

tin pot and a boathook live, and its effect is good. The half-drowned man becomes articulate enough to justify the report. "It's his daughter he's asking for—overboard, too!" and then the man who spoke first says: "You be easy in your mind, master; we'll find her. Bear away a bit, and lie to, Tom." Tom is the man in the cobble, and he does as he is bidden. He ships his sculls and drifts, watching round on all sides for what may be just afloat near the surface. The four-oar remains, and the eyes of her crew are straining hard to catch a sight of anything that is not mere lift and ripple of a wave.

Then more boats one after another, and more, and the gathering crowd that lines the shore sees them scatter and lie to, some way apart, to watch the greater space of water. All drift, because they know that what they seek is drifting, too, and that if they move they lose their only chance; for the thing they have to find is so small, so small, and that great waste of pitiless sea is so large. It is their only chance.

The crowd, always growing, moves along the beach as the flotilla of drifting boats move slowly with the tide. They can hear the shouting from boat to boat, but catch but little of the words. They follow on, with little speech among themselves, and hope dying slowly out of their hearts. Gradually towards the jetty, where the girl they are seeking sat, only a few days since, beside the man whose heart the memory of yesterday is still rejoicing; the only trouble of whose unconscious soul is the thought that he and she must soon be parted, however short the term of their separation may be. He will know more soon.

Suddenly the shouting increases in the boats, and excited voices break the silence on the shore. It won't do to hope too much, but surely all the boats are thickening to one spot. . . . No, it's nothing! . . . Yes, it *is*—it *is* something—one knows what—sighted abaft the Ellen Jane, whose steersman catches it with a boathook as the oars we on the beach saw suddenly drop back water—slowly, cautiously—and only wait for him to drag the light weight athwart the gunwale to row for the dear life towards the town. The scattered crowd turns and comes back, trampling the shingle, to meet the boat as she lands, and follow what she brings to the nearest haven.

## CHAPTER XLVI

AN ERRAND IN VAIN, AND HOW DR. CONRAD CAME TO KNOW. CONCERNING LLOYD'S COFFEEHOUSE, AND THE BATTLE OF CAMPERDOWN. MARSHALL HALL'S SYSTEM AND SILVESTER'S. SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES. A CHAT WITH A CENTENARIAN, AND HOW ROSALIND CAME TO KNOW. THOMAS LOCOCK OF ROCHESTER. ONE O'CLOCK!

"Is that you, Dr. Conrad?" It was Rosalind who spoke, through the half-open window of her bedroom, to the happy, expectant face of the doctor in the little front garden below. "I'm only just up, and they're both gone out. I shall be down in a few minutes." For she had looked into her husband's room, and then into Sally's, and concluded they must have gone out together. So much the better! If Sally was with him, no harm could come to him.

"I don't see them anywhere about," said the doctor. Sally had not been gone ten minutes, and at this moment had just caught sight of Fenwick making for the pier. The short cut down took her out of sight of the house. Rosalind considered a minute.

"Very likely they've gone to the hotel—the 'beastly hotel,' you know." There is the sound of a laugh, and the caress in her voice, as she thinks of Sally, whom she is quoting. "Gerry found a friend there last night—a German gentleman—who was to go at seven-fifty. Very likely he's walked up to say good-bye to him. Suppose you go to meet them! How's Mrs. Verker this morning?"

"Do you know, I haven't seen her yet! We talked rather late, so I left without waking her. I've been for a walk."

"Well, go and meet Gerry. I feel pretty sure he's gone there." And thereon Dr. Conrad departed, and so, departing towards the new town, lost sight for the time being of the pier and the coast. He went by the steps and Albion Villas, and as he caught a glimpse therefrom of the pier-end in the distance, had an im-



pression of a man running along it and shouting; but he drew no inferences, although it struck him there was panic, with the energy of sudden action, in this man's voice.

He arrived at the hotel, of course without meeting either Sally or Fenwick. He had accepted them as probably there, on perhaps too slight evidence. But they might be in the hotel. Had the German gentleman gone?—he asked. The stony woman he addressed replied from her precinct, with no apparent consciousness that she was addressing a fellow-creature, that No. 148, if you meant him, had paid and gone by last 'bus. She spoke as to space, but as one too indifferent on all points to care much who overheard her.

Vereker thanked her, and turned to go. As he departed he caught a fragment of conversation between her and the waiter who had produced the brandy the evening before. He was in undress uniform—a holland or white-jean jacket, and a red woollen comforter. He had lost his voice, or most of it, and croaked; and his cold had got worse in the night. He was shedding tears copiously, and wiping them on a cruet-stand he carried in one hand. The other was engaged by an empty coal-scuttle with a pair of slippers in it, inexplicably.

"There's a start down there. Party over the pier-end! Dr. Maccoll he's been 'phoned for."

"Party from this hotel?"

"Couldn't say. Poreibly. No partic'lars to identify, so far."

"They're not bringing him here?"

"Couldn't say, miss; but I should say they wasn't myself."

"If you know you can say. Who told you, and what did *he* say? Make yourself understood."

"Dr. Maccoll he's been 'phoned for. You can inquire and see if I ain't right. Beyond that I take no responsibility."

The Lady of the Bureau came out; moved, no doubt, by an image of a drowned man whose resources would not meet the credits she might be compelled to give him. She came out to the front through the swing-door, looked up and down the road, and seemed to go back happier. Dr. Conrad's curiosity was roused, and he started at once for the beach, but absolutely without a trace of personal misgiving. No doubt the tendency we all have to impute public mishaps to a special class of people

outside our own circle had something to do with this. As he passed down an alley behind some cottages—a short way to the pier—he was aware of a boy telling a tale in a terrified voice to a man and an elderly woman. It was the man with the striped shirt, and the boy was young Benjamin. He had passed on a few paces when the man called to him, and came running after him, followed by the woman and boy.

"I ask your pardon, sir—I ask your pardon. . . ." What he has to say will not allow him to speak, and his words will not come. He turns for help to his companion. "*You* tell him, Martha woman," he says, and gives in.

"My master thinks, sir, you may find something on the beach. . . ."

"Something on the beach! . . ." Fear is coming into Dr. Conrad's face and voice.

"Find something has happened on the beach. But they've got him out. . . ."

"Got him out! Got whom out? Speak up, for Heaven's sake!"

"It might be the gentleman you know, sir, and . . ." But the speaker's husband, having left the telling to his wife, unfairly strikes in here, to have the satisfaction of lightening the communication. "*But he's* out safe, sir. You may rely on the young lad." He has made it harder for his wife to tell the rest, and she hesitates. But Dr. Conrad has stayed for no more. He is going at a run down the sloped passage that leads to the sea. The boy follows him, and by some dexterous use of private thoroughfares, known to him, but not to the doctor, arrives first, and is soon visible ahead, running towards the scattered groups that line the beach. The man and woman follow more slowly.

Few of those who read this, we hope, have ever had to face a shock so appalling as the one that Conrad Vereker sustained when he came to know what it was that was being carried up the beach from the boat that had just been driven stern on to the shingle, as he emerged to a full view of the sea and the running crowd, thickening as its last stragglers arrived to meet it. But most of us who are not young have unhappily had some experience of the sort, and many will recognise (if we can describe it) the feeling that was his in excess when a chance by-



stander—not unconcerned, for no one was that—used in his hearing a phrase that drove the story home to him, and forced him to understand. "It's the swimming girl from Lobjoit's, and she's drowned." It was as well, for he had to know. What did it matter how he became the blank thing standing there, able to say to itself, "Then Sally is dead," and to attach their meaning to the words, but not to comprehend why he went on living? One way of learning the thing that closes over our lives and veils the sun for all time is as good as another; but how came he to be so colourlessly calm about it?

If we could know how each man feels who hears in the felon's dock the sentence of penal servitude for life, it may be we should find that Vereker's sense of being for the moment a cold, unexplained unit in an infinite unfeeling void, was no unusual experience. But this unit knew mechanically what had happened perfectly well, and its duty was clear before it. Just half a second for this sickness to go off, and he would act.

It was a longer pause than it seemed to him, as all things appeared to happen quickly in it, somewhat as in a photographic life-picture when the films are run too quick. At least, that remained his memory of it. And during that time he stood and wondered why he could not feel. He thought of her mother and of Fenwick, and said to himself they were to be pitied more than he; for they were human, and *could* feel it—could really know what jewel they had lost—had hearts to grieve and eyes to weep with. He had nothing—was a stupid blank! Oh, he had been mistaken about himself and his love: he was a stone.

A few moments later than his first sight of that silent crowd—moments in which the world had changed and the sun had become a curse; in which he had for some reason—not grief, for he could not grieve—resolved on death, except in an event he dared not hope for—he found himself speaking to the men who had borne up the beach the thing whose germ of life, if it survived, was *his* only chance of life hereafter.

"I am a doctor; let me come." The place they had brought it to was a timber structure that was held as common property by the fisher-world, and known as Lloyd's Coffeehouse. It was not a coffeehouse, but a kind of spontaneous club-room, where the old men sat and smoked churchwarden pipes, and told each

other tales of storm and wreck, and how the news of old sea-battles came to St. Sennans in their boyhood; of wives made widows for their country's good, and men all sound of limb when the first gun said "Death!" across the water, crippled for all time when the last said "Victory!" and there was silence and the smell of blood. Over the mantel was an old print of the battle of Camperdown, with three-deckers in the smoke, flanked by portraits of Rodney and Nelson. There was a long table down the centre that had been there since the days of Rodney, and on this was laid what an hour ago was Sally; what each man present fears to uncover the face of, but less on his own account than for the sake of the only man who seems fearless, and lays hands on the cover to remove it; for all knew, or guessed, what this dead woman might be—might have been—to this man.

"I am a doctor; let me come."

"Are ye sure ye know, young master? Are ye sure, boy?" The speaker, a very old man, interposes a trembling hand to save Vereker from what he may not anticipate, perhaps has it in mind to beseech him to give place to the local doctor, just arriving. But the answer is merely, "I know." And the hand that uncovers the dead face never wavers, and then that white thing we see is all there is of Sally—that coil and tangle of black hair, all mixed with weed and sea-foam, is the rich mass that was drying in the sun that day she sat with Fenwick on the beach; those eyes that strain behind the half-closed eyelids were the merry eyes that looked up from the water at the boat she dived from two days since; those lips are the lips the man who stands beside her kissed but yesterday for the first time. The memory of that kiss is on him now as he wipes the sea-slime from them and takes the first prompt steps for their salvation.

The old Scotch doctor, who came in a moment later, wondered at the resolute decision and energy Vereker was showing. He had been told credibly of the circumstances of the case, and gave way on technical points connected with resuscitation, surrendering views he would otherwise have contended for about Marshall Hall's and Silvester's respective systems. Perhaps one reason for this was that auscultation of the heart convinced him that the case was hopeless, and he may have reflected that if any



other method than Dr. Vereker's was used that gentleman was sure to believe the patient might have been saved. Better leave him to himself.

Rosalind returned to her dressing, after Dr. Conrad walked away from the house, with a feeling—not a logical one—that now she need not hurry. Why having spoken with him and forwarded him on to look for Sally and Gerry should make any difference was not at all clear, and she did not account to herself for it. She accepted it as an occurrence that put her somehow in touch with the events of the day—made her a part of what was going on elsewhere. She had felt lapsed, for the moment, when, waking suddenly to advanced daylight, she had gone first to her husband's room and then to Sally's, and found both empty. The few words spoken from her window with her recently determined son-in-law had switched on her current again, metaphorically speaking.

So she took matters easily, and was at rest about her husband, in spite of the episode of the previous evening—rather, we should have said, of the small hours of that morning. The fact is, it was her first sleep she had waked from, an unusually long and sound one after severe tension, and in the ordinary course of events she would probably have gone to sleep again. Instead, she had got up at once, and gone to her husband's room to relieve her mind about him. A momentary anxiety at finding it empty disappeared when she found Sally's empty also; but by that time she was effectually waked, and rang for Mrs. Lobjoit and the hot water.

If Mrs. Lobjoit, when she appeared with it, had been able to give particulars of Sally's departure, and to say that she and Mr. Fenwick had gone out separately, Rosalind would have felt less at ease about him; but nothing transpired to show that they had not gone out together. Mrs. Lobjoit's data were all based on the fact that she found the street door open when she went to do down her step, and she had finished this job and gone back into the kitchen by the time Sally followed Fenwick out. Of course, she never came upstairs to see what rooms were empty; why should she? And as no reason for inquiry presented itself, the question was never raised by Rosalind. Sally

was naturally an earlier bird than herself, and quite as often as not she would join Gerry in his walk before breakfast.

How thankful she felt, now that the revelation was over, that Sally was within reach to help in calming down the mind that had been so terribly shaken by it; for all her thoughts were of Gerry; on her own behalf she felt nothing but contentment. Think what her daily existence had been! What had she to lose by a complete removal of the darkness that had shrouded her husband's early life with her—or rather, what had she not to gain? Now that it had been assured to her that nothing in the past could make a new rift between them, the only weight upon her mind was the possible necessity for revealing to Sally in the end the story of her parentage. What mother, to whom a like story of her own early days was neither more nor less than a glimpse into Hell, could have felt otherwise about communicating it to her child? She felt, too, the old feeling of the difficulty there would be in making Sally understand. The girl had not chanced across devildom enough to make her an easy recipient of such a tale.

Oh, the pleasure with which she recalled his last words of the night before: "She is *my* daughter now!" It was the final ratification of the protest of her life against the "rights" that Law and Usage grant to technical paternity; rights that can only be abrogated or ignored by a child's actual parent—its mother—at the cost of insult and contumely from a world that worships its own folly and ignores its own gods. Sally was hers—her own—hard as the terms of her possession had been, and she had assigned a moiety of her rights in her to the man she loved. What was the fatherhood of blood alone to set against the one her motherhood had a right to concede, and had conceded, in response to the spontaneous growth of a father's love? What claim had devilish cruelty and treachery to any share in their result—a result that, after all, was the only compensation possible to their victim?

We do not make this endeavour to describe Rosalind's frame of mind with a view to either endorsing or disclaiming her opinions. We merely record them as those of a woman whose life-story was an uncommon one; but not without a certain sympathy for the new definition of paternity their philosophy



involves, backed by a feeling that its truth is to some extent acknowledged in the existing marriage-law of several countries. As a set-off against this, no woman can have a child entirely her own except by incurring what are called "social disadvantages." The hare that breaks covert incurs social disadvantages. A happy turn of events had shielded Rosalind from the hounds, or they had found better sport elsewhere. And her child was her own.

But even as the thought was registered in her mind, that child lay lifeless; and her husband, stunned and dumb in his despair, dared not even long that she, too, should know, to share his burden.

"Those people are taking their time," said she. Not that she was pressingly anxious for them to come home. It was early still, and the more Gerry lived in the present the better. Sally and her lover were far and away the best foreground for the panorama of his mind just now, and she herself would be quite happy in the middle distance. There would be time and enough hereafter, when the storm had subsided, for a revelation of all those vanished chapters of his life in Canada and elsewhere.

It was restful to her, after the tension and trial of the night, to feel that he was happy with Sally and poor Prosy. What did it really matter how long they dawdled? She could hear in anticipation their voices and the laughter that would tell her of their coming. In a very little while it would be a reality, and, after all, the pleasure of a good symposium over Sally's betrothal was still to come. She and Gerry and the two principals had not spoken of it together yet. That would be a real happiness. How seldom it was that an engagement to marry gave such complete satisfaction to bystanders! And, after all, *they* are the ones to be consulted; not the insignificant bride and bridegroom elect. Perhaps, though, she was premature in this case. Was there not the Octopus? But then she remembered with pleasure that Conrad had represented his mother as phenomenally genial in her attitude towards the new arrangement; as having, in fact, a claim to be considered not only a bestower of benign consent, but an accomplice before the fact. Still, Rosalind felt her own reserves on the subject, although she had always taken the part of the Octopus on principle when

she thought Sally had become too disrespectful towards her. Anyhow, no use to beg and borrow troubles! Let her dwell on the happiness only that was before them all. She pictured a variety of homes for Sally in the time to come, peopling them with beautiful grandchildren—only, mind you, this was to be many, many years ahead! She could not cast herself for the part of grandmother while she twined that glorious hair into its place with hands that for softness and whiteness would have borne comparison with Sally's own.

In the old days, before the news of evil travelled fast, the widowed wife would live for days, weeks, months, unclouded by the knowledge of her loneliness, rejoicing in the coming hour that was to bring her wanderer back; and even as her heart laughed to think how now, at last, the time was drawing near for his return, his heart had ceased to beat, and, it may be, his bones were already bleaching where the assassin's knife had left him in the desert; or were swaying to and fro in perpetual monotonous response to the ground-swell, in some strange green reflected light of a sea-cavern no man's eye had ever seen; or buried nameless in a common tomb with other victims of battle or of plague; or, worst of all, penned in some dungeon, mad to think of home, waking from dreams of *her* to the terror of the intolerable night, its choking heat or deadly chill. And all those weeks or months the dearth of news would seem just the chance of a lost letter, no more—a thing that may happen any day to any of us. And she would live on in content and hope, jesting even in anticipation of his return.

Even so Rosalind, happy and undisturbed, dwelt on the days that were to come for the merpussy and poor Prosy, as she still had chosen to call him, for her husband and herself; and all the while *there*, so near her, was the end of it all, written in letters of death.

They were taking their time, certainly, those people; so she would put her hat on and go to meet them. Mrs. Lobjoit wasn't to hurry breakfast, but wait till they came. All right!

It looked as if it would rain later, so it was just as well to get out a little now. Rosalind was glad of the sweet air off the sea, for the night still hung about her. The tension of it was on her still, for all that she counted herself so much the better, so



much the safer, for that interview with Gerry. But oh, what a thing to think that now he knew *her* as she had known him from the beginning! How much they would have to tell each other, when once they were well in calm water! . . . Why were those girls running, and why did that young man on the beach below shout to some one who followed him, "It's over at the pier"?

"Is anything the matter?" She asked the question of a very old man, whom she knew well by sight, who was hurrying his best in the same direction. But his best was but little, as speed, though it did credit to his age; for old Simon was said to be in his hundredth year. Rosalind walked easily beside him as he answered:

"I oondersta'and, missis, there's been a fall from the pier-head. . . . Oh yes, they've gotten un out; ye may easy your mind o' that." But, for all that, Rosalind wasn't sorry her party were up at the hotel. She had believed them there long enough to have forgotten that she had no reason for the belief to speak of.

"You've no idea who it is?"

"Some do say a lady and a gentleman." Rosalind felt still gladder of her confidence that Sally and Gerry were out of the way. "Ary one of 'em would be bound to drown but for the boats smart and handy—barring belike a swimmer like your young lady! She's a rare one, to tell of!"

"I believe she is. She swam round the Cat Buoy in a worse sea than this two days ago."

"And she would, too!" Then the old boy's voice changed as he went on, garrulous: "But there be seas, missis, no man can swim in. My fower boys, they were fine swimmers—all fower!"

"But were they? . . ." Rosalind did not like to say drowned; but old Simon took it as spoken.

"All fower of 'em—fine lads all—put off to the wreck—wreck o' th' brig *Thyrsis*, on th' Goodwins—and ne'er a one come back. And I had the telling of it to their mother. And the youngest, he never was found; and the others was stone dead ashore, nigh on to the Foreland. There was none to help. Fifty-three year ago come this Michaelmas."

"Is their mother still living?" Rosalind asked, interested.

Old Simon had got to that stage in which the pain of the past is less than the pleasure of talking it over. "Died, she did," said he, almost as though he were unconcerned, "thirty-five year ago—five year afower ever I married my old missis yander." Rosalind felt less sympathy. If she were to lose Sally or Gerry, would she ever be able to talk like this, even if she lived to be ninety-nine? Possibly yes—only she could not know it now. She felt too curious about what had happened at the pier to think of going back, and walked on with old Simon, not answering him much. He seemed quite content to talk.

She did not trouble herself on the point of her party returning and not finding her. Ten chances to one they would hear about the accident, and guess where she had gone. Most likely they would follow her. Besides, she meant to go back as soon as ever she knew what had happened.

Certainly there were a great many people down there round about Lloyd's Coffeehouse! Had a life been lost? How she hoped not! What a sad end it would be to such a happy holiday as theirs had been! She said something to this effect to the old man beside her. His reply was: "Ye may doubt of it, in my judgment, missis. The rowboats were not long enough agone for that. Mayhap he'll take a bit of nursing round, though." But he quickened his pace, and Rosalind was sorry that a sort of courtesy towards him stood in her way. She would have liked to go much quicker.

She could not quite understand the scared look of a girl to whom she said, "Is it a bad accident? Do you know who it is?" nor why this girl muttered something under her breath, then got away, nor why so many eyes, all tearful, should be fixed on *her*. She asked again of the woman nearest her, "Do you know who it is?" but the woman gasped, and became hysterical, making her afraid she had accosted some anxious relative or near friend, who could not bear to speak of it. And still all the eyes were fixed upon her. A shudder ran through her. Could that be pity she saw in them—pity for *her*?

"For God's sake, tell me at once! Tell me what this is. . . ."

Still silence! She could hear through it sobs here and there in the crowd, and then two women pointed to where an elderly man who looked like a doctor came from a doorway close by.



She heard the hysterical woman break down outright, and her removal by friends, and then the strong Scotch accent of the doctor-like man making a too transparent effort towards an encouraging tone.

"There's nae reason to antecipate a fatal tairmination, so far. I wouldna undertake myself to say the seestolic motion of the heart was . . ." But he hesitated, with a puzzled look, as Rosalind caught his arm and hung to it, crying out: "Why do you tell *me* this? For God's sake, speak plain! I am stronger than you think."

His answer came slowly, in an abated voice, but clearly: "Because they tauld me ye were the girl's mither."

In the short time that had passed since Rosalind's mind first admitted an apprehension of evil the worst possibility it had conceived was that Vereker or her husband was in danger. No misgiving about Sally had entered it, except so far as a swift thought followed the fear of mishap to one of them. "How shall Sally be told of this? When and where will she know?"

Two of the women caught her as she fell, and carried her at the Scotch doctor's bidding into a house adjoining, where Fenwick had been carried in a half-insensible collapse that had followed his landing from the cobble-boat in which he was sculled ashore.

"Tell me what has happened. Where is Dr. Vereker?" Rosalind asks the question of any of the fisher-folk round her as soon as returning consciousness brings speech. They look at each other, and the woman the cottage seems to belong to says interrogatively, "The young doctor-gentleman?" and then answers the last question. He is looking to the young lady in at the Coffeehouse. But no one says what has happened. Rosalind looks beseechingly round.

"Will you not tell me now? Oh, tell me—tell me the whole!"

"It's such a little we know ourselves, ma'am. But my husband will be here directly. It was he brought the gentleman ashore. . . ."

"Where is the gentleman?" Rosalind has caught up the speaker with a decisive rally. Her natural strength is returning, prompted by something akin to desperation.

"We have him in here, ma'am. But he's bad, too! Here's my husband. Have ye the brandy, Tom?"

Rosalind struggles to her feet from the little settee they had laid her on. Her head is swimming, and she is sick, but she says: "Let me come!" She has gathered this much—that whatever has happened to Sally, Vereker is there beside her, and the other doctor she knows of. She can do nothing, and Gerry is close at hand. They let her come, and the woman and her husband follow. The one or two others go quietly out; there were too many for the tiny house.

That is Gerry, she can see, on the trestle-bedstead near the window with the flowerpots in it. He seems only half conscious, and his hands and face are cold. She cannot be sure that he has recognised her. Then she knows she is being spoken to. It is the fisherman's wife who speaks.

"We could find no way to get the gentleman's wet garments from him, but we might make a shift to try again. He's a bit hard to move. Not too much at once, Tom." Her husband is pouring brandy from his flask into a mug.

"Has he had any brandy?"

"Barely to speak of. Tell the lady, Tom!"

"No more than the leaving of a flask nigh empty out in my boat. It did him good, too. He got the speech to tell of the young lady, else—God help us!—we might have rowed him in, and lost the bit of water she was under. But we had the luck to find her." It was the owner of the cobble who spoke.

"Gerry, drink some of this at once. It's me—Rosey—your wife!" She is afraid his head may fail, for anything may happen now; but the brandy the fisherman's wife has handed to her revives him. No one speaks for awhile, and Rosalind, in the dazed state that so perversely notes and dwells on some small thing of no importance, and cannot grasp the great issue of some crisis we are living through, is keenly aware of the solemn ticking of a high grandfather clock, and of the name of the maker on its face—"Thomas Locoek, Rochester." She sees it through the door into the front room, and wonders what the certificate or testimonial in a frame beside it is; and whether the Bible on the table below it, beside the fat blue jug with a ship and inscriptions on it, has illustrations and the Stem of Jesse rendered