Over the top of the grand-piano, she could see him, leaning back in his chair; a slightly amused smile playing about his lips. He was evidently still enjoying the humour of Dr. Rob's prohibition.

The Rosary has but one opening chord. She struck it; her eyes upon his face. She saw him sit up, instantly; a look of surprise, expectation, bewilderment, gathering there.

Then she began to sing. The deep rich voice, low and vibrant, as the softest tone of 'cello, thrilled into the startled silence.

"The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me;
I count them over, every one apart,
My rosary; my rosary.
Each hour a pearl —"

Jane got no further.

Garth had risen. He spoke no word; but he was coming blindly over to the piano. She turned on the music-stool, her arms held out to receive him. Now he had found the woodwork. His hand crashed down upon the bass. Now he had found her. He was on his knees, his arms around her. Hers enveloped him — yearning, tender, hungry with the repressed longing of all those hard weeks.

He lifted his sightless face to hers, for one moment. "You?" he said. "You? You — all the time?"

Then he hid his face in the soft lace at her breast.

"Oh, my boy, my darling!" said Jane, tenderly; holding the dear head close. "Yes; I, all the time; all the time near him, in his loneliness and pain. Could I have stopped away? But, oh, Garth! What it is, at last to hold you, and touch you, and feel you here! . . . Yes, it *is* I. Oh, my beloved, are you not quite sure? Who else could hold you thus? . . . Take care, my darling! Come over to the couch, just here; and sit beside me."

Garth rose, and raised her, without loosing her; and she guided herself and him to a safer seat close by. But there again he flung himself upon his knees, and held her; his arms around her waist; his face hidden in the shelter of her bosom.

"Ah, darling, darling," said Jane softly, and her hands stole up behind his head, with a touch of unspeakable protective tenderness; "it has been so sweet to wait upon my boy; and help him in his darkness; and shield him from unnecessary pain; and be always there, to meet his every need. But I could not come — myself — until he knew; and understood; and had forgiven — no, not 'forgiven'; understood, and yet still *loved*. For he does now understand? And he does forgive? . . . Oh, Garth! . . . Oh hush, my darling! . . . You frighten me! . . . No, I will never leave you; never, never! . . . Oh, can't you understand, my beloved? . . . Then I must tell you more plainly. Darling, — do be still, and listen. Just for a few days we must be — as we have been; only my boy will know it is I who am near him. Aunt 'Gina is coming this evening. She will be here in half an hour. Then, as soon as possible, we will get a special license; and we will be married, Garth; and then —" Jane paused: and the man who knelt beside her, held

his breath to listen — "and then," continued Jane in a low tender voice, which gathered in depth of sacred mystery, yet did not falter — "then it will be my highest *joy*, to be always with my husband, night and day."

A long sweet silence. The tempest of emotion in her arms, was hushed to rest. The eternal voice of perfect love had whispered: "Peace, be still"; and there was a great calm.

At last Garth lifted his head. "Always? Always together?" he said. "Ah, that will be 'perpetual light!'"

When Simpson, pale with importance, flung open the library door, and announced: "Her Grace, the Duchess of Meldrum," Jane was seated at the piano, playing soft dreamy chords; and a slim young man, in evening dress, advanced with eager hospitality to greet his guest.

The duchess either did not see, or chose to ignore the guiding cord. She took his outstretched hand warmly in both her own.

"Goodness gracious, my dear Dal! How you surprise me! I expected to find you blind! And here you are, striding about, just your old handsome self!"

"Dear Duchess," said Garth, and stooping, kissed the kind old hands still holding his; "I cannot see you, I am sorry to say; but I don't feel very blind to-night. My darkness has been lightened, by a joy beyond expression."

"Oh ho! So that's the way the land lies! Now which are you going to marry? The nurse, — who, I gather, is a most respectable young person, and highly recommended; or that hussy, Jane; who, without the

smallest compunction, orders her poor aunt from one end of the kingdom to the other, to suit her own convenience?"

Jane came over from the piano, and slipped her hand through her lover's arm.

"Dear Aunt 'Gina," she said; "you know you loved coming; because you enjoy a mystery, and like being a dear old 'Deus-ex-machina,' at the right moment. And he is going to marry them both; because they both love him far too dearly ever to leave him again; and he seems to think he cannot do without either."

The duchess looked at the two radiant faces; one sightless; the other, with glad proud eyes for both; and her own filled with tears.

"Hoity-toity!" she said. "Are we in Salt Lake City? Well, we always thought one girl would not do for Dal; he would need the combined perfections of several; and he appears to think he has found them. God bless you both, you absurdly happy people; and I will bless you, too; but not until I have dined. Now, ring for that very nervous person, with side-whiskers; and tell him I want my maid, and my room, and I want to know where they have put my Toucan. I had to bring him, Jane. He is so *loving*, dear bird! I knew you would think him in the way; but I really could not leave him behind."

CHAPTER XXXVII

"IN THE FACE OF THIS CONGREGATION"

THE society paragraphs would have described it as "a very quiet wedding," when Garth and Jane, a few days later, were pronounced "man and wife together," in the little Episcopal church among the hills.

Perhaps, to those who were present, it stands out rather as an unusual wedding, than as a quiet one.

To Garth and Jane the essential thing was to be married, and left to themselves, with as little delay as possible. They could not be induced to pay any attention to details as to the manner in which this desired end was to be attained. Jane left it entirely to the doctor, in one practical though casual sentence: "Just make sure it is valid, Dicky; and send us in the bills."

The duchess, being a true conservative, early began mentioning veils, orange-blossom, and white satin; but Jane said: "My dear Aunt! Fancy me—in orange-blossom! I should look like a Christmas pantomime. And I never wear veils, even in motors; and white satin is a form of clothing I have always had the wisdom to avoid."

"Then in what *do* you intend to be married, unnatural girl?" inquired the duchess.

"In whatever I happen to put on, that morning," replied Jane, knotting the silk of a soft crimson cord she was knitting; and glancing out of the window, to where Garth sat smoking, on the terrace.