

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

a mental recurrence, a distressing and imperfect one, connected with the earlier time he could not reach back to, of the words being used to himself by a girl who ascribed them to Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and a discussion after of their whereabouts in Shakespeare.

The indescribable wrench this gave his mind was so painful that he was quite relieved to recall Vereker's opinion that it was always the imperfection of the memory and the effort that gave pain, not the thing remembered. And in this case there could be no doubt that it was a mere dream, for the girl not only took the form of his Rosey he was going back to directly, but actually claimed her name, saying distinctly, "like my namesake, Celia's friend, in Shakespeare." Could any clearer proof be given that it was mere brain-froth?

The man with "Bessie" and "Elinor" tattooed on his arm was enjoying a pipe and mending a net, not to be too idle. The glass might be rising—or not. He was independent of Science. A trifle of wind in the night was his verdict, glass or no! The season was drawing nigh to a close now for a bathing-resort, as you might say. Come another se'nnight, you wouldn't see a machine down, as like as not. But you could never say, to a nicety. He'd known every lodging in the old town full, times and again, to the end of September month, before now. But this year was going to fall early, and your young lady would lose her swimming.

"She's a rare lass, too, for the water," he concluded, without any consciousness of familiarity in the change of phrase. "Not that I know much myself, touching swimming and the like. For I can't swim myself, never a stroke."

"That's strange, too, for a seaman," said Fenwick.

"No, sir! Not so strange as you might think it. You ask up and down among we, waterside or seafaring, and you'll find a many have never studied it, for the purpose. Many that would make swimmers, with a bit of practice, will hold off, for the reason I tell you. Overboard in mid-ocean, and none to help, and not a spar, would you soonest drown, end on, or have to fight for it, like it or no?"

"Drown! The sooner the better." Fenwick has no doubt about the matter.

"Why, sure! So I say, master. And I've put no encouragement on young Benjamin, over yonder, to give study to the learning of it, for the same reason. And not a stroke can he swim, any more than his father."

"Well! I can't swim myself, so there's three of us!" said Fenwick. "My daughter swims enough for the lot." It gave him such pleasure to speak thus of Sally boldly, where there need be no exact definition of their kinship. The net-mender pursued the subject with the kind of gravity on him that always comes on a seaman when drowning is under discussion.

"She's a rare one, for sure. Never but three, or may be fower, have I seen in my time to come anigh to her—man nor woman. The best swimmer a long way I've known—Peter Burtenshaw by name—I helped bring to after drowning. He'd swum—at a guess—the best part of six hours a fower we heard the cry of him on our boat. Too late a bit we were, but we found him, just stone-dead like, and brought him round. It was what Peter said of that six hours put me off of letting 'em larn yoong Benjamin to swim when he was a yoongster. And when he got to years of understanding I told him my mind, and he never put himself to study it."

Fenwick would have liked to go on talking with the fisherman, as his mental recurrence about Shakespeare had fidgeted him, and he found speech a relief. But some noisy visitors from the new St. Sennans on the cliff above had made an irruption into the little old fishing-quarter, and the attention of the net-mender was distracted by possibilities of a boat-to-day being foisted on their simplicity; it was hardly rough enough to forbid the idea. Fenwick, therefore, sauntered on towards the jetty, but presently turned to go back, as half his time had elapsed.

As he repassed the net-mender with a short word or two for valediction, his ear was caught by a loud voice among the party of visitors, who were partly sitting on the beach, partly throwing stones in the water. Something familiar about that voice, surely!

"I gannod throw stoanss. I am too vat. I shall sit on the peach and see effrypotty else throw stoanss. I shall smoke another cigar. Will you haff another cigar, Mr. Prown? You will not? Ferry well! Nor you, Mrs. Prown? Not for the world?"

Ferry well! Nor you, Mr. Bilkington? Ferry well! I shall haff one myself, and you shall throw stoanss." And then, as though to remove the slightest doubt about the identity of the speaker, the voice broke into song:

"Ich hatt' einen Kameraden,
Einen bessern findst du nicht—"

but ended on "Mein guter Kamerad," exclaiming stentorianly, "Opleitch me with a madge," and lighting his cigar in spite of his companions' indignation at the music stopping.

Fenwick stood hesitating a moment in doubt what to do. His inclination was to go straight down the beach to his old friend, whom—of course, you understand?—he now remembered quite well, and explain the strange circumstances that had rendered their meeting in Switzerland abortive. But then!—what would the effect be on his present life, in his relation to Rosalind and (almost as important) to Sally? Diedrich Kreutzkammer had been, for some time in California, a most intimate friend. Fenwick had made him the confidant of his marriage and his early life, all that he had since forgotten, and he had it now in his power to recover all this from the past. Strange to say, although he could remember the telling of these things, he could only remember weak, confused snatches of what he told. It was unaccountable—but there!—he could not try to unravel that skein now. He must settle, and promptly, whether to speak to the Baron or to run.

He was not long in coming to a decision, especially as he saw that hesitation was sure to end in the adoption of the former course—probably the wrong one. He just caught the Baron's last words—a denunciation of the hotel he was stopping at, loud enough to reach the new St. Sennans, of which it was the principal constituent—and then walked briskly off. He arrived at Iggulden's within the hour he had first conceded to the Octopus, and got Rosalind out for a walk, as originally proposed.

There was no apparent reason why the impossibility of overtaking Sally and the doctor should be interpreted into an excuse for going in the opposite direction; but each accepted it as such, or as a justification at least. Rosalind had not so distinct a reason as her husband for wishing not to break in upon them, as

he had not reported the whole of his last talk with Vereker. But though she did not know that Dr. Conrad had as good as promised to make a clean breast of it before returning to London, she thought nothing was more likely than that he should do so, and resolved to leave the stage clear for the leading parts. She may even have flattered herself that she was showing tact—keeping an unconscious Gerry out of the way, who might else interfere with the stars in their courses, in the manner of the tactless. Rosalind suspected this of Sally, that whatever she might think she thought, and whatever parade she made of an even mind no sentiments whatever prevailed in, there was in her inmost heart another Sally, locked in and unconfessed, that had strong views on the subject. And she wanted this Sally to be let out for a spell, or for poor Prosy to be allowed into her cell long enough to speak for himself. Anyhow, this was their last chance here, and she wasn't going to spoil it.

She had gone near to making up her mind—after her sufferings from Gwenny's mamma in the morning—to attempt, at any rate, a communication of their joint story to her husband. But it *must* depend on circumstances and possibilities. She foresaw a long period of resolutions undermined by doubts, decisions rescinded at the last moment, and suddenly-revealed ambushes, and perhaps in the end self-reproach for a mismanaged revelation that might have been so much more skilfully done. Never mind—it was all in the day's work! She had borne much, and would bear more.

"How do you know they are all nonsense, Gerry darling?" We catch their conversation in the middle as they walk along the sands the tide is leaving clear, after accommodating the few morning-bathers with every opportunity to get out of their depths. "How do you *know*? Surely the parts that you *do* seem to remember clearly *must* be all right, however confused the rest is."

Fenwick gives his head the old shake, dashes his hair across his brow and rubs it, then replies: "The worst of the job is, you see, that the bits I remember clearest are the greatest gammon. What do you make of that?"

Rosalind's hand closes on her nettle. "Instance, Gerry!—give me an instance, and I shall know what you mean."

Fenwick is outrageously confident of the safety of his last imperfect recollection. He can trust to its absurdity if he can trust to anything."

"Well! For instance, just now—an hour ago—I recollected something about a girl who would have it Rosalind in *As You Like It* said, 'By my troth I take thee for pity,' to Orlando. And all the while it was Benedick said it to Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*."

The hand on the nettle tightens. "Gerry *dearest!*" she remonstrates. "There's nothing in *that*, as Sallykin says. Of course it *was* Benedick said it to Beatrice."

"Yes—but the gammon wasn't in that. It was the girl that said it. When I tried to think who it was, she turned into *you!* I mean, she became exactly like you."

"But I'm a woman of forty." This was a superb piece of nettle-grasping; and there was not a tremor in the voice that said it, and the handsome face of the speaker was calm, if a little pale. Fenwick noticed nothing.

"Like what I should suppose you were as a girl of eighteen or twenty. It's perfectly clear how the thing worked. It was from something else I seem to recollect her saying, 'Like my namesake, Celia's friend in Shakespeare.' The moment she said that, of course the name Rosalind made me think you into the business. It was quite natural."

"Quite natural! And when I was that girl that was what I said." She had braced herself up, in all the resolution of her strong nature, to the telling of her secret, and his; and she thought this was her opportunity. She was mistaken. For as she stood, keeping, as it were, a heartquake in abeyance, till she should see him begin to understand, he replied without the least perceiving her meaning—evidently accounting her speech only a variant on "If I *had* been that girl," and so forth—"Of course you did, sweetheart," said he, with a laugh in his voice, "*when* you were that girl. And I expect that girl said it when she was herself, whoever she was, and the name Rosalind turned her into you? Look at this cuttlefish before he squirts."

For a moment Rosalind Fenwick was almost two people, so distinctly did the two aspects or conditions of herself strike her mind. The one was that of breath drawn freely, of a respite, a

reprieve, a heartquake escaped; for, indeed, she had begun to feel, as she neared the crisis, that the trial might pass her powers of endurance. The other of a new terror—that the tale, perhaps, *could not be told at all!* that, unassisted by a further revival of her husband's memory, it would remain permanently incredible by him, with what effect of a half-knowledge of the past God only knew. The sense of reprieve got the better of the new-born apprehension—bid it stand over for a while, at least. Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof.

Meanwhile, Gerry, absolutely unconscious of her emotion, and seeming much less disconcerted over this abortive recollection than over previous ones, stood gazing down into the clear rock-pool that contained the cuttlefish. "Do come and look at him, Rosey love," said he. "His manners are detestable, but there can be no doubt about the quality of his black."

She leaned a bit heavily on the arm she took as they left the cuttlefish to his ill-conditioned solitude. "Tired, dearest?" said her husband; and she answered, "Just a little!" But his mind was a clean sheet on which his story would have to be written in ink as black as the cuttlefish's Parthian squirt, and in a full round hand without abbreviations, unless it should do something to help itself. Let it rest while she rested and thought.

She thought and thought—happy for all her strain of nerve and mind, on the quiet stretch of sand and outcrop of chalk, slippery with weed, that the ebbing tide would leave safe for them for hours to come. So thinking, and seeing the way in which her husband's reason was entrenched against the facts of his own life, in a citadel defended by human experience at bay, she wavered in her resolution of a few hours since—or, rather, she saw the impossibility of forcing the position, thinking contentedly that at least if it was so impracticable to her it would be equally so to other agencies, and he might be relied on to remain in the dark. The *status quo* would be the happiest, if it could be preserved. So when, after a two hours' walk through the evening glow and the moonrise, Rosalind came home to Sally's revelation, as we have seen, the slight exception her voice took to universal rejoicing was the barest echo of the tension of her absolutely unsuccessful attempt to get in the thin end of the wedge of an incredible revelation.

Quite incredible! So hopeless is the case of a mere crude, unadulterated fact against an irresistible *a priori* belief in its incredibility.

Sally was reserved about details, but clear about the outcome of her expedition with Prosy. They perfectly understood each other, and it wasn't anybody else's concern; present company's, of course, excepted. Questioned as to plans for the future—inasmuch as a marriage did not seem inconsequent under the circumstances—Sally became enigmatical. The word "marriage" had not been so much as mentioned. She admitted the existence of the institution, but proposed—now and for the future—to regard it as premature. Wasn't even sure she would tell anybody, except Tishy; and perhaps also Henriette Prince, because she was sure to ask, and possibly Karen Braun if she did ask. But she didn't seem at all clear what she was going to say to them, as she objected to the expression "engaged." A thing called "it" without an antecedent, got materialised, and did duty for something more intelligible. Yes!—she would tell Tishy about It, and just those one or two others. But if It was going to make any difference, or there was to be any fuss, she would just break It off, and have done with It.

Sentiments of this sort provoked telegraphic interchanges of smile-suggestion between her hearers all through the evening meal that was so unusually late. This lateness received sanction from the fact that Mr. Fenwick would very likely have letters by the morning post that would oblige him to return to town by the afternoon train. If so, this was his last evening, and clearly nothing mattered. Law and order might be blowed, or hanged.

It was, under these circumstances, rather a surprise to his hearers when he said, after smoking half through his first cigar, that he thought he should walk up to the hotel in the new town, because he fancied there was a man there he knew. As to his name, he thought it was Pilkington, but wasn't sure. Taunted with reticence, he said it was nothing but business. As Rosalind could easily conceive that Gerry might not want to introduce all the Pilkingtons he chanced across to his family, she didn't press for explanation. "He'll very likely call round to see your young man, chick, when he's done with Pilkington." To which Sally

replied, "Oh, he'll come round here. Told him to!" Which he did, at about ten o'clock. But Fenwick had never called at Iggulden's, neither had he come back to his own home. It was after midnight before his foot was on the stairs, and Sally had retired for the night, telling her mother not to fidget—Jeremiah would be all right.