

intervals. However, she was got up in the end, and thought she could take a little milk with a teaspoonful of brandy in it.

But as to giving any conception of the difficulties that arose at this point in determining the choice between above and below, that must be left to your imagination. A conclusion *was* arrived at in time—in a great deal of it—and the Goody was actually settled on the ground floor at Mrs. Iggulden's, and contriving to battle against collapse from exhaustion with an implication that she had no personal interest in reviving, but would do it for the sake of others.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW SALLY PUT THE FINISHING TOUCH ON THE DOCTOR, WHO COULDN'T SLEEP. OF THE GRAND DUKE OF HESSE-JUNKERSTADT. AND OF AN INTERVIEW OVERHEARD

FENWICK was not a witness of this advent, as the Monday on which it happened had seen his return to town. He had had his preliminary week, and his desk was crying aloud for him. He departed, renewing a solemn promise to write every day as the train came into the little station at Egbert's Road, for St. Sennans and Growborough. It is only a single line, even now, to St. Sennans from here, but as soon as it was done it was good-bye to all peace and quiet for St. Sennan.

Rosalind and her daughter came back in the omnibus—not the one for the hotel, but the one usually spoken of as Padlock's—the one that lived at the Admiral Collingwood, the nearest approach to an inn in the old town. The word "omnibus" applied to it was not meant literally by Padlock, but only as a declaration of his indifference as to which four of the planet's teeming millions rode in it. This time there was no one else except a nice old farmer's wife, who spoke *to* each of the ladies as "my dear," and *of* each of them as "your sister." Rosalind was looking wonderfully young and handsome, certainly. They secured all the old lady's new-laid eggs, because there would be Mrs. Vereker in the evening. We like adhering to these ellipses of daily life.

Next morning Sally took Dr. Vereker for a walk round to show him the place. Try to fancy the condition of a young man of about thirty, who had scarcely taken his hand from the plough of general practice for four years—for his holidays had been mighty insignificant—suddenly inaugurating three weeks of paradise in *the* society man most covets—of delicious seclusion remote from patients, a happy valley where stethoscopes might be forgotten, and carbolic acid was unknown, where diagnosis

ceased from troubling, and prognosis was at rest. He got so intoxicated with Sally that he quite forgot to care if the cases he had left to Mr. Neckitt (who had been secured as a substitute after all) survived or got terminated fatally. Bother them and their moist *râles* and cardiac symptoms, and effusions of blood on the brain!

Dr. Conrad was a young man of an honest and credulous nature, with a turn for music naturally, and an artificial bias towards medicine infused into him by his father, who had died while he was yet a boy. His honesty had shown itself in the loyalty with which he carried out his father's wishes, and his credulity in the readiness with which he accepted his mother's self-interested versions of his duty towards herself. She had given him to understand from his earliest years that she was an unselfish person, and entitled to be ministered unto, and that it was the business of every one else to see that she did not become the victim of her own self-sacrifice. At the date of this writing her son was passing through a stage of perplexity about his duty to her in its relation to his possible duty to a wife undefined. That he might not be embarrassed by too many puzzles at once, he waived the question of who this wife was to be, and ignored the fact that would have been palpable to any true reading of his mind, that if it had not been for Miss Sally Nightingale this perplexity might never have existed. He satisfied his conscience on the point by a pretext that Sally was a thing on a pinnacle out of his reach—not for the likes of him! He made believe that he was at a loss to find a foothold on his greasy pole, but was seeking one in complete ignorance of what would be found at the top of it.

This shallow piece of self-deception was ripe for disillusionment when Sally took its victim out for a walk round to show him the place. It had the feeblest hold on existence during the remainder of the day, throughout which our medical friend went on dram-drinking, knowing the dangers of his nectar-draughts, but as helpless against them as any other dram-drinker. It broke down completely and finally between moonrise and midnight—a period that began with Sally calling under Iggulden's window, "Come out, Dr. Conrad, and see the phosphorescence in the water; it's going to be quite bright presently," and ended with, "Good

gracious, how late it is! Shan't we catch it?" an exclamation both contributed to. For it was certainly past eleven o'clock.

But in that little space it had broken down, that delusion; and the doctor knew perfectly well, before ten o'clock, certainly, that all the abstract possible wives of his perplexity meant Sally, and Sally only. And, further, that Sally was at every point of the compass—that she was in the phosphorescence of the sea, and the still golden colour of the rising moon. That space was full of her, and that each little wave-splash at their feet said "Sally," and then gave place to another that said "Sally" again. Poor Prosy!

But what did they *say*, the two of them? Little enough—mere merry chat. But on his part so rigid a self-constraint underlying it that we are not sure some of the little waves didn't say—not Sally at all, but—Miss Nightingale! And a persistent sense of a thought that was only waiting to be thought as soon as he should be alone—that was going to run somewhat thus: "How could it come about? That this girl, whom I idolize till my idolatry is almost pain; this girl who has been my universe this year past, though I would not confess it; this wonder whom I judge no man worthy of, myself least of all—that she should be cancelled, made naught of, hushed down, to be the mate of a poor G.P.; to visit his patients and leave cards, make up his little accounts, perhaps! Certainly to live with his mother. . . ." But he knew under the skin that he would be even with that disloyal thought, and would stop it off at this point in time to believe he hadn't thought it.

Still, for all that this disturbing serpent would creep into his Eden, for all that he would have given worlds to dare a little more—that moment in the moonlight, with a glow-flecked water at his feet and hers, and the musical shingle below, and a sense of Christy Minstrels singing about Billy Pattison somewhere in the warm night-air above, and the flash of the great revolving light along the coast answering the French lights across the great, dark silent sea—that moment was the record moment of his life till then. It would never do to say so to Sally, that was all! But it was true for all that. For his life had been a dull one, and the only comfort he could get out of the story of it so far was that at least there was no black page in it he would

like to cut out. Sally might read them all, and welcome. Their relation to *her* had become the point to consider. You see, at heart he was a slow-coach, a milksop, nothing of the man of the world about him. Well, her race had had a dose of the other sort in the last generation. Had the breed wearied of it? Was that Sally's unconscious reason for liking him?

"How very young Prosy has got all of a sudden!" was Sally's postscript to this interview, as she walked back to their own lodgings with her mother, who had been relieving guard with the selfless one while the doctor went out to see the phosphorescence.

"He's like a boy out for a holiday," her mother answered. "I had no idea Dr. Conrad could manage such a colour as that; I thought he was pallid and studious."

"Poor dear. *We* should be pallid and studious if it was cases all day long, and his ma at intervals."

"Do you know, kitten darling, I can't help thinking perhaps we do that poor woman an injustice. . . ."

"—Can't you?" Thus Sally in a parenthetic voice—

". . . and that she really isn't such a very great humbug after all!"

"Why not?"

"Because she would be such a *very* great humbug, don't you see, chick?"

"Why shouldn't she? Somebody must, or there'd be no such thing."

"Why should there be any such thing?"

"Because of the word. Somebody must, or there'd be no one to hook it to. . . . Have they stopped, I wonder, or are they going to begin again?" This referred to the Ethiopian banjos afar. "I do declare they're going to sing Pesky Jane, and it's nearly twelve o'clock!"

"Never mind *them!* How came *you* to know all the vulgar nigger-songs? . . . I was going to say. It's very difficult to believe it's quite all humbug when one hears her talk about her son and his welfare, and his prospects and . . ."

"I know what she talked about. When her dear son marries, she's going to devote herself to him and her dear daughter that will be. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes; but then she couldn't say more than that all she had would be theirs, and she would take her to her bosom, etcetera. Could she?"

"She'll have to pull a long way!" The vulgar child's mind has flown straight to the Goody's outline in profile. She is quite incorrigible. "But wasn't that what old Mr. Turveydrop said, or very nearly? Of course, one has to consider the parties and make allowance."

"Sallykin, what a madcap you are! You don't care *what* you say."

"We-e-ell! there's nothing in that. . . . But look here, mammy darling. Did that good woman in all she said to-night—all the time she was jawing—did she once lose sight of her meritorious attitude?"

"It may only be a *façon de parler*—a sort of habit."

"But it isn't. Jeremiah says so. We've talked it over, us two. He says he wouldn't like his daughter—meaning me—to marry poor Prosy, because of the Goody."

"Are you sure he meant you? Did you ask him?"

"No, because I wasn't going to twit Jeremiah with being only step. We kept it dark who was what. But, of course, he meant me. Like a submarine telegraph." Sally stopped a moment in gravity. Then she said: "Mother dear!"

"What, kitten?"

"What a pity it is Jeremiah is only step! Just think how nice if he'd been real. Now, if you'd only met twenty years sooner. . . ."

A nettle to grasp presented itself—a bad one. Rosalind seized it bodily. "I shouldn't have had my kitten," she said.

"I see. I should have been somebody else. But that wouldn't have mattered to me."

"It would have—to me!" But this is the most she can do in the way of nettle-grasping. She is glad when St. Sennan, from his tower with the undoubted piece of Norman, begins to count twelve, and gives her an excuse for a recall to duty. "Do think how we're keeping poor Mrs. Lobjoit up, you unfeeling child!" is her appeal on behalf of their own fisherman's wife. Sally is just taking note of a finale of the Ethiop choir. "They've done Pesky Jane, and they're going away to bed," she says. "How the

black must come off on the sheets!" And then they hurried home to sleep sound.

But there was little sleep for the doctor that night, perhaps because he had got so young all of a sudden. So it didn't matter much that his mother countermanded his proposal that bed should be gone to, on the ground that it was so late now that she wouldn't be able to sleep a wink. If she *could* have gone an hour ago it would have been different. Now it was too late. An aggressive submissiveness was utilized by the good lady to the end of his discomfort and that of Mrs. Iggulden, who—perhaps from some memories of the Norman Conquest hanging about the neighbourhood—would never go to bed as long as a light was burning in the house.

"It is very strange and most unusual, I know," she continued saying after she had scarified a place to scratch on. "Your great-uncle Everett Gayler did not scruple to call it phenomenal, and that when I was the merest child. After eleven no sleep!" She continued her knitting with tenacity to illustrate her wakefulness. "But I am glad, dear Conrad, that you forgot about me. You were in pleasanter society than your old mother's. No one shall have any excuse for saying I am a burden on my son. No, my dear boy, my wish is that you shall feel *free*." She laid aside the knitting needles, and folding her hands across the outline Sally was to be dragged up, or along, dropped her eyelids over a meek glare, and sat with a fixed, submissive undersmile slightly turned towards her son.

"But I thought, mother, as Mrs. Fenwick was here . . ." Slow, slight, acquiescent nods stopped him; they were enough to derail any speech except the multiplication-table or the House-that-Jack-built! But she waited with exemplary patience for certainty that the train had stopped. Then spoke as one that gives a commission to speech, and observes its execution at a distance. Her expression remained immutable. "She is a well-meaning person," said she.

"I didn't know how late it was." Poor Dr. Conrad gives up self-defence—climbs down. "The time ran away." It *had* done so, there was no doubt about that.

"And you forgot your mother. But Mrs. Fenwick is a well-meaning person. We will say no more about it."

Whereupon her son, feeling that silence is golden, said nothing. But he went and kissed her for all that. She said inscrutably: "You might have kissed me." But whether she was or wasn't referring to the fact that she had succeeded in negotiating his kiss on the rim of her spectacles, Conrad couldn't tell. Probably she meant he might have kissed her before.

There was no doubt, however, about her intention of knitting till past one in the morning. She did it enlarging on the medical status of her illustrious uncle, Dr. Everett Gayler, who had just crept into the conversation. Her son wasn't so sorry for this as Mrs. Iggulden, who dozed and waked with starts, on principle, outside in the passage unseen. *He* could stand at the wide-open window, and hear the little waves plash "Sally" in the moonlight, and the counter-music of the down-drawn shingle echo "Sally" back. Sometimes the pebbles and the water gave place for a moment to the tread of two persistent walkers up and down—men who smoked cigars, and became a little audible and died again at every time of passing.

One time the doctor caught a rise of voice—though they did not pass so very near—that said: "My idea is to stay here till . . ."

Then at the next turn the same voice grew from inaudibility to . . . "So I arranged with the parson here for to-morrow, and we shall get . . ." and died again. At this moment Dr. Everett Gayler was at the climax of his fame, having just performed tracheotomy on the Grand Duke of Hesse-Junkerstadt, and been created Knight-Commander of some Order whose name Mrs. Vereker wasn't sure about.

Next time the men returned, the same voice that seemed to do all the talking said: ". . . Expensive, of course, but she hates the idea of a registry-office." They paused, and the listener heard that the other voice had said something to which the first replied: "No, not Grundy. But she had some friends cooked at one, and they said it was stuffy, and they would sooner have endured twenty short homilies. . . ."

A wax vesta scratched, blazed, lighted another cigar, and the second voice said, "Oh—ah!" and both grew inaudible again.

Dr. Everett Gayler had just pronounced the Grand Duchess's disease—they were an afflicted family—a disease his narrator

couldn't pronounce at all. Most of her bones, in a state of necrosis, had been skilfully removed by the time the smokers had passed back. But so much more was Dr. Conrad listening to what the waves said to the shingle and the shingle answered back, than to either the Grand Duchess or the registry-office, that it never crossed his mind whose the voice was who lit the vesta. He heard it say good-night—its owner would get back to the hotel—and the other make due response. And then nothing was left but the coastguard.

But the Grand Duke's family were not quite done with. It had to be recorded how many of his distinguished ancestors had suffered from *Plica polonica*. Still, the end did come at last, and the worthy lady thought perhaps if she could lie down now she might drop off. So Mrs. Iggulden got her release and slept.

Dr. Conrad didn't, not a wink. The whole place was full of Sally. The flashlight at intervals, in couplets, seemed to say "Sally" twice when it came, and then to leave a blank for him to think about her in. The great slow steamer far out to sea showed a green eye of jealousy or a red one of anger because it could not come ashore where Sally was, but had perforce to go on wherever it was navigated. The millions of black sea-elves—did you ever discriminate them?—that the slight observer fancies are the interstices of the moonlight on the water, were all busy about Sally, though it was hard to follow their movements. And every time St. Sennan said what o'clock it was, he added, "One hour nearer to Sally to-morrow!"

Poor Prosy!

CHAPTER XXIX

OF A MARRIAGE BY SPECIAL LICENCE. ROSALIND'S COMPARISONS. OF THE THREE BRIDESMAIDS, AND HOW THE BRIDE WAS A GOOD SAILOR

BUT it never occurred to Dr. Vereker that the voice of the smoking gentleman, whose "*she*" knew a couple that had been cooked at a registry office, was a voice quite familiar to him. The only effect it had on his Sally-dazed mind was to make him wonder four hours after what it was that kept putting Julius Bradshaw into his head. If a brain-molecule could have been found not preoccupied with Sally he might have been able to give her next day a suggestive hint about a possibility ahead. But never a word said he to Sally; and when, on her return from bathing the following morning, Mrs. Lobjoit, the fisherman's wife, surprised her with the news that "the young lady" had come and had left her luggage, but would be back in half-an-hour, she was first taken aback, and thought it was a mistake next. But no—no chance of that! The young lady had asked for Mrs. Algernon Fenwick, or, in default, for Miss Sally, quite distinctly. She hadn't said any name, but there was a gentleman with her. Mrs. Lobjoit seemed to imply that had there been no gentleman she might have been nameless. Padlock's omnibus they came in.

So Sally went on being taken aback where she had left off, and was still pondering over the phenomenon when her mother followed her through the little yard paved with round flints bedded in mortar—all except the flower-beds, which were in this case marigold-beds and fuschia-beds and tamarisk-shakedown—and the street door which always stood open, and it was very little use ringing, the bell being broken. But you could pass through, and there would always be old Mr. Lobjoit in the kitchen, even if Mrs. Lobjoit was not there herself.

"Why not look on the boxes, you stupid kitten? There's a name on them, or ought to be." Thus Rosalind, after facts told.