

she could not speak freely to her—nor, indeed, speak at all. And as soon as the tension died down, she went back as to a source of peace to the failure of his powers of memory, obvious, complete. All her hopes lay in that. Where would they be if the whole past were suddenly sprung on him? He *might* be ready to bury by-gones, but——

She woke next day fairly at ease in her mind, but feeling as one does after any near-run escape. And then it was she said to herself that she was a good actress. But the part *was* hard to act.

The relations between Fenwick and the Nightingales, mother and daughter, seem to us to have been acquiring cohesion at the time of the foregoing interview. It is rather difficult to say why. But it serves to pave the way to the state of things that Sally accepted as the "spooneyness" of Fenwick, and her mother's observation of his "going on," without the dimmest idea of the underlying motives of the drama. Another three months, bringing us on to these discriminations of Sally's, may also have brought about appearances that justified them.

## CHAPTER X

THE DANGERS OF AN UNKNOWN PAST. NETTLE-GRASPING, AND A RECURRENCE. WHO AMONG US COURTS CATECHISM ABOUT HIMSELF? A UNIVERSALLY PROVIDED YOUNG MAN. HOW ABOUT THE POOR OLD FURNITURE?

WE defy the acutest of psychologists to estimate precisely the hold love has on a man who is diagnosed, in the language of the vulgar child Sally, as "spooney." Probably no patient has ever succeeded in doing this himself. It is quite another matter when the eruption has broken out, when the crater is vomiting flames and the lava is pouring down on the little homesteads at the mountain's base, that may stand in the metaphor for all that man's duties and obligations. By that time he *knows*. But, while still within the "spooney" zone he knows no more than you or I (or that most important *she*) what the morrow means to bring. Will it be a step on or a step back? An altogether new *she*, or the fires of the volcano, let loose beyond recall?

Fenwick was certainly not in a position to gauge his own feelings towards Mrs. Nightingale. All previous experience was cut away from him, or seemed so. He might have been, for anything he knew, a married man with a family, a devoted husband. He might have been recently wedded to an adoring bride, and she might now be heart-broken in her loneliness. How could he tell? The only thing that gave him courage about this was that he *could* remember the fact that he had had parents, brothers, sisters. He could not recollect *anything whatever* about sweetheart, wife, or child. Unearthly gusts of half-ideas came to him at times, like that of the girl and the dog-cart. But they only gave him pain, and went away unsolved, leaving him sick and dizzy.

His situation was an acutely distressing one. He was shackled and embarrassed, so to speak, by what he knew of his relations to existence. At any moment a past might be sprung on him,

bringing him suddenly face to face with God knows what. So strongly did he feel this that he often said to himself that the greatest boon that could be granted to him would be an assurance of continued oblivion. He was especially afflicted by memories of an atrocious clearness that would come to him in dreams, the horror of which would remain on into his waking time. They were not necessarily horrible things at all, but their clearness in the dream, and their total, if slow, disappearance as the actual world came back, became sometimes an excruciating torment. Who could say that they, or some equivalents, might not reach him out of the past to-day or to-morrow—any time?

For instance, he had one morning waked up in a perfect agony—a cold perspiration as of the worst nightmares—because of a dream harmless enough in itself. He had suddenly remembered, in the dream-street he could identify the houses of so plainly, a first-floor he had occupied where he had left all his furniture locked up years ago. And he had found the house and the first-floor quite easily, and had not seen anything strange in the landlord saying that he and his old woman often wondered when Mr. Fenwick would come for his things. It was not the accumulation of rent unpaid, nor that of the dirt he knew he should find on the furniture (all of which he could recollect in the dream perfectly well), but the fact that he had forgotten it all, and left it unclaimed all those years, that excruciated him. Even his having to negotiate for its removal in his shirt did not afflict him so much as his forgetfulness for so long of the actual furniture; his conviction of the reality of which lasted on after his discovery about his costume had made him suspect, in his dream, that he was dreaming.

To a man whose memory is sound, who feels sure he looks back on an actual past in security, such a dream is only a curiosity of sleep. To Fenwick it was, like many others of the same sort, a possible herald of an analogous revelation in waking hours, with a sequel of dreadful verification from some abyss of an utterly forgotten past.

His worst terror, far and away, was the fear that he was married and a father. It might have been supposed that this arose from a provisional sense of pity for the wife and children he must have left; that his mind would conceive hypothetical poverty

for them, or sorrow, disease, or death, the result direct or indirect of his disappearance. But this was scarcely the case. They themselves were too intensely hypothetical. In this respect the blank in his intellect was so unqualified that it might never have occurred to him to ask himself the question if they existed had it not been suggested to him by Mrs. Nightingale herself. It was, in fact, a question she almost always recurred to when Miss Sally was out of the way. It was no use trying to talk seriously when that little monkey was there. She turned everything to a joke. But the Major was quite another thing. He would back her up in anything reasonable.

"I wish more could be done to find out," said she for the twentieth time to Fenwick one evening, shortly after the musical recital of last chapter. "I don't feel as if it was right to give up advertising. Suppose the poor thing is in Australia or America."

"The poor thing is my hypothetical wife?"

"Exactly so. Well, suppose she is. Some people never see any newspapers at all. And all the while she may have been advertising for *you*."

"Oh no; we should have been sure to see or hear."

"But why? Now I ask you, Mr. Fenwick, suppose she advertised half a dozen times in the 'Melbourne Argus' or the 'New York Sun,' *would* you have seen it, necessarily?"

"I should not, because I never see the 'Melbourne Argus' or the 'New York Sun.' But those agents we paid to look out go steadily through the agony columns—the personal advertisements—of the whole world's press; they would have found it if it had ever been published."

"I dare say they only pocketed the money."

"That they did, no doubt. But they gave me something for it. A hundred and twenty-three advertisements addressed to Fenwicks—none of them to me!"

"But have we advertised enough?"

"Oh, heavens, yes. Think of the answers we've had! I've just received the hundred and forty-second. From a lady in distressed circumstances who bought a piano ten years ago from a party of my name and initials—thought I might be inclined to buy it back at half-price. She proposes to call on me early next week."

"Poor Mr. Fenwick! It is discouraging, I admit. But, oh dear! fancy if there's some poor thing breaking her heart somewhere! It's easy enough for you—you don't believe in her."

"That's it; I don't!" He dropped a tone of pleasantry, and spoke more seriously. "Dear Mrs. Nightingale, if my absence of conviction of the existence of this lady did not rise to the height of a definite disbelief in her altogether—well, I should be wretched. But I feel very strongly that I need not make myself a poor miserable about her. I *don't* believe in her, that's the truth!"

"You don't believe a man could forget his wife?"

"I *can't* believe it, try how I may! Anything—anybody else—but his wife, no!"

Fenwick had come in late in the evening, as he was in the habit of doing, often three or four times in the week. He looked across from his side of the heathrug, where he had been standing watching the fire, but could not see the face opposite to him. Mrs. Nightingale was sitting with her back to the light sheltering her eyes from the blaze with a fire-screen. So Fenwick saw only the aureole the lamp made in her hair—it was a fine halo with a golden tinge. Sally was very proud of mamma's hair; it was much better fun to do than her own, said the vulgar child. But even had she not been hidden by the screen, the expression on her face might have meant nothing to him—that is, nothing more than the ready sympathy he was so well accustomed to. A little anxiety of eye, a tremor in the lip, the birth of a frown without a sequel—these might have meant anything or nothing. She might even have turned whiter than she did, and yet not be said to show the cross-fire of torments in her heart. She was, as we told you, a strong woman, either by nature, or else her life had made her one.

For, think of what the recesses of her memory held; think of the past she looked back on, and knew to be nothing but a blank to him. Think of what *she* was, and *he* was, as he stood there and said, "Anybody else, but his wife;" and then rather shaped the "No" that followed with his lips than said it; but shook an emphasis into the word with his head.

"When are you going to get your hair cut, Mr. Fenwick?" said she; and he did think she changed the subject abruptly, with-

out apparent cause. "It's just like a lion's mane when you shake it like that."

"To-morrow, if you think it too disreputable."

"I like it. Sally wants to cut it. . . ."

The last few words showed the completeness of Fenwick's *tame attitude* in the family. It had developed in an amazingly short time. Was it due to the old attachment of this man and woman—an attachment, mind you, that was sound and strong till it died a violent death? We do not find this so very incredible; perhaps, because that memory of their old parting in the garden went nearer to an actual revival than any other stirring in his mind. But, of course, there may have been others equally strong, only we chance to hear of this one.

That was not our purpose, however, in recording such seeming trivial chat. It was not trivial on Mrs. Nightingale's part. She had made up her mind to flinch from nothing, always to grasp her nettle. Here was a nettle, and she seized it firmly. If she identified as clearly as she did that shaken lion-mane of Fenwick's with that of Gerry, the young man of twenty years ago, and seeing its identity was silent, that would be flinching. She would and did say the self-same thing she could recall saying to Gerry. And she asked Fenwick when he was going to get his hair cut with a smile, that was like that of the Indian brave under torture. A knife was through her heart. But it was well done, so she thought to herself. If she could be as intrepid as that, she could go on and live. She tried experiments of this sort when the watchful merry eyes of her daughter were not upon her, and even felt glad, this time, that the Major was having a doze underneath a "Daily Telegraph." Fenwick took it all as a matter of course, mere chaff. . . .

Did he? If so, why, after a few words more of chat, did he press his hands on his eyes and shake a puzzled head; then, after an abrupt turn up and down the room, come back to where he stood at first and draw a long breath?

"Was that a recurrence, Mr. Fenwick?" she asked. They had come to speak of these mental discomforts as *recurrences*. They would afflict him, not seldom, without bringing to his mind any definite image. And this was the worst sort. When an image came, his mind felt eased.

"A sort of one."

"Can you tell when it came on?" All this was nettle-grasping. She was getting used to it. "Was it before or after I said that about your hair?"

"After. No, before. Perhaps just about then." Mrs. Nightingale decided that she would not tempt Providence any further. Self-discipline was good, but not carried to danger-point.

"Now sit down and be quiet," she said. "We won't talk any more about unpleasant things. Only the worst of it is," she added, smiling, "that one's topics—yours and mine, I mean—are so limited by the conditions. I should ask any other man who had been about the world, as you *must* have done, all sorts of questions about all sorts of places—where he had been, whom he had seen. You can't answer questions, though I hope you will some day. . . ."

She paused, and he saw the reason. "You see," said he, with a good-humoured laugh, "one gets back directly to the unpleasant subject, whether one will or no. But if I could remember all about my precious self, I might not court catechism about it. . . ."

"I should not about mine." This was said in a low tone, with a silent look on the unraised eyes that was almost an invitation not to hear, and her lips hardly moved to say it, either. He missed it for the moment, but finished his speech with the thought in his mind.

"Still, it's an ill-wind that blows nobody good. See what a clear conscience I have! But what was that *you* said?"

She dropped the fire-screen and raised her eyes—fine eyes they were, which we might have likened to those of Juno had the eyes of oxen been blue—turning them full on him. "When?" said she.

"Just this minute. I ought to have apologized for interrupting you."

"I said I should not court catechism about myself. I should not." Fenwick felt he could not assign this speech its proper place in the dialogue without thinking. He thought gravely, looking to all seeming into the fire for enlightenment; then turned round and spoke.

"Surely that is true, in a sense, of all mankind—mankind and womankind. Nobody wants to be seen through. But one's past would need to be a very shaky one to make one wish for an oblivion like mine to extinguish it."

"I should not dislike it. I have now all that I wish to keep out of the past. I have Sally. There is nothing I could not afford to forget in the past, no one thing the loss of which could alter her in the least, that little monkey of a daughter of mine! And there are many, many things I should like to see the last of." From which speech Fenwick derived an impression that the little monkey, the vulgar child, had come back warm and living and welcome to the speaker's mind, and had driven away some mists of night, some uglinesses that hung about it. How he wished he could ask: "Was one of them her father?" That was not practicable. But it was something of that sort, clearly. His mind could not admit the idea of a haunting remorse, a guilty conscience of an action of her own, in the memory of the woman who spoke to him. He was too loyal to her for that. Besides, the wording of her speech made no such supposition necessary. Fenwick's answer to it fell back on abstractions—the consolation a daughter must be, and so forth.

"There she is!" said her mother; and then added, as perturbation without heralded Miss Sally's approach: "I will tell you what I meant some other time." For there she was, no doubt of it, wild with excitement to report the splendid success of the great sestet, the production of which had been the event of the musical gathering she had come from. And you know as well as we do how it is when youth and high spirits burst in upon the sober stay-at-homes, intoxicated with music and lights and supper and too many people talking at once. Sally's eyebrows and teeth alone would have been enough to set all the birds singing in the dullest coppices decorum ever planted, let alone the tales she had to tell of all the strange and wonderful things that had come to pass at the Erskine Peels', who were the givers of the party, and always did things on such a scale.

"And where do you think, mother, Mrs. Erskine Peel gets all those good-looking young men from that come to her parties? Why, from the Stores, of course. Just fancy! . . . How do I know? Why, because I talked to one of them for ever so long,

and made him tell me all about it. I detected him, and told him so straight off. How did I recognise him? Why, of course, because he's that young man that came here about the letter. Oh, *you* know, Mr. Fenwick! Gracious me, how slow you are! The young man that brought you the letter to translate. Rather tall, dark eyes."

"Oh yes, certainly. I remember him quite well. Well, I expect he made a very good young man for a small tea-party."

"Of course he did, and it's quite ridiculous." By which the vulgar child meant that class distinctions were ridiculous. She had this way of rushing subjects, eliding the obvious, and relying on her hearers. "He told me all about it. He'd been universally provided, he said; and I promised not to tell. Miss Erskine Peel—that's Orange, you know, the soprano—went to the manager and said her mother said they *must* get more men, though it wasn't dancing, or the rooms looked so bad; only they mustn't be fools, and must be able to say Wagner and Liszt and things. And he hoped I didn't think he was a fool."

"What did you say?"

"Said I couldn't say—didn't know him well enough. He might be, to look at. Or not, accordingly. I didn't say *that*, you know, mamma."

"I didn't know, darling. You're very rude sometimes."

"Well, he said he could certainly say Wagner and Liszt, and even more, because—it was rather sad, you know, mamma dear——"

"Sally, you've told that young man he may call; you know you have!"

"Well, mamma dear, and if I have, I don't see that anybody's mare's dead. Because, do listen!" Fenwick interposed a parenthesis.

"I don't think you need to be apprehensive, Mrs. Nightingale. He was an educated young man enough. His not knowing a French phrase like that implies nothing. Not one in a hundred would." The way in which the Major, who, of course, had come out of his doze on the inrush of Miss Sally, looked across at Fenwick as he said this, implied an acquired faith in the judgment of the latter. Sally resumed.

"Just let me tell you. His name's Bradshaw. Only he's no

relation to *the* Bradshaw—in a yellow cover, you know. We-e-ell, I don't see anything in that!" Sally is defending her position against a smile her mother and Fenwick have exchanged. They concede that there is nothing in it, and Sally continues. "Where was I? Oh, Bradshaw; yes. He was an awfully promising violinist—awfully promising! And what do you think happened? Why, the nerves of his head gave way, and he couldn't stand the vibration! So it came to being Cattley's or nothing." Sally certainly had the faculty of cutting a long story short.

She thought the story, so cut, one that her mother and Mr. Fenwick might have shown a more active interest in, instead of saying it was time for all of us to be in bed. She did not, however, ascribe to them any external preoccupation—merely an abstract love of Truth; for was it not nearly one o'clock in the morning?

Nevertheless, a little incident of Mr. Fenwick's departure, not noticed at the moment, suddenly assumed vitality just as Sally was "going off," and woke her up. What was it she overheard her mother say to him, just as he was leaving the house, about something she had promised to tell him some time? However, reflection on it with waking faculties dissipated the importance it seemed to have half-way to dreamland, and Sally went contentedly to sleep again.

Fenwick, as he walked to his lodgings through the dull February night, did not regard this something, whatever it was, as a thing of slight importance at all. He may have been only "spooney," but it was in a sense that left him no pretence for thinking that anything connected with this beautiful young widow-lady could be unimportant to him. On the contrary, she was more and more filling all his waking thoughts, and becoming the pivot on which all things turned. It is true, he "dismissed from his mind"—whatever that means—every presumptuous suggestion that in some precious time to come she might be willing to throw in her lot with his own, and asked himself what sort of thing was he that he should allow such an idea to come even as far as contradiction-point? He, a poor inexplicable wreck! What was the Self he had to offer, and what else had he? But, indeed, the speculation rarely got even to this maturity, so promptly was it nipped in the bud. Only, there were

so many buds to nip. He became aware that he was giving a good deal of attention to this sort of gardening.

Also, he had a consciousness that he was growing morbidly anxious for the maintenance of his own oblivion. That which was at first only a misgiving about what a return of memory might bring to light, was rapidly becoming a definite desire that nothing should come to light at all. How *could* he look forward to that "hypothetical" wife whom he did not in the least believe in, but who might be somewhere, for all that! He knew perfectly well that his relations with Krakatoa Villa would *not* remain the same, say what you might! Of course, he also knew that he had no relations there that *need* change—most certainly not! At this point an effort would be made against the outcrop of his thoughts. Those confounded buds were always bursting. It was impossible to be even with them.

Perhaps it was on this evening, or rather early morning, as he walked home to his lodgings, that Fenwick began to recognise more fully than he had done before Mrs. Nightingale's share in what was, if not an absolute repugnance to a revival of the unknown past, at least a very ready acquiescence in his ignorance of it. But surely, he reasoned with himself, if this cause is making me contented with my darkness, it is the more reason that it should be penetrated.

An uncomfortable variation of his dream of the resurrected first-floor crossed his mind. Suppose he had forgotten the furniture, but remembered the place, and gone back to tenant it with a van-load of new chairs and tables. What would he have done with the poor old furniture?

## CHAPTER XI

MORE GIRLS' CHATTER. SWEEPS AND DUSTMEN. HOW SALLY DISILLU-  
SIONED MR. BRADSHAW. OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN

It is impossible to make Gluck's music anything but a fore-taste of heaven, as long as there is any show of accuracy in the way it is rendered. But, then, you must go straight on, and not go over a difficult phrase until you know it. You must play fair. Orpheus would probably only have provoked Cerberus—certainly wouldn't have put him to sleep—if he had practised, and counted, and gone back six bars and done it again.

But Cerberus wasn't at 260, Ladbroke Grove Road, on the Tuesday following Mrs. Erskine Peel's musical party, which was the next time Sally went to Lætitia Wilson. And it was as well that he wasn't, for Sally stuck in a passage at the end of one page and the beginning of the next, so that you had to turn over in the middle; and it was bad enough, goodness knew, without that! It might really have been the north-west passage, so insuperable did it seem.

"I shall never get it right, I know, Tishy," said the viola.

And the violin replied: "Because you never pay any attention to the arpeggio, dear. It doesn't begin on the chord. It begins on the G flat. Look here, now. One—two—three. One—two—three."

"Yes, that's all very well. Who's going to turn over the leaf, I should like to know? I know I shall never do it. Not because the nerves of my head are giving way, but because I'm a duffer."

"I suppose you know what that young man is, dear?" Sally accepts this quite contentedly, and immediately skips a great deal of unnecessary conversation.

"I'm not in love with him, Tishy dear."

"Didn't say you were, dear. But I suppose you don't know what he is, all the same." Which certainly seems inconsecutive, but we really cannot be responsible for the way girls talk.