CHAPTER VIII

THE ANTECEDENTS OF ROSALIND NIGHTINGALE, SALLY'S MOTHER. HOW BOTH CAME FROM INDIA TO ENGLAND, AND TOOK A VILLA ON A REPAIRING LEASE. SOMEWHAT OF SALLY'S UPBRINGING. SOME MORE ROPER GOSSIP, AND A CAT LET OUT OF A BAG. A PIECE OF PRESENCE OF MIND

SALLY GRAYTHORPE (our Mrs. Nightingale) was the daughter of a widowed mother, also called Sally, the name in both cases being (as in that of her daughter whom we know) Rosalind, not Sarah. This mother married *en secondes noces* a former sweetheart; it had been a case of a match opposed by parents on the ground of the apparent hopelessness of the young man's prospects. Mr. Paul Nightingale, however, falsified the doleful predictions about his future by becoming a successful leader-writer and war correspondent. It was after the close of the American Civil War, in which he had gained a good deal of distinction, that he met at Saratoga his old flame, Mrs. Graythorpe, then a widow with a little daughter five or six years old. Having then no wishes to consult but their own, and no reason to the contrary appearing, they were married.

They did not find the States a pleasant domicile in the early days following the great war, and came to England. The little daughter soon became like his own child to Mr. Paul Nightingale, and had his wish been complied with she would have taken his name during his life. But her mother saw no reason, apparently, for extinguishing Mr. Graythorpe *in toto*, and she remained Sally Graythorpe.

Miss Graythorpe was, at a guess, about fifteen when her stepfather died. Her mother, now for the second time a widow, must have been very comfortably off, as she had an income of her own as well as a life-interest in her late husband's invested savings, which was unfettered by any conditions as to her marrying again, or otherwise. She was not long in availing herself

of this liberty; for about the time when her daughter was of an age to be engaged on her own account, she accepted a third offer of marriage—this time from a clergyman, who, like herself, had already stood by the death-beds of two former mates, and was qualified to sympathize with her in every way, including comfortable inheritances.

But the young Sally Graythorpe kicked furiously against this new arrangement. It was an insult to papa (she referred to Mr. Nightingale; her real papa was a negligible factor), and she wouldn't live in the same house with that canting old hypocrite. She would go away straight to India, and marry Gerry—*he* would be glad enough to have her—see how constant the dear good boy had been! Not a week passed but she got a letter. She asked her mother flatly what could she want to marry again for at her time of life? And such a withered old sow-thistle as that! Sub-dean, indeed! She would *sub-dean* him! In fact, there were words, and the words almost went the length of taking the form known as "language" *par excellence*. The fact is, this Sally and her mother never *did* get on together well; it wasn't the least like her subsequent relation with our special Sally—Sally number three—who trod on Mr. Fenwick in the Twopenny Tube.

The end of the "words" was a letter to Gerry, a liberal trousseau, and a first-class passage out by P. and O. The young lady's luggage for the baggage-room was beautifully stencilled "Care of Sir Oughtred Penderfield, The Residency, Khopal." Perfectly safe in his keeping no doubt it would have been. But, then, that might have been true also of luggage if consigned to the Devil. If the tale hinted at in our last chapter *was* true, its poor little headstrong, inexperienced heroine would have been about as safe with the latter.

Anyhow, this club gossip supplies all the broad outline of the story; and it is a story we need not dwell on. It gives us no means of reconciling the like of the Mrs. Nightingale we know now with the amount of dissimulation, if not treachery, she must have practised on an unsuspicious boy, assuming that she did, as a matter of course, conceal her relation with Penderfield. One timid conjecture we have is, that the girl, having to deal with a subject every accepted phrase relating to which is an equivocation or an hypocrisy, really found it impossible to make her

position understood by a lover who simply idolized the ground she trod on. Under such circumstances, she may either have given up the attempt in despair, or jumped too quickly to the conclusion that she had succeeded in communicating the facts, and had been met half-way by forgiveness. Put yourself in her position, and resolve in your mind exactly how you would have gone about it—how you would have got a story of that sort forced into the mind of a welcoming lover; wedged into the heart of his unsuspicious rapture. Or, if you fancied he understood you, and no storm of despairing indignation came, think how easy it would be to persuade yourself you had done your duty by the facts, and might let the matter lapse! Why should not one woman once take advantage of the obscurities of decorum so many a man has found comforting to his soul during confession of sin, when pouring his revelations into an ear whose owner's experience of life has not qualified her to understand them. Think of the difficulty you yourself have encountered in getting at the absolute facts in some delicate concurrence of circumstances in this connexion, because of the fundamental impossibility of getting any one, man or woman, to speak direct truth!

Let us find out, or construct, all the excuses we can for poor Miss Graythorpe. Let us imagine the last counsel she had from the only one of her own sex who would be likely to know anything of the matter—the nefarious partner (if the Major's surmise was true) in the crime of her betrayer. "You are making a fuss about nothing. Men are not so immaculate themselves; your Gerry is no Joseph! If he rides the high horse with you, just you ask him what *he* had to say to Potiphar's wife! Oh, we're not so strait-laced out here—bless us alive!—as we are in England, or pretend to be." We can fancy the elegant brute saying it.

All our surmises bring us very little light, though. It is not that we are at such a loss to forgive poor Sally Graythorpe as a mere human creature we know nothing about. The difficulty is to reconcile what she seems to have been then with what she is now. We give it up.

Only, we wish to remark that it is her offence against her *fiancé* alone that we find it hard to stomach. As to her relations with Colonel Penderfield, we can say nothing without full particulars. And even if we had them, and they bore hard upon Miss Graythorpe, our mind would go back to the Temple in Jerusalem, and a morning nearly two thousand years ago. The voice that said who was to cast the first stone is heard no more, or has merged in ritual. But the Scribes and Pharisees are with us still, and quite ready to do the pelting. We should be harder on the Colonel, no doubt, with our prejudices; only, observe! he isn't brought up for judgment. He never is, any more than the other party was that day in Jerusalem. But, then, the Scribes and Pharisees were male! And they had the courage of their convictions—their previous convictions!—and acted on them in their selection of the culprit.

Without further apology for retailing conjecture as certainty, the following may be taken as substantially the story of this lady—we do not know whether to call her a divorced or a deserted wife—and her little encumbrance.

She found a resource in her trouble in the person of this old friend of her stepfather Paul Nightingale, Colonel (at that time Major) Lund. This officer had remained on in harness to the unusual age of fifty-eight, but it was a civil appointment he held; he had retired from active service in the ordinary course of things. It was probably not only because of his old friendship for her stepfather, but because the poor girl told him her unvarnished tale in full and he believed it, that he helped and protected her through the critical period that followed her parting from her husband; found her a domicile and seclusion, and enlisted on her behalf the sympathies of more than one officer's wife at our Sally's birth-place—Umritsur, if Major Roper was right. He corresponded with her mother as intercessor and mediator, but that good lady was in no mood for mercy: had her daughter not told her that she was too old to think of marriage? Too old! And had she not called her venerable sub-dean a withered old sow-thistle? She could forgive, under guarantees of the sinner's repentance; for had not her Lord enjoined forgiveness where the bail tendered was sufficient? Only, so many reservations and qualifications occurred in her interpretations of the Gospel narrative that forgiveness, diluted out of all knowledge, left its perpetrator free to refuse ever to see its victim again. But she would pray for her. A subdiaconal application

would receive attention; that was the suggestion between the lines.

The kind-hearted old soldier pooh-poohed her first letters. She would come round in time. Her natural good-feeling would get the better of her when she had had her religious fling. He didn't put it so—a strict old Puritan of the old school—but that was Miss Graythorpe's gloss in her own mind on what he did say. However, her mother never did come round. She cherished her condemnation of her daughter to the end, forgiving her again *morê suo,* if anything with increased asperity, on her death-bed.

This Colonel Lund is (have we mentioned this before?) the "old fossil" whom we have seen at Krakatoa Villa. He was usually called "the Major" there, from early association. He continued to foster and shelter his *protégée* during the year following the arrival of our own particular young Sally on the scene, saw her safely through her divorce proceedings, and then, when he finally retired from his post as deputy commissioner for the Umritsur district, arranged that she herself, with her encumbrance and an ayah, should accompany him to England. His companion travelled as Mrs. Graythorpe, and Sally junior as Mrs. Graythorpe's baby. She was excessively popular on the voyage; Sally was not suffering from sea-sickness, or feeling apparently the least embarrassed by the recent bar-sinister in her family. She courted Society, seizing it by its whiskers or its curls, and holding on like grim death. She endeavoured successively to get into the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic, but failed in every attempt, and was finally landed at Southampton in safety, after a resolute effort to drag the captain, who was six feet three high and weighed twenty stone, ashore by his beard. She was greatly missed on the remainder of the voyage (to Bremen—the boat was a German boat) by a family of Vons, who fortunately never guessed at the flaw in Sally's extraction, or there's no knowing what might not have happened.

But the arrival was too late for her poor mother to utilise her services towards a reconciliation with her own offended parent. A sudden attack of influenza, followed by low diet on high principles, and uncombated by timely port wine and tonics, had been followed by heart-failure, and the sub-dean was left

free to marry again, again. Whether he did so or not doesn't matter to us. The scheme Mrs. Graythorpe had been dwelling on with pleasure through the voyage of simply dropping her offspring on its grandmother, and leaving it to drive a coach and six through the latter's Christian forgiveness, was not to come to pass. She found herself after a year and a half of Oriental life back in her native land, an orphan with a small—but it must be admitted a very charming—illegitimate family. It was hard upon her, for she had been building on the success of this manœuvre, in which she had, perhaps, an unreasonable confidence. If she could only rely on Sally not being inopportunely sick over mamma just at the critical moment—that was the only misgiving that crossed her mind. Otherwise, such creases and such a hilarious laugh would be too much for starch itself. Poor lady! she had thought to herself more than once, since Sally had begun to mature and consolidate, that if Gerry had only waited a little—just long enough to see what a little duck was going to come of it all—and not lost his temper, all might have been made comfortable, and Sally might have had a little legitimate half-brother by now. What *had* become—what would become of Gerry? That she did not know, might never know.

One little pleasant surprise awaited her. It came to her knowledge for the first time that she was sole heir to the estate of her late stepfather, Paul Nightingale. The singular practice that we believe to exist in many families of keeping back all information about testamentary dispositions as long as possible from the persons they concern, especially minors, had been observed in her case; and her mother, perhaps resenting the idea that her daughter—a young chit!—should presume to outlive her, had kept her in ignorance of the contents of her stepfather's will. It did not really matter much. Had the sum been large, and a certainty, it might have procured for her a safer position when a temporary guest at the Residency at Khopal, or even caused her indignant young bridegroom to think twice before he took steps to rid himself of her. But, after all, it was only some three hundred and fifty pounds a year, and depended on the life of a lady of forty-odd, who might live to be a hundred. A girl with no more than that is nearly as defenceless as she is without it.

A condition was attached to the bequest—not an unwelcome one. She was to take her stepfather's name, Nightingale. She was really very glad to do this. There was a *faux air* of a real married name about Mrs. Nightingale that was lacking in Mrs. Graythorpe. Besides, all troublesome questions about who Sally's father was would get lost sight of in the fact that her mother had changed her name in connexion with that sacred and glorious thing, an inheritance. A trust-fund would always be a splendid red-herring to draw across the path of Mrs. Grundy's sleuth-hounds—a quarry more savoury to their nostrils even than a reputation. And nothing soothes the sceptical more than being asked now and again to witness a transfer of stock, especially if it is money held in trust. It has all the force of a pleasant alterative pill on the circulation of Respectability—removes obstructions and promotes appetite—is a certain remedy for sleeplessness, and so forth. So though there wasn't a particle of reason why Mrs. Nightingale's money should be held by any one but herself, as she had no intention whatever of marrying, Colonel Lund consented to become her trustee; and both felt that something truly respectable had been done—something that if it didn't establish a birthright and a correct extraction for Miss Sally, at any rate went a long way towards it.

By the time Mrs. Nightingale had got settled in the little house at Shepherd's Bush, that she took on a twenty-one years' lease five or six years after her return to England, and had christened it Saratoga, after her early recollection of the place where she first saw her stepfather, whose name she took when she came into the money he left her—by this time she, with the assistance of Colonel Lund, had quite assumed the appearance of a rather comfortably off young widow-lady, who did not make a great parade of her widowhood, but whose circumstances seemed reasonable enough, and challenged no inquiry. Inquisitiveness would have seemed needless impertinence—just as much so as yours would have been in the case of the hypothetical So-and-sos at the beginning of our last chapter. A vague impression got in the air that Sally's father had not been altogether satisfactory—well, wasn't it true? It may have leaked out from something in "the Major's" manner. But it never produced any

effect on friends, except that they saw in it a reason why Mrs. Nightingale never mentioned her husband. He had been a black sheep. Silence about him showed good feeling on her part. *De mortuis*, etc. . . .

Of one thing we feel quite certain—that if, at the time we made this lady's acquaintance, any chance friend of hers or her daughter's—say, for instance, Lætitia Wilson, Sally's old school-friend and present music-colleague—had been told that Mrs. Nightingale, of Krakatoa Villa, No. 7, Glenmoira Road, Shepherd's Bush, W., had been the heroine of divorce proceedings under queer circumstances, that her husband wasn't dead at all, and that that dear little puss Sally was Goodness-knows-who's child, we feel certain that the information would have been cross-countered with a blank stare of incredulity. Why, the mere fact that Mrs. Nightingale had refused so many offers of marriage was surely sufficient to refute such a nonsensical idea! Who ever heard of a lady with a soiled record refusing a good offer of marriage?

But while we are showing our respect for what the man in the street says or thinks, and the woman in the street thinks and says, are we not losing sight of a leading phrase of the symphony, sonata, cantata—whatever you like to call it—of Mrs. Nightingale's life? A phrase that steals in, just audibly—no more, in the most *strepitoso* passage of the stormy second movement—a movement, however, in which the proceedings of the Divorce Court are scarcely more audible, *pianissimo legato,* a chorus with closed lips, all the stringed instruments *con sordini*. But it grows and grows, and in *allegro con fuoco* on the voyage home, and only leaves a bar or two blank, when the thing it metaphorically represents is asleep and isn't suffering from the wind. It breaks out again *vivacissimo accelerando* when Miss Sally (whom we allude to) wakes up, and doesn't appreciate Nestlé's milk. But it always grows, and in due course may be said to become the music itself.

More intelligibly, Mrs. Nightingale became so wrapped up in her baby, that had seemed to her at first a cruel embarrassment—a thing to be concealed and ignored—that very soon she really had no time to think about where she broke her molasses-jug, as Uncle Remus says. The new life that it had become hers to

guard took her out of herself, made her quite another being from the reckless and thoughtless girl of two years ago.

As time went on she felt more and more the value of the newcomer's indifference to her extraction and the tragedy that had attended it. A living creature, with a stupendous capacity for ignoring the past, and, indeed, everything except a monotonous diet, naturally gave her mind a bias towards the future, and hope grew in her heart unconsciously, without reminding her that it might have been despair. A bad alarm, when the creature was six months old, that an enteric attack might end fatally, had revealed to its mother how completely it had taken possession of her own life, and what a power for compensation there was even in its most imperious and tyrannical habits. As it gradually became articulate—however unreasonable it continued—her interest in its future extinguished her memories of her own past, and she found herself devising games for baby before the little character was old enough to play them, and costumes before she was big enough to wear them. By the time Saratoga Villa had become Krakatoa, Miss Sally had had time to benefit by a reasonable allowance of the many schemes her mother had developed for her during her infancy. Had all the projects which were mooted for her further education at this date been successfully carried out, she would have been an admirable female Crichton, if her reason had survived the curriculum. Luckily for her, she had a happy faculty for being plucked at examinations, and her education was consequently kept within reasonable bounds.

There was, however, one department of culture in which Sally outshot all competitors. This was swimming. She would give a bath's length at the Paddington Baths to the next strongest swimmer in the Ladies' Club, and come in triumphant in a race of ten lengths. It was a grand sight to see Sally rushing stem on, cleaving the water with her head almost as if breath were an affectation, and doubling back at the end while the other starters were scarcely half-way. Or shooting through the air in her little blue costume straight for the deepest water, and then making believe to be a fish on the shiny tiles at the bottom.

Her mother always said she was certain that if that little monkey had managed to wriggle through some hole into the sea, on her voyage home, she would have swum after the ship and climbed up the rudder chains. Possibly, but she was only twelve months old! If, however, she had met with an early death, her mother's lot would have lacked its redemption. The joint life of the two supplies a possible answer to the conundrum that has puzzled us. For in a certain sense the absorption of her own existence in that of another than herself had made of Rosalind the woman, at the date of our introduction to her, quite another person from Rosalind the hot-headed and thoughtless girl that had quarrelled with her natural guardian for doing what she had a perfect right to do, and had steered alone into unknown seas, a ship without a rudder or a compass, and very little knowledge of the stars of heaven for her guide. We can see what she is now much better than we can judge what she was then.

It need not be supposed that this poor lady never felt any interest, never made any inquiry, about the sequel of the life she had so completely *bouleversé;* for, whatever blame we feel bound to express, or whatever exculpation we contrive to concoct for her, there can be no doubt what the result was to the young man who has come into the story, so far, only under the name of Gerry. We simply record his designation as it has reached us in the data we are now making use of. It is all hearsay about a past. We add what we have been able to gather, merely noting that what it seems to point to recommends itself to us as probable.

"Nobody knoo, nobody cared," was our friend Major Roper's brief reply to an inquiry what became of this young man. "Why, good Lard, sir!" he went on, "if one was to begin fussin' about all the Johnnies that shy off when there's a row of that sort, one would never get a dam night's rest! Not but what if I could recollect his name. Now, what *was* his confounded name? Thought I'd got it—but no—it wasn't Messiter. Fancy his Christian name was Jeremiah. . . . I recollect Messiter I'm thinkin' of—character that looked as if he had a pain in his stomach—came into forty thousand pounds. Stop a bit—was it Indermaur? No, it wasn't Indermaur. No use guessin'—give it up."

Besides, the Major was getting purple with suppressed cough-

ing. When he had given it up, he surrendered unconditionally to the cough, but was presently anxious to transmit, through its subsidence, an idea that he found it impossible to shake across the table between us out of an inarticulate forefinger end. It assumed form in time. Why not ask the lady herself? We demurred, and the old soldier explained.

"Not rushin' at her, you know, and sayin', 'Who the dooce was it married you, ma'am?' I'm not a dam fool. Showin' tact, you know—puttin' it easy and accidental. 'Who was that young beggar now?—inspector—surveyor—something of the sort —up at Umballa in seventy-nine? Burrumpooter Irrigation— that's what *he* was on.' And, Lard bless you, my dear sir, you don't suppose she'll up and say, 'I suppose you mean that dam husband of mine.' Not she! Sensible woman that, sir—seen the world—knows a thing or two. You'll see she'll only say, 'That was Foodle or Parker or Stebbins or Jephson,' as may be, accordin' to the name."

We did not see our way to this enterprise, and said so. We drew a line; said there were things you could do, and things you couldn't do. The Major chuckled, and admitted this might be so; his old governor used to say, "Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines." The last two words remained behind in the cough, unless, indeed, they were shaken out off the Major's forefinger into a squeezed lemon that was awaiting its Seltzer.

"But I can tell you thing, Mr.," said he, forgetting our name, as soon as he felt soothed by the lemon-squash. "He didn't keep his name, that young man didn't. You may bet he didn't safely! Only, it's no use askin' me why, nor what he changed it to. If it *was* him that was lost in the Bush in New South Wales, when I was at Sydney, why, of course that chap's *name* was the same. I remember that much. Can't get hold of the name, though." He appeared to consult the pattern on his silk pocket-handkerchief as an oracle, and to await its answer with a thoughtful eye. Presently he blew his nose on the oracle, and returned it to his pocket, adding: "But it's a speculation—little speculation of my own. Don't *ask me!*" We saw, however, that more would come, without asking. And it came.

"It made a talk out there at the time. But *that* didn't bring him to life. You may talk till you're hoarse, but you won't bring a dead man to—not when he's twenty miles off in a forest of gum-trees, as like as tallow-candles. . . . Oh yes, they had the natives put on the scent—black trackers, they call 'em— but, Lard! it was all no use. They only followed the scent of his horse, and the horse came back a fortnight after with them on his heels, an hour or so behind. . . . He'd only just left his party a moment, and meant to come back into the open. I suppose he thought he was sure to cross a cutting, and got trapped in the solid woodland."

"But what was the speculation? You said just now . . ."

"Not much to go by," said the Major, shaking a discouraging head. "Another joker with another name, who turned up a hundred miles off! Harrisson, I fancy—yes, Harrisson. It was only my idea they were the same. I came away, and don't know how they settled it."

"But something, Major Roper, must have made you think this man the same—the same as Jeremiah Indermaur, or whatever his name was—Mrs. Nightingale's man?"

"Somethin' must! What it was is another pair of shoes." He cogitated and reflected, but seemed to get no nearer. "You ask Pelloo," he said. "He might give you a tip." Then he called for a small glass of cognac, because the Seltzer was such dam chilly stuff, and the dry sherry was no use at all. We left him arranging the oracle over his face, with a view to a serious nap.

We got a few words shortly after with General Pellew, who seemed a little surprised at the Major's having referred to him for information.

"I don't know," said he, "why our friend Roper shouldn't recollect as much about it as I do. However, I do certainly remember that when this young gentleman, whatever his name was, left the station, he did go to Sydney or Melbourne, and I have some hazy recollection of some one saying that he was lost in the Bush. But why old Jack fancies he was found again or changed his name to Harrisson I haven't the slightest idea."

So that all we ourselves succeeded in getting at about Gerry may be said to have been the trap-door he vanished through. Whether Mrs. Nightingale got at other sources of information we

cannot say. Whatever she learned she would be sure to keep her own counsel about. She may have concluded that the bones of the husband who had in a fit of anger deserted her had been picked by white ants, twenty years ago, in an Australian forest; or she may have come to know, by some means, of his resuscitation from the Bush, and his successes or failures in a later life elsewhere. We have had our own reasons for doubting that she ever knew that he took the name of Harrisson—if he really did—a point which seemed to us very uncertain, so far as the Major's narrative went. If she did get a scrap of tidings, a flying word, about him now and again, it was most likely all she got. And when she got it she would feel the danger of further inquiry—the difficulty of laying the reasons for her curiosity before her informant. You can't easily say to a stranger: "Oh, do tell us about Mrs. Jones or Mr. Smith. She or he is our divorced or separated wife or husband." A German might, but Mrs. Nightingale was not a German.

However, she *may* have heard something about that Gerry, we grant you, in all those twenty long years. But if you ask us our opinion—our private opinion—it is that she scarcely heard of him, if she heard at all, and certainly never set eyes on him, until one day her madcap little daughter brought him home, half-killed by an electric shock, in a cab we were at some pains to describe accurately a few pages ago. And even then, had it not been for the individualities of that cab, she might have missed seeing him, and let him go away to the infirmary or the police-station, and probably never been near him again.

As it was, the face she saw when a freak of chance led to her following that cab, and looking in out of mere curiosity at its occupant, was the face of her old lover—of her husband. Eighteen—twenty—years had made a man of one who was then little more than a boy. The mark of the world he had lived in was on him; and it was the mark of a rough, strong world where one fights, and, if one is a man of this sort, maybe wins. But she never doubted his identity for a moment. And the way in which she grasped the situation—above all, the fact that he had not recognised her and would not recognise her—quite justified, to our thinking, Major Roper's opinion of her powers of self-command.

Nevertheless, these were not so absolute that her demeanour escaped comment from the cabby, the only witness of her first sight of the "electrocuted" man. He spoke of her afterwards as that squealing party down that sanguinary little turning off Shepherd's Bush Road he took that sanguinary galvanic shock to.