

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW A STONE THROWN DROVE THE WEDGE FURTHER YET. OF A TERRIBLE NIGHT IN A BIG GALE, AND A DOOR THAT SLAMMED. THE WEDGE WELL IN

THE speculative weather-wisdom of the tattooed capstan-driver was confirmed when three in the morning came, and the full of the tide. The wind must have gone round to the southward, or to some equally stimulating quarter, to judge by the work it got through that night in the way of roofs blown off and chimney-pots blown down; standing crops laid flat and spoiled for reaping; trees too full of leaf to bear such rough treatment compelled to tear up half their roots and fall, or pay tribute to the gale in boughs snapped asunder in time to spare their parent stem. All these results we landsmen could see for ourselves next day, after the storm had died down, and when the air was so delightful after it that we took walks in the country on purpose to enjoy it. But for the mischief it did that night at sea, from sportively carrying away the spars of ships, which they wanted for their own use, or blowing a stray reefer from the weather-earring, to sending a full crew to the depths below, or on jagged rocks no message from the white foam above could warn the look-out of in time—for the record of this we should have belated intermittent newspaper paragraphs, ever so long after.

But the wind had not reached its ideal when, at the end of a pleasant evening, Sally and her belongings decided that they must just go down to the beach and see the waves before going to bed. Wasn't there a moon? Well—yes, there was a moon, but you couldn't see it. That made a difference, certainly, but not a conclusive one. It wasn't a bad sort of a night, although it certainly was blowing, and the waves would be grand seen close. So the party turned out to go down to the beach. It included the Julius Bradshaws and Dr. Conrad, who had looked in as usual.

But the doctor found out that it was past eleven, and, recalled by duty, returned to his Octopus.

The waves, seen close, would have been grand if you could have seen them from the beach, or as much of it as they had left you to stand on. But you really could only guess what was going on out in that great dark world of deep thunder, beyond the successive rushes of mad foam, each of which made up its mind to tear the coast up this time; and then changed it and went back, but always took with it stones enough for next attempt. And the indignant clamour of the rushing shoals, dragged off to sea against their will, rose and fell in the lulls of the thunder beyond. Sally wanted to quote Tennyson's "Maud" about them, but she couldn't for the tremendous wind.

The propensity to throw stones into the water, whenever there are stones and water, is always a strong one, even when the water is black mountain ranges, foam-ridged Sierras coming on to crush us, appalling us, even though we know they are sure to die in time. Stones were thrown on this occasion by Sally and her stepfather, who was credulous enough to suppose that his pebbles passed the undertow and reached the sea itself. Sally was prevented by the elements from misusing an adjective; for she wanted to say that the effect of a stone thrown into such a sea was merely "homœopathic," and abstained because her remark would have been unheard.

Fenwick wanted to say that it was like the way a man dies and vanishes into the great unknown. He, too, refrained from this, but only partly for the same reason. Its want of novelty made another.

All the others soon wanted to say it was time to go home to bed, and tried to say it. But practice seemed easier, and they all turned to go, followed by Fenwick and Sally, cheerfully discussing the point of whether Sally could have swum out into that sea or not. Sally wanted to know what was to prevent her. Obvious enough, one would have said!

But Rosalind noticed one thing that was a pleasure to her. The moment Sally came in, her husband's dream-afflictions went out. Had he ever spoken of one in her presence? She could recall no instance. This evening the return to absolute cheerful-

ness dated from the reappearance of Sally after she had changed everything, and made her hair hold up. It lasted through fried soles and a huge fowl—done enough this time—and a bread-and-butter pudding impaired by too many raisins. Through the long end of a game of chess begun by Sally and Dr. Conrad the evening before, and two rubbers of whist, in which everybody else had all the good cards in their hands, as is the case in that game. And through the visit to Neptune above recorded.

But when, after half-an-hour's chat over the day's events with Rosalind, midnight and an extinguished candle left Fenwick to himself and his pillow in the little room next hers with no door between, which Mrs. Lobjoit's resources dictated, there came back to him first a recollection of his suppressed commonplace about the stone that had vanished for ever in the world of waters; then a hazy memory of the same thing having happened before and the same remark having been made by himself; then a sudden jerk of surprise, when, just as he was thinking of sleep, he was able to answer a question Space asked him spontaneously about where this happened, with what would have been, had he been quite awake, words spoken aloud to himself. "That time at Niagara, of course!" And this jerk of surprise left him wide-awake, struggling with an army of revived memories that had come on him suddenly.

He was so thoroughly waked by them that a difficulty he always had of remaining in bed when not asleep dictated a relighted candle and a dressing-gown and slippers. It was akin to his aversion to over-comfortable chairs; though he acknowledged beds as proper implements of sleep, sleep being granted. And sleep seemed now so completely out of the question, even if there had been no roaring of the gale and no constant thunder of the seas on the beach below, that Fenwick surrendered at discretion, and gave himself up a helpless prisoner in the grasp of his own past.

Not of the whole of it. But of as much as he could face here and now. Another mind that could have commanded some strange insight into the whole of this past, and his power or powerlessness to look it in the face, might have striven to avert its revival. That blow might have been too overwhelming. But there was enough, as we shall see, in the recollection that came

back of the decade before his return to England, to make his breath catch and a shudder run through his strong frame as he pressed his palms hard on his eyelids, just as though by so doing he could shut it out.

Thank God Rosey was asleep, or would be soon. He would have time to think how he could tell the story he could not be silent about—that, he felt, might be impossible—and yet keep back one ominous portentous fact that had come to him, as a motive force in his former life, without the details of his early history that belonged to it. That fact Rosey must never know, even if . . . well!—so many things turned on it. All he could see now—taken by surprise as he was—was that, come what might, that fact should always be kept from *her*. But as to concealing from her his strange experience altogether, that was hardly to be thought of. He would conceal it while he could, though, provisionally.

One o'clock by his watch on the dressing-table under the candle. St. Sennans must have struck unheard. No wonder—in this wind! Surely it had rather increased, if anything. Fenwick paced with noiseless care about the little room; he could not be still. The sustained monotone of wind and sea was only crossed now and then by a sound of fall or breakage, to chronicle some little piece of mischief achieved by the former on land, and raise the latter's hopes of some such success in its turn before the night should end. . . .

Two o'clock by the dressing-table watch, and still the noiseless slippered feet of the sleepless man came and went. Little fear of any one else hearing him! For the wind seemed to have got up the bit that was predicted of it, and had certainly gone round to the southward. If any sleeper could cling to unconsciousness through the rattle of the windows and the intermittent banging of a spectral door that defied identification—the door that always bangs in storms everywhere—the mere movement of a cautious foot would have no effect. If unable to sleep for the wind, none would be alive to it. It would be lost in the storm. . . .

Three o'clock! Did you, who read this, ever watch through a night with something on your mind you are to be forced to speak of in the morning—a compulsion awaiting you as a lion awaiting the *début* of a reluctant martyr in the arena of the Coliseum?

Did you, so watching, feel—not the tedium—but the maddening speed of the hours, the cruelty of the striking clocks? Were you conscious of a grateful reliance on your bedroom door, still closed between you and *your* lion, as the gate that the eager eyes of Rome were fixed on was still a respite from *his*? Fenwick was; keenly conscious. And when on a sudden he heard with a start that a furtive hand was on the old-fashioned door-latch, he, knowing it could be none other than Rosalind, sleepless in the storm, felt that the lion had stolen a march on him, and that he must make up his mind sharp whether he would go for complete confidence or partial reserve. Certainly the latter, of necessity, said Alacrity. There could be no doubt of it, on her account—for the present, at any rate.

For he had recollected, look you, that at the time of that stone-throw into the rapids above Niagara he was a married man somehow separated from his wife. And the way that he knew this was that he could remember plainly that the reason he did not make an offer of marriage, there by the great torrent that was rushing to the Falls, to a French girl (whose name he got clearly) was that he did not know if his wife was dead or living. He did not know it now. The oddity of it was that, though he remembered clearly this incident hinging on the fact that he was then a married man, he could remember neither the wife he had married nor anything connected with her. He strove hard against this partial insight into his past, which seemed to him stranger than complete oblivion. But he soon convinced himself that a slight hazy vision he conjured up of a wedding years and years ago was only a reflex image—an automatic reaction—from his recent marriage. For did not the wraith of his present wife quietly take its place before the altar where by rights he should have been able to recall her predecessor? It was all confusion; no doubt of it.

But his mind had travelled quickly too; for when Rosalind looked in at his door he knew what he had to say, for her sake.

"Gerry darling, have you never been to bed?"

"For a bit, dearest. Then I found I couldn't sleep, and got up."

"Isn't it awful, the noise? One hears it so in this house. . . .

Well, I suppose it's the same in any house that looks straight over the sea."

"Haven't you slept?"

"Oh yes, a little. But then it woke me. Then I thought I heard you moving."

"So I was. Now, suppose we both go to bed, and try to sleep. I shall have to, because of my candle. Is that all you've got left?"

"That's all, and it's guttering. And the paper will catch directly." She blew it out to avoid this, and added: "Stop a minute and I'll take the paper off, and make it do for a bit."

"You can have mine. Leave me yours." For Fenwick's was, even now, after burning so long, the better candle-end of the two. He took it out of the socket, and slipped its paper roll off, an economy suggested by the condition of its fellow.

But as he did so his own light flashed full on his face, and Rosalind saw a look on it that scarcely belonged to mere sleeplessness like her own—unrest that comes to most of us when the elements are restless.

"Gerry, you've been worrying. You know you have, dear. Speak the truth! You've been trying to recollect things."

"I had nobody here to prevent me, you see." He made no denial; in fact, thought admission of baffled effort was his safest course. "I get worried and fidgeted by chaotic ideas when you're not here. But it's nothing." Rosalind did not agree to this at all.

"I wish Mrs. Lobjoit could have put us both in one room," she said.

"Well, *we* didn't see our way, you know," he replied, referring to past councils on sleeping arrangements. "It's only for a week, after all."

"Yes, darling; but a week's a week, and I can't have you worried to death." She made him lie down again, and sat by him, holding his hand. So unnerved was he by his glance back into his past, so long unknown to him, and so sweet was the comfort of her presence and the touch of her living hand after all those hours of perturbation alone, that Fenwick made no protest against her remaining beside him. But a passiveness that would have belonged to an invalid or a sluggish temperament seemed unlike

the strong man Rosalind knew him for, and she guessed from it that there was more behind. Still, she said nothing, and sat on with his hand grasping hers and finding in it his refuge from himself. To her its warm pressure was a sure sign that his memory had not penetrated the darkness of his earlier time. If God willed, it might never do so. Meanwhile, what was there for it but patience?

As she sat there listening to the roaring of the gale outside, and watching with satisfaction the evident coming of sleep, she said to herself that it might easily be that some new thing had come back to him which he would be unwilling she should know about, at least until his own mind was clearer. He might speak with less reserve to Vereker. She would give the doctor leave to talk to him to-morrow. Fear of what she would hear may have influenced her in this.

So when, sooner than she had expected, she caught the sound of the first breath of indisputable sleep, she rose and slipped away quietly, and as she lay down again to rest again asked herself the question: Was it the galvanism that had done it?

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW FENWICK AND VEREKER WENT FOR A WALK, AND MORE MEMORIES CAME BACK. HOW FENWICK WAS A MILLIONAIRE, OR THEREABOUTS. OF A CLUE THAT KILLED ITSELF. HARRISSON'S AFFAIR NOW! BOTH THE MILLIONS! IS NOT LOVE BETTER THAN MONEY? ONLY FENWICK'S NAME WASN'T HARRISSON NEITHER

"We thought it best to let you have your sleep out, dear. Sally agreed. No, leave the pot alone. Mrs. Lobjoit will make some fresh coffee."

"Who's the other cup?"

"Vereker. He came in to breakfast; to see if we were blown away."

"I see. Of course. Where are they now?"

"They? . . . oh, him and Sally! They said they'd go and see if Tishy and her husband were blown away."

"Well, I have had my sleep out with a vengeance. It's a quarter to ten."

"Never mind, darling. So much the better. Let's have a look at you. . . ." And the little self-explanatory colloquy ends with Rosalind kissing her husband and examining him with anxious eyes. She sees a face less haggard than the one she saw last night, for is it not daylight and has not the wind fallen to a mere cheerful breeze you can quite stand upright in, leaning slightly seawards? And are not the voices and the footsteps of a new day outside, and the swift exchanges of sunlight and cloud-shadow that are chasing each other off the British Channel? And has not a native of eighty years of age (which he ignores) just opened the street door on his own responsibility and shouted along the passage that pra'ans are large this morning? He is more an institution than a man, and is freely spoken of as "The Shrimps." A flavour of a Triton who has got too dry on the beach comes in with the sea air, and also a sense of prawns, emptied from a wooden measure they have been honourably