

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.

"Have you a time-table?" inquired her Grace of Meldrum, with dangerous calmness. "And can you send me to the station this afternoon?"

"We can always send to the station, at a moment's notice," said Jane, working in a golden strand, and considering the effect. "But where are you going, dear Aunt 'Gina? You know Deryck and Flower arrive this evening."

"I am washing my hands of you, and going South," said the duchess, wrathfully.

"Don't do that, dear," said Jane, placidly. "You have washed your hands of me so often; and, like the blood of King Duncan of Scotland, I am upon them still. 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.'" Then, raising her voice: "Garth, if you want to walk, just give a call. I am here, talking over my trousseau with Aunt 'Gina."

"What is a trousseau?" came back in Garth's happy voice.

"A thing you get into to be married," said Jane.

"Then let's get into it quickly," shouted Garth, with enthusiasm.

"Dear Aunt," said Jane, "let us make a compromise. I have some quite nice clothes upstairs, including Redfern tailor-mades, and several uniforms. Let your maid look through them, and whatever you select, and she puts out in readiness on my wedding morning, I promise to wear."

This resulted in Jane appearing at the church in a long blue cloth coat and skirt, handsomely embroidered with gold, and suiting her large figure to perfection; a deep yellow vest of brocaded silk; and old lace ruffles at neck and wrists.

Garth was as anxious about his wedding garments,

as Jane had been indifferent over hers; but he had so often been in requisition as best-man at town weddings, that Simpson had no difficulty in turning him out in the acme of correct bridal attire. And very handsome he looked, as he stood waiting at the chancel steps; not watching for his bride; but obviously listening for her; for, as Jane came up the church on Deryck's arm, Garth slightly turned his head and smiled.

The duchess — resplendent in purple satin and ermine, with white plumes in her bonnet, and many jewelled chains depending from her, which rattled and tinkled, in the silence of the church, every time she moved — was in a front pew on the left, ready to give her niece away.

In a corresponding seat, on the opposite side, as near as possible to the bridegroom, sat Margery Graem, in black silk, with a small quilted satin bonnet, and a white lawn kerchief folded over the faithful old heart which had beaten in tenderness for Garth since his babyhood. She turned her head anxiously, every time the duchess jingled; but otherwise kept her eyes fixed on the marriage service, in a large-print prayer book in her lap. Margery was not used to the Episcopal service, and she had her "doots" as to whether it could possibly be gone through correctly, by all parties concerned. In fact this anxiety of old Margery's increased so painfully when the ceremony actually commenced, that it took audible form; and she repeated all the answers of the bridal pair, in an impressive whisper, after them.

Dr. Rob, being the only available bachelor, did duty as best-man; Jane having stipulated that he should not be intrusted with the ring; her previous observations leading her to conclude that he would most

probably slip it unconsciously on to his finger, and then search through all his own pockets and all Garth's, and begin taking up the church matting, before it occurred to him to look at his hand. Jane would not have minded the diversion, but she did object to any delay. So the ring went to church in Garth's waistcoat pocket, where it had lived since Jane brought it out from Aberdeen; and, without any fumbling or hesitation, was quietly laid by him upon the open book.

Dr. Rob had charge of the fees for clerk, verger, bell-ringers, and every person, connected with the church, who could possibly have a tip pressed upon them. Garth was generous in his gladness, and eager to do all things in a manner worthy of the great gift made fully his that day. So Dr. Rob was well provided with the wherewithal; and this he jingled in his pockets as soon as the exhortation commenced, and his interest in the proceedings resulted in his fatal habit of unconsciousness of his own actions. Thus he and the duchess kept up a tinkling duet, each hearing the other, and not their own sounds. So the duchess glared at Dr. Rob; and Dr. Rob frowned at the duchess; and old Margery looked tearfully at both.

Deryck Brand, the tallest man in the church, his fine figure showing to advantage in the long frock coat with silk facings, which Lady Brand had pronounced indispensable to the occasion, retired to a seat beside his wife, just behind old Margery, as soon as he had conducted Jane to Garth's side. As Jane removed her hand from his arm, she turned and smiled at him; and a long look passed between them. All the memories, all the comprehension, all the trust and affection of years, seemed to concentrate in that look; and Lady Brand's eyes dropped to her dainty white

and gold prayer-book. She had never known jealousy; the doctor had never given her any possible reason for acquiring that cruel knowledge. His Flower bloomed for him; and her fragrance alone made his continual joy. All other lovely women were mere botanical specimens, to be examined and classified. But Flower had never quite understood the depth of the friendship between her husband and Jane, founded on the associations and aspirations of childhood and early youth, and a certain similarity of character which would not have wedded well, but which worked out into a comradeship, providing a source of strength for both. Of late, Flower had earnestly tried to share, even while failing to comprehend, it.

Perhaps she, in her pale primrose gown, with daffodils at her waist, and sunbeams in her golden hair, was the most truly bridal figure in the church. As the doctor turned from the bride, and sought his place beside her in the pew, he looked at the sweet face, bent so demurely over the prayer-book, and thought he had never seen his wife look more entrancingly lovely. Unconsciously his hand strayed to the white rosebud she had fastened in his coat as they strolled round the conservatory together that morning. Flower, glancing up, surprised his look. She did not think it right to smile in church; but a delicate wave of colour swept over her face, and her cheek leaned as near the doctor's shoulder, as the size of her hat would allow. Flower felt quite certain that was a look the doctor had never given Jane.

The service commenced. The short-sighted clergyman, very nervous, and rather overwhelmed by the unusual facts of a special license, a blind bridegroom, and the reported presence of a duchess, began reading

very fast, in an undertone, which old Margery could not follow, though her finger, imprisoned in unwonted kid, hurried along the lines. Then conscious of his mistake, he slowed down, and became too impressive; making long nerve-straining pauses, filled in by the tinkling of the duchess, and the chinking in Dr. Rob's trousers-pockets.

Thus they arrived at the demand upon the congregation, if they could show any just cause why these two persons might not lawfully be joined together, *now* to speak — and the pause here was so long, and so overpowering, that old Margery said "nay"; and then gave a nervous sob. The bridegroom turned and smiled in the direction of the voice; and the doctor, leaning forward, laid his hand on the trembling shoulder, and whispered: "Steady, old friend. It is all right."

There was no pause whatever after the solemn charge to the couple; so if Garth and Jane had any secrets to disclose, they had perforce to keep them for after discussion.

Then Jane found her right hand firmly clasped in Garth's; and no inadequacy of the Church's mouth-piece could destroy the exquisite beauty of the Church's words, in which Garth was asked if he would take her to be his own.

To this, Garth, and old Margery, said they would; with considerable display of emotion.

Then the all-comprehensive question was put to Jane; the Church seeming to remind her gently, that she took him in his blindness, with all which that might entail.

Jane said: "I will"; and the deep, tender voice, was the voice of "The Rosary."

When the words were uttered, Garth lifted the hand he held, and reverently kissed it.

This was not in the rubric, and proved disconcerting to the clergyman. He threw up his head suddenly, and inquired: "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" And as, for the moment, there was no response, he repeated the question wildly, gazing into distant corners of the church.

Then the duchess, who up to that time had been feeling a little bored, realised that her moment had come, and rejoiced. She sailed out of her pew, and advanced to the chancel step.

"My dear good man," she said; "I give my niece away; having come north at considerable inconvenience for that express purpose. Now, go on. What do we do next?"

Dr. Rob broke into an uncontrollable chuckle. The duchess lifted her lorgnette, and surveyed him.

Margery searched her prayer-book in vain for the duchess's response. It did not appear to be there.

Flower looked in distressed appeal at the doctor. But the doctor was studying, with grave intentness, a stencilled pattern on the chancel roof; and paid no attention to Flower's nudge.

The only people completely unconscious of anything unusual in the order of proceedings, appeared to be the bride and bridegroom. They were taking each other "in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation." They were altogether absorbed in each other, standing together in the sight of God; and the deportment of "this congregation," was a matter they scarcely noticed. "People always behave grotesquely at weddings," Jane had said to Garth, before-hand; "and ours will be no exception to the general

rule. But we can close our eyes, and stand together in Sightless Land; and Deryck will take care it is valid."

"Not in Sightless Land, my beloved," said Garth; "but in the Land where they need no candle neither light of the sun. However, and wherever, I take *you* as my wife, I shall be standing on the summit of God's heaven."

So they stood; and in their calmness the church hushed to silence. The service proceeded; and the minister, who had not known how to keep them from clasping hands when the rubric did not require it, found no difficulty in inducing them to do so again.

So they took each other — these two, who were so deeply each other's already — solemnly, reverently, tenderly, in the sight of God, they took each other, according to God's holy ordinance; and the wedding ring, type of that eternal love which has neither beginning nor ending, passed from Garth's pocket, over the Holy Book, on to Jane's finger.

When it was over, she took his arm; and leaning upon it, so that he could feel she leaned, guided him to the vestry.

Afterwards, in the brougham, for those few precious minutes, when husband and wife find themselves alone for the first time, Garth turned to Jane with an eager naturalness, which thrilled her heart as no studied speech could have done. He did not say: "My wife." That unique moment had been theirs, three years before.

"Dearest," he said, "how soon will they all go? How soon shall we be quite alone? Oh, why couldn't they drive to the station from the church?"

Jane looked at her watch. "Because we must

lunch them, dear," she said. "Think how good they have all been. And we could not start our married life by being inhospitable. It is just one o'clock; and we ordered luncheon at half past. Their train leaves the station at half past four. In three hours, Garth, we shall be alone."

"Shall I be able to behave nicely for three hours?" exclaimed Garth, boyishly.

"You must," said Jane, "or I shall fetch Nurse Rosemary."

"Oh hush!" he said. "All that is too precious, to-day, for chaff. Jane" — he turned suddenly, and laid his hand on hers — "Jane! Do you understand that you are now — actually — my wife?"

Jane took his hand, and held it against her heart, just where she so often had pressed her own, when she feared he would hear it throbbing.

"My darling," she said, "I do not understand it. But I know — ah, thank God! — I know it to be true."