

pictorially. Or is it "Pilgrim's Progress," and no Bible at all? Who or what is she, that can sit and think of this and that, knowing that a world—her world and her husband's—is at stake, and that a terrible game is being played to save it, there within twenty yards of them? If she could only have given active help! But that she knows is impossible. She knows enough to be satisfied that all that can be done is being done; that even warmth and stimulants are useless, perhaps even injurious, till artificial respiration has done its work. She can recall Sally's voice telling her of these things. Yes, she is best here beside her husband.

What is it that he says in a gasping whisper? Can any one tell him what it is has happened? She cannot—perhaps could not if she knew—and she does not yet know herself. She repeats her question to the fisherman and his wife. They look at each other and say young Ben Tracy was on the pier. Call him in. It is something to know that what has happened was on the pier. While young Ben is hunted up the opportunity is taken to make the change of wet clothes for extemporised dry ones. The half-drowned, all-chilled, and bewildered man is reviving, and can help, though rigidly and with difficulty. Then Ben is brought in, appalled and breathless.

The red-eyed and tear-stained boy is in bad trim for giving evidence, but under exhortation to speak up and tell the lady he articulates his story through his sobs. He is young, and can cry. He goes back to the beginning.

His father told him to run and hunt round for the life-belt, and he went to left instead of to right, and missed of seeing it. And he was at the top o' the ladder, shooat'un aloud to his father, and the gentleman—he nodded towards Fenwick—was walking down below. Then the young lady came to the top stair of the ladder. The narrator threw all his powers of description into the simultaneousness of Sally's arrival at this point and the gentleman walking straight over the pier-edge. "And then the young lady she threw away her hat, and come runnin' down, runnin' down, and threw away her cloak, she *did*, and stra'at she went for t' wa'ater!" Young Benjamin's story and his control over his sobs come to an end at the same time, and his father, just arrived, takes up the tale.

"I saw there was mishap in it," he says, "by the manner of my young lad with the lady's hat, and I went direct for the life-belt, for I'm no swimmer myself. Tom, man, tell the lady I'm no swimmer . . ." Tom nodded assent, ". . . or I might have tried my luck. It was a bad business that the life-belt was well away at the far end, and I had no chance to handle it in time. It was the run of the tide took them out beyond the length of the line, and I was bound to make the best throw I could, and signal to shore for a boat." He was going to tell how the only little boat at the pier-end had got water-logged in the night, when Rosalind interrupted him.

"Did you see them both in the water?"

"Plain. The young lady swimming behind and keeping the gentleman's head above the water. I could hear her laughing like, and talking. Then I sent the belt out, nigh half-way, and she saw it and swam for it. Then I followed my young lad for to get out a shore-boat."

It was the thought of the merpussy laughing like and talking in the cruel sea that was to engulf her that brought a heart-broken choking moan from her mother. Then, all being told, the fisher-folk glanced at each other, and by common consent went noiselessly from the room and lingered whispering outside. They closed the outer door, leaving the cottage entirely to Rosalind and her husband, and then they two were alone in the darkened world; and Conrad Vereker, whom they could not help, was striving—striving against despair—to bring back life to Sally.

A terrible strain—an almost killing strain—had been put upon Fenwick's powers of endurance. Probably the sudden shock of his immersion, the abrupt suppression of an actual fever almost at the cost of sanity, had quite as much to do with this as what he was at first able to grasp of the extent of the disaster. But actual chill and exposure had contributed their share to the state of semi-collapse in which Rosalind found him. Had the rower of the cobble turned in-shore at once, some of this might have been saved; but that would have been one pair of eyes the fewer, and every boat was wanted. Now that his powerful constitution had the chance to reassert itself, his revival went

quickly. He was awakening to a world with a black grief in it; but Rosey was there, and had to be lived for, and think of his debt to her! Think of the great wrong he did her in that old time that he had only regained the knowledge of yesterday! Her hand in his gave him strength to speak, and though his voice was weak it would reach the head that rested on his bosom.

"I can tell you now, darling, what I remember. I went off feverish in the night after you left me, and I suppose my brain gave way, in a sense. I went out early to shake it off, and a sort of delusion completely got the better of me. I fancied I was back at Bombay, going on the boat for Australia, and I just stepped off the pier-edge. Our darling must have been there. Oh, Sally, Sally! . . ." He had to pause and wait.

"Hope is not all dead—not yet, not yet!" Rosalind's voice seemed to plead against despair.

"I know, Rosey dearest—not yet. I heard her voice . . . oh, her voice! . . . call to me to be still, and she would save me. And then I felt her dear hand . . . first my arm, then my head, on each side." Again his voice was choking, but he recovered. "Then, somehow, the life-belt was round me—I can't tell how, but she made me hold it so as to be safe. She was talking and laughing, but I could not hear much. I know, however, that she said quite suddenly, 'I had better swim back to the pier. Hold on tight, Jeremiah!' . . ." He faltered again before ending. "I don't know why she went, but she said, 'I must go,' and swam away."

That was all Fenwick could tell. The explanation came later. It was that unhappy petticoat-tape! A swimmer's leg-stroke may be encumbered in a calm sea, or when the only question is of keeping afloat for awhile. But in moderately rough water, and in a struggle against a running tide—which makes a certain speed imperative—the conditions are altered. Sally may have judged wrongly in trying to return to the pier, but remember—she could not in the first moments know that the mishap had been seen, and help was near at hand. Least of all could she estimate the difficulty of swimming in a loosened encumbered skirt. In our judgment, she would have done better to remain near the life-belt, even if she, too, had ultimately had to depend on it. The additional risk for Fenwick would have been small.

After he had ended what he had to tell he remained quite still, and scarcely spoke during the hour that followed. Twice or three times during that hour Rosalind rose to go out and ask if there was any change. But, turning to him with her hand on the door, and asking "Shall I go?" she was always met with "What good will it do? Conrad will tell us at once," and returned to her place beside him. After all, what she heard might be the end of Hope. Better stave off Despair to the last.

She watched the deliberate hands of the clock going cruelly on, unfaltering, ready to register in cold blood the moment that should say that Sally, as they knew her, was no more. Thomas Locock, of Rochester, had taken care of that. Where would those hands be on that clock-face when all attempt at resuscitation had to stop? And why live after it?

She fancied she could hear, at intervals, Dr. Conrad's voice giving instructions; and the voice of the Scotsman, less doubtfully, which always sounded like that of a medical man, for some reason not defined. As the clock-hand pointed to ten, she heard both quite near—outside Lloyd's Coffeehouse, evidently. Then she knew why she had so readily relinquished her purpose of getting at Dr. Conrad for news. It was the dread of seeing anything of the necessary manipulation of the body. Could she have helped, it would have been different. No, if she must look upon her darling dead, let it be later. But now there was that poor fellow-sufferer within reach, and she could see him without fear. She went out quickly.

"Can you come away?"

"Quite safely for a minute. The others have done it before."

"Is there a chance?"

"There is a chance." Dr. Conrad's hand as she grasps it is so cold that it makes her wonder at the warmth of her own. She is strangely alive to little things. "Yes—there is a chance," he repeats, more emphatically, as one who has been contradicted. But the old Scotch doctor had only said cautiously, "It would be airy times to be geevin' up hopes," in answer to a half-suggestion of reference to him in the words just spoken. Rosalind keeps the cold hand that has taken hers, and the crushing weight of her own misery almost gives place to her utter pity

for the ash-white face before her, and the tale there is in it of a soul in torture.

"What is the longest time . . . the longest time . . . ?" she cannot frame her question, but both doctors take its meaning at once, repeating together or between them, "The longest insensibility after immersion? Many hours."

"But how many?" Six, certainly, is Dr. Conrad's testimony. But the Scotchman's conscience plagues him; he must needs be truthful. "Vara likely you're right," he says. "I couldna have borne testimony pairsonally to more than two. But vara sair-tainly you're more likely to be right than I." His conscience has a chilling effect.

Fenwick, a haggard spectacle, has staggered to the door of the cottage. He wants to get the attention of some one in the crowd that stands about in silence, never intrusively near. It is the father of young Benjamin, who comes being summoned.

"That man you told me about . . ." Fenwick begins.

"Peter Burtenshaw?"

"Ah! How long was he insensible?"

"Eight hours—rather better! We got him aboard just before eight bells of the second dog-watch, and it was eight bells of the middle watch afore he spoke. Safe and sure! Wasn't I on the morning-watch myself, and beside him four hours of the night before, and turned in at eight bells? He'll tell you the same tale himself. Peter Burtenshaw—he's a stevedore now, at the new docks at Southampton." Much of this was quite unintelligible—ship's time is always a problem—but it was reassuring, and Rosalind felt grateful to the speaker, whether what he said was true or not. In that curious frame of mind that observed the smallest things, she was just aware of the difficulty in the way of a reference to Peter Burtenshaw at the new docks at Southampton. Then she felt a qualm of added sickness at heart as she all but thought, "How that will amuse Sally when I come to tell it to her!"

The old Scotchman had to keep an appointment—connected with birth, not death. "I've geen my pledge to the wench's husband," he said, and went his way. Rosalind saw him stopped as he walked through the groups that were lingering silently for a chance of good news; and guessed that he had none to give, by

the way his questioners fell back disappointed. She was conscious that the world was beginning to reel and swim about her; was half asking herself what could it all mean—the waiting crowds of fisher-folk speaking in undertones among themselves; the pitying eyes fixed on her and withdrawn as they met her own; the fixed pallor and tense speech of the man who held her hand, then left her to return again to an awful task that had, surely, something to do with her Sally, there in that cramped tarred-wood structure close down upon the beach. What did his words mean: "I must go back; it is best for you to keep away"? Oh, yes; now she knew, and it was all true. She saw how right he was, but she read in his eyes the reason why he was so strong to face the terror that she knew was *there*—in *there*! It was that he knew so well that death would be open to him if defeat was to be the end of the battle he was fighting. But there should be no panic. Not an inch of ground should be uncontested.

Back again in the little cottage with Gerry, but some one had helped her back. Surely, though, his voice had become his own again as he said: "We are no use, Rosey darling. We are best here. Conrad knows what he's about." And there was a rally of real hope, or a bold bid for it, when his old self spoke in his words: "Why does that solemn old fool of a Scotch doctor want to put such a bad face on the matter? Patience, sweet-heart, patience!"

For them there was nothing else. They could hinder, but they could not help, outside there. Nothing for it now but to count the minutes as they passed, to feel the cruelty of that inexorable clock in the stillness; for the minutes passed too quickly. How could it be else, when each one of them might have heralded a hope and did not; when each bequeathed its little legacy of despair? But was there need that each new clock-tick as it came should say, as the last had said: "Another second has gone of the little hour that is left; another inch of the space that parts us from the sentence that knows no respite or reprieve"? Was it not enough that the end must come, without the throb of that monotonous reminder: "Nearer still!—nearer still!"

Neither spoke but a bare word or two, till the eleventh stroke of the clock, at the hour, left it resonant and angry, and St. Sennans tower answered from without. Then Rosalind said,

"Shall I go out and see, now?" and Fenwick replied, "Do, darling, if you wish to. But he would tell us at once, if there were anything." She answered, "Yes, perhaps it's no use," and fell back into silence.

She was conscious that the crowd outside had increased, in spite of a fine rain that had followed the overclouding of the morning. She could hear the voices of other than the fisher-folk—some she recognised as those of beach acquaintance. That was Mrs. Arkwright, the mother of Gwenny. And that was Gwenny herself, crying bitterly. Rosalind knew quite well, though she could hear no words, that Gwenny was being told that she could not go to Miss Nightingale now. She half thought she would like to have Gwenny in, to cry on her and make her perhaps feel less like a granite-block in pain. But, then, was not Sally a baby of three once? She could remember the pleasure the dear old Major had at seeing baby in her bath, and how he squeezed a sponge over her head, and she screwed her eyes up. He had died in good time, and escaped this inheritance of sorrow. How could she have told him of it?

What was she that had outlived him to bear all this? Much, so much, of her was two dry, burning eyes, each in a ring of pain, that had forgotten tears and what they meant. How was it that now, when that Arkwright woman's voice brought back her talk upon the beach, not four-and-twenty hours since, and her unwelcome stirring of the dead embers of a burned-out past—how was it that that past, at its worst, seemed easier to bear than this intolerable *now*? How had it come about that a memory of twenty years ago, a memory of how she had prayed that her unborn baby might die, rather than live to remind her of that black stain upon the daylight, its father, had become in the end worse to her, in her heart of hearts, than the thing that caused it? And then she fell to wondering when it was that her child first took hold upon her life; first crept into it, then slowly filled it up. She went back on little incidents of that early time, asking herself, was it then, or then, I first saw that she was Sally? She could recall, without adding another pang to her dull, insensate suffering, the moment when the baby, as the Major and General Pellew sat playing chess upon the deck, captured the white king, and sent him flying into the

Mediterranean; and though she could not smile now, could know how she would have smiled another time. Was that white king afloat upon the water still? A score of little memories of a like sort chased one another as her mind ran on, all through the childhood and girlhood of their subject. And now—it was all to end. . . .

And throughout those years this silent man beside her, this man she meant to live for still, for all it should be in a darkened world—this man was . . . where? To think of it—in all those years, no Sally for him! See what she had become to him in so short a time—such a little hour of life! Think of the waste of it—of what she might have been! And it was she, the little unconscious thing herself, that sprang from what had parted them. If she had to face all the horrors of her life anew for it, would she flinch from one of them, only to hear that the heart that had stopped its beating would beat again, that the voice that was still would sound in her ears once more?

Another hour! The clock gave out its warning that it meant to strike, in deadly earnest with its long premonitory roll. Then all those twelve strokes so quick upon the heels of those that sounded but now, as it seemed. Another hour from the tale of those still left but reasonable hope; another hour nearer to despair. The reverberations died away, and left the cold insensate tick to measure out the next one, while St. Sennans tower gave its answer as before.

"Shall I go now, Gerry, to see?"

"I say not, darling; but go, if you like." He could not bear to hear it, if it was to be the death-sentence. So Rosalind still sat on to the ticking of the clock.

Her brain and powers of thought were getting numbed. Trivial things came out of the bygone times, and drew her into dreams—back into the past again—to give a moment's spurious peace; then forsook her treacherously to an awakening, each time deadlier than the last. Each time to ask anew, what could it all mean? Sally dead or dying—Sally dead or dying! Each time she repeated the awful words to herself, to try to get a hold she was not sure she had upon their meaning. Each time she slipped again into a new dream and lost it.

Back again now, in the old days of her girlhood! Back in

that little front garden of her mother's house, twenty odd years ago, and Gerry's hand in hers—the hand she held to now; and Gerry's face that now, beside her, looked so still and white and heart-broken, all aglow with life and thoughtless youth and hope. Again she felt upon her lips his farewell kiss, not to be renewed until . . . but at the thought she shuddered away, horror-stricken, from the nightmare that any memory must be of what then crossed her life, and robbed them both of happiness. And then her powers of reason simply reeled and swam, and her brain throbbed as she caught the thought forming in it: "Better happiness so lost, and all the misery over again, than this blow that has come upon us now! Sally dead or dying—Sally dead or dying!" For what was *she*, the thing we could not bear to lose, but the living record, the very outcome, of the poisoned soil in that field of her life her memory shrank from treading?

What was that old Scotchman—he seemed to have come back—what was he saying outside there? Yes, listen! Fenwick starts up, all his life roused into his face. If only that clock would end that long unnecessary roll of warning, and strike! But before the long-deferred single stroke comes to say another hour has passed, he is up and at the door, with Rosalind clinging to him terrified.

"What's the news, doctor? Tell it out, man!—never fear." Rosalind dares not ask; her heart gives a great bound, and stops, and her teeth chatter and close tight. She could not speak if she tried.

"I wouldna like to be over-confeudent, Mr. Fenwick, and ye'll understand I'm only geevin' ye my own eempression. . . ."

"Yes, quite right—go on. . . ."

"Vara parteecularly because our young friend Dr. Vereker is unwulling to commeet himself . . . but I should say a pairceptible . . ."

He is interrupted. For with a loud shout Dr. Conrad himself, dishevelled and ashy-white of face, comes running from the door opposite. The word he has shouted so loudly he repeats twice; then turns as though to go back. But he does not reach the door, for he staggers suddenly, like a man struck by a bullet, and falls heavily, insensible.

There is a movement and a shouting among the scattered groups that have been waiting, three hours past, as those nearest at hand run to help and raise him; and the sound of voices and exultation passes from group to group. For what he shouted was the one word "Breath!" And Rosalind knew its meaning as her head swam and she heard no more.