

CHAPTER XXVI

MORNING AT LADBROKE GROVE ROAD, AND FAMILY DISSENSION. FACCIOLATI, AND A LEGACY. THE LAST CONCERT THIS SEASON. THE GOODY WILL COME TO IGGULDEN'S. BUT FANCY PROSY IN LOVE!

TOWARDS the end of the July that very quickly followed Rosalind noticed an intensification of what might be called the Ladbroke Grove Road Row Chronicle—a record transmitted by Sally to her real and adopted parent in the instalments in which she received it from Tishy.

This record on one occasion depicted a battle-royal at breakfast, "over the marmalade," Sally said. She added that the Dragon might just as well have let the Professor alone. "He was reading," she said, "The Classification of Roots in Pre-historic Dialects," because I saw the back; and Tacitus was on the butter. But the Dragon likes the grease to spoil the bindings, and she knows it."

A vision of priceless Groliers soaking passed through Rosalind's mind. "Wasn't that what this row was about, then?" she asked.

"I don't think so," said Sally, who had gone home to breakfast with Tishy after an early swim. "It's difficult to say what it was about. Really, the Professor had hardly said *anything at all*, and the Dragon said she thought he was forgetting the servants. Fossett wasn't even in the room. And then the Dragon said, 'Yes, shut it,' to Athene. Fancy saying 'Yes, shut it,' in a confidential semitone! Really, I can't see that it was so very wrong of Egerton, although he *is* a booby, to say there was no fun in having a row before breakfast. He didn't mean them to think he meant them to hear."

"But how did it get from the marmalade to Tishy's haberdasher?" asked Fenwick.

"Can't say, Jeremiah. It all came in a buzz, like a wopse's nest. And then Egerton said it was rows, rows, rows all day

long, and he should hook it off and get a situation. It *is* rows, rows, rows, so it's no use pretending it isn't. But it always comes round to the haberdasher grievance in the end. This time Tishy went to her father in the library, and confessed up about Kensington Gardens."

Both hearers said, "Oh, I see!" and then Sally transmitted the report of this interview. It had not been stormy, and may be looked at by the light of the Professor's last remark. "The up-shot is, Tish, that you can marry Julius against your mother's consent right off, and never lose a penny of your aunt's legacy."

"Legacy is good, very excellent good," said Fenwick. "How much was it, Sarah?"

"Oh, I don't know. Lots—a good lot—a thousand pounds! The Dragon wanted to make out that it was conditional on her consent to Tishy's marriage. That was fibs. But what I don't see is that Gaffer Wilson ever said a word to Tishy about his own objections to her marrying Julius, if he has any!"

"Perhaps," Rosalind suggested, "she hasn't told you all he said." But to this Sally replied that Tishy had told her over and over and over again, only she said *over* so often that her adopted parent said for Heaven's sake stop, or he should write the word into his letters. However, the end of the last despatch was at hand, and he himself took up the conversation on signing it.

"Yours faithfully, Algernon Fenwick. That's the lot! I agree with the kitten."

"What about?"

"About if he has any. I believe he'd be glad if Miss Wilson took the bit in her teeth and bolted."

"You agree with Prosy?" As Sally says this, without a thought in a thoughtful face but what belongs to the subject, her mother is conscious that she herself is quite prepared to infer that Prosy already knows all about it. She has got into the habit of hearing that he knows about things.

"What does Vereker say?" Thus Fenwick.

"He'll be here in a minute, and you can ask him. That's him! I mean that's his ring."

"It's just like any other ring, chick." It is her mother who speaks. But Sally says: "Nonsense! as if I didn't know Prosy's

ring!" And Dr. Vereker appears, quartet bound, for this was the weekly musical evening at Krakatoa Villa.

"Jeremiah wants to know whether you don't think Tishy's male parent would be jolly glad if she and Julius took the bit in their teeth and bolted?" "I shouldn't be the least surprised if they did," is the doctor's reply. But it does not strike Sally as rising to the height of her Draconic summary.

"You're not shining, Dr. Conrad," she says; "you're evading the point. What do *you* think Gaffer Bristles thinks, that's the point?" Dr. Conrad appears greatly exhilarated and refreshed by Sally, whose mother seems to share his feeling, but she enjoins caution, for all that.

"Do take care, kitten," she says. "They're on the stairs." But Sally considers "they" are miles off, and will take ages getting upstairs. "They've only just met at the door," is her explanatory comment, showing appreciation of one human weakness.

"Suppose we were to get it put in more official form!" Fenwick suggests. "Would Professor Sales Wilson be very much shocked if his daughter and Paganini made a runaway match of it?" The name Paganini has somehow leaked out of Cattley's counting-house, and become common property.

"I think, if you ask me," says Vereker, speaking to Fenwick, but never taking his eyes off Sally, on whom they feed, "that Professor Sales Wilson would be very much relieved."

"That's right!" says Sally, speaking as to a pupil who has profited. "Now you're being a good little General Practitioner." And then, the ages having elapsed with some alacrity, the door opens and the two subjects of discussion make their appearance.

The anomalous cousin did not come with them, having subsided. Mrs. Fenwick herself had taken the pianoforte parts lately. She had always been a fair pianist, and application had made her passable—a good make-shift, anyhow. So you may fill out the programme to your liking—it really doesn't matter what they played—and consider that this musical evening was one of their best that season. It was just as well it should be so, as it was their last till the autumn. Sally and her mother were going to the seaside all August and some of September, and Fenwick was coming with them for a week at first, and after that for short

week-end spells. He had become a partner in the wine-business, and was not so much tied to the desk.

"Well, then, it's good-bye, I suppose?" The speaker is Rosalind herself, as the Stradivarius is being put to bed. But she hasn't the heart to let the verdict stand—at least, as far as the doctor is concerned. She softens it, adds a recommendation to mercy. "Unless you'll come down and pay us a visit. We'll put you up somewhere."

"I'm afraid it isn't possible," is the answer. But the doctor can't get his eyes really off Sally. Even as a small boy might strain at the leash to get back to a source of cake against the grasp of an iron nurse, even so Dr. Conrad rebels against the grip of professional engagements, which is the name of his cold, remorseless tyrant. But Sally is harnessing up a coach-and-six to drive through human obligations. Her manner of addressing the doctor suggests previous talk on the subject.

"You *must* get the locum, and come. You know you can, and it's all nonsense about can't." What would be effrontery in another character makes Sally speak through and across the company. A secret confidence between herself and the doctor, that you are welcome to the full knowledge of, and be hanged to you! is what the manner of the two implies.

"I spoke to Neckitt about it, and he can't manage it," says the doctor in the same manner. But the first and second violin are waiting to take leave.

"We'll say good-night, then—or good-bye, if it's for six weeks." Tishy is perfectly unblushing about the *we*. She might be conveying Mr. Tishy away. They go, and get away from Dr. Vereker, by-the-bye. An awkward third isn't wanted.

"There's plenty more Neckitts where he comes from," pursues Sally, as the "other two"—for that is how Fenwick thinks of them—get themselves and their instruments out of the house. "So don't be nonsensical, Dr. Conrad. . . . Stop a moment. I *must* speak to Tishy." And Sally gives chase, and overtakes the other two just by the fire-alarm, where Fenwick came to a standstill. Do you remember? It certainly has been a record effort to "get away first." You know this experience yourself at parties? Sally speaks to Tishy in the glorious summer night,

and the three talk together earnestly together under innumerable constellations, and one gas-lamp that elbows the starry heavens out of the way—a self-asserting, cheeky gas-lamp.

The doctor organizes tactics rapidly. He can hear that Sally's step goes up the street, and then the voices at a distance. If he can say good-bye and rush away just as Sally does the same, why then they will meet outside, don't you see?

Rosalind and her husband seem to have wireless telegrams passing. For when Sally vanishes there is a ring as of instruction received in the tone of Fenwick's voice as he addresses the doctor:

"Couldn't you manage to get your mother to come too, Vereker? She must be terribly in want of a change."

"So I tell her; but she's so difficult to move."

"Have a sedan-chair thing——"

"I don't mean that—not physically difficult. I mean she's got so anchored no one can persuade her to move. She hasn't been away for ages."

"Sally must go and persuade her." It is Rosalind who says this. "I'm sure Sally will manage it."

"She will if any one can," says the doctor. "Of course, I could soon get a locum if there was a chance of mother." And then the conversation supports itself on the possible impossibility of finding a lodging at St. Sennans-on-Sea, and consoles itself with its intense improbability till the doctor finds it necessary to depart with the promptitude of a fire-engine suddenly rung up.

He had calculated his time to a nicety, for he met Sally just as "the other two" got safe round the corner.

"Oh no," said Fenwick, replying to a query; "he doesn't mean to carry it all the way. He'll pick up a cab at the corner." The query was about the violoncello, and Fenwick was coming back to the room where his wife was closing the piano in anticipation of Ann. He had discreetly launched the instrument and its owner under the stars, and left the street door standing wide open—a shallow pretence that he believed Sally already in touch with it.

"They *are* a funny couple," Rosalind said. "Just fancy! They've known each other two years, and there they are! But

I do like him. It's all his mother, you know . . . what is? . . . why, goose—of course I mean he would speak at once if it wasn't for that obese mother of his."

"But she's so fond of Sally." In reply to this his wife kisses his cheeks, forehead, and chin consecutively, and he says it was right that time, only the other way round. This refers to a system founded on the crossing incident at Rheims.

"Of course she is, darling; or pretends she is. But he can neither divorce his mamma nor ask the kitten to marry her. You see?"

"I see—in fact, I've thought so myself. In confidence, you know. But is no compromise possible?" Rosalind shakes a slow, regretful, negative head, and her lips form a silent "No!"

"Not with her. The woman has her own share of selfishness, and her son's, too. *He* has none."

"But Sally."

"I see what you mean. Sally goes to the wall one way if she doesn't the other. So he works out selfish, poor dear fellow! in the end. But, Gerry darling, let me tell you this: you have no idea how impossible that young man thinks it that a girl should love *him*. If he thought it possible the kitten really cared about, or could care about him, he'd go clean off his head. Indeed, I am right."

"Perhaps you are. There she is."

Sally ran straight upstairs, leaving Ann to close the door. She at once discharged her mind of its burden, *more suo*.

"Prosy thinks so, too!"

"Thinks what?"

"Thinks they'll go and get married one fine morning, whether or no!"

But she seemed to be the only one much excited about this. Something was preoccupying the other two minds, and our Sally had not the remotest notion what.

Nevertheless, it came about that before the next Monday—the day of Sally's departure with her mother to St. Sennans-on-Sea—that young person paid a farewell visit to the obese mother of her medical adviser, and found her knitting.

"That, my dear, is what I am constantly saying to Conrad," was her reply to a suggestion of Sally's that she wanted change and rest. "Only this very morning, when he came into my room to see that I had fresh-made toast—because you know, my dear, how tiresome servants are about toast—they make it overnight, and warm it up in the morning. Cook is no exception, and I have complained till I'm tired. I should be sorry to change, she's been here so long, but I did hear the other day of such a nice respectable person. . . ."

Sally interrupted, catching at a slight pause: "But when Dr. Conrad came into your room, what did he say?"

"My dear, I was going to tell you." She paused, with closed eyes and folded hands of aggressive patience, for all trace of human interruption to die down; then resumed: "I said to Conrad: 'I think you might have thought of that before.' And then he was sorry. I will do him that justice. My dear boy has his faults, as I know too well, but he is always ready to admit he is wrong."

"We can get you lodgings, you know," said Sally, from sheer intuition, for she had not a particle of information, so far, about what passed over the toast. The old lady seemed to think the conversation had been sufficiently well filled out, for she merely said, "Facing the sea," and went on knitting.

Sally and her mother knew St. Sennan well—had been at his watering-place twice before—so she was able, as it were, to forecast lodgings on the spot. "I dare say Mrs. Iggulden's is vacant," she said. "I wish you could have hers, she's such a nice old body. Her husband was a pilot, and she has one son a coast-guard and another in the navy. And one daughter has no legs, but can do shell-work; and the other's married a tax-collector."

But Goody Vereker was not going to be beguiled into making herself agreeable. She took up the attitude that Sally was young, and easily deceived. She threw a wet blanket over her narrative of the Iggulden family, and ignored any murmurs that came from beneath it. "Sea-faring folk are all alike," so she said. "When I was your age, my dear, I simply worshipped them. My father and all his brothers were devoted to the sea, and my Uncle David published an account of his visit to the Brazils. But you will learn by experience. At any rate, I trust there are no vermin.

That is always my terror in these lodging-houses, and ill-aired beds."

Was it fair, Sally thought to herself, to expose that dear old Mrs. Iggulden, who lived in a wooden dwelling covered with tar, between two houses built of black shiny bricks, but consisting chiefly of bay-windows with elderly visitors in them looking through telescopes at the shipping, and telling the credulous it was brigs or schooners—was it fair to expose Mrs. Iggulden to this gilt-spectacled lob-worm? Sally didn't know that Mrs. Iggulden could show a proper spirit, because in her own case the conditions had never been favourable. They had practised no incantations.

"Very well, then, Mrs. Vereker. As soon as ever mamma and I have shaken down, we'll see about Iggulden's; and if they can't take you somebody else will."

"I am in your hands," said the Goody, smiling faintly and submissively. She leaned back with her eyes closed, and was afraid she had done too much. She used to have periodical convictions to that effect.

Sally had an appointment with Lætitia Wilson at the swimming bath, so the Goody, in an access of altruism, perceived that she mustn't keep her. She herself would try to rest a little.

All people, as we suppose, lead two lives, more or less—their outer life, that of the world and action, and an inner life they have all to themselves. But how different is the proportion of the two lives in different subjects! And how much less painful the latter life is when we feel we could tell it all if we chose. Only we don't choose, because it's no concern of yours or any one else's.

This was Sally's frame of mind. She would not have felt the ghost of a reserve of an inmost thought (from her mother, for instance) in the face of questions asked, though she kept her own counsel about many points whose elucidation was not called for. It may easily be that Rosalind asked no questions about some things, because she had no wish that her daughter should formulate their answers too decisively. Her relation with Conrad Vereker, for example. Was it love, or what? If there was to be marrying, and families, and that sort of thing, and possible inter-

ference with swimming-matches and athletics, and so on, would she as soon choose this man for her accomplice as any other she knew? Suppose she was to hear to-morrow that Dr. Vereker was engaged to Sylvia Peplow, would she be glad or sorry?

Rosalind certainly did ask no such questions. If she had, the answers to the first two would have been, we surmise, very clear and decisive. What nonsense! Fancy Prosy being in love with anybody, or anybody being in love with Prosy! And as for marrying, the great beauty of it all was that there was to be no marrying. Did he understand that? Oh dear, yes! Prosy understood quite well. But we wonder, is the image our mind forms of Sally's answer to the third question correct or incorrect? It presents her to us as answering rather petulantly: "Why *shouldn't* Dr. Conrad marry Miss Peplow, if he likes, and *she* likes? I dare say *she'd* be ready enough, though!" and then pretending to look out of the window. And shortly afterwards: "I suppose Prosy has a right to his private affairs, as much as I have to mine." But with lips that tighten over her speech, without a smile. Note that this is all pure hypothesis.

But she had nothing to conceal that she knew of, had Sally. What a difference there was between her inner world and her mother's, who could not breathe a syllable of that world's history to any living soul!

Rosalind acknowledged to herself now how great the relief had been when, during the few hours that passed between her communication to her old friend on his deathbed and the last state of insensibility from which he never rallied, there had actually been on this earth one other than herself who knew all her story and its strange outcome. For those few hours she had not been alone, and the memory of it helped her to bear her present loneliness. She could hear again, when she woke in the stillness of the night, the voice of the old man, a whisper struggling through his half-choked respiration, that said again and again: "Oh, Rosey darling! can it be true? Thank God! thank God!" And the fact that what she had then feared had never come to pass—the fact that, contrary to her expectations, he had been strangely able to look the wonder in the face, and never flinch from it, seeing nothing in it but a priceless boon—this fact seemed to give her now the fortitude to bear without help the burden of her knowl-

edge—the knowledge of who he was, this man that was beside her in the stillness, this man whose steady breathing she could hear, whose heart-beats she could count. And her heart dwelt on the old soldier's last words, strangely, almost incredibly, resonant, a hard-won victory in his dying fight for speech, "Evil has turned to good. God be praised!" It had almost seemed as if the parting soul, on the verge of the strangest chance man has to face, lost all measure of the strangeness of any earthly thing, and was sensible of nothing but the wonderment of the great cause of all.

But one thing that she knew (and could not explain) was that this secret knowledge, burdensome in itself, relieved the oppression of one still more burdensome, and helped her to drive it from her thoughts. We speak of the collision of the record in her mind of what her daughter was, and whence, with the fact that Sally was winding herself more and more, daughterwise, round the heart of the man whose bond with her mother she, small and unconscious, had had so large a share in rending asunder twenty years ago. It was to her, in its victory over crude physical fact, even while it oppressed her, a bewildering triumph of spirit over matter, of soul over sense, this firm consolidating growth of an affection such as Nature means, but often fails to reach, between child and parent. And as it grew and grew, her child's actual paternity shrank and dwindled, until it might easily have been held a matter for laughter, but for the black cloud of Devildom that hung about it, and stamped her as the infant of a Nativity in the Venusberg, whose growing after-life had gone far to shroud the horror of its lurid caverns with a veil of oblivion.

We say all these things quite seriously of our Sally, in spite of her incorrigible slanginess and vulgarity. We can now go on to St. Sennans-on-Sea, where we shall find her in full blow, but very sticky with the salt water she passes really too much of her time in, even for a merpussy.