

CHAPTER XXXIX

HOW MEMORY CREPT BACK AND BACK, AND FENWICK KEPT HIS OWN COUNSEL. ROSALIND NEED NEVER KNOW IT. OF A JOLLY BIG BLOB OF MELTED CANDLE, AND SALLY'S HALF-BROTHER. OF FENWICK'S IMPROVED GOOD SPIRITS

THAT was a day of many little incidents, and a fine day into the bargain. Perhaps the next day was helped to be a flat day by the barometer, which had shown its usual untrustworthiness and gone down. The wind's grievance—very perceptible to the leeward of keyholes and window-cracks—may have been against this instability. It had been looking forward to a day's rest, and here this meteorology must needs be fussing. Neptune on the contrary was all the fresher for his half-holiday, and was trotting out tiny white ponies all over his fields, who played bo-peep with each other in and out of the valleys of the plough-land. But they were grey valleys now, that yesterday were smiling in the sun. And the sky was a mere self-coloured sky (a modern expression, as unconvincing as most of its congeners), and wanted to make everything else as grey as itself. Also there came drifts of fine rain that wetted you through, and your umbrella wasn't any good. So a great many of the visitors to St. Sennans thought they would stop at home and get those letters written.

Sally wouldn't admit that the day was flat *per se*, but only that it had become so owing to the departure of Lætitia and her husband. She reviewed the latter a good deal, as one who had recently been well under inspection and had stood the test. He was really a very nice fellow, haberdasher or no, wasn't he, mother? To which Rosalind replied that he was a very nice fellow indeed, only so quiet. If he had had his violin with him, he would have been much more perceptible. But she supposed it was best to travel with it as little as possible. For it had been decided, all things considered, that the precious Strad should be left locked up at home. "It's got an insurance policy all to it-

self," said Sally, "for three hundred pounds." She was quite awestruck by the three hundred golden sovereigns which these pounds would have been if they had had an existence of their own off paper.

"You ought to have an insurance policy all to yourself, Sarah," said Fenwick. "Only I don't believe any office would accept you. Fancy your swimming out like that yesterday! How far did you go?"

"Round the buoy and aback again. I say, Jeremiah, if ever I get drowned, mind you rush to the bathing-machine and see if there's a copy of 'Ally Sloper' or 'Tit-Bits'. Because there'd be fifty pounds for each. Think of that!" Sally is delighted with these sums, too, to the extent of quite losing sight of the sacrifice necessary for their acquisition.

"Two whole fifties!" Fenwick says, adding after consideration: "I think we had sooner keep our daughter, eh, Rosey?" And Rosalind agreed. Only she really was a shocking madcap, the kitten!

Had some flavour of Fenwick's mental history got in the air, that Sally, presumably with no direct information about its last chapter, should say to him suddenly: "It is such a puzzle to me, Jeremiah, that you've never recollected the railway-carriage"? He was saved from telling fibs in reply—for he *had* recollected the railway-carriage, and left it, as it were, for Mr. Harrison—by Sally continuing: "When you were Mr. Fenwick, and I wasn't at liberty to kiss you." She did so to illustrate.

"I don't see how I could reasonably have resented your kissing me, Sarah. And I'm Mr. Fenwick now."

"On the contrary, you're Jeremiah. But if you were he ever so, I'm puzzled why Mr. Fenwick *now* can't remember Mr. Fenwick *then*."

"He *can't*, Sarah dear. He can no more remember Mr. Fenwick *then* than if no such person had ever existed." It was a clever equivocation, for though he had so far made nothing of the name on his arm, he was quite clear he came back to England Harrison. His gravity and sadness as he said it may have been not so much duplicity as a reflection from his turgid current of thought of the last two days. It imposed on Sally, who decided in her own mind on changing the topic as soon as

she could do it without a jerk. Meanwhile, a stepping-stone was available—extravagant treatment of the subject with a view to help from laughter.

"I wonder what Mr. Fenwick *then* would have thought if I had kissed him in the railway-carriage."

"He'd have thought you must be Sally, only he hadn't noticed it. *He* wouldn't have made a rumpus on high moral grounds, I'm sure. But I don't know about the old cock that talked about the terms of the Company's charter. . . ."

"Hullo!" Sally interrupts him blankly. He had better have let it alone. But it wouldn't do to admit anything.

"What's 'hullo,' Sarah?"

"See how you're recollecting things! Jeremiah's recollecting the railway-carriage, mother—the electrocution-carriage."

"Are you, darling?" Rosalind, coming behind his chair, puts her hands round his neck. "What have you recollected?"

"I don't think I've recollected anything the kitten hasn't told me," says Fenwick dreamily. But Sally is positive she never told him anything about the terms of the Company's charter.

Rosalind adheres to her policy of keeping Sally out of it as much as possible. In this case a very small fib indeed serves the purpose: "You must have told him, chick; or perhaps I repeated it. I remember your telling *me* about the elderly gentleman who was in a rage with the Company." Sally looked doubtful, but gave up the point.

Nevertheless, Fenwick felt certain in his own heart that "the terms of the Company's charter" was a bit of private recollection of his own. And Rosalind had never heard of it before. But it was true she had heard of the elderly gentleman. Near enough!

As to the crowd of memories that kept coming, some absolutely clear, some mere phantoms, into the arena of Fenwick's still disordered mind, they would have an interest, and a strong one, for this story if its object were the examination of strange freaks of memory. But the only point we are nearly concerned with is the rigid barrier drawn across the backward pathway of his recollection at some period between ten and fifteen years ago. Till this should be removed, and the dim image of his forgotten marriage should acquire force and cohesion, he and his wife were

safe from the intrusion of their former selves on the scene of their present happiness—safe possibly from a power of interference it might exercise for ill—safe certainly from risk of a revelation to Sally of her mother's history and her own parentage—but safe at a heavy cost to the one of the three who alone now held the key to their disclosure.

However vividly Fenwick had recalled the incidents of his arrival in England, and however convinced he was that no part of them was mere dream, they all belonged for him to that buried Harrisson whose identity he shrank from taking on himself—*would* have shrank from, at the cost that was to be paid for it, had the prize of its inheritance been ten times as great. Still, one or two connecting links had caught on either side, the chief one being Sally, who had actually spoken with him whilst still Harrisson—although it must be admitted she had not kissed him—and the one next in importance, the cabman. The pawnbroker made a very bad third—in fact, scarcely counted, owing to his own moroseness or reserve. But the cabman! Why, Fenwick had it all now at his fingers' ends. He could recall the start from New York, the wish to keep the secret of his gold-mining success to himself on the ship, and his satisfaction when he found his name printed with one *s* in the list of cabin passengers. Then a pleasant voyage on a summer Atlantic, and that nice young American couple whose acquaintance he made before they passed Sandy Hook, every penny of whose cash had been stolen on board, and how he had financed them, careless of his own ready cash. And how then, not being sure if he should go to London or to Manchester, he decided on the former, and wired his New York banker to send him credit, prompt, at the bank he named in London; and then Livermore's Rents, 1808, and the joy of the cabman; and then the Twopenny Tube; and then Sally. He tried what he could towards putting in order what followed, but could determine nothing except that he stooped for the half-crown, and something struck him a heavy blow. Thereupon he was immediately a person, or a confusion, sitting alone in a cab, to whom a lady came whom he thought he knew, and to this lady he wanted to say, "Is that you?" for no reason he could now trace, but found he could scarcely articulate.

Recalling everything thus, to the full, he was able to supply

links in the story that we have found no place for so far. For instance, the loss of a small valise on the boat that contained credentials that would have made it quite unnecessary for him to cable to New York for credit, and also an incident this reminded him of—that he had not only parted with most of his cash to the young Americans, but had given his purse to the lady to keep her share of it in, saying he had a very good cash pocket, and would have plenty of time to buy another, whereas *they* were hurrying through to catch the tidal boat for Calais. This accounted for that little new pocket-book without a card in it that had given no information at all. He could remember having made so free with his cards on the boat and in the train that he had only one left when he got to Euston.

He found himself, as the hours passed, better and better able to dream and speculate about the life he now chose to imagine was *Harrisson's* property, not his; and the more so the more he felt the force of the barrier drawn across the earlier part of it. Had the barrier remained intact, he might ultimately have convinced himself, for all practical purposes, that *Harrisson's* life was all dream. Yes, all a dream! The cold and the gold of the Klondyke, the French Canadians at Ontario, four years on a cattle-ranch in California, five of unsuccessful attempts to practise at the American Bar—all, all a dream of another man named *Harrisson*, dreamed by Algernon Fenwick, that big hairy man at the wine-merchant's in Bishopsgate, who has a beautiful wife and a daughter who swims like a fish. One of the many might-have-beens that were not! But a decision against its reality demanded time, and his revival of memory was only forty-eight hours old so far.

Of course, he would have liked, of all things, to make full confession, and talk it all out—this quasi-dream—to *Rosalind*; but he could not be sure how much he could safely bring to light, how much would be best concealed. He could not run the *slightest* risk when the thing at stake was her peace of mind. No, no—*Harrisson* be hanged! Him and his money, too.

So, though things kept coming to his recollection, he could hold his peace, and did so. There was nothing to come—not likely to be—that could unsay that revelation that he had been a married man, and did not know of his wife's death; not even

that he and she had been divorced, which would have been nearly as bad. He knew the worst of it, at any rate, and *Rosalind* need never know it if he kept it all to himself, best and worst.

So that day passed, and there was nothing to note about it, unless we mention that *Sally* was actually kept out of the Channel by Neptune's little white ponies aforesaid, which spoiled the swimming water—though, of course, it wasn't rough—backed by the fact that these little sudden showers wetted you through, right through your waterproof, before you knew where you were. Dr. Conrad came in as usual in the evening, reporting that his mother was "rather better." It was a discouraging habit she had, when she was not known to have been any worse than usual. This good lady always caught Commiseration napping, if ever that quality took forty winks. The doctor was very silent this evening, imbibing *Sally* without comment. However, *St. Senans* was drawing to a close for all others. That was enough to account for it, *Sally* thought. It was the last day but one, and poor *Prosy* couldn't be expected to accept her own view—that the awful jolliness of being back at Krakatoa Villa would even compensate—more than compensate—for the pangs of parting with the Saint. *Sally's* optimism was made of a stuff that would wash, or was all wool.

According to her own account, she had spent the whole day wondering whether the battle between *Tishy* and her mother had come off. She said so last thing of all to *her* mother as she decanted the melted paraffin of a bedroom candle whose wick, up to its neck therein, was unable to find a scope for its genius, and yielded only a spectral blue spark that went out directly if you carried it. Tilted over, it would lick in the end—this was *Sally's* testimony; and if you dropped the grease on the back of the soap-dish and thickened it up to a good blob, it would come off click when it was cold, and not make any mess at all.

"Yes, I've been wondering all day long," said she. "How I should enjoy being there to see! How freezing and dignified the Dragon will be! Mrs. Sales Wilson! Or perhaps she'll flare. (I wish this wick would; and it's such disgraceful waste of good candle!)"

"I do think, kitten, you're unkind to the poor lady. Just think how she must have dreamed about the splendid match her

handsome daughter was going to make! And, you know, it is rather a come down. . . ."

"Yes, of course it's a come down. But I don't pity the Dragon one bit. She should have thought more of Tishy's happiness, and less of her grandeur. (It's just beginning; the flame will go white directly.)"

"She'd got some one else in view then?" Rosalind was quickly perceptive about it.

"Oh yes; don't you know? Sir Penderfield. (That'll do now, nicely; there's the white flame!) Sir Oughtred Penderfield. He's a Bart., of course. But he's a horror, and they say his father was even worse. Like father, like son! And the Dragon wanted Tishy to accept him."

At the name Rosalind shivered. The thought that followed it sent a knife-cut to her heart. This man that Sally had spoken of so unconsciously was *her brother*—at least, he was brother enough to her by blood to make that thought a blade to penetrate the core of her mother's soul. It was a case for her strength to show itself in—a case for nettle-grasping with a vengeance. She would grasp this nettle directly; but oh, for one moment—only one moment—just to be a little less sick with the slice of the chill steel! just to quench the tremor she knew would come with her voice if she tried now to say, "What was the name? Tishy's *prétendu's*, I mean; not his father's."

But she could take the whole of a moment, and another, for that matter. So she left her words on her tongue's tip to say later, and felt secure that Sally would not look up and see the dumb white face she herself could see in the mirror she sat before. For, of course, she saw Sally's reflection, too, its still thoughtful eyelids half shrouded in a broken coil of black hair their owner's pearly teeth are detaining an end of, to stop it falling in the paraffin she is so intent on, as she watches it cooling on the soap-dish.

"I've made it such a jolly big blob it'll take ever so long to cool. You can, you know, if you go gently. Only then the middle stops soft, and if you get in a hurry it spoils the clicket." But it is hard enough now to risk moving the hair over it, and Sally's voice was free to speak as soon as her little white hand had swept the black coils back beyond the round white throat.

Mrs. Lobjoit's mirror has its defects apart from some of the quicksilver having been scratched off; but Rosalind can see the merpussy's image plain enough, and knows perfectly well that before she looks up she will reap the harvest of happiness she has been looking forward to. She will "clicket" off the "blob" with her finger.

The moment of fruition comes, and a filbert thumbnail spuds the hardened lozenge off the smooth glaze. "There!" says Sally, "didn't I tell you? Just like ice. . . . What, mother?" For her mother's question had been asked, very slightly varied, in a nettle-grasping sense. She has had time to think.

"What was Tishy's man's name—the other applicant? Christian name, I mean; not his father's."

"Sir Oughtred Penderfield. Why?"

"I remember there was a small boy in India, twenty-two years ago, named Penderfield. Is Oughtred his only name?" The nettle-grasping there was in this! Rosalind felt consoled by her own strength.

"Can't say. He may have a dozen. Never seen him. Don't want to! But his hair's as black as mine, Tishy says. . . . I say, mother, isn't it deliciously smooth?" But this refers to the paraffin lozenge, not to the hair.

"Yes, darling. Now I want to get to bed, if you've no objection."

"Certainly, mother darling; but say I'm right about the Dragon and Sir Penderfield. Because I *am*, you know."

"Of course you are, chick. Only you never told me about him; now, did you?"

"Because I was so honourable. It was a secret. Very well, good-night, then. . . . Oh, you poor mother! how cold you are, and I've been keeping you up! Good-night!"

And off went Sally, leaving her mother to reason with herself about her own unreasonableness. After all, what was there in the fact that the little chap she remembered, seven years old, at the Residency at Khopal twenty odd years ago had grown up and inherited his father's baronetcy? What was there in this to discompose and upset her, to make her breath catch and her nerves thrill? A longing came on her that Gerry should not look in to say good-night till she was in a position to refuse

interviewing on the score of impending sleep. She made a dash for bed, and got the light out, out-generalling him by perhaps a minute.

What could she expect? Not that little Tamerlane, as his father called him, should die just to be out of her path. It was no fault of his that he was his father's son, with—how could she doubt after what Sally had just said?—the curse of his father's form of manhood or beasthood upon him. And yet, might it not have been better that he should have died, the innocent child she knew him, than live to follow his father's footsteps? Better, best of all that the whole evil brood should perish and be forgotten. . . . Stop!

For the thought she had framed caught her breath and held it, caught her by the heart and checked its beating, caught her by the brain and stopped its thinking; and she was glad when her husband's voice found her, dumb and stunned in the silence, and brought a respite to the unanswerable enigma she was face to face with.

"Hullo! light out already? Beg your pardon, darling. Good-night!"

"I wasn't asleep." So he came in and said good-night officially and departed. His voice and his presence had staved off a nightmare idea that was on the watch to seize on her—how if chance had brought Sally across this unsuspected relation of hers, and events had forced a full declaration of their kinship? Somnus jumped at the chance given by its frustration; the sea air asserted itself, and went into partnership with him, and Rosalind's mind was carried captive into dreamland.

But not before she had heard her husband stop singing to himself a German student's song as he closed his door on himself for the night.

"War ich zum grossen Herrn geboren, wie Kaiser Maximilian. . . ."

There could be no further unwelcome memories there, thank Heaven! No mind oppressed by them could possibly sing "Kram-bam-bambuli, krambam-bu-li!"

CHAPTER XL

BATHING WEATHER AGAIN, AND A LETTER FROM TISHY BRADSHAW. THE TRIUMPH OF ORPHEUS. BUT WAS IT EURYDICE OR THE LITTLE BATTERY? THE REV. MR. HERRICK. OF A REVERIE UNDER A BATHING-MACHINE, AND OF GWENDOLEN'S MAMMA'S CONNECTING-LINK. OF DR. CONRAD'S MAMMA'S DONKEY-CHAIR, AND HIS GREAT-AUNT ELIZA. HOW SALLY AND HE STARTED FOR THEIR LAST WALK AT ST. SENNANS

THE next day the morning was bright and the sea was clear of Poseidon's ponies. They had gone somewhere else. Therefore, it behooved Mrs. Lobjoit to get breakfast quick, because it was absurd to expect anybody to go in directly after, and the water wouldn't be good later than half-past ten. Which Sally, coming downstairs at eight, impressed on Mrs. Lobjoit, who entered her own recognisances that it should appear as by magic the very minute your mamma came down. For it is one of the pleasures of anticipation-of-a-joy-to-come to bring about its antecedents too soon, and so procure a blank period of unqualified existence to indulge Hope in without alloy. Even so, when true prudence wishes to catch a train, she orders her cab an hour before, and takes tickets twenty minutes before, and arrives on the platform eighteen minutes before there is the slightest necessity to do so; and then she stands on the said platform and lives for the train that is to be, and inquires of every guard, ticket-taker, and pointsman with respect to every linear yard of the platform edge, whether her train is going to come up there; and they ask each other questions, and give prismatic information; and then the train for Paradise (let us say) comes reluctantly backwards into the station with friends standing on its margin, and prudence seizes her valise and goes at a hand-gallop to the other end, where the *n*th class is, and is only just in time to get a corner seat.

So, though there was no fear of the tide going out as fast as the train for Paradise, Sally, relying on Mrs. Lobjoit, who had become a very old friend in eight weeks, felt she had done well