CHAPTER XLIII

OF AN OBSERVANT AND THOUGHTFUL, BUT SNIFFY, WAITER; AND HOW HE OPENED A NEW BOTTLE OF COGNAC. HOW THE BARON SAW FENWICK HOME, WITHOUT HIS HAT. AN OLD MEMORY FROM ROSALIND'S PAST AND HIS. AND THEN FACE TO FACE WITH THE WHOLE. SLEEP UPON IT! BUT WHAT BECAME OF HIS HORRIBLE BABY?

At eleven o'clock that night a respectable man with weak eyes and a cold was communing with a commanding Presence that lived in a bureau—nothing less!—in the entrance-hall of the big hotel at the new St. Sennans. It was that of a matron with jet earrings and tube-curls and a tortoise-shell comb, and an educated contempt for her species. It lived in that bureau with a speaking-pipe to speak to every floor, and a telephone for the universe beyond. He that now ventured to address it was a waiter, clearly, for he carried a table-napkin, on nobody's behalf and uselessly, but with a feeling for emblems which might have made him Rouge Dragon in another sphere. As it was, he was the head waiter in the accursed restaurant or dining-*salon* at the excruciating new hotel, where he would bring you cold misery from the counter at the other end, or lukewarm depression *à la carte* from the beyond—but nothing that would do you any good inside, from anywhere.

"Are those parties going, in eighty-nine, do you make out?" The Presence speaks, but with languid interest.

"Hapathetic party, and short customer. Takes you up rather free. Name of Pilkington. Not heard 'em say anything!"

"Who did you say was going?"

"The German party. Party of full 'abit. Call at seven in the morning. Fried sole and cutlets *à la* mangtynong and sweet omelet at seven-thirty sharp. Too much by way of smoking all day, in my thinking! But they say plums and greengages, took all through meals, is a set-off."

"I don't pretend to be an authority. Isn't that him, in the smoking-room?"

"Goin' on in German? Prob'ly." Both stop and listen. What they hear is the Baron, going on very earnestly indeed in German. What keeps them listening is that another voice comes in occasionally—a voice with more than mere earnestness in it; a voice rather of anguish under control. Then both voices pause, and silence comes suddenly.

"Who's the other party?"

"In a blue soote, livin' in one of the sea-'ouses down on the beach. Big customer. Prodooces a rousin' impression!"

"Is that his daughter that swims? . . . That's him—coming away."

But it isn't. It is the Baron, wrathful, shouting, swearing, neither in German nor English, but in either or both. Where is that tamned kellner? Why does he not answer the pell? This is an *abscheuliches* hotel, and every one connected with it is an *Esel*. What he wants is some cognac and a doctor forthwith. His friend has fainted, and he has been pressing the tamned puddon, and nobody comes.

The attitude of the lady with the earrings epitomizes the complete indifference of a hotel-keeper to the private lives of its guests nowadays. That bell must be seen to, she says. Otherwise she is callous. The respectable waiter hurries for the cognac, and returns with a newly-drawn bottle and two glasses to the smoking-room, to find that the gentleman has recovered and won't have any. He suggests that our young man could step round for Dr. Maccoll; but the proposed patient says, "The devil fly away with Dr. Maccoll!" which doesn't look like docility. The respectable waiter takes note of his appearance, and reports of it to his principal on dramatic grounds, not as a matter into which human sympathies enter.

"Very queer he looks. Doo to reaction, or the coatin's of the stomach. Affectin' the action of the heart. . . . No, there's nobody else in the smoking-room. Party with the 'ook instead of a hand's watching of 'em play penny-pool in the billiard-room." Surely a tale to bring a tear to the eye of sensibility! But not to one that sees in mankind only a thing that comes and goes and pays its bill—or doesn't. The lady in the bureau appears to listen slightly to the voices that come afresh from the smoking-room, but their duration is all she is concerned with.

"He's going now," she says. He is; and he does look queer—very queer. His companion does not leave him at the door, but walks out into the air with him without his hat, speaking to him volubly and earnestly, always in German. His speech suggests affectionate exhortation, and the way he takes his arm is affectionate. The voices go out of hearing, and it is so long before the Baron returns, hatless, that he must have gone all the way to the sea-houses down on the beach.

Sally retired to her own couch in order to supply an inducement to her mother to go to bed herself, and sit up no longer for Gerry's return, which might be any time, of course. Rosalind conceded the point, and was left alone under a solemn promise not to be a goose and fidget. But she was very deliberate about it; and though she didn't fidget, she went all the slower that she might think back on a day—an hour—of twenty years ago, and on the incident that Gerry had half recalled, quite accurately as far as it went, but strangely unsupported by surroundings or concomitants.

It came back to her with both. She could remember even the face of her mother's coachman Forsyth, who had driven her with Miss Stanynaught, her *chaperon* in this case, to the dance where she was to meet Gerry, as it turned out; and how Forsyth was told not to come for them before three in the morning, as he would only have to wait; and how Miss Stanynaught, her governess of late, who was over forty, pleaded for two, and Forsyth *did* have to wait; and how she heard the music and the dancing above, for they were late; and how they waded upstairs against a descending stream of muslin skirits and marked attentions going lawnwards towards the summer night, and bent on lemonade and ices; and then their entry into the dancing-room, and an excited hostess and daughters introducing partners like mad; and an excited daughter greeting a gentleman who had come upstairs behind them, with "Well, Mr. Palliser, you *are* late. You don't deserve to be allowed to dance at all." And that was Jessie Nairn, of course, who added, "I've jilted you for Arthur Fenwick."

How well Rosalind could remember turning round and seeing a splendid young chap who said, "What a jolly shame!" and didn't seem to be oppressed by that or anything else; also Jessie's

further speech, apologizing for having also appropriated Miss Graythorpe's partner. So they would have to console each other. What a saucy girl Jessie was, to be sure! She introduced them with a run, "Mr. Algernon Palliser, Miss Rosalind Graythorpe, Miss Rosalind Graythorpe, Mr. Algernon Palliser," and fled. And Rosalind was piqued about Arthur Fenwick's desertion. It seemed all so strange now—such a vanished world! Just fancy! —she had been speculating if she should accept Arthur, if he got to the point of offering himself.

But a shaft from Cupid's bow must have been shot from a slack string, for Rosalind could remember how quickly she forgot Arthur Fenwick as she took a good look at Gerry Palliser, his great friend, whom he had so often raved about to her, and who was to be brought to play lawn-tennis next Monday. And then to the ear of her mind, listening back to long ago, came a voice so like the one she was to hear soon, when that footstep should come on the stair.

"I can't waltz like Arthur, Miss Graythorpe. But you'll have to put up with me." And the smile that spread over his whole face was so like him now. Then came the allusion to *As You Like It.*

"I'll take you for pity, Mr. Palliser—'by my troth,' as my namesake Rosalind, Celia's friend, in Shakespeare, says to what's his name . . . Orlando. . . ."

"Come, I say, Miss Graythorpe, that's not fair. It was Benedick said it to Beatrice."

"Did he? And did Beatrice say she wouldn't waltz with him?"

"Oh, please! I'm so sorry. No—it wasn't Benedick—it *was* Rosalind."

"That's right! Now let me button your glove for you. You'll be for ever, with those big fingers." For both of us, thought Rosalind, were determined to begin at once and not lose a minute. That dear old time . . . before . . . !

Then, even clearer still, came back to her the dim summer-dawn in the garden, with here and there a Chinese lantern not burned out, and the flagging music of the weary musicians afar, and she and Gerry with the garden nearly to themselves. She could feel the cool air of the morning again, and hear the crowing of a self-important cock. And the informal wager which would

live the longer—a Chinese lantern at the point of death, or the vanishing moon just touching the line of tree-tops against the sky, stirred by the morning wind. And the voice of Gerry when return to the house and a farewell became inevitable. She shut her eyes, and could hear it and her own answer.

"I shall go to India in six weeks, and never see you again."

"Yes, you will; because Arthur Fenwick is to bring you round to lawn-tennis. . . ."

"That won't make having to go any better. And then when I come back, in ever so many years, I shall find you . . ."

"Gone to kingdom come?"

"No—married! . . . Oh no, do stop out—don't go in yet. . . ."

"We ought to go in. Now, don't be silly."

"I can't help it. . . . Well!—a fellow I know asked a girl to marry him he'd only known two hours."

"What very silly friends you must have, Mr. Palliser! Did she marry him?"

"No! but they're engaged, and he's in Ceylon. But you wouldn't marry me. . . ."

"How on earth can you tell, in such a short time? What a goose you are! . . . There!—the music's stopped, and Mrs. Nairn said that must be the last waltz. Come along, or we shall catch it."

They had known each other exactly four hours!

Rosalind remembered it all, word for word. And how Gerry captured a torn glove to keep; and when he came, as appointed, to lawn-tennis, went back at once to Shakespeare, and said he had looked it up, and it *was* Beatrice and Benedick, and not Rosalind at all. She could remember, too, her weary and reproachful *chaperon*, and the well-deserved scolding she got for the way she had been going on with that young Palliser. Eight dances!

So long ago! And she could think through it all again. And to him it had become a memory of shreds and patches. Let it remain so, or become again oblivion—vanish with the rest of his forgotten past! Her thought that it would do so was confidence itself as she sat there waiting for his footstep on the stair. For had she not spoken of herself unflinchingly as the girl who said

those words from Shakespeare, and had not her asseveration slipped from the mind that could not receive it as water slips from oil? She could wait there without misgiving—could even hope that, whatever it was due to, this recent stirring of the dead bones of memory might mean nothing, and die away leaving all as it was before.

Sally, acknowledging physical fatigue with reluctance, after her long walk and swim in the morning, went to bed. It presented itself to her as a thing practicable, and salutary in her state of bewilderment, to lie in bed with her eyes closed, and think over the events of the day. It would be really quiet. And then she would be awake when Jeremiah came in, and would call out for information if there was a sound of anything to hear about. But her project fell through, for she had scarcely closed her eyes when she fell into a trap laid for her by sleep—deep sleep, such as we fancy dreamless. And when Fenwick came back she could not have heard his words to her mother, even had they risen above the choking undertone in which he spoke, nor her mother's reply, more audible in its sudden alarm, but still kept down—for, startled as she was at Gerry's unexpected words, she did not lose her presence of mind.

"What is it, Gerry darling? What is it, dear love? Has anything happened? I'll come."

"Yes—come into my room. Come away from our girl. She mustn't hear."

She knew then at once that his past had come upon him somehow. She knew it at once from the tone of his voice, but she could make no guess as to the manner of it. She knew, too, that that heartquake was upon her—the one she had felt so glad to stave off that day upon the beach—and that self-command had to be found in an emergency she might not have the strength to meet.

For the shock, coming as it did upon her false confidence—a sudden thunderbolt from a cloudless sky—was an overwhelming one. She knew she would have a moment's outward calm before her powers gave way, and she must use it for Sally's security. What Gerry said was true—their girl *must not* hear.

But oh, how quick thought travels! By the time Rosalind, after stopping a second outside Sally's door, listening for any

movement, had closed that of her husband's room as she followed him in, placing the light she carried on a chair as she entered, she had found in the words "our girl" a foretaste of water in the desert that might be before her.

Another moment and she knew she was safe, so far as Gerry himself went. As he had himself said, he would be the same Gerry to her and she the same Rosey to him, whatever wild beast should leap out of the past to molest them. She knew it was as he caught her to his heart, crushing her almost painfully in the great strength that went beyond his own control as he shook and trembled like an aspen-leaf under the force of an emotion she could only, as yet, guess at the nature of. But the guess was not a wrong one, in so far as it said that each was there to be the other's shield and guard against ill, past, present, and to come—a refuge-haven to fly to from every tempest fate might have in store. She could not speak—could not have found utterance even had words come to her. She could only rest passive in his arms, inert and dumb, feeling in the short gasps that caught his breath how he struggled for speech and failed, then strove again. At last his voice came—short, spasmodic sentences breaking or broken by like spans of silence:

"Oh, my darling, my darling, remember! . . . remember! . . . whatever it is . . . it shall not come between us . . . it shall not . . . it *shall* not. . . . Oh, my dear! . . . give me time, and I shall speak . . . if I could only say at once . . . in one word . . . could only understand . . . that is all . . . to understand. . . ." He relaxed his hold upon her; but she held to him, or she might have fallen, so weak was she, and so unsteady was the room and all in it to her sight. The image of him that she saw seemed dim and in a cloud, as he pressed his hands upon his eyes and stood for a moment speechless; then struggled again to find words that for another moment would not come, caught in the gasping of his breath. Then he got a longer breath, as for ease, and drawing her face towards his own—and this time the touch of his hand was tender as a child's—he kissed it repeatedly—kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. And in his kiss was security for her, safe again in the haven of his love, come what might. She felt how it brought back to her the breath she knew would fail her, unless her heart, that had beaten so furiously a

moment since, and then died away, should resume its life. The room became steady, and she saw his face and its pallor plainly, and knew that in a moment she should find her voice. But he spoke first, again.

"That is what I want, dear love—to understand. Help me to understand," he said. And then, as though feeling for the first time how she was clinging to him for support, he passed his arm round her gently, guiding her to sit down. But he himself remained standing by her, as though physically unaffected by the storm of emotion, whatever its cause, that had passed over him. Then Rosalind found her voice.

"Gerry darling—let us try and get quiet over it. After all, we are both here." As she said this she was not very clear about her own meaning, but the words satisfied her. "I see you have remembered more, but I cannot tell how much. Now try and tell me—have you remembered *all?*"

"I think so, darling." He was speaking more quietly now, as one docile to her influence. His manner gave her strength to continue.

"Since you left Mr. Pilkington—your friend at the hotel—didn't you say the name Pilkington?"

"No—there was no Pilkington! Oh yes, there was!—a friend of Diedrich's. . . ."

"Has it come back, I mean, since you left the house? Who is Diedrich?"

"Stop a bit, dearest love! I shall be able to tell it all directly." She, too, was glad of a lull, and welcomed his sitting down beside her on the bed-end, drawing her face to his, and keeping it with the hand that was not caressing hers. Presently he spoke again, more at ease, but always in the undertone, just above a whisper, that meant the consciousness of Sally, too, near. Rosalind said, "She won't hear," and he replied, "No; it's all right, I think," and continued:

"Diedrich Kruetzkammer—he's Diedrich—don't you remember? Of course you do! . . . I heard him down on the beach to-day singing. I wanted to go to him at once, but I had to think of it first, so I came home. Then I settled to go to him at the hotel. I had not remembered anything then—anything to speak of—I had not remembered IT. Now it is all back upon

me, in a whirl." He freed the hand that held hers for a moment, and pressed his fingers hard upon his eyes; then took her hand again, as before. "I wanted to see the dear old fellow and talk over old times, at 'Frisco and up at the Gold River—that, of course! But I wanted, too, to make him repeat to me all the story I had told him of my early marriage—oh, my darling!—*our* marriage, and I did not know it! I know it now—I know it now."

Rosalind could feel the thrill that ran through him as his hand tightened on hers. She spoke, to turn his mind for a moment. "How came Baron Kreutzkammer at St. Sennans?"

"Diedrich? He has a married niece living at Canterbury. Don't you remember? He told you and you told me. . . ." Rosalind had forgotten this, but now recalled it. "Well, we talked about the States—all the story I shall have to tell you, darling, some time; but, oh dear, how confused I get! *That* wasn't the first. The first was telling him my story—the accident, and so on—and it was hard work to convince him it was really me at Sonnenberg. That was rather a difficulty, because I had sent him in the name I had in America, and he only saw an old friend he thought was dead. All *that* was a trifle; but, oh, the complications! . . ."

"What was the name you had in America?"

Fenwick answered musingly, "Harrisson," and then paused before saying, "No, I had better not . . ." and leaving the sentence unfinished. She caught his meaning, and said no more. After all, it could matter very little if she never heard his American experiences, and the name Harrisson had no association for her. She left him to resume, without suggestion.

"He might have reminded me of anything that happened in the States, and I should just have come back here and told it you, because, you see, I should have been sure it was true, and no dream. It was India. I had told him all, don't you see? And I got him to repeat it, and then it all came back—all at once, the moment I saw it was *you*, my darling—you yourself! It all became quite easy then. It was *us*—you and me! I know it now—I know it now!"

"But, dearest, what made you see that it was us?"

"Why, of course, because of the name! He told me all I had told him from the beginning in German. We always spoke German. He could not remember your first name, but he remembered your mother's—it had stayed in his mind—because of the German word *Nachtigall* being so nearly the same. As he said the word my mind got a frightful twist, and I thought I was mad. I did, indeed, my dearest love—raving mad!"

"And then you knew it?"

"And then I knew it. I nearly fainted clean off, and he went for brandy; but I came round, and the dear old boy saw me to this door here. It has all only just happened." He remained silent again for a little space, holding her hand, and then said suddenly: "It *has* happened, has it not? Is it all true, or am I dreaming?"

"Be patient, darling. It is all true—at least, I think so. It is all true if it is like this, because remember, dear, you have told me almost nothing. . . . I only know that it has come back to you that I am Rosey and that you are Gerry—the old Rosey and Gerry long ago in India. . . ." She broke down over her own words, as her tears, a relief in themselves, came freely, taxing her further to keep her voice under for Sally's sake. It was only for a moment; then she seemed to brush them aside in an effort of self-mastery, and again began, dropping her voice even lower. "It is all true if it is like this. I came out to marry you in India . . . my darling! . . . and a terrible thing happened to me on the way . . . the story you know more of now than I could tell you then . . . for how *could* I tell it . . . think? . . ."

Her husband started up from her side gasping, beating his head like a madman. She was in terror lest she had done wrong in her speech. "Gerry, Gerry!" she appealed to him in a scarcely raised voice, "think of Sally!" She rose and went to him, repeating, "Think of Sally!" then drew him back to his former place. His breath went and came heavily, and his forehead was drenched with sweat, as in epilepsy; but the paroxysm left him as he sank back beside her, saying only, "My God! that miscreant!" but showing that he had heard her by the force of the constraint he put upon his voice. It gave her courage to go on.

"I could not get it told then. I did not know the phrases—and you were so happy, my darling—so happy when you met me at the station! Oh, how could I? But I was wrong. I

ought not to have let you marry me, not knowing. And then . . . it seemed deception, and I could not right it. . . ." Her voice broke again, as she hid her face on his shoulder; but she knew her safety in the kiss she felt on her free hand, and the gentleness of his that stroked her hair. Then she heard his almost whispered words above her head, close to her ear:

"Darling, forgive me—forgive me! It was *I* that was in fault. I might have known. . . ."

"Gerry, dear . . . no! . . ."

"Yes, I might. There was a woman there—had been an officer's wife. She came to me and spoke rough truths about it—told me her notion of the tale in her own language. 'Put her away from you,' she said, 'and you won't get another like her, and won't deserve her!' And she was right, poor thing! But I was headstrong and obstinate, and would not hear her. Oh, my darling, *how* we have paid for it!"

"But you have found me again, dear love!" He did not answer, but raised up her face from his shoulder, parting the loose hair tenderly—for it was all free on her shoulders—and gazing straight into her eyes with an expression of utter bewilderment. "Yes, darling, what is it?" said she, as though he had spoken.

"I am getting fogged!" he said, "and cannot make it out. Was it pure accident? Surely something must have happened to bring it about."

"Bring what about?"

"How came we to find each other again, I mean?"

"Oh, I see! Pure accident, I should say, dear! Why not? It would not have happened if it had not been possible. Thank God it did!"

"Thank God it did! But think of the strangeness of it all! How came Sally in that train?"

"Why not, darling? Where else could she have been? She was coming back to tea, as usual."

"And she put me in a cab—bless her!—she and Conrad Vereker—and brought me home to you. But did you know me at once, darling?"

"At once."

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"If you had shown the slightest sign of knowing me I should have told you, and taken my chance; but you only looked at me and smiled, and never knew me! Was mine a good plan? At least, it has answered." A clasp and a kiss was the reply. She was glad that he should choose the line of conversation, and did not break into the pause that followed. The look of fixed bewilderment on his face was painful, but she did not dare any suggestion of guidance to his mind. She had succeeded but ill before in going back to the cause of their own early severance. Yet that was what she naturally had most at heart, and longed to speak of. Could she have chosen, she would have liked to resume it once for all, in spite of the pain—to look the dreadful past in the face, and then agree to forget it together. She was hungry to tell him that even when he broke away from her that last time she saw him at Umballa—broke away from her so roughly that his action had all the force and meaning of a blow—she only saw *his* image of the wrong she had done, or seemed to have done him; that she had nothing for him through it all but love and forgiveness. At least, she would have tried to make sure that he had been able to connect and compare the tale she had told him since their reunion with his new memory of the facts of twenty years ago. But she dared say nothing further as yet. For his part, at this moment, he seemed strangely willing to let all the old story lapse, and to dwell only on the incredible chance that had brought them again together. All that eventful day our story began with had leaped into the foreground of his mind.

Presently he said, still almost whispering hoarsely, with a constant note of amazement and something like panic in his voice: "If it hadn't happened—the accident—I suppose I should have gone back to the hotel. And what should I have done next? I should never have found you and Sally. . . ."

"Were you poor, Gerry darling?"

"Frightfully rich! Gold-fields, mining-place up the Yu-kon. Near the Arctic Circle." He went on in a rapid undertone, as if he were trying to supply briefly what he knew the woman beside him must be yearning to know, if not quite unlike other women. "I wasn't well off before—didn't get on at the Bar at St. Louis—but not poor exactly. Then I made a small pile cattle-ranching in Texas, and somehow went to live at Quebec.

There were a lot of French Canadians I took to. Then after that, 'Frisco and the gold. . . ."

"Gerry dear!"

"Yes, love, what?"

"Have you any relations living in England?"

"Heaps, but I haven't spoken to one of them for years and years—not since *then*. One of them's a Bart. with a fungus on his nose in Shropshire. He's an uncle. Then there's my sister, if she's not dead—my sister Livy. She's Mrs. Huxtable. I fancy they all think I'm dead in the bush in Australia. I had a narrow squeak there. . . ."

"Now, Gerry darling, I'll tell you what I want you to do. . . ."

"Yes, dear, I will."

"You can't tell me all these things now, and you'll be ill; so lie down on the bed there, and I'll sit by you till you go to sleep. Or look, you get to bed comfortably, and I'll be back in a few minutes and sit by you. Just till you go off. Now do as I tell you."

He obeyed like a child. It was wonderful how, in the returning power of her self-command, she took him, as it were, in hand, and rescued him from the tension of his bewilderment. Apart from the fact that the fibre of her nature was exceptionally strong, her experience of this last hour had removed the most part of the oppression that had weighed her down for more than a twelvemonth—the doubt as to which way a discovery of his past would tell on her husband's love for her. She had no feeling now but anxiety on his behalf, and this really helped her towards facing the situation calmly. All things do that take us out of ourselves.

She stood again a moment outside Sally's door to make sure she was not moving, then went to her own room, not sorry to be alone. She wanted a pause for the whirl in her brain to stop, for the torrent of new event that had rushed in upon it to find its equilibrium. If Gerry fell asleep before she returned to him so much the better! She did not even light her candle, preferring to be in the dark.

But this did not long defer her return to her husband's room. A very few minutes in the darkness and the silence of her own were enough for her, and she was grateful for both. Then she went back, to find him in bed, sitting up and pressing his fingers

on his eyes, as one does when suffering from nervous headache. But he disclaimed any such feeling in answer to her inquiry. She sat down beside him, holding his hand, just as she had done in the night of the storm, and begged him for her sake and his own to try to sleep. It would all seem so much easier and clearer in the morning.

Yes, he would sleep, he said. And, indeed, he had resolved to affect sleep, so as to induce her to go away herself and rest. But it was not so easy. Half-grasped facts went and came—recollections that he knew he should before long be able to marshal in their proper order and make harmonious. For the time being, though they had not the nightmare character of the recurrences he had suffered from before his memory-revival, they stood between him and sleep effectually. But he could and would simulate sleep directly, for Rosalind's sake. He had looked at his watch and seen that it was near two in the morning. Yes, he would sleep; but he must ask one question, or lose his reason if she left him alone with it unanswered.

"Rosey darling!"

"What, dearest?"

"We'll forget the old story, won't we, and only think of *now?* That's the right way to take it, isn't it?"

She kissed his face as she answered, just as she might have kissed a child. "Quite right, dear love," she said; "and now go to sleep. Or if you must talk a little more, talk about Conrad and Sally."

"Ah yes!" he answered; "that's all happiness. Conrad and Sally! But there's a thing . . ."

"What thing, dear? What is it?"

"I shall ask it you in the end, so why not now?" She felt in his hand a shudder that ran through him, as his hold on her fingers tightened.

"So why not now?" she repeated after him. "Why hesitate?"

The tremor strengthened in her hand and was heard in his voice plainly as he answered with an effort: "What became of the baby?"

"What became of the baby!" There was a new terror in Rosalind's voice as she repeated the words—a fear for his reason. "What baby?"

"*The* baby—*his* baby—*his* horrible baby!"

"Gerry darling! Gerry *dearest!* do think. . . ." His puzzled eyes, bloodshot in his white face, turned full upon her; but he remained silent, waiting to hear more. "You have forgotten, darling," she said quietly.

His free hand that lay on the coverlid clenched, and a spasm caught his arm, as though it longed for something to strike or strangle. "No, no!" said he; "I am all right. I mean that damned monster's baby. There *was* a baby?" His voice shook on these last words as though he, too, had a fear for his own reason. His face flushed as he awaited her reply.

"Oh, Gerry darling! but you *have* forgotten. His baby was Sally—my Sallykin!"

For it was absolutely true that, although he had as complete a knowledge, in a certain sense, of Sally's origin as the well-coached student has of the subject he is to answer questions in, he had forgotten it under the stress of his mental trial as readily as the student forgets what his mind has only acquiesced in for its purpose, in his joy at recovering his right to ignorance. Sally had an existence of her own quite independent of her origin. She was his and Rosalind's—a part of *their* existence, a necessity. It was easy and natural for him to dissociate the living, breathing reality that filled so much of their lives from its mere beginnings. It was less easy for Rosalind, but not an impossibility altogether, helped by the forgiveness for the past that grew from the soil of her daughter's love.

"You *had* forgotten, dear," she repeated; "but you know now."

"Yes, I had forgotten, because of Sally herself; but she is *my* daughter now. . . ."

She waited, expecting him to say more; but he did not speak again. As soon as he was, or seemed to be, asleep, she rose quietly and left him.

She was so anxious that no trace of the tempest that had passed over her should be left for Sally to see in the morning that she got as quickly as possible to bed; and, with a little effort to tranquillise her mind, soon sank into a state of absolute oblivion. It was the counterswing of the pendulum—Nature's protest against a strain beyond her powers to bear, and its remedy.

CHAPTER XLIV

OF A CONTRACT JOB FOR REPAIRS. HOW FENWICK HAD ANOTHER SLEEPLESS NIGHT AFTER ALL. WHICH IS WHICH, NOW OR TWENTY ODD YEARS AGO? HOW SALLY FOLLOWED JEREMIAH OUT. WHAT A LOT OF TALK ABOUT A LIFE-BELT!

A COLOURLESS dawn chased a grey twilight from the sea and white cliffs of St. Sennans, and a sickly effort of the sun to rise visibly, ending above a cloud-bank in a red half-circle that seemed a thing quite unconnected with the struggling light, was baffled by a higher cloud-bank still that came discouragingly from the west, and quenched the hopes of the few early risers who were about as St. Sennans tower chimed six. The gull that flew high above the green waste of white-flecked waters was whiter still against the inky blue of the cloud-curtain that had disallowed the day, and the paler vapour-drifts that paused and changed and lost themselves and died; but the air that came from the sea was sweet and mild for the time of year, and the verdict of the coastguardsman at the flagstaff, who in pursuance of his sinecure had seen the night out, was that the day was pretty sure to be an uncertain sart, with little froshets on the water, like over yander. He seemed to think that a certainty of uncertainty had all the value of a forecast, and was as well satisfied with his report as he was that he had not seen a smuggler through the telescope he closed as he uttered it.

"Well, I should judge it might be fairly doubtful," was the reply of the man he was speaking with. It was the man who had "Elinor" and "Bessie" tattooed on his arm. They were not legible now, as a couple of life-belts, or hencoops, as they are sometimes called, hung over the arm and hid them. The boy Benjamin was with his father, and carried a third. An explanation of them came in answer to interrogation in the eye of the coastguard. "Just to put a touch of new paint on 'em against the weather." The speaker made one movement of his head say