

other day if it doesn't turn out that he's been married ever so long! And when I taxed him with needless secrecy and mistrust of an old friend, what does the young humbug say? 'The fact is, sir, I hadn't the cheek to tell you.' Well, *I* was like that. I hadn't the cheek."

"At any rate, you have the grace to call him a young humbug. I'm glad you're repentant, Dr. Conrad."

"Come—I say, now—Sally! That's not fair."

"What's not fair?"

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. You called me 'Dr. Conrad.'"

"We-ell, I don't see anything in *that*. Of course, it's quite a different thing—you and me."

"Very well, then. I shall say Miss Sally. Miss Sally!"

Here was Sally's opportunity, clear enough. She had never had a chance till now of bringing back the mysterious young lady of the jetty-interview into court, and examining her. She felt quite sure of herself and her powers of conducting the case—and she was mistaken. She knew nothing of the traps and pitfalls that were gaping for her. Her opening statement went easily though; it was all prepared.

"Don't you see, Dr. Conrad dear, the cases are quite different? When you're married, your wife will call *me* Sally, of course. But . . . well, if I had a husband, you know, *he* would call *you* Dr. Vereker. Sure to!" Sally felt satisfied with the sound of her voice. But the doctor said never a word, and his face was grave. She would have to go on, unassisted, and she had invented nothing to say, so far. So a wavering crept in—nothing in itself at first, apart from her consciousness of it. "Besides, though, of course *she* would call *me* Sally, she mightn't quite—not altogether, you know—I mean, she might think it . . ." But ambushes revealed themselves in every hedge, ready to break out if she ended this sentence. Dr. Conrad made completion unnecessary.

"Whom do you mean by *she*, Sally?"

"Why, of course! Who could I mean but the girl you told me about that you think wouldn't agree with your mother?"

"I thought so. See what a mess I made of it! No, Sally, there's no such person. Now I shall have to speak the truth, and

then I shall have to go away from you, and it will all be spoiled. . . ." But Sally interposes on the tense speech, and sound of growing determination in the doctor's voice:

"Oh no, don't—no, don't! Don't say anything that will change it from *now*. See how happy we are! How could it be better? I'll call you Conrad, or anything you like. Only, *don't* make it different."

"Very well, I won't. I promise!" The doctor calms down. "But, Sally dearest—I may say Sally dearest, mayn't I? . . ."

"Well, perhaps. Only you must make that do for the present."

But there is a haunting sense of the Octopus in the conscientious soul of her son, and even though he is allowed to say "Sally dearest," the burden is on him of knowing that he has been swept away in the turmoil of this whirlwind of self, and he is feeling round to say *peccavi*, and make amends by confession. He makes "Sally dearest" do for the moment, but captures as a set-off the hand that slips readily enough into the arm he offers for it, with a caressing other hand, before he speaks again. He renews his promise—but with such a compensation in the hand that remains at rest in his! and then continues:

"Dearest Sally, I dare say you see how it was—about mother. It was very stupid of me, and I did it very badly. I got puzzled, and lost my head."

"I thought it was a real young lady, anyhow."

"I saw you did. And I do think—just now—I should have let you continue believing in the real young lady . . . only when you said that . . ."

"Said what?"

"Said that about your husband, and calling me Conrad. I couldn't stand it. It was just like a knife . . . no, I'm in earnest, it *was*. How could I have borne it—gone on at all—with you married to any one else?" He asks this in a tone of serious conviction, of one who is diagnosing a strange case, conscientiously. Sally declines consultation—won't be too serious over it.

"You would have had to. Men get on capitally when they have to. But very likely I won't marry you. Don't be too sure! I haven't committed myself, you know." Nevertheless, the hand remains passive in the doctor's, as he continues his diagnosis:

"I shouldn't deserve you. But, then, who could?"

Sally tacitly refuses to help in answering this question.

"I vote for neither of us marrying anybody else, but going on like now," says she thoughtfully.

Sally, you see, was recovering herself after a momentary alarm, produced by the gust of resolution on Dr. Conrad's part. She had shut her window on the storm in his soul, and felt safe in resuming her identity. All through this walk, ever since the hand-incident, she had been hard at work ignoring suggestions of her inner mind that her companion was a loaded gun, and not quite safe to play with. Now she felt she had established a sort of *modus vivendi* which would not involve her in the horrors of a formal engagement, with the concomitants of dissension and bitterness that she had noticed in friends' families on such occasions. Why shouldn't she and poor Prosy walk about together as much as they liked—yes, even call in at a church and get married if they liked—and have no one else fussing over them? The sort of semi-trothplight she had just hushed into silence would do for a good long time to come, because she understood Prosy down to the ground, and, of course, she knew that his mistrusting her was out of the question.

As for the doctor, his was the sort of temperament one often meets with in very fair men of his type—intensely shy, but with a backing of resolution on occasion shown, bred of a capacity for high-strung passion. He had formed his intention fully and clearly of telling Sally the whole truth before they arrived at St. Sennans that evening, and had been hastened to what was virtually an avowal by a premature accident, as we have seen. Now the murder was out, and he was walking home slowly beside the marvel, the mystery, that had taken possession of the inmost recesses of his life—very much in her pocket, if the truth must be told—with an almost intolerable searching fire of joy finding every moment a new untouched recess in his innermost heart. He could have fallen at her feet and kissed them, could have poured out his very soul in passionate protestations, could and would have done anything that would have given a moment's respite to the tension of his love for this all-absorbing other creature that was absolutely here—a reality, and no dream—beside him. But he was going to be good, at her bidding, and re-

main a sane and reasonable general practitioner, however much his heart beat and his head swam. Poor Prosy!

No! On consideration, Agur, the son of Jakeh, didn't know all about it. He only knew the Oriental temperament. He was quite up to date, no doubt, but neither he nor Ithiel nor Ucal nor King Solomon could reckon with spiritual volcanoes. Probably nothing in the world could have explained to either of them the meaning of one or two bits of music Schubert wrote on this subject of Love—we don't flinch from our phraseology; we know that all will understand it whom we care should do so. By-the-bye, Dr. Vereker was partly German, and a musician. Agur can have had no experience of either. The ancestors of Schubert and Beethoven were splendid savages in his day, sleeping on the snow-wreaths in the forests of the north; and somewhere among them there was a germ of a love-passion that was one day to ring changes on the peals that were known to Agur, the son of Jakeh.

But this is wandering from the point, and all the while Sally and her lover have been climbing that hill again, and are now walking over the lonely down above, towards the sun, and their shadows are long behind them—at least, their shadow; for they have but one, and we fancy we have let some of our record slip, for the man's arm is round the girl's waist. Yes, some further clearer understanding has come into their lives, and maybe Sally sees by now that the vote she passed *nem. con.* may be rescinded in the end.

If you had been near them then, invisible, we know you would not have gone close and listened. You would have been too honourable. But you would only have heard this—take our word for it!

"Do you know what I always call you behind your back? I always call you Prosy. I don't know why."

"Because I *am* prosy—level-headed, slow sort of card—but prosy beyond a doubt."

"No, you're not. I don't think you know the least what you're like. But I shall call you Prosy, all the same, or whatever I choose!"

"You don't take to Conrad, somehow?"

"It sounds so reproachful. It's like William."

"Does William sound reproachful?"

"Of course it does! Willy-yum! A most reproachful name. No, Prosy dear, I shall call you Prosy, whatever the consequences may be. People must put their own construction upon it."

"Mother calls me Conny very often."

"When she's not taking exception to you . . . oh, no! I know. I was only joking . . . there, then! we won't quarrel and go home opposite ways about that. Besides, I'm the young lady. . . ."

"Oh, Sally darling, dearest, it does make me feel such a fool. Please don't!"

"Stuff and nonsense, Prosy dear! I shall, if I choose. So there! . . . No, but seriously—*why* did you think I shouldn't get on well with your mother?" Poor Prosy looks very much embarrassed at this point; his countenance pleads for respite. But Sally won't let him off. And he is as wax in her hands, and she knows it, and also that every word that passes her coral lips seems to the poor stricken man a pearl of wisdom. And she is girl enough to enjoy her power, is Sally.

"*Why* do you think I shan't get on with her?" Note the slight variation in the question, driving the nail home, leaving no escape. The doctor's manner in reply is that of one who appeals to Truth herself to help him, before a court that acknowledges no other jurisdiction.

"Because . . . I must say it because it's true, only it seems so . . . so disloyal, you might say, to mother. . . ."

"Well! Because what?"

"Because then it won't be the same as *your* mother. It can't be."

"Why not?"

"Oh, Sally—dearest love—how can it?"

"Well! Perhaps *why not* was fibs. And, of course, mother's an angel, so it's not fair. But, Prosy dear, I'll tell you one thing I *do* think—that affectionate sons make very bad medical attendants for their ma's; and I should say the same if they had all the degrees in Christendom."

"You think a nervous element comes in? . . ."

And so the conversation ripples on, a quiet undertone of perfect confidence, freedom without reserve as to another self, sud-

denly discovered in the working identity of a fellow-creature. It ripples on just thus, all the distance of the walk along the top-most down, in the evening sunlight, and then comes a pause to negotiate the descent to their handy little forest below. Then a sense that they are coming back into a sane, dry world, and must be a lady and a gentleman again. But there must be a little farewell to the enchanted land they are leaving behind—a recognition of its story, under the beech-trees as the last gleam goes, and leaves us our inheritance of twilight.

"Do you remember, darling, how we climbed up there, coming, and had hold to the top?" His lips find hers, naturally and without disguise. It is the close of the movement, and company-manners will be wanted directly. But just a bar or two, and a space, before the music dies! . . .

"I remember," says Sally. "That began it. Oh, what a long time ago that does seem now! What a rum start it all is—the whole turn-out!" For the merpussy is her incorrigible self, and will be to the last.

When Sally reached home, very late, she was not displeased, though she was a little surprised, to find that Mrs. Lobjoit was keeping dinner back, and that her mother and Fenwick had not reappeared, having been away since they parted. Not displeased, because it gave her time to settle down—the expression she made use of, to think with; not with any admission, however, that she either felt or looked unusually *exaltée*—but surprised, because it was eight o'clock, and she felt that even Mrs. Lobjoit's good-nature might have limits.

But while she was settling down, in a happy, excited dream she half wondered that she did not wake from, back came the truants; and she heard from her room above Mrs. Lobjoit's report that Miss Sally was gone upstairs to get ready, with the faintest hint of reproach in the tone. Then her mother's "Don't stop to read letters, Gerry—that'll do after," and Fenwick's "All right!" not followed by immediate obedience. Then, after half a moment's delay, in which she felt some surprise at herself for not going out to meet them coming up the stairs, her mother's voice approaching, that asked where the kitten was.

"Oh, here you are, chick!—how long have you been in? Why,

Sallykin! what is it, child? . . . Oh, Gerry—Gerry—come up here and hear this!" For the merpussy, in spite of many stoical resolutions, had merged a beginning of verbal communication in a burst of happy tears on her mother's bosom.

And when Fenwick, coming upstairs three steps at a time, filled the whole house with "Hullo, Sarah! what's the latest intelligence?" this young lady had only just time to pull herself together into something like dignified self-possession, in order to reply ridiculously—how could she have been our usual Sally, else?—"We-ell! I don't see that it's anything so very remarkable, after all. I've been encouraging my medical adviser's attentions, if you want to know, Jeremiah."

Was it only a fancy of Sally's, as she ended off a hurried toilet, for Mrs. Lobjoit's sake, or did her mother say to Fenwick, "Well!—*that* is something delightful, at any rate"? As though it were in some sense a set-off against something not delightful elsewhere.

CHAPTER XLII

OF A RECURRENCE FROM *AS YOU LIKE IT* AND HOW FENWICK DIDN'T. WHY A SAILOR WOULD NOT LEARN TO SWIM. THE BARON AGAIN. OF A CUTTLE-FISH AND HIS SQUIRT. OF THE POWER OF *A PRIORI* REASONING. OF SALLY'S CONFESSION, AND HOW FENWICK WENT TO A FIRST-CLASS HOTEL

WHEN Fenwick turned back towards home, ostensibly to shorten Rosalind's visit to the doctor's mother, he had no intention of doing so early enough to allow of his rejoining his companions, however slowly they might walk. Neither did he mean to deprive old Mrs. Vereker of Rosalind until she had had her full allowance of her. In an hour would do—or three-quarters. He discounted twenty-five per cent., owing to a recollection of the green veil and spectacles. Then he felt unkind, and said to himself, that, after all, the old woman couldn't help it.

Fenwick felt he was making a great concession in giving up three-quarters of an hour of Rosalind. As soon as he had had exercise enough for the day, and was in a mood to smoke and saunter about idly, he wanted Rosalind badly, and was little disposed to give her up. But the old Goody was going away tomorrow, and he would be liberal. He would take a turn along the sea-front—would have time to get down to the jetty—and then would invade the cave of the Octopus and extract the prisoner from its tentacles.

His intention in forsaking Sally and the doctor was half suspected by the latter, quite clear to himself, and only unperceived by his opaque stepdaughter. As he idled down towards the old fisher-dwellings and the net-huts, he tried to picture the form the declaration would take, and the way it would be received. That this would be favourable he never doubted for a moment; but he recalled the speech of Benedick to Beatrice, "By my troth I take thee for pity," and fancied Sally's response might be of the same complexion. His recollection of these words produced