

But they were the last words Colonel Lund spoke. He died so quietly that the exact moment of dissolution was not distinguishable. Fenwick and Sally found Rosalind so overstrained with grief and watching that they asked for no explanation of the words. Indeed, they may not have ascribed any special meaning to them.

CHAPTER XXV

ABOUT SIX MONTHS, AND HOW A CABMAN SAW A GHOST. OF SALLY'S AND THE DOCTOR'S "MODUS VIVENDI," AND THE SHOOSMITH FAMILY. HOW SALLY MADE TEA FOR BUDDHA, AND HOW BUDDHA FORESAW A STEPDAUGHTER. DELIRIUM TREMENS

It may make this story easier to read at this point if we tell our reader that this twenty-fifth chapter contains little of vital import—is, in fact, only a passing reference to one or two by-incidents that came about in the half-year that followed. He cannot complain that they are superfluous if we give him fair warning of their triviality, and enable him to skip them without remorse. But they register, to our thinking, what little progress events made in six very nice months—a period Time may be said to have skipped. And whoso will may follow his example, and lose but little in the doing of it.

Very nice months they were—only one cloud worth mention in the blue; only one phrase in a minor key. The old familiar figure of "the Major"—intermittent, certainly, but none the less invariable; making the house his own, or letting it appropriate him, hard to say which—was no longer to be seen; but the old sword had been hung in a place of honour near a portrait of Paul Nightingale, Mrs. Fenwick's stepfather—its old owner's school-friend of seventy years ago. At her death it was to be offered to the school; no surviving relative was named in the will, if any existed. Everything was left unconditionally "to my dear daughter by adoption, Rosalind Nightingale."

Some redistributions of furniture were involved in the importation of the movables from the two rooms in Ball Street. The black cabinet, or cellaret, with the eagle-talons, found a place in the dining-room in the basement into which Fenwick—only it seems so odd to go back to it now—was brought on the afternoon of his electrocution. Sally always thought of this cabinet as "Major Roper's cabinet," because she got the whiskey from it for

him before he went off in the fog. If only she had made him drunk that evening! Who knows but it might have enabled him to fight against that terrible heart-failure that was not the result of atmospheric conditions. She never looked at this cabinet but the thought passed through her mind.

Her mother certainly told her nothing at this time about her last conversation with the Colonel, or almost nothing. Certainly she mentioned more than once what she thought a curious circumstance—that the invalid, who was utterly ignorant of Old Jack's death, had persisted so strongly that he was present in the room when he must have been dead some hours. Every one of us has his little bit of Psychical Research, which he demands respect for from others, whose own cherished private instances he dismisses without investigation. This example became Mrs. Fenwick's; who, to be just, had not set herself up with one previously, in spite of the temptation the Anglo-Indian is always under to espouse Mahatmas and buried Faquirs and the like. There seemed a good prospect that it would become an article of faith with her; her first verdict—that it was an hallucination—having been undermined by a certain contradictiousness, produced in her by an undeserved discredit poured on it by pretenders to a superior ghost-insight; who, after all, tried to utilise it afterward as a peg to hang their own particular ghosts on. Which wasn't researching fair.

Sally was no better than the rest of them; if anything, she was a little worse. And Rosalind was far from sure that her husband wouldn't have been much more reasonable if he hadn't had Sally there to encourage him. As it was, the league became, *pro hac vice*, a league of Incredulity, a syndicate of Materialists. Rosalind got no quarter for the half-belief she had in what the old Colonel had said on his death-bed. Her report of his evident earnestness and the self-possession of his voice carried no weight; failing powers, delirium, effects of opiates, and ten degrees above normal had it all their own way. Besides, her superstition was weak-kneed. It only went the length of suggesting that it really was very curious when you came to think of it, and she couldn't make it out.

That the incident received such very superficial recognition must be accounted for by the fact that Krakatoa Villa was not

a villa of the speculative-thinker class. We have known such villas elsewhere, but we are bound to say we have known none where speculative thought has tackled the troublesome questions of death-bed appearances, haunted houses, *et id genus omne*, with the result of coming to any but very speculative conclusions. The male head of this household may have felt that he himself, as a problem for the Psychical Researcher, was ill-fitted to discuss the subject. He certainly shied off expressing any decided opinions.

"What do you really think about ghosts?" said his wife to him one day, when Sally wasn't there to come in with her chaff.

"Ghosts belong in titled families. Middle-class ghosts are a poor lot. Those in the army and navy cut the best figure, on the whole—Junior United Service ghosts. . . ."

"Gerry, be serious, or I'll have a divorce!" This was a powerful grip on a stinging-nettle. Rosalind felt braced by the effort. "Did you ever see a ghost, old man?"

"Not in the present era, sweetheart. I can't say about B.C." He used to speak of his life in this way, but his wife always felt sorry when he alluded to it. It seldom happened. "No, I have never seen one to my knowledge. I've been seen as a ghost, though, which is very unpleasant, I assure you."

Rosalind's mind went back to the fat Baron at Sonnenberg. She supposed this to be another case of the same sort. "When was that?" she said.

"Monday. I took a hansom from Cornhill to our bonded warehouse. It's under a mile, and I asked the driver to change half-a-crown; I hadn't a shilling. He got out a handful of silver, and when he had picked out the two shillings and sixpence he looked at me for the first time, and started and stared as if I was a ghost in good earnest."

"Oh, Gerry, he must have seen you before—before it happened!" Remember that this was, in the spirit of it, a fib, seeing that the tone of voice was that of welcome to a possible revelation. To our thinking, the more honour to her who spoke it, considering the motives. Gerry continued:

"So I thought at first. But listen to what followed. As soon as his surprise, whatever caused it, had toned down to mere recognition point, he spoke with equanimity. 'I've driven you

afore now, mister,' said he. 'You won't call me to mind. Parties don't, not when fares; when drivers, quite otherwise. I'm by way of taking notice myself. You'll excuse *me*?' Then he said, 'War-r-r-p,' to the horse, who was trying to eat himself and dig the road up. When they were friends again, I asked, 'Where had he seen me? Might I happen to call to mind Livermore's Rents, and that turn-up?—that was his reply. I said I mightn't; or didn't, at any rate. I had never been near Livermore's Rents, nor any one else's rents, that I could recall the name of. 'Try again, gov'nor,' said he. 'You'll recall if you try hard enough. *He* recollects it, *I'll* go bail. My Goard! you *did* let him have it?' Was it a fight? I asked. Well, do you know, darling, that cabby addressed me seriously; took me to task for want of candour. 'That ain't worthy of a gov'nor like you,' he said. 'Why make any concealments? Why not treat me open?' I gave him my most solemn honour that I was utterly at a loss to guess what he was talking about, on which he put me through a sort of retrospective catechism, broken by reminders to the horse. 'You don't rec'lect goin' easy over the bridge for to see the shipping? Nor yet the little narrer court right-hand side of the road, with an iron post under an arch and parties hollerin' murder at the far end? Nor yet the way you held him in hand and played him? Nor yet what you sampled him out at the finish? My Goard!' He slapped the top of the cab in a sort of ecstasy. 'Never saw a neater thing in my life. *No unnecessary violence, no agitation!* And him carried off the ground as good as dead! Ah! I made inquiry after, and that was *so*.' I then said it must have been some one else very like me, and held out my half-crown. He slipped back his change into his own pocket, and when he had buttoned it over ostentatiously addressed me again with what seemed a last appeal. 'I take it, gov'nor,' said he, 'you may have such a powerful list of fighting fixtures in the week that you don't easy recollect one out from the other. But *now, do, you, mean* to say your memory don't serve you in this?—I drove you over to Bishopsgate, 'cross London Bridge. Very well! Then you bought a hat—white Panama—and took change, seein' your own was lost. And you was going to pay me, and I drove off, refusin' to accept a farden under the circumstances. Don't you rec'lect that?' I said I

didn't. 'Well, I *did*,' said he. 'And, with your leave, I'll do the same thing now. I'll drive you most anywhere you'd like to name in reason, but I won't take a farden.' And, do you know, he was off before my surprise allowed me to say a word."

"Now, Gerry, was it that made you so glum on Monday when you came back? I recollect quite well. So would Sally."

"Oh no; it was uncomfortable at first, but I soon forgot all about it. I recollect what it was put me in the dumps quite well. It was a long time after the cabby."

"What was it?"

"Well, it was as I walked to the station. I went a little way round, and passed through an anonymous sort of a churchyard. I saw a box in a wall with 'Contributions' on it, and remembering that I really had no right to the cabby's shilling or eighteenpence, I dropped a florin in. And then, Rosey dear, I had the most horrible recurrence I've had for a long time—something about the same place and the same box, and some one else putting three shillings in it. And it was all mixed up with a bottle of champagne and a bank. I can't explain why these things are so painful, but they are. *You know, Rosey!*"

"I know, dear." His wife's knowledge seemed to make her quite silent and absent. She may have seen that the recovery of this cabman would supply a clue to her husband's story. Had he taken the number of the cab? No, he hadn't. Very stupid of him! But he had no pencil, or he could have written it on his shirt-sleeve. He couldn't trust his memory. Rosalind didn't feel very sorry the clue was lost. As for him, did he, we wonder, really exert himself to remember the cab's number?

But when the story was told afterwards to Sally, the moment the Panama hat came on the tapis, she struck in with, "Jeremiah! you know quite well you had a Panama hat on the day you were electrocuted. And, what's more, it was brand new! And, what's more, it's outside in the hall!"

It was brought in, and produced a spurious sense of being detectives on the way to a discovery. But nothing came of it.

All through the discussion of this odd cab-incident the fact that Fenwick "would have written down the cab-driver's number on his shirt-sleeve," was on the watch for a recollection by one of the three that a something had been found written on the shirt-

cuff Fenwick was electrocuted in. The ill-starred shrewdness of Scotland Yard, by detecting a mere date in that something, had quite thrown it out of gear as an item of evidence. By the way, did no one ever ask why should any man, being of sound mind, write the current date on his shirt-sleeve? It really is a thing that can look after its own interests for twenty-four hours. The fact is that, no sooner do coincidences come into court, than sane investigation flies out at the skylight.

There was much discussion of this incident, you may be sure; but that is all we need to know about it.

Our other chance gleanings of the half-year are in quite another part of the field. They relate to Sally and Dr. Vereker's relation to one another. If this relation had anything lover-like in it, they certainly were not taking Europe into their confidence on the subject. Whether their attitude was a spontaneous expression of respectful indifference, or a *parti-pris* to mislead and hoodwink her, of course Europe couldn't tell. All that that continent, or the subdivision of it known as Shepherd's Bush, could see was a parade of callousness and studied civility on the part of both. The only circumstance that impaired its integrity or made the bystander doubt the good faith of its performers was the fact that one of them was a girl, and an attractive one—so attractive that elderly ladies jumped meanly at the supposed privileges of their age and sex, and kissed her a great deal more than was at all fair or honourable.

The ostentatious exclusion of Cupid from the relationship of these two demanded a certain mechanism. Every meeting had to be accounted for, or there was no knowing what match-making busybodies wouldn't say; or, rather, what they would say would be easily guessable by the lowest human insight. Not that either of them ever mentioned precaution to the other; all its advantages would have vanished with open acknowledgment of its necessity. These arrangements were instinctive on the part of both, and each credited the other with a mole-like blindness to their existence.

For instance, each was graciously pleased to believe—or, at least, to believe that the other believed—in a certain institution that called for a vast amount of checking of totals, comparisons of counterfoils, inspection of certificates, verification of data—

everything, in short, of which an institute is capable that could make incessant correspondence necessary and frequent personal interviews advisable. It could boast of Heaven knows how many titled Patrons and Patronesses, Committees and Sub-committees, Referees and Auditors. No doubt the mere mention of such an institution was enough to render gossip speechless about any single lady and gentleman whom it accidentally made known one to another. Its firm of Solicitors alone, with a line all to itself in its prospectuses, was enough to put a host of Loves to flight.

On which account Ann, at Krakatoa Villa, when she announced, "A person for you, Miss Sally," was able to add, "from Dr. Vereker, I think, miss," without the faintest shade of humorous reserve, as of one who sees, and does not need to be told.

And when Sally had interviewed a hopeless and lopsided female, who appeared to be precariously held together by pins, and to have an almost superhuman power of evading practical issues, she (fortified by this institution) was able to return to the drawing-room and say, without a particle of shame, that she supposed she should have to go and see Old Prosy about Mrs. Shoosmith to-morrow afternoon. And when she called at the doctor's at teatime—because that didn't take him from his patients, as he made a point of his tea, because of his mother, if it was only ten minutes—both he and she believed religiously in Mrs. Shoosmith, and Dr. Vereker filled out her form (we believe we have the phrase right) with the most business-like gravity at the little table where he wrote his letters.

Mrs. Shoosmith's form called for filling out in more senses than one. The doctor's mother's form would not have borne anything further in that direction; except, indeed, she had been provided with hooks to go over her chair back, and keep her from rolling along the floor, as a sphere might if asked to sit down.

A suggestion of the exceptional character of all visits from Sally to Dr. Vereker, and *vice-versa*, was fostered by the domesticities at his house as well as at Krakatoa Villa. The maid Craddock, who responded to Sally's knock on this Shoosmith occasion, threw doubt on the possibility of the doctor ever being visible again, and kept the door mentally on the jar while she spoke through a moral gap an inch wide. Of course, that is only our nonsense. Sally was really in the house when Craddock