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Title: *Beggars on Horseback*

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Release Date: October 20, 2010 [EBook #33911]

Language: English

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BEGGARS ON HORSEBACK

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BEGGARS ON
HORSEBACK

By F. TENNYSON JESSE
AUTHOR OF "THE MILKY WAY," ETC



LONDON MCMXV
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED
WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE
TO
MISS HANNAH MERCY ROBERTS
(NAN)
AS A SMALL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF A LARGE DEBT

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The stories in this volume are printed in chronological order.

A SHEPHERDESS OF FAUNS

ARCHIE LETHBRIDGE arrived in Provence thoroughly satisfied with life. He had just sold a big picture; was contemplating, with every prospect of success, giving a "one-man-show" in London of the work he would do in Provence; and the girl he loved had accepted him.

Miss Gwendolen Gould was eminently eligible—her income, though comfortable, was not large enough to brand her husband as a fortune-hunter; she was pretty in a well-bred way that satisfied the eye without causing it to turn and gaze after her; and above all, she could be relied upon never to do, say, or think an unusual thing. Like all painters, when they are conventionally minded, Archie was the fine flower of propriety—he owned to enough wild oats of his own sowing to save him from inferiority in the society of his fellow-men, and he held exceedingly rigid views on the subject of his womenkind. Gwendolen might—doubtless had, for she was one of the large army of young women brought up to no profession save that of sex—give this or that man a kiss

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[4] at a dance, but she would never have saved all of passion and possibilities for one man, and lavished them on him, regardless of suitable circumstances. Archie's name (that he hoped one day to adorn with some coveted letters at which he now pretended to sneer) would be perfectly safe with Gwendolen.

The only drawback to his complete content was that his fair, sleek person showed signs of getting a trifle too plump—for he was only young as a man who is nearly "arrived" counts youth. On the whole, however, it was with a feeling of settled attainment that Archie left Nice and proceeded to strike up into the Alpes Maritimes, totally unprepared for any bizarre or inexplicable event—he would have laughed satirically at the bare idea.

To do him justice, he worked hard, and he had a tremendous facility and a certain charm that concealed his lack of true artistic sensitiveness. There is probably nothing more difficult to interpret in paint than an olive-tree—the incredible grey brilliance of the thing, each leaf set at a slightly different angle, and refracting the light till the whole tree seems made of blown mist and sharp-cut shadows. Archie painted olives under every effect; sparkling in the sun, fog-grey on a grey day, and pale with the shimmering under-side of straining leaves against a storm-dark sky. He also painted very dirty children picking the ranked violets and stocks that grew along the olive terraces, and this he achieved without once descending into the realms of the "pretty-pretty," while at the same time infusing just the right amount of sentiment to ensure a sale.

[5] He painted here and there from Grasse to Le Broc, and then one day, feeling he had taken all he could from the soft-scented land of olives and flowers, he hired a motor to convey him up into the Back o' Beyond, and drop him there. Once he met a couple of women bearing on their heads the sheaves of tight little red rosebuds that look exactly like bundles of radishes, and caught a whiff of the strange, bitter-sweet smell of the newly cut stems. Then he passed an old shepherd in a cloak of faded blue, with sheepskin legs cross-gartered to the knee, taking his lean, golden-brown flock up into the mountains.

After that he saw no living thing, neither bird nor beast nor human, for many miles. Rounded hills, opening out from each other in endless succession and covered from crest to base with harsh yellow grass, and strewn with grey boulders. Deep gullies that at one time had been set alight and now were scorched and brown like plague-pits, with here and there a patch of pale stones showing up vividly from the charred thorns and blackened soil. Archie shivered, partly because of the keen wind blowing down from the great plateau beyond the hills, partly because something savage in the scene gripped at him.

The car throbbed on, higher and higher, till the road, winding acutely along the edge of precipices, developed a surface that caused his chauffeur to swear gently to himself. Valley after valley opened out, long and narrow, and Archie noticed signs of a long-past cultivation in the curved terraces into which the bed of each valley was cut, forming an endless series of semicircles. There was no trace of any crop, and the whole effect was as of some rude amphitheatre where prehistoric man had sat and watched gladiatorial shows.

[6] The car, sticking now and then in a rut, or jolting violently over stones, finally crested the last rise, and Archie found himself on a vast stretch of land ringed in by sharp-edged hills, like some dead, gigantic crater; to the right, far away on a slope of the mountain ring, lay a grey straggling town that looked hacked out of the hardened lava. The only sign of life was in a patch of vividly green grass near at hand, where hundreds of crocuses had burned their way up through the earth and showed like a bed of thin blue flames.

Archie directed the contemptuous chauffeur towards the town, and they finally drew up at the inn—a little green-shuttered affair, with a stone-flagged passage, and a tortoise-shell cat drowsing beside the door. Outside a *buvette* opposite was a marble-topped table at which sat a couple of workmen drinking cider. An evanescent gleam of sun shone out, and the tawny liquid caught and held it, making each glass throw on to the table a bubble of gold fire enmeshed in the delicate shadow of the vessel itself. Archie stood transfixed for a moment with pleasure, then, as the gleam faded and died, he entered the inn.

* * * * *

Like most people with the creative temperament, Archie Lethbridge was the prey of environment. The unborn child is not more influenced by the surroundings of its mother than a book or picture by those of its creator. Draginoules took such a deep, sure grip of Archie that it did more than merely affect his work—it began to upset his neatly arranged values, and, since Nature abhors a vacuum, to substitute fresh ones in their place. Draginoules, in short, behaved like a master of scenic effects; it allowed a couple of days for the background to permeate Archie's consciousness, and, when he was ripe for it, introduced the human element, which, to a man of his type, means a woman.

[7] It was one morning when he was washing brushes in the dim inn kitchen that he saw her first. She came out of the *buvette* to serve some workmen, and Archie stopped dead in the act of swirling a cobalt-laden brush round and round in the hollowed yellow soap he held. He always saw the whole scene in memory as clearly as he saw it then—the low-fronted *buvette*, the glass of the door refracting the light as it still quivered from her passage; the pools of blue shadow that lay under the table and chairs on the pavement; the blouse-clad figures of the workmen, particularly a young man with a deeply burnt back to his neck; and the girl herself, holding aloft

a tray of liqueur glasses, that winked like little eyes. All this he saw framed by the darkness of the kitchen and cut sharply into squares by the black bars of the window; then, as he mechanically went on frothing blue-stained bubbles out of the soap, he said to himself, "I must paint that girl."

He soon found out that she was the niece of the stout couple who kept the *buvette*, and that her name was Désirée Prévost. As they mentioned her most people shrugged their shoulders. Oh, no, there was nothing against the girl—though it was true her eyebrows met in a thick bar across her nose, and old people had always said that was a sign of the Loup-Garou; enlightened moderns, however, did not really hold by that. The town was proud of her looks, for it considered her *très bien*, the highest expression of praise from a Provençal, who is a dour kind of person, taking his pleasures as sadly as the proverbial Englishman, and whose chief aim in life is to place one sou on the top of another, and when possible insert a third in between.

[8] Archie approached the aunt of Désirée on the subject of sittings with some trepidation, but met with an agreeable pliancy from her, and a calm though indifferent assent from Désirée herself. She had a high opinion of her own value, and no amount of appreciation surprised her.

Scanning her afresh as they stood on the pavement making final arrangements, Archie inwardly congratulated himself. From the heavy brass-coloured hair massed with a sculptured effect round her well-poised head, to the firmly planted feet, admirably proportioned to the rest of her, she was entirely right for his purpose—she seemed the spirit of Draginoules incarnate. Owing to the opaque pallor of her skin, her level bar of fair eyebrow and heavily folded lids, her big, finely modelled nose and faintly tinted mouth, all took on a sculptured quality that made for repose; the very shadows of her face were delicate in tone, mere breaths of shadows. Yet she was excessively vital, but it was a smouldering, restrained vitality suggestive of a quiescent crater. Her face was too individual to be perfect—the nose over big; the brow too narrow for the full modelling across the cheekbones, but she had an egg-like curve from turn of jaw to pointed chin. When she laughed her teeth showed large and strong, and her throat was the loveliest Archie had ever seen—magnificently big—and she had a trick of tilting her head back that made the smoothly knitted muscles of her neck swell a little under the white skin. As he painted her Archie used to find himself racking his brains for some speech that would make her head take that upward poise, so that he could watch the play of throat.

[9] He chose his background well; a sheltered spot in a fold of hill just beyond the town, where a slim young oak sapling still retained its copper-hued autumn leaves, that seemed almost fiery against the deep, soft blue of the sky. He had conceived of her as standing under the oak-tree, so that, to him, working lower down on the slope she too showed against the sky, seemingly caught in a network of delicate boughs. Being below her he was also the richer by the soft, three-cornered shadow under her chin, and the whole of her became a tone of exquisite delicacy, as of shadowed ivory, in the setting of sky—that sky of southern spring which seems literally drenched in light. The tawny note of the oak-leaves was to be repeated in some sheep, which, though kept subservient to the figure of Désirée, were to supply the motive of the picture—or so Archie thought till the sudden freak that made him introduce the fauns.

Désirée was all for robing herself in her best—a black silk bodice with a high collar, and a be-trained, jet-spangled skirt, but Archie coaxed her into wearing the dress he first saw her in; a mere wrapper of indefinite prune colour, belted in at the waist to show the lines of her deep chested, long flanked figure, and cut so low as to leave her throat bare from the pit of it. Her sleeves were rolled back to the elbow and her arms showed milk-white as far as the reddened wrists and the big, work-roughened hands that held a hazel switch across her thighs.

Archie was Anglo-Saxon enough to feel a slight stiffness at the first sitting, but Désirée was a stranger to the sensation of tied tongue.

[10] "I like the English," she announced. "Not many of them come here, but I have not spent my life in Draginoules, no, indeed! I was in a laundry once at La Madeleine. Do you know it? It is where they take in the washing of Nice. So I used to go much into Nice, and an English lady there painted me. She had a talent! She made me look beautiful. In Draginoules, do you know what they call me? They call me *l'Anglaise manquée!*"

"Because you like the English so?" asked Archie. His French was considerably purer than hers, she spoke it with the Provençal accent that sounds exactly like a Cockney twang.

"Because I have the nature, the habits of an English woman. Oh, I assure you! I like to live out of doors—to be out all day with one's bread and a bottle of wine and sleep on the hillside—that is what I call living. I always open my window at night, though my aunt says it is a folly. I could go to England if I chose, as a maid. My English lady would have me. Ah! how I long to see England. One gets so tired with Draginoules."

"But your friends—you would be sorry to leave them?"

"Oh, for that, I do not care about the people of Draginoules. It was my mother's place, not mine. I was born in Lyons, where my father was a silk-weaver. But he was a bad kind of man, so I came to my aunt to live. I do not think much of the people of Draginoules. They all like me, but I do not like them!"

"Why don't you go to England, then? Though I think you are far better here!" quoth Archie, on whom the glamour of the place was strong.

"My fiancé would kill himself," said Désirée serenely.

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"Oh—you are fiancée?" murmured Archie, wondering why he felt that absurd mingling of relief and regret.

"To Auguste Colombini. He is a mechanic in Nice. We are to marry when he gets a rise. *Hélas! je ne serai plus fille!*"

Her words, so simply and directly spoken, caught at Archie's imagination—" *Hélas! je ne serai plus fille!*"

"What a *vierge farouche!*" he said to himself. "If I can get that feeling into my picture!" Aloud he said: "And your fiancé—he is very devoted, then?"

"He adores me. It is a perfect folly, see you, to feel for anyone what he does for me. He is mad about me."

She spoke with a calm arrogance that was very effective. How sure she was of her man! Was it a peculiarity of temperament in her or her fiancé that made such confidence possible? Archie flattered himself he was something of a student of human nature, and he absorbed all of Désirée that he could get in a spirit positively approaching that of the journalist.

When a man and woman fall into the habit of discussing the intimate things, such as love and marriage; and, above all, of comparing the sexes; disaster, even if only a temporary one, is apt to follow. Archie returned to the themes next time she posed for him.

"So you think a man can care too much for a woman?" he asked, and stopped for a moment with raised brush to watch her answer. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, yet enough to make the folds of her wrapper strain upward for a fleeting moment.

"As to that I think women are worth it. But it is foolish to care everything for one person."

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"You could care for others, then—as well as M. Colombini?" asked Archie with a sudden stir at his pulses.

"I? One can care a little—here and there. But commit a folly for a man, that is a thing I would never do. And I am very fond of Auguste. If I did not think we should be happy and faithful I should not marry him. I look round on all the married people I know, and see nothing but betrayal everywhere. Here a husband plays his wife false, there she in her turn cheats him. Bah!—it is not good, that!"

"How right you are!" said Archie virtuously. "But you do not then think it necessary to care as much for Auguste as he cares for you?"

"*Damme*, no! How should I? He pleases me, and he is good—I can respect him. And I like him to kiss me . . ." the most charming look of self-consciousness mingled with reminiscence flitted over her face—"but for him—he is mad when he kisses me. Women do not care like that. It is a folly. And it is always happier, Monsieur, when it is the husband who cares the most. That is how men are made."

Oh, yes, thought Archie, she was a woman after all, this *vierge farouche*, and more unashamedly woman, franker in her admissions of knowledge—for she admitted in her expressive face and gestures more than she actually said—than any woman of his world. He worked in silence for a while then told her to rest.

She flung herself on the turf with an abandonment of limb and muscle usually only seen in young animals, and he came and lay a little below her and lit a cigarette. Désirée lay serenely, her face upturned, and he studied her thoughtfully.

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"Surely very few of your countrywomen are as blonde as you?" he asked her. "Your eyes are blue, and your brows and lashes a faint brown and your hair is——"

He paused, at a loss how to describe her hair. It was not golden, rather that strong brass-colour that, had he seen it on a sophisticated townswoman he would have dubbed "peroxide." It was oddly metallic hair, not only in its colour, but in the carven ripples of it where she wore it pulled across her low brow and massed in heavy braids round her head. That way of wearing her hair right down to her brows, except for a narrow white triangle of forehead showing, boy-like, at one side, gave her an oddly animal look—using the word in its best sense. A look as of some low-browed, heavy-tressed faun, fearless and unashamed—it was only in her eyes that mystery lay.

"My hair?" she exclaimed, showing her big white teeth in a laugh as frank as a boy's; "but that, you know, is not natural! It was an accident!"

"An accident! How on earth——?"

"Why, I was doing the *ménage* for a chemist and his wife over the border, at Cannes. And she had hair like this, and one day she gave me a little bottle and said: 'Désirée, you're a good girl, but you don't know how to make the best of yourself. You put some of this on your head.' I rubbed some on, one side only, just to see what would happen, and next day I found one half of my head golden—golden like the sun. 'Mon Dieu!' I said, 'but what do I look like, one half yellow and one half brown!' So I poured it on all over. It is nothing now because I have not put on the stuff for so long, but at one time it was beautiful. Such hair! Below my waist, and gold, oh, such a gold! Now

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it wants doing again."

She ducked her head down for him to see the crown of it, and he perceived from the parting outwards two inches of unabashed dark hair—almost blue it looked by contrast with the circling wrappings of yellow. Archie, immensely tickled at finding this splendid young savage in the Back o' Beyond with dyed hair, could but shout with mirth, and Désirée, totally unoffended, joined in. When he went back that evening he felt he knew her far better than on the preceding day. In intimacies between men and women each day marks a distinct phase, making a series of steps; and the only possible thing to do is to see that the steps do not lead downwards. Like most people when on those magic stairs, Archie gave no heed to the question.

The next day he unconsciously took up their conversation of the day before—a sure sign of intimacy if ever there were one. They were resting again, for he said it was too hot to work; and the sunset effect he wanted was growing later every day.

"So you could care a little for some one else before you marry Auguste?" he suggested lightly enough, and looking away from her to the snow mountains that bared white fangs in the blue of the sky.

She laughed a little, stretched herself, drooped her lids, was in a flash, and for a flash, entirely woman—alluring, withdrawing, sure of herself. As she gained in poise Archie felt his own tenure on self-control slipping away from him.

"Could you?" he persisted, his eyes by now back on her changing face.

[15] "How does one care? What is it?" she evaded. "I do not think *you* would be able to tell me. You are so cold, so English, you would care just as much as would be pleasant and never enough to make you uncomfortable!"

The penetration of this remark displeased Archie.

"But you are like that yourself," he objected. "You are the most cool, calculating girl I ever met—everything you say shows it."

She rolled over slightly on the grass, so that her head, the chin thrust forward on her cupped hands, was brought nearer to him but kept at the provocative three-quarter angle suggestive of withdrawal. Her thick heavy lids were drooped, but suddenly they flickered and half-rose to show a gleam so wild, so unlike anything he had ever seen in her, that Archie caught his breath. It was as though some alien spirit, a pagan, woodland thing, was looking at him through the eyes of the self-possessed, level-headed young woman, who at times even seemed more *bourgeois* than peasant.

"Désirée! How beautiful you are!" he cried.

"As beautiful as Mademoiselle your fiancée?" asked Désirée.

With a run Archie descended into the commonplace, and Désirée became for him nothing but a pretty girl who went rather too far.

"Englishmen do not care to discuss the lady of their choice," he said grandiloquently. "May I ask how you knew I was fiancé?"

[16] "I have seen her picture in your room," said Désirée frankly; "the patronne told me there was one there. She is pretty, but yes, very pretty. Her hair is so beautifully done in all those little rolls, one would say it must be false. She is altogether mignonne, one would say the head of a doll!"

Désirée was absolutely sincere in thinking she was giving Miss Gwendolen Gould the highest praise possible. She would willingly have exchanged her splendid muscular body for the slim, corseted form of Miss Gould, and have bartered her strongly modelled head for the small, regular features and Marcel-waved hair of the other girl. It was only his perception of this that kept Archie from anger, and as it was the truth of the praise hit him sharply. That night he sat down before the miniature and conscientiously tried to conjure up the emotions of a lover. The experiment was a failure.

When he came to go to bed he found, to his amazement, a sprig of myrtle lying on his pillow—just a spray of leaves and a cluster of the purple berries with their little frilled heads.

"How did that get there I wonder?" he asked himself, and then stooped, with an exclamation of disgust. A corner of the turned back sheet that trailed on the floor was lightly powdered with earth as though a muddy shoe had stood on it. The footprint—if footprint it were—was oddly impossible in shape, short and rounded, more like the mark of a hoof.

"Can the patronne's goat have got up here? I saw it wandering in the passage to-day," thought Archie vexedly. "Beastly animal to drop half-chewed green food all over my pillow!"

The injured man thumped his pillow and turned it over, so that the despised myrtle sprig lay crushed beneath it. Then he went to bed and to sleep.

[17] "I dreamt of you all night, Désirée," he told her next day.

"I was pursuing you round rocks and over streams and through undergrowth all night long. You

were you and yet you weren't. Somehow I got the impression that it was you as you would have been hundreds and thousands of years ago. And I kept on losing you and then little satyrs beckoned at me to show me the way you'd gone, and I stumbled on after the hoofs that were always flashing up just ahead—just vanishing round corners."

"Satyrs? What are they?" asked Désirée.

Archie explained as picturesquely as possible, but was brought to a stop by a curious change in Désirée's eyes. They wore the strained, misty look of the person who is trying hard to catch at some long-lost memory. Again he was startled by that strange feeling that something else was looking from between those placid lids of hers.

"But I know," she began—"those creatures you are telling me—*what* is it I know about them?" She broke off and shook herself impatiently. "Bah! It is gone. And then what happened—did you find me at the end?"

"I can't quite remember," said Archie slowly "Something happened, but what it was is all blurred. I believe you're a wood-nymph, Désirée—a wood-nymph whose father was a satyr—and he chased and caught your mother and took her down through his tangle of undergrowth with his hands in her hair, never heeding her screams. You have very definite little points at the top of your ears, you know! We all have them a bit to remind us of our wild-dog days, but yours are the most so I've ever seen. Do you never take off all your clothes and go creeping and slipping through the woods at night, to bathe in one of the crater-pools by the light of the moon?"

"How did you know?" She turned wide, startled eyes on him, her quickened breath fluttered her gown distressfully.

"What!—you do it, then?" exclaimed Archie.

"No! no! What folly are you talking!" She sprang to her feet and slipped behind the oak-sapling, as though it were a defence against some danger; across the boughs he saw her puzzled, fearful eyes. As he watched her the expression of alarm faded—she put up her hand to her hair, gave it a quieting pat and tucked some stray strands into place, then she looked across at the easel.

"It must be time to work again!" she exclaimed. "Have we been resting long, M'sieu? I feel as though I'd been asleep and you'd just awakened me." She yawned as she spoke, stretching her strong arms in a slow, wide circle, the muscles of her shoulders rounding forward and making two little hollows appear above her collar-bones. The sight aroused the artist in Archie, and he too scrambled up, and betook himself to work. The sheep and goats that he had bribed the shepherd to pasture there happened to "come" as he wanted them that evening, and he began to work away at them in silence. One of the goats, a piebald, shaggy creature, reared itself up on its hind legs, with its fore-feet against the tree trunk, and began to nibble at the foliage. Something about the pose of the creature sent a swift suggestion to Archie's mind, and he just had time to rough in the legs, with their slight outward tilt, the hoofs set firmly apart and the tail sticking out and up from the sharply curved-in rump, before the animal dropped on all fours and moved away. Archie, with the smile of the creator in his eyes, worked on, and the goat's legs merged into the beginnings of a slim human body with the hands leaning against the tree and the head, tilted on one side, peering around at the figure of Désirée. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of annoyance.

"There is some one watching us from those myrtle bushes. Confound the beggar—some one from the village, I suppose."

Désirée turned sharply, just in time to see a brown face grinning through the leaves. It was a face compact of curiously slanting lines—upward-twitched tufts of brows, upward wrinkles at the corners of the narrow eyes, and a slanting mouth that laughed above a pointed, thrusting chin.

"That! That is only my little brother, M'sieu. It is one of God's innocents and lame on both feet. Sylvestre! Come out and speak to M'sieu—no one will hurt you."

The bushes rustled and parted and an odd little figure, apparently that of a boy of about ten, came scrambling out with a queer, lungeing action from the hips. The child's legs were deformed, but he swung himself forward at a marvellous speed on a pair of clumsy crutches. Archie saw that when he was not laughing his brown eyes were wide and grave, with a look of innocence in them that contrasted oddly with the knowing gleam they showed a minute earlier.

"But he is exactly what I want for the picture!" cried Archie, running his hand through the boy's tangled curls and tilting his face gently backwards. "He is exactly like the things I was telling you of. He must sit to me."

He deftly tugged the boy's shirt out of his belt and peeled it off him, exposing a thin little brown body with a skin as fine as silk. When he felt the sun on his bare flesh the child made guttural sounds of delight, flinging himself backwards on the ground; and, supported by his elbows, letting his head tip back till his curls touched the grass. As the shielding locks fell away, Archie saw with a thrill which was almost repulsion, that dark brown hair grew thickly out of the boy's ears. . . .

"Would he stay still, do you think?" he asked Désirée.

"He will if I tell him," replied Désirée. "Come to me, Sylvestre," and drawing the child to her she stroked his head and whispered to him with a motherly gesture of which Archie would not

have thought her capable. He had listened to her exceedingly modern views on the subject of the family, and her own strictly limited intentions in that respect.

[21] After the addition of Sylvestre the picture made great strides, even if the intimacy between Archie and Désirée advanced less rapidly than before. And yet every now and again, in sudden flashes of wildness, in a half-uttered phrase totally at variance with her normal self—little things that she seemed to remember from some forgotten whole, Désirée would give him that impression of being two people at once; and always, on these occasions, she was as puzzled as he, and with an added touch of something that seemed almost shame. For the everyday Désirée, that calm, practical and comely young woman, Archie's friendliness was touched by nothing warmer than the inevitable element of sex; but the shy, bold thing that sometimes peeped from between her lids, that thing that seemed to take possession of her beautiful body, and mock and allure and chill him in a breath, that thing was waking an answering spirit in himself, and he knew it. Miss Gould's portrait was unable to protect him from wakeful nights, when he turned his pillow again and again to find a cool surface for his cheek, nights when he would at last fling off the clothes and lean out of the window to watch the steel-blue dawn turn to the blessed light of everyday. He was living in a state of tension, and it seemed to him that some great event was holding its breath to spring, as though the very trees and rocks, the brooding sky and quiescent pools, were all in some conspiracy, hoodwinking yet preparing him for the moment of revelation.

It was on to the sensitive surface of this mood that a letter from Gwendolen, announcing her speedy arrival on the Riviera dropped like a dart, tearing the delicate tissues and stringing the fibres to the necessity for haste. Gwendolen, aunt-dragoned, and Baedeker in hand, meant the return to the acceptance of the old values that had once filled him with complacency. And yet, with all the jarring sense of intrusion that Gwendolen's advent instilled, there mingled a feeling that was almost relief—as though he were being saved, against his will, but with his judgment, from something too disturbing and beautiful to be quite comfortable.

[22] Three or four days after receiving Gwendolen's letter, he put the last touches to the picture and informed Désirée he would need her no more. She received the news quite calmly, apparently without regret—thus do women tactlessly fail in what is expected of them. Archie felt absurdly flat as he wrapped up his wet brushes in a week-old sheet of the *Petit Niçois*. He also felt very virtuous, and told himself it was not many men who would have refrained from making love to the girl under the circumstances. It is astonishing what a comfortless thing is the glow of conscious virtue—it is bright in hue but gives off no warmth.

There was a little hut, used for stacking wood, close to where he worked, and here, thanks to the courtesy of the owner, he was wont to put his picture for the night. Désirée, as usual, helped him to carry it in and plant the legs of the easel firmly into the earthen floor. He had worked late, and the sun had just slipped behind the far ridge of the mountains; the tiny hut was filled with a deepening half-light, the stacked brush-wood seemed wine-coloured in the warm shadow, here and there a peeled twig stood out luminously. By the open door hoof-marks in the trampled earth showed that the patronne's mule had been carrying away wood that morning. That was as palpable as the fact that it must have been Sylvestre's deformed foot which had soiled Archie's sheet, yet those marks re-created the atmosphere of his dream, and seemed, in the sudden confusion mounting to his brain at the warmth and nearness of Désirée, to mix madly with Sylvestre, and rustled undergrowth and the glimmer of elusive hoofs round myrtle-bushes—and the glimmer of something whiter and more elusive still.

[23] He could hear Désirée's breathing beside him—not as even as usual, but deeper-drawn and uncertain, and turning, he met the sidelong glance of her eyes.

"Désirée . . . you said you sometimes slipped out at night and played in the woods—and the pools. Take me out with you to-night and show me where you go and what you do. . . . I'll be awfully good, I swear I will—you're not a woman, you're a nymph, a strange, uncanny thing. I believe you meet your kinsfolk there and dance with them—Désirée!"

She looked at him for a moment in silence. In her eyes her normal and her unknown selves contended.

"It is true I often go out as you say, something drives me, but I do not know why myself. And I get very tired and can never remember clearly what it has been like. It is as though I did it almost in my sleep, or had dreamt it."

"It *is* a dream—everything's a dream, and I've got to wake up soon. Let's have this bit of dream together—Désirée!"

She yielded. They took bread and wine and apples for a midnight feast, and set off together over the lava-fields to the woods that tufted the mountain slopes. Through the deep, soft night the pallor of her face and throat glimmered as through dark water. She held his hand to guide him over the fissures and round the piled boulders, once he slipped on a hummock of harsh grass, and felt her grow rigid on the instant to check his fall. They were very silent, until, seated at the edge of the woods, they ate their supper, and then they laughed softly together like children, with fragmentary speech; and once Désirée sang a snatch of a Provençal song; Archie, who knew his Mistral, joining in.

[24] Presently, when they fell on silence again, it seemed the wood was full of noises—stealthy footfalls, snapping of dry twigs, the rustling of parted shrubs. As the late moon, almost at the full, swam up the sky, making the distant snow-peaks gleam like white flames against the dusky blue,

and shimmering on the pools cupped here and there over the hollowed expanse below, Archie could have sworn that the penetrating light showed quick-glancing faces and bright eyes from the thicket. . . . Once a great white owl did sail out with a beating of wings; so close to them that they could see the stiff brows that bristled over his lambent orbs, and once a strong smell and a gleam of black and white told of a wild cat tracking her prey.

They buried the disfiguring remnants of their little feast, and then Archie solemnly poured out what was left of the red wine on to the slope below.

"For the gods!" he announced, "the liquor for us and the dregs for them!"

"Ah!" cried Désirée, as though his action pricked sleeping memories to life, "now I remember it all again! I forget when I go home, but then the next time everything is clear again, and so it goes on."

She disappeared in a jutting spur of the wood, and Archie scrambled to his feet and followed her. As he broke through to the further edge, which hung over a wide pool, he caught his foot in something soft—Désirée's clothes that lay in a circle, just as she had slipped out of them.

[25]

She stood at the pool's brim, her hands clasping at the back of her head; a thing to dream of. She was so lovely that all feeling died save a passionate appreciation, keen to the verge of pain; she was so lovely that of necessity she awoke an impersonal motion. Slowly she stretched herself, and as the muscles rippled into curves and sank, the delicate shadows ebbed and breathed out again on the pearl-white of her body. Archie's every nerve was strung not to lose one line or one breath of tone.

Putting out a foot she touched the water, so that little tremors soft as feathers fled over the surface; then, as she waded in, deeper and deeper, the water parted round her in flakes of brightness that shook and mixed up and broke away. When she rose, dripping wet, the moonlight refracted off her, was mirrored in the water, and thrown back again on her—a magic shuttle weaving an aura of whiteness. Long arrows of light fled back through the pool as she waded to shore, where she stood for a moment motionless; head slightly forward, arms hanging, and one hip thrown outwards as she poised her weight. Myriads of tiny, crescent-shaped drops clung to her limbs like fish-scales, so that she seemed more mermaiden than wood-nymph, but Archie's eyes proclaimed her Artemis—she would have calmed a satyr as she stood. Thoughts of forest glades were chill, sweet sports were held, and the wildest hoof was tamed to the childlike kinship with Nature that is pagan innocence, floated through his mind like visible things.

Suddenly she became conscious of his presence, and gave one glance in which invitation and a certain calm aloofness seemed to mingle.

"Désirée!" stammered Archie, "Désirée!"

[26]

All at once excitement tingled through him, blurring his ideas, just as chloroform sets the blood pricking with thousands of points and edges, while dizzying the brain. She stayed still a second longer; then, either the fearful nymph swayed her utterly, or, as it seemed to Archie, a sudden rejection of him, the clumsy, civilized mortal, sprang into her eyes. She flung up her head, turned, and was gone in the tangle of the woods. Without more than a second's hesitation he plunged in after her.

To Archie, whenever he looked back, that night seemed an orgy of chase-gone-mad; gathering in force as it went and sweeping into its resistless flow the most incongruous of elements.

He ran after her, stumbling, tripping, whipped across the face by brambles. Everything in life was crystallized into the desire to catch up, to track her to the enchanted green where, with her, he could become part of a remote free life he had never imagined before. All his own personality, except that in him which was hers, had ceased to exist—work, Gwendolen, the great world, and the inn at Draginoules, were wiped out of knowledge by the force of his concentration on one thing. The arbitrary line drawn between the actual and the unreal, the credible and the impossible, sanity and so-called madness, was swept away. She, the descendant of the gods knew what strange race—a race that perhaps had lingered in these crater-fastnesses and myrtle groves long after it had died off the rest of the earth—was fleeing before him through a wood alive with brightened eyes and quickened hoofs; and in her veins the slender strain of blood derived from some goat-legged, tall-eared thing—a strain asleep through the generations of her ancestors, had mastered all the rest of her heritage, and was triumphant in her soul as in Sylvestre's body. She ran on, swiftly, and without effort, and Archie ran after her.

* * * * *

[27]

Dawn broke at last, reluctant, chill, showing the woods clear-edged and motionless as though cut out of steel, glimmering on the quiet pools and the ribbed lava slopes, though the hollow of the plain still held a great lake of shadow.

Désirée's clothes lay no longer by the pool where she had bathed; no trace of human presence remained; even the marshy edge showed only trampled hoof-marks, as though some goat-footed herd had watered there.

To Archie, breaking through the undergrowth at the edge of the wood, it seemed incredible that everything should look so much as usual. Still more he felt the wonder when, with the broad

sunlight, he reached his inn. He himself felt so shaken in soul that even the thought of the Englishman's panacea—a cold bath—failed to appeal to him as a solution of all trouble. Plucked out of his accustomed place, flung by the sport of what strange gods he knew not, into a headlong medley of undreamed emotions, his values had been so violently disrupted that he could not have told which held true worth—the normal life of Gwendolens and one-man shows and newspaper criticisms, or what had passed in the woods that night. And, whatever strange rite he had surprised, and whether it were golden actuality that a man might live happy because he had once seen, or the mere wildness of a dream, there had been something about it which taught him not to blaspheme the revelation. He did not tell himself that the *vin ordinaire* must have gone to his head, or that he had been a romantic fool worked on by moonlight. This was remarkable, for few people are strong enough not to profane the past.

[28]

So much of grace held by him even when he found a letter awaiting him to tell of Gwendolen's arrival with the obedient aunt at Cannes, whither she summoned him. He debated whether to say good-bye to Désirée or not. The matter was settled for him by meeting her accidentally outside the *buvette*. She was looking pale and jaded, not at all at her best, but her eyes were blankly unknowing and clear of all embarrassment. She said good-bye with charming unemotional friendliness and informed him that she was going to be married very soon—Monsieur Colombini had had a rise that justified it. Here was anti-climax enough, even if the cold bath, the letter and the prose of packing were not sufficient. And yet, since it had not been Désirée, the frank peasant, who had shown Archie the wonders of that night, his memories remained. Half-fearful and half splendid, not enough to make him walk with the vision beautiful, but merely enough to spoil his pictures for the public, because instead of being content with the merely obvious he was now always trying for something beyond his powers to express. Enough also, to prick him to an occasional weary clear-eyed knowledge of his Gwendolen—a knowledge that was hardly criticism, for he admitted his kinship with her world. And what it was that companioned him, that he strove to show in his pictures, he never entirely told; for just as no woman ever tells what it is her sex has and the other lacks—that something which makes all the difference—just as no man tells a woman what it is he and his fellows talk about when the last skirt has trailed from the dinner-table, so no one ever tells the whole truth about the beloved.

[29]

THE LADDER

[31]

THE LADDER

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I

THE TRIAL

(Account taken from a contemporary journal)

"TO-DAY, March 3, the Court being sat in the Castle at Launceston, about eight o'clock in the morning, the prisoner was set to the bar.

"Sophia Bendigo, of the parish of St. Annan in this county, was indicted, for that she, not having the fear of God before her eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, on October 20, in the 24th year of his Majesty's reign, and again since, to wit, on October 21, with force and arms upon the body of Constantine Bendigo, Gent., her father, did make an assault, and in her malice aforethought, did kill and murder, by putting into some water-gruel a certain powder called arsenic, and afterwards giving to him, the said Constantine Bendigo, a potion thereof, knowing it to be mixed with the powder aforesaid, so that he, the said Constantine, was poisoned, and of which poison, he, the said Constantine, died, on the 22nd of the said month of October; against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity.

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"The Counsel for the Crown were the Hon. Mr. Bathwick; Mr. Sergeant Wheeler; Mr. Grice, Town Clerk of Launceston; Mr. Rose, Mr. Kirton, and the Hon. Mr. Harrington: And for the prisoner, Mr. Ford, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Walton.

"The Counsel for the Crown having opened the indictment, proceeded to inform the Court and Jury that this prosecution was carried on by the order, and at the expense of his Majesty (who is ever watchful to preserve the lives, liberties, and properties of his subjects) against the prisoner at the bar, Sophia Bendigo, for one of the most atrocious crimes; the cruel, inhuman, and deliberate murder of her own father: That the prisoner at the bar was the daughter and only child

of Mr. Constantine Bendigo, Squire of Troon, in the hundred of Penwith, a gentleman both by his birth and education; that as she was the only, so she was the beloved child of her father, who had spared no pains in giving her a genteel, as well as a pious education; that her father, indeed, had used this pious fraud (if he might be allowed that expression) in saying that her fortune would be £10,000, to the end, he supposed, that his daughter might be married suitable to such a fortune. That in June of the preceding year one Capt. William Lucius Crandon came to Penwith map-making, and hearing that Miss Bendigo was a £10,000 fortune, and having a mind to marry this fortune, notwithstanding he had a wife and child alive, contrived to get acquainted with this family; how well he succeeded, and how sadly for this family, this unhappy catastrophe has shown. That Mr. Bendigo, having been informed that Mr. Crandon was married, he desired his daughter to break off all correspondence with him; that instead of doing so, she acquainted Mr. Crandon with her father's command, who, instead of clearing his character to her father's satisfaction, contrives the means and persuades this beloved, this tenderly indulged daughter, to be an actor in her father's destruction.

"That the Captain left Cornwall at the end of September, since when, on the miscarriage of his plans, he had disappeared entirely; and soon after he is gone, we find this wicked scheme beginning to be put into execution. That on October 20, Mr. Bendigo found himself much disordered after taking some tea, that next day, the prisoner having made him another dish of tea, deceased had thought it to taste odd and sent it downstairs; that Crandon, to hasten the work of destruction, sent a letter to the prisoner, making use of an allegorical expression, not to spare the powder, in order to keep the rust off the pebbles. That the tea being too thin to admit of a larger quantity at the time, you will find by the witnesses that shall be produced, that the prisoner did mix a large quantity of the powder in a pan of water-gruel and gave some of it to her father next day which had such terrible effects as to occasion his death on the morning of the 23rd. That he would call the physicians first, and they would prove that what was administered to the deceased was poison and the cause of his death.

"Mr. Harvey, of St. Annan, and Dr. Polwhele, of Penzance, were then called and both sworn; and Mr. Harvey said that, being on the evening of the 22nd sent for to Mr. Bendigo, he thus made his complaints: That he had a violent burning pain, saying it was a ball of fire in his guts, that he vomited much since taking some tea two days before and again after taking some gruel that evening, that he had a cold sweat, hiccups, prickings all over his body, which he compared to a number of needles. He desired to drink, but could not swallow, his pulse intermitted, his tongue swelled, his throat was excoriated, his breath difficult and interrupted. Towards morning he grew worse, became delirious and sank gradually, dying about six o'clock in the morning.

"Being asked if he thought Mr. Bendigo was poisoned, witness answered, He really believed he was, for that the symptoms, while living, were like those of a person who had taken arsenic; and the appearances after death, like those that were poisoned by arsenic."^[A]

"King's Counsel: Did you also make an examination of the powder found in the gruel?

"Mr. Harvey: I did. I threw it upon a hot iron; boiled ten grains in water and divided the concoction, after filtering it into five equal parts. Into one I put oil of vitriol, into another tartar, into the third spirit of sal ammoniac, into the fourth spirit of salt, and into the fifth spirit of wine. I tried it also with syrup of violets, and made the like experiments with the same quantity of white arsenic which I bought in Penzance. It answered exactly to every one of them, and therefore I believed it to be white arsenic.

"Mr. Harvey further deposed that Mr. Bendigo told him that he suspected poison, and that he believed it came to his daughter with the serpentine beads, for that his daughter had had a present of those damned pebbles that morning; that if he, this witness, would look in the gruel, he might find something, that when he, this witness, asked Mr. Bendigo whom he imagined gave him the poison, he replied, A poor love-sick girl, but I forgive her; what will not a woman do for the man she loves?

"That later on the evening of the 22nd, Mr. Bendigo being a trifle easier, consented to see Miss, that he, this witness, was present when Miss came into the chamber, and fell down upon her knees, saying, Oh! sir, forgive me! Do what you will with me, and I'll never see Crandon more if you will but forgive me. To which Mr. Bendigo replied, I forgive thee, but thou shouldst have remembered that I am thy father, upon which Miss said, Oh, sir, your goodness strikes daggers to my soul; sir, I must down on my knees and pray that you will not curse me. He replied, No, child, I bless thee and pray that God may bless thee and let thee live to repent. Miss then declared she was innocent of this illness, and he replied, that he feared she was not, and that some of the powder was in such hands as would show it against her. Witness added that deceased, before Miss Bendigo's entry, had bidden him look to the remainder of the gruel.

"Prisoner's Counsel: Who was it sent for you when deceased was taken ill?

"Harvey: James Ruffiniac,^[B] the steward, fetched me and said it was at the command of Miss Bendigo, who said, to-morrow will not satisfy me, you must go now, which he did.

"Prisoner's Counsel: All the years you have known Miss Bendigo what has been her behaviour to her father? Has she not always done everything that an affectionate child could for her father's ease?

"Harvey: She always behaved like a dutiful daughter, as far as ever I knew, and seemed to do

everything in her power for her father's recovery whenever he was indisposed.

"King's Counsel: Did she tell you that she had put anything into her father's gruel and that she feared it might in some measure occasion his death?

"Harvey: She never did.

"Dr. Polwhele, having been sworn at the same time as Mr. Harvey, and stood in Court close by him, was now asked by the King's Counsel if he was present at the opening of Mr. Bendigo and whether the observations made by Mr. Harvey were true: he said he was present and made the same observations himself. He was then asked what was his opinion of the cause of the death of Mr. Bendigo, and he replied, by poison absolutely.

[37] "Eliza Ruffiniac, being sworn, said, that on the afternoon of the 20th, her master being unwell, from (as they thought at the time) an attack of bile, Miss Bendigo, the prisoner at the bar, made him a dish of tea. That after taking it he was very sick, but seemed easier next day, when Miss again made him some tea which he did not drink. That next evening he sent for the witness and asked for some water-gruel to be made; that Miss on hearing of it, said, I will make it, that there's no call for you to leave your ironing; that Miss was a long time stirring the gruel in the pantry, and on coming into the kitchen said, I have been taking of my father's gruel, and I think I shall often eat of it; I have taken a great fancy to it.

"King's Counsel: Do you recollect that one Keast, the cook-maid, had been taken ill with drinking some tea the day before, and tell the Court how it was.

"E. Ruffiniac: Hester Keast brought down the tea from my master's room and afterwards drank it in the scullery, where I found her crying out she was dying, being taken very ill with a violent vomiting and pains and a great thirst.

"Prisoner's Counsel: On that occasion, how did Miss Bendigo behave?

"E. Ruffiniac: She made Hester Keast go to her bed and sent her a large quantity of weak broth and white wine whey.

"King's Counsel: Did you ever see Miss Bendigo burn any papers, and when?

"E. Ruffiniac: On the evening of the 22nd, Miss brought a great many papers in her apron down into the kitchen and put them on the fire, then thrust them into it with a stick and said, now, thank God, I am pretty easy, and then went out of the kitchen; that this witness and Hester Keast were in the kitchen at the time; that they, observing something to burn blue, it was raked out and found to be a paper of powder that was not quite consumed; that there was this inscription on the paper; Powder to clean the pebbles, and that this paper, she, the witness, delivered to Dr. Polwhele next day. Being shown a paper, with the above inscription on it, partly burnt, she said she believed the paper to be the same the prisoner put into the fire and she took out.

[38] "This witness was asked if she ever heard the prisoner use any unseemly expressions against her father, and what they were? Replied, many times; sometimes she damned him for an old rascal; and once when she was in the dairy and the prisoner passing at the time outside, she heard her say, Who would not send an old father to hell for ten thousand pounds?

"Hester Keast, the cook-maid, deposed, That, on the 21st she bore down her master's dish of tea and drank of it, being afterwards taken very ill, that on the next day, being down in the kitchen after her master was taken ill, Lylie Ruffiniac brought a pan with some gruel in it to the table and said, Hester, did you ever see any oatmeal so white? that this witness replied, That oatmeal? Why, it is flour! and Lylie replied, I never saw flour so gritty in my life; that they showed it to Mr. Harvey, the apothecary, who took it away with him.

"James Ruffiniac was next called and sworn.

"King's Counsel: When your master was dead, did you not have some particular conversation with the prisoner? Recollect yourself, and tell my Lord and the Jury what it was.

"J. Ruffiniac: After my master was dead, Miss Bendigo asked me if I would live along with her, and I said no, and she then said, If you will go with me, your fortune will be made; I asked her what she wanted me to do and she replied, Only to hire a post-chaise to go to London. I was shocked at the proposal and absolutely refused her request. On this she put on a forced laugh, and said, I was only joking with you.

[39] "Charles Le Petyt, Clerk in Holy Orders, was next called and sworn, and said, That, meeting Miss Bendigo in St. Annan when the crowd was insulting her, he took her into the inn, and spoke with her there, asking if she would not return home under his protection; she answered yes, that upon this he got a closed post-chaise and brought her home; that upon her coming home she asked him what she should do, that he, having heard her, said that they should fix the guilt upon Crandon if she could produce anything to that end, but in some agony she replied she had destroyed all evidences of his guilt.

"Prisoner's Counsel: Do you, Mr. Le Petyt, believe that the Prisoner had any intention to go off, from what appeared to you, and if she was not very ready to come back with you from the inn?

"Le Petyt: She was very ready to come back, and desired me to protect her from the mob, and she had, I am sure, no design to make an escape.

"Here the Counsel for the Crown rested their proof against the prisoner, and she was thereupon called to make her defence.

[40] "Prisoner: My Lord, in my unhappy plight, if I should use any terms that may be thought unfitting, I hope I shall be forgiven, for it will not be with any desire to offend. My Lord, some time before my father's death, I unhappily became acquainted with Captain Crandon. This, after a time, gave offence to my father, and he grew very angry with me over Captain Crandon. I am passionate, which I know is a fault, and when I have found my father distrustful over Captain Crandon, I may have let fall an angry expression, but never to wish him injury, I have always done all in my power to tend him, as the witnesses against me have not denied. When my father was dead, being ill and unable to bear confinement in the house, I took a walk over to St. Annan, but I was insulted, and a mob raised about me, so that when Mr. Le Petyt came to me I desired his protection and to go home with him, which I did.

"I will not deny, my Lord, that I did put some powder into my father's gruel; but I here solemnly protest, as I shall answer it at the great tribunal, and God knows how soon, that I had no evil intention in putting the powder in his gruel: It was put in to procure his love and not his death.

"Then she desired that several witnesses might be called in her defence, who all allowed that Miss Bendigo always behaved to her father in a dutiful and affectionate manner. And Anne Lear and Elizabeth Pollard, women occasionally employed at Troon, deposed that they had heard Lylie Ruffiniac say, Damn the black bitch (meaning the prisoner), I hope I shall see her walk up a ladder and swing.

[41] "The prisoner having gone through her defence, the King's Counsel, in reply, observed, That the prisoner had given no evidence in contradiction of the facts established by the witnesses for the crown; that indeed, Anne Lear and Elizabeth Pollard had sworn to an expression of Lylie Ruffiniac, which, if true, served to show ill-will in Ruffiniac towards the prisoner, but that he thought the incident was too slight to deserve any manner of credit. That the other witnesses, produced by the prisoner, served only to prove that Mr. Bendigo was a very fond, affectionate and indulgent parent, therefore there could be no pretence of giving him powders or anything else to promote in him an affection for his daughter. That if the Jury believed the prisoner to be innocent, they would take care to acquit her: but if they believed her guilty, they would take care to acquit their own consciences.^[C]

"The prisoner desired leave to speak in answer to what the King's Counsel had said, which being granted, she said, The gentleman was mistaken in thinking the powders were given to her father to produce his affection to her, for that they were given to procure her father's love to Captain Crandon.

"The judge summed up the evidence in a clear and impartial manner to the Jury, and they, without going out of Court, brought in their verdict: Guilty, Death.

"After sentence of death was pronounced upon her she, in a very solemn and affecting manner, prayed the Court that she might have as much time as could be allowed her to prepare for her great and immortal state. The Court told her she should have a convenient time allowed her; but exhorted her, in the meantime, to lose not a moment, but incessantly to implore the mercy of that Being to Whom alone mercy belongs."

II

FIRST STEPS

[42] To the making of such a scene as that recounted in the contemporary journal, much had gone during the months so crudely analysed. That damning pile of evidence had been building itself up, touch upon touch, since the first moment when Sophie Bendigo's eyes lit on the instigator of the trouble; and the causes of her own share in it had been strengthening from far earlier even than that. In after years the Wise Woman of Bosullow would recount that when the baby Sophie was brought to her to be passed for luck through the ringed stone of the Men-an-Tol, she had foretold for her the rise in life that eventually came about. True, the terms of the prophecy had been so vague that beyond the fact that a ladder, metaphorical or otherwise, was to play a part in Sophie's career, Mr. Bendigo had not been much the wiser. The mother had lain in the bleak moorland churchyard for several years now, but she had had time, during the most malleable years of a girl's life, the early teens, to impress Sophie with a sense of destiny. Not for her the vulgar loves and joys of other country girls, to her some one shining, resplendent, would come flashing down, and Sophie must learn to bear with powdered hair and hoops against that moment. For London, of course, would be her splendid bourne, and as to saying that hoops got in the way of her legs—why, hoops were the mode and to a hoop she must come. Since Mrs. Bendigo had died, worn out by the terrible combination of the Squire's slow cruelty and his suave tongue, Sophie had given up the struggle with hoops and powder, but she still lived for and by her vision of the future. If Sophie Bendigo had not glanced over her shoulder in Troon Lane, thereby presenting an exceptional face at the most alluring of angles—chin up and eyes innocently sidelong—to the view of Mr. Crandon, she might never have climbed so high. When she saw Mr. Crandon, his white wig tied with a black ribbon, and an excellent paste pin flashing from his cravat, riding up the lane, she never doubted that her star had risen at last.

[43]

Sophie Bendigo was of the pure Celtic type still preserved among the intermarrying villages of West Penwith. Her rather coarse hair was a burnt black, so were her thick, straight brows, but her eyes were of that startlingly vivid blue one only meets in Cornish women and Cornish seas. There was something curiously Puck-like about Sophie; the cheekbones wide and jaw pointed, while her mouth was long, the thin, finely cut lips curving up at the ends, and there was a freakish flaunt at the corners of her brows—Crandon thought of piskies as he looked. She wore a plain white gown, low in the throat and short in the sleeve, and she carried an apron-load of elder-flower, the pearly blossoms of it showing faintly green against the deader white of the linen.

"Excuse me, but does this lead to St. Annan?" asked Crandon, bending a little towards her. Sophie felt one swift pang lest he should be riding out of her life straightway, and swiftly answered:

"You are out of your way," she told him, "this lane only leads to our house. You must go back to the highway and follow it past the 'Nineteen Merry Maidens' and turn on to your right—but it is a matter of three or four miles."

For a moment they remained looking at each other, then Crandon said:

"Is there perhaps an inn near here where I and my mare could rest? We have come from Zennor this morning, and she is newly shod."

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"There is no need for an inn," said Sophie, "we are always glad to rest a traveller at Troon Manor. I am Sophie Bendigo."

Crandon smilingly dismounted and walked by her side up the lane.

"It would be ungracious to refuse when the Fates have led me and Venus herself seconds the invitation. . . . Have you just risen from the sea, I wonder, that your eyes still hold its hue?"

Sophie, used only to the clumsy overtures of the county squires, flushed with pleasure, not at the allusion, which she did not understand, but at the air of gallantry which pervaded the man. She glanced up admiringly between her narrowed lids—Crandon was accustomed to such glances, so had his girl-wife in Scotland looked at him, before he deserted her and her child. He meditated no harm to this girl, no plan was formulated in his mind; and as to the ten thousand pounds, of which so much was heard later on, no whisper of it had then reached his ears. The road had led to her, her own face lured him on, and a few hours of a pretty girl on such a June day, where was the harm? The innocence and spontaneity of his feelings gave the Captain a delightful glow of conscious virtue, and he walked beside Sophie with a slight swagger of enjoyment.

The drive was a mere rutted cart-track; hemlock, foxgloves, purple knapweed, blue scabious and tall, thin-stemmed buttercups grew along the tangled hedges, and the blackberry flowers patterned the brambles with pearliness. The luminous chequer-work of sun and shadow fell over Sophie's white gown, and the green light, filtering through the trees, reflected on her face and on her glossy head, so that she seemed to be walking in the depths of the sea, and Crandon's simile gained in aptness.

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At the bend of the lane they came on the Manor House, its whitewash dazzling in the sunshine, even the shadows thrown on it by the eaves and sills were so clear they gave a curious effect of being as light as the rest. Only the Bendigo arms—a clenched fist—carved on the granite lintel, had been left untouched by the whitewash, and showed a sullen grey. A few fawn-coloured fowls, blazing like copper in the sunshine, pecked at the dusty ground, and some white pigs, looking as utterly naked as only white pigs can, snuffled at a rubbish heap, their big ears flapping. A tall, lean woman, clad in a dirty silk dressing-jacket of bright yellow, was talking to a labourer by the dairy door. There was something oddly suggestive of secrecy in the turn of their shoulders and their bent heads, and the woman's soiled finery made her thin face—that of a shrewd but comely peasant, framed in an untidy pompadour of reddish-brown hair—seem oddly incongruous. The man lapsed into insignificance beside her, yet something of likeness in their sharpened lines, and in the tinge of hot colour showing up through them, proclaimed them kin. They were Lylie Ruffiniac, Squire Bendigo's housekeeper, and her brother James, who acted as bailiff on the estate. Sophie, her head turned towards her companion, did not see them, but Crandon did, and was pricked at once to curiosity. Living as he did by his wits, his every fibre was quickened to superficial alertness, though of intellectual effort he was almost incapable. An old journal for 1752 that published, in addition to its account of the trial, some "Memoirs of the Life of Lucius William Crandon, Esq.," had enough acumen to remark: "He was not, however, destitute of parts, for he would often surprise those who entertained a mean opinion of his abilities, by schemes and concertions which required more genius than they thought he had been master of. . . . As he was not of sufficient learning to qualify him either for law or for physic, he turned his thought towards the army, where a very moderate share of literature is sufficient, and where few voices disqualify a man from making a figure. . . ." And a figure Lucius Crandon certainly made—a figure that caused the woman in the yellow jacket to stop and stare, then to disappear into the house by a side-door—Crandon received the impression that she had gone to warn some one of his approach.

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THE WOOING

[47] It is said that rogues know each other by instinct—certain it is that the Squire and Captain Crandon had no need of disguises once they had crossed glances, and therefore each man cloaked himself with an elaborate pretence of being unable to see through the other's garment. It was not by any wish of Squire Bendigo's that Captain Crandon heard of the rumour of the ten thousand pounds, but when one has circulated a report with diligence for several years it is impossible to withdraw it at will, and so the Squire found, and it only needed this report of Sophie's marriage portion for Crandon to attempt the capture in earnest; what happened to the map history does not relate, but the Captain stayed at the "Bendigo Arms," making explorations in the familiar but always surprising country of a woman's mind. A mind simpler, more passionate, and more one-ideaed than any he had met before, a mind at once proud, confiding and reckless—a mind fitted, both by the quality of it and its loneliness, to be easily influenced by the flattery of love.

Sophie Bendigo had a fixed belief in her star. The predictions of the Wise Woman and of her eager mother, and her own knowledge of her superiority to the people among whom she moved, all tended to give her that confidence in her fate which does not think misfortune possible. She had always led a hard life with her best of fathers, the smiling old rogue who had never been heard to address a rude word to her, and who was harsh and immutable as granite. She had always waited, with such sureness she had not even felt impatience, for her opportunity to come, and mingled with the half-shy, half-innocently sensuous imaginings of a young girl on the subject of love, ran a streak of personal ambition, a hardness inherited from her father.

[48] At first, before he had found out beyond a doubt that the Captain was a needy fortune-hunter, the Squire allowed his visits at Troon, and Crandon soon grew to be on terms of intimacy with the members of the household. These consisted of the Bendigos, father and daughter, Lylie Ruffiniac, her brother, and the servant, a girl called Hester Keast. The three latter were supposed to live more or less in the back premises and take their meals in the kitchen, but once when Crandon surprised Lylie Ruffiniac with the Squire, there were two glasses of spirits and water on the table, and, several weeks after, when he had to meet Sophie by stealth and at night, he saw a light being carried from the servants' quarters towards the Squire's room. As for Hester Keast, she was a pretty girl in her way—a way at once heavier and less strong than Sophie's. She had the dewy brown eyes, the easily affected, over-thin skin, and the soft red mouth, blurred at the edges, which betray incapacity for resistance. There was no harm in the girl, she was merely a young animal, with very little instinct of self-protection to counteract her utter lack of morals. Crandon kissed her behind the door on his second visit, and James Ruffiniac's wooing of her had long passed the preliminary stages—so long that with him ideas of marriage were growing misty, the thing seemed so unnecessary. Lylie's blood was controlled by scheming, and the most charitable explanation of the Squire's tortuous nature was that some mental or moral twist in him made him love evil for its own sake, and embrace it as his good. Such was the household where, for the last three years, Sophie had lived, practically alone—her egoism had done her that much service, it had won her aloofness. Crandon, who was by nature predisposed to think the worst of humanity, made the mistake, at first, of thinking Sophie's innocence assumed—it seemed a thing so incredible in that house of hidden schemings and furtive amours. When he found that partly a natural fastidiousness, and partly her young crudity had kept her clean in thought and knowledge as well as in deed, he wisely guessed there must be some outside influence on the side of the angels, and scenting opposition to his own schemes, he set himself to discover all he could. That was not difficult in such a sparsely inhabited district, hemmed in on three sides by the sea, and he soon made, at St. Annan's Vicarage, the acquaintance of its vicar, Mr. Charles le Petyt. He no sooner set eyes on the clergyman's plain and frail physique, with the burning eyes and quick nervous hands, than he knew he was right to fear him as an influence, though he could scorn him as a rival.

[49] Charles and Sophie had practically grown up together, Charles' six years of seniority making him stand in the place of an elder brother to her, until he had become her urgent lover. Charles' father, the former Vicar of St. Annan, had given Sophie what little education she possessed—a medley of mythology and history, some incorrect geography, and a smattering of literature—all the things that go to fire the imagination. Mixed with these was a mass of all the wild legendary lore of the Duchy, solemnly believed in by the common people at that date, and by no means without its effect on the gentry. Sophie would not have been of her race and time if she had not had faith in charms, witches, death-warnings and love-potions; and in Charles the spiritual sense was so acute that, though from sheer sensitiveness it rejected the more vulgar superstitions, it responded like a twanged string to the breath of a less gross world. The finer side of Sophie, the delicate feeling for the beautiful, which owed so much of its existence to Charles, received a severe shock when she discovered the change in his viewing of her. She had been so used to think of him as her brother, and as her leader in the intangible matters which were sealed books to the rest at Troon, that the discovery of warm, human sentiments in him filled her with repulsion, and she took to avoiding him as much as she had sought him before. Poor Charles, whose earthly love, though as reverent, was as fiery as his heavenly affections, and who was handicapped by the lover's inability to understand that his devotion can be repellent, suffered acutely. It was some time before he understood that Sophie was so accustomed to see him burning with a white flame that she could not forgive him for being alight with a red one as well. A more sensual love, and coarser in its expression than his could ever be, would have revolted

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her less coming from a less exalted man—Mr. Le Petyt paid for the high opinion she held him in. If Lucius Crandon had never come to Troon, Sophie would in time have grown used to the idea of Charles as a husband, for there is no combination of circumstances, incredible as it appears to youth, that time does not soften and make bearable. But Sophie, destiny-ridden, gave no heed to Charles, save as a friend who had made her dread him even while she was still fond of him, and Lucius Crandon stepped in just when her nerves, awakened to the existence of actual love, were beginning to calm from the shock and even to set towards curiosity—just when she was most receptive. Pitiful and ignorant Sophie, whose only protection from gross housemates and a hot-blooded, cold-hearted lover, was a dreamer as guileless as herself!

[51] With all his unworldliness, the unfailing instinct of the spiritual-minded warned Mr. Le Petyt against the Captain, and when the Squire, strangely friendly, sent word asking his vicar to come and see him on urgent business, Mr. Le Petyt guessed to what matter the business related. He found the Squire seated in his writing-room, a glass of rare old smuggled brandy before him and a packet of letters on his knee. The Squire was a big, puffy man, with a large and oddly impassive face, where even the hanging folds of flesh seemed rigid; only his small eyes, of a clear light grey, twinkled like chips of cut steel from between his wrinkled lids. His bull neck, wide as his head across the nape, sagged in a thick fold over his cravat, and his thighs swelled against the close-fitting cloth of his riding-breeches. The only contradiction to the stolidity of the man was his hands, and they were never still, but were for ever fiddling with something; with his waistcoat buttons, his rings, with a paper-knife, or the cutlery at table, or with any live thing they could get. Charles Le Petyt well remembered how, as a small boy, he had come on him superintending the reaping, and fingering a puppy behind his back. Whether the Squire was aware of what he was doing or whether his fingers did their work instinctively, without his brain, Charles never could decide, but when the Squire, turning away from the reapers, unlocked his hands, the puppy lay limp across his palm—the life choked out of it. The Squire stood still for a moment, looking at the little body, and then, moving away in a straight line from the labourers, so that it was concealed from them, he dropped it into a rabbit-hole and stuffed it down with his cane. Sick to the heart, little Charles stood at gaze, and glancing up, the Squire saw he was watched, and for a moment his impassive features were convulsed with rage—he looked as though he would have liked to treat Charles as he had the puppy. The memory of that day would have been enough, without the sight of Sophie's dread of her father, to prevent Mr. Le Petyt from joining in the general praise of Squire Bendigo.

[52] The two men made a great contrast as they sat opposite to each other in the little room, the Squire solid and imperturbable, the parson transparent in mind and physical texture, the quick colour flying up under his skin with his emotions. The dust lay thickly over the table and books, for Sophie, the careful housewife, was seldom admitted here, and however Lylie Ruffiniac spent the hours when she was closeted with the Squire, it was evidently not in work. The evening light shone into the low-browed room through an ash-tree by the window, filling the air with a luminous gloom, gilding the dust films, gleaming on Mr. Le Petyt's shoe-buckles, and making a bright crescent in the glass of spirits which the Squire was jerking between his finger and thumb.

"You want to consult me on something?" began the younger man, going straight to the point. The Squire, with a gesture of protest for such methods, nevertheless fell into an agreeing humour.

"The fact is, Charles," he began, with that disarming air of candour none assumed better than he, "I have had cause to be uneasy at the intimacy between my dear but headstrong daughter and this Captain Crandon, so I wrote to a trustworthy man I know in London to find out all he could for me. His letter came to-day by Mr. Borlace, who was riding down in all haste from London to his wife's bedside—thus does Providence permit the trials of others to be of use to us."

[53] Here he paused, but Mr. Le Petyt, throwing in no suitable remark, he continued:

[54] "I will read you some extracts from the letter, and you shall judge for yourself whether a parent's anxiety has not been justified. Let me see—ah, here we are! 'I find' (says my informant) 'that about the year 1744 Crandon became acquainted with a Miss Isabel Thirsk, then at her uncle's. Miss Thirsk was remarkably genteel, delicate, and of a very amiable disposition, which gained her a great number of admirers. Her uncle, observing that Crandon always discovered an inclination of conversing with his niece alone, desired him to explain himself fully on a point so very delicate. Crandon declared he counted Miss Thirsk on the most honourable terms, but the young lady's uncle desired that Crandon's visits should be less frequent, lest his niece should suffer in her reputation. Soon after, this gentleman's affairs caused him to be absent from his home for some time, during which Crandon proposed a private marriage, which the young lady consented to, and for some time they lived together without any of their relations being privy to it. The natural consequence arising, and her uncle, some time after his return, suspecting it, she readily acknowledged she was with child, and protested she was married to Crandon four months before, adding, that her husband, who was soon to set out for London, had not yet publicly acknowledged her for his wife. Accordingly the uncle dispatched a messenger to Crandon demanding full acknowledgment of his wife before his departure for England. Crandon wrote in answer that he never intended to deny his marriage with Miss Thirsk, and that he would ever love her with conjugal tenderness, but that at the moment he had to hasten to London, which he did. There he every day saw young fellows making their fortunes by marriage, and he imagined nothing but his being married could hinder him from being as successful as the rest, thus he began to neglect a person whose beauty and virtue merited a more worthy spouse. When he returned to Scotland that country was involved in a civil war, and rebellion raging in its bowels.

He found all the relations of Miss Thirsk joined in the mad expedition and in all probability would suffer at the hands of their country for disturbing its peace. He therefore concluded that it was not in their power to give him any disturbance, and, consequently, it was a good opportunity for renouncing his wife. The affair, at last, after various meetings and expostulations of friends, came to a trial before the Lords of Session in Scotland, who found the marriage valid and settled fifty pounds a year on the lady, which she now enjoys by their decree."

The Squire put down the papers.

"So much for Captain Crandon!" he said, in a glow of rage at the man for trying to deceive him, mingled with pride in his own acuteness and a dash of assumed piety: "Who but a person, something worse than a villain, could ever have indulged a thought of using so innocent, so lovely a being as Miss Thirsk in such a monstrous manner! Surely Divine justice will pursue him for this unnatural, this unheard-of piece of brutality!"

"Divine justice has at least saved Sophie from the same fate," replied Mr. Le Petyt. His first feeling was for her, his second, to his own shame, was the relief of the jealous lover.

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"Ah—Sophie!" said the Squire thoughtfully—"that is where I crave your help. She is headstrong, poor child, sadly headstrong, but your opinions have always had weight with her. You have an influence, Charles. Use it to save my unhappy child from this villain Crandon."

"I would save her from all villainy if I could," said Mr. Le Petyt.

The Squire pulled the bell-rope, and on the appearance of Lylie, splendid in what even the guileless parson could not but see was a new silk, stiff enough to stand up by itself, the Squire told her curtly to desire "Miss's" presence. Lylie withdrew with downdropped lids, and a few minutes later Sophie appeared. She glanced quickly from one man to the other, and scenting a conspiracy, remained standing, her head up, and her hands strongly clasped behind her. She was against the window, so that subtleties of expression were lost to Mr. Le Petyt, and only the aloofness of her pose struck at him miserably, as confounding him and her father together. The big white muslin cap she wore showed delicately dark against the daylight, the outstanding frill of it framing the solid shadow of face and neck with a semi-transparent halo, and a yoke of light lay across her shoulders—to Mr. Le Petyt's quick fancy she looked like some virgin-saint of old at her trial.

"Sophie," said the Squire gently, "I feel I should not be doing my duty by my dear daughter if I did not inform her that her lover, Lucius Crandon, is a married man."

He watched, smiling. She stood a little tense, but with scorn of him and not with fear, and he went on:

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"He married a Miss Isabel Thirsk, by whom he had a child——"

A slight convulsion swept over Sophie, passed, and left her rigid, and the Squire continued:

"A lovely child, I believe—a boy, and the image of his father. . . . But that is not the chief matter of interest. Captain Crandon deserted his young and trusting wife, and appealed against the validity of the marriage. The law decided against him, and condemned him to pay fifty pounds a year for her support. It was a sad scandal, a very sad scandal. You, my sweet child, do not know the wickedness of the world as I do, therefore I must shield you from it—in short, I forbid you to have speech with Captain Crandon again."

"Is that all?" asked Sophie.

"All—save that I should much regret having to lock you up in your room to enforce obedience."

"And you, Charles?" cried Sophie, "are you, too, in this plot to speak ill of an absent man?"

"Sophie," cried Mr. Le Petyt, "do not take it so, I beg of you. There seems only too little doubt that what your father says is true."

"You are against me, too!" said Sophie cruelly. "Papa, I am going to meet Captain Crandon now, and I shall ask him for the truth."

"Sophie! You will not believe him?" exclaimed Mr. Le Petyt, half-rising in his agitation.

"Every word he says," cried Sophie, with a little laugh of utter confidence. Her hand was on the latch, and the Squire, restrained by Mr. Le Petyt's presence, dared not put out a hand to stop her by force. For half a moment more the three emotions held—the scorn of the girl, the distress of the one man and the vindictiveness of the other, then the door had closed behind Sophie as the will to see her lover swept her on; and the taunt, one-ideaed feeling of the men fell into complexity as they turned first towards each other, then away, in the gathering dusk.

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Sophie found Crandon awaiting her by the dam above Vellan-Crowse mill. The daylight was all but gone and a darkly soft glamour seemed to hold the full-foliaged trees and shadowed water in a hush of expectation. There was still enough of red reflecting from the West to make the grass and leaves a vivid though subdued green; but of the hollow in the bushes, where the lovers met, darkness already seemed to make a nest. Everything to lull the mind and stir the heart and blood was there, and Sophie's generous trust, her pride in taking his word against the world, were not more powerful allies of Crandon's tongue than the time and the place. It was of little avail later to marvel that his ingenious reconstruction of events won upon her; his garbled confession of a

liaison with Isabel Thirsk, and denial of the marriage, his statement of Miss Thirsk's infidelities, and his evident nobility in voluntarily allowing her an income. As for the sin itself—"It was before I met you. You could make me what you will."

[58] Sophie, only too willing to be convinced, sat by him in the little clearing, and listened almost in silence. Behind them on both sides the hazel-bushes made a faintly whispering screen of darkness, at their feet the mill-dam lay silent save for the occasional plop-plop of the tiny trout rising at late flies, on the further bank the hedge was a network of tangled black against the deepening sky, while overhead the elms and sycamores were pierced by the first faint stars. The two were set in a hushed sphere of aloofness, and for Sophie it was the world. "Trust me, my sweet Sophie—only trust me!" was whispered in her ear, and when she answered that she did, and he told her that if it were really so she would not draw away from him, she let his arms creep round her and his mouth come to hers. Weeks of carefully calculated love making had gone to make her pliable, kisses at which all the chill girlhood of her would earlier have shuddered, as it had at the same thing in Charles Le Petyt, she now bore, if not yet with passion, yet with the woman's tolerance of it in the man she loves. Crandon knew it was the moment to bind her to him irrevocably, for he guessed that to a woman of her type faithfulness is a necessity of self-respect, and with him desire was one with deliberate planning. Whether he threw a spell of words over her, or whether the mere force of his thought pleaded with her to prove she trusted him utterly, Sophie could never have told. She only knew that the still night, the soft air, the rustling leaves and the pricking stars, his presence, dimly seen but deeply felt, and the beating in her own frame, all cried to her, "It was for this that I was born! For this, for this, for this!"

IV

THE SPELL

[59] EVERY one, on looking back at the past, even from the near standpoint of a few months, realizes how it falls into separate phases, unnoticed at the time, but nevertheless distinct. When she had reached her apex, Sophie saw how that night by the mill-dam had shut down one phase for ever, and ushered in a new one. Deceptions, and constant evading of her father's suspicions, secret meetings, to connive at which it became a bitter necessity to bribe the servants, hard Lylie and slow-tongued James—while at the same time instinct warned her to keep the thing from Hester Keast—all these were wearisome and galling, but by the quality of affairs with Crandon fell into insignificance, merely an added irritation, flies on a wound.

[60] What first suggested to Crandon his idea of the love-potion was the discovery of Sophie's credulousness. Like all West Country folk, especially in those days, she was a firm believer in witches and spells, to an extent incredible to a Saxon. As late as the latter half of the nineteenth century an old woman was accused by a farmer of ill-wishing his bullocks and was brought to trial; while a "cunning man," or "white-witch," lived until lately in the northern part of the Duchy. A century earlier, therefore, when Cornwall was practically cut off from England, when even the coach came no further than Saltash, and travellers continued on horseback or in a "kitterine"; when newspapers were unknown, and books only found in parsonages or the biggest of the country houses; when animals were burned alive as sacrifices to fortune, and any man out at night went in fear of ghosts and the devil, then there was no one, of whatever rank, who did not believe in witchcraft. That Sophie, lonely, romantic, with the superstitious blood of the Celt unadulterated in her veins, should give credence to such things, was inevitable; and when Crandon suggested giving a love-potion to the Squire, so that he might feel his heart warmed towards his would-be son-in-law, she seized at what was to her more a certainty than a hope.

It was an afternoon in late September, and she and Crandon had met in a wood about a mile away from Troon, when he first mooted his plan; she sat beside him on one of the great grey boulders with which the sloping floor of the wood was covered, and listened with growing eagerness. It was a damp, steamy day, gold and tawny leaves, blown down in one night's gale, were drifted thickly in the fissures of the rocks and over the patches of vividly green moss; and livid orange fungi grew on the tree-boles. Sophie, always affected by externals, shuddered a little and drew closer to Crandon. Slipping his hand under the heavy knot of her hair, he laid it against the nape of her neck, and as she closed her eyes in the pleasure of his touch he looked down at her with a queer expression on his narrow face.

"You have the loveliest neck in the world, my Sophie," he said, making his hands meet round it as he spoke, "see—I make you a living necklace for it."

Sophie tucked in her chin, and bending her head, kissed the clasping fingers. Although he was not of those men to whom the attained woman gains in attractions, yet there were still things about Sophie—little flashes and gleams, swift touches, that fired him afresh. She stirred him now, yet he was cold enough to be glad of the stir because it gave him added eloquence for his purpose.

[61] "I will get you a better necklace," he told her. "Nothing very fine, or what would the Squire think? I have been collecting choice bits of serpentine, and had them cut out and polished, and you shall have a necklace of them—the stones of your own country. Your throat will warm them, my Sophie, as it would warm my hands if they were cold in death."

"Death!" murmured Sophie, shuddering again, "we should not speak of it, lest it hear us."

"Then we will talk of love instead—of our love, Sophie."

"Alas, that way too lies sorrow! Lucius, what is the end to be? My father would kill me if he knew."

"Does he hate me so?"

She nodded, with the look of dumb fear in her eyes that thought of the Squire always brought there.

"Dear heart, we will change his hate to love. There is a way—if you will trust me and obey me."

A tremor of exquisite delight thrilled through her at the words. She had no arts of allurements, no strength of will to make her play the coquette with him, and she was unable, for the purpose of leading him on and tantalizing him to fresh excitement, to deny herself the joy of being his slave.

"Obey you!" she said, slipping a little lower on her rock so that her back-tilted head lay against his knee as she looked up at him, "I am yours for you to do with as you will."

Stooping, he kissed the swelling curve of her throat, and privately marvelled at her for being such a fool.

"Sweetheart," he began softly, "we will call in the aid of higher powers than our own. You know my mother was a Scotswoman, and she had the second sight, like your old Madgy Figgy of the Men-an-tol. She was learned in all kinds of charms, too. Well I remember as a child seeing her staunch the flow of blood from an old servant by crossing two charmed sticks from the hearth over him and saying a charm."

"It was Madgy Figgy who told about my ladder," Sophie said, "she has many charms, I know. She carries the water from St. Annan's spring to the church whenever there's to be a christening. No one baptized in water from St. Annan's spring can die by hanging, every one knows that. Was your mother as learned in charms as old Madgy?"

"She was a wise woman in more than mere charms, yet we will not slight her knowledge of them, since through that we will win your father's affection for me."

"If it could be!" cried Sophie.

"It can be. Listen, my sweet. My dear mother, in dying, left me, among books of the craft of healing and suchlike things, an old love-charm she had had from a Wise Woman in the Highlands. It is nothing but a little white powder, yet it affects the very heart-strings of him who takes it."

"Could it turn my father's heart towards you? Lucius, how happy we should all be. . . . But surely it might make him love some one else instead—Mr. Le Petyt, perhaps?"

"You should know better than that, my foolish Sophie. These things all depend on the intention of he who gives them. You have but to concentrate on me while you give it him, and all will be well."

"He would be furious if he guessed," objected Sophie.

"Neither he nor anyone else must guess, or the charm will fail. I will send it to you in packets with the serpentine beads, and mark it 'Powder to clean the pebbles.'"

"Why not give it to me?" asked Sophie.

"Because I have to go away for a time, my sweet. Not for very long—" as Sophie made a movement of distress, "but I have business I must see to in town. I will send you the beads to remember me by in my absence. Will you wear them for my sake, Sophie."

"I will wear them night and day, but I need no reminders of you, Lucius. But you—will you forget me in London? It is so big and far away and full of great ladies who will put your poor Sophie out of remembrance. Lucius, Lucius. . . ."

"My sweet, silly little Sophie," he whispered, soothing her as she clung to him, "how can you misjudge me so? Is not one black hair from your head, one glance from your blue eyes, dearer to me than all the women in the world? What have I done that you should think so ill of me?"

"Forgive me, dear. I know men are not like women, and I cannot see what there is in me to hold you—except my love for you. No other women could love you half so well, Lucius. It is my only gift, but it at least could not be bettered by anyone."

"I know it, my sweet," he told her, "and when your father is of a better mind towards me you shall give me your love before all the world, and then I need no longer travel alone. Would you like to see London, heart of mine?"

"Ah, with you!" breathed Sophie. "Once, before I met you, I thought of nothing but London, and how I meant some day to be a great lady there, but now I think of nothing but to be with you. Perhaps, after all, this is what the Wise Woman meant and my golden ladder is my love for you, and I've climbed on it from loneliness to joy."

"A Jacob's ladder, for the feet of an angel, then, my Sophie."

"If it could only reach from here to London! Oh, Lucius, need you go?"

"I must, my sweet. Don't make it harder for me."

That checked her plaint at once, as he knew it would.

"When do you go?" she asked quietly.

"In a day or two, sweetheart. Ah, Sophie, how shall I live without you?"

While she comforted him, forgetting self, he made a mental calculation as to how soon he could get away. He kissed Sophie's hair somewhat absently.

"I will write to you, heart of mine," he murmured, "and I will contrive so that he finds I have gone completely away, and that will lull any suspicion he may have against us. And while I am gone you will be working for us, my Sophie. Do not be alarmed if at first the powder seems to cause an indisposition. It has to expel the evil humours from a man before it can turn his nature to good. Give it to him in a small quantity once or twice, and he will vomit and be rid of this disaffection towards me, and the rest will work beneficially. Your father will arise and call you blessed, my Sophie, for having sworn him the evil of his own heart. Do not write me word when anything definite happens—I am leaving my servant at Penzance, and he will post up to me at once when you give him news."

"And then—then you will come down again, and we shall all be able to be happy. Perhaps my father will even dismiss Lylie Ruffiniac when his heart is turned towards you. That woman frightens me, Lucius. She is always looking at me as though she wished me away. No one loves me except yourself—and poor Charles. Hester avoids me, and James never did speak a word to me that he could avoid. Lucius, sometimes it seems to me that he and Lylie and Hester have all grown to hate me, that they would harm me if they could. It frightens me—Lucius, Lucius, what shall I do when you have left me?"

Crandon fought down his boredom and gave himself over to consoling her, with now and again a surreptitious glance at the watch dangling from his fob. He had another interview to go through—with Lylie Ruffiniac. She had to be fostered in the belief that he was going to take Sophie away as soon as possible, leaving the housekeeper free to influence the Squire—for Lylie's ambition rose to being legitimate mistress of the Manor, and Sophie once gone, she saw no reason why she should not attain her end. She knew that the ten thousand pounds was a mere myth, but that she kept hidden from Crandon, even bringing forward, as women can, apparently casual little pieces of information that would all tend to fix him in his belief. Crandon had been wise to impress on Sophie the necessity for keeping the love-potion hidden from every one—Lylie, who had a fine nose for a rogue, would have been in possession of his scheme—a scheme so devastating to her own—at once. As soon as safety and decency permitted he would carry Sophie off, go through the ceremony of marriage with her in a place where he was not known, gain possession of the money—and clear out of England for good. This was his last throw of the dice in his own country—let him but win the stake and he would disappear and enjoy his fortune elsewhere.

He took a last glance at his watch, a last kiss of Sophie's mouth, and scrambled to his feet. He walked back with Sophie as near Troon as was safe, then took an affectionate good-night of her, and started off for the cove to meet Lylie Ruffiniac.

"Thank the gods, that hard-headed vixen of a Lylie won't want me to kiss her!" he reflected as he went. "Ah, there's a woman might have been some help to me if I'd met her in the shoes of Isabel or of this Sophie. Lucius, my son, you are playing a very risky game, but the stakes are worth it. Ten thousand pounds, a fresh country—and entirely new women!"

V

THE LOVE-POTION

Two weeks after Crandon's departure the first instalment of serpentine beads arrived for Sophie. There was no concealing the fact, and Sophie replied to her father's suave inquiries that the beads were a keepsake from a friend. Enclosed with them was a tiny packet of white powder, on which was written "Powder to clean the pebbles," and this Sophie secreted at once.

A few days later the Squire was unwell with a violent headache and bilious attack resulting from too much port and smuggled brandy the night before—Sophie suggested that she should make him a dish of tea. In the night he was taken with violent sickness, but by the next day he had not only recovered from that but apparently actually benefited by it, as it had cured him of the result of his orgy. Next day, to continue the cure, Sophie again sent him up some tea, but this time the Squire thought it tasted odd, and Hester, on bearing away the dish, finding that the rare beverage was left untouched, hid it in the scullery and drank it that evening. She was soon taken with violent pains and sickness and a raging thirst, and it was in this condition that Lylie found her.

"My life, Hester, what have 'ee got?" asked Lylie.

"The pains of death, I do think," gasped Hester. "Oh, oh!"

Lylie looked at her unsympathetically.

"Simme you'm whist wi' en," she observed, "scrawlen' like that. Some bad you do look, though, there's no denyen'."

"I'm dyen'!" wailed Hester.

Sophie, who had come into the kitchen, heard the commotion, and went into the scullery.

"Why, Hester, what ails you?" she exclaimed. "Lylie, what has happened?"

"'Tes the pains o' death, she do say," replied Lylie, "but 'tes nawthen but to be in the bed and somethen' hot that she needs."

"She must get to bed at once. Here, Lylie, you take her arm that side and I'll take this. She's getting quieter."

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Indeed, the worst spasms were over: Hester, weak and exhausted, was put to bed, and Sophie, her dislike of the girl forgotten in compassion, sent up weak broth and white wine whey. Late that evening as Lylie sat with the Squire, he asked her what all the noise had been about.

"'Tes that maid Hester," said Lylie indifferently, "she'd taken somethen' that went agen her and was vomiten' all evenin'. Some bad she did vomit, and Miss and I had to get her overstairs to the bed."

The Squire stirred in his chair and very slowly brought his eyes round to Lylie.

"What time did the sickness take her?" he asked.

"Soon after she'd put your tray to the kitchen, measter. Look 'ee, now, at this lutestring piece I got to Penzance church-town. It do sore need a ribbon to go wi' en. What do 'ee say to given' I a crown to buy et with, eh, measter?"

"Shalt have thy crown, woman," said the Squire shortly, "but leave me be now. I want no more for the night. And tell Miss I wish to speak with her to-morrow forenoon."

Lylie, somewhat offended, but mollified by the unexpectedly easy capture of the crown, withdrew, and next morning, as Sophie was busier than usual in household tasks—Hester still being confined to her bed—she delivered the Squire's message. It was with a heart fluttering with hope that Sophie went to his room. He was not yet out of bed, and, wrapped in a dingy dressing-gown, much stained with snuff and wine, his big jowl unshaven and his bald head innocent of wig (that ornament hung rakishly askew on a chair-back) he looked anything but a pleasant object. Sophie stopped short on the threshold.

[69]

"You sent for me, sir?" she asked.

"'Tis nothing of any importance, my dear," said the Squire smoothly, "merely to tell you how recovered I am. How blooming you look, my Sophie—more like my own daughter than you have since this shadow fell between us."

Indeed, Sophie, in her flutter of hope and excitement, showed a glowing face. Her heart softened at the kindness of her father's tone.

"Oh, sir"—she began, "if only this shadow—if you would only let it lift—if you would only believe in me—in him!"

"Who knows," said the Squire benignly, "but that I may see cause to change my opinions. You will understand, my dear daughter, that a father is in so responsible a position, he must not accept an affair of the kind lightly, without due inquiry. Perhaps the fellow who sent me that report was prejudiced, who knows? I might, in justice, inquire further. But you are not wearing your beads, my child."

"They—they have not all come yet," she faltered, "but I received some more yesterday."

"The roses on thy cheeks are the best adornment in a father's eye," said the Squire, "and now tell Lylie to bring me some broth with brandy in it, and bless thee, my child. And," he added to himself as she left the room, "I do not think I shall be taken with sickness again yet awhile."

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Sophie's easily persuaded reason and her affectionate nature were swayed to gratitude, and she reproached herself because something in her was repulsed by the old man's blandness. She ran downstairs and out into the yard singing under her breath, and saw the postboy coming up the drive. He had a packet for her which she took up to her room to open. There were a dozen or so more of the polished pebbles, cut into beads, and a short note in which Crandon assured her of his undying affection, and ended by saying, "Do not spare the powder in order to keep the rust off the pebbles."

That afternoon Charles Le Petyt came over to Troon and walked with Sophie in the garden. He was full of joy to see the increased brightness of her look, and soon detected a softening in her tone when she spoke of her father—Crandon's name they avoided by silent consent.

"You may yet be happy with your father, Sophie," said Mr. Le Petyt with the hopefulness of the born idealist, and Sophie, confident in her supernatural knowledge, agreed.

"And I reproach myself that sometimes I have been wicked enough to wish I might never see him again," she said as they walked slowly towards the house door, past the open dairy windows, "and indeed, Charles, I think it must have been the Devil himself who sometimes suggested to me how much happier I should be if he were dead. I have seemed to hear a whisper: 'Who would not wish an old father dead for ten thousand pounds?'—because that meant freedom and—peace."

"My poor Sophie," replied Charles pressing her hand.

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He stayed and took tea with her and the Squire, and the latter went to bed soon after he had left. The weather had turned rainy, autumn seemed invaded by a tang of winter that evening, and the Squire, who was subject to fits of shivering, had a huge fire lit, and demanded hot gruel of Lylie.

"There's no occasion for you to leave your ironing, Lylie," remarked Sophie when they were in the kitchen, and the woman acquiescing, Sophie went into the pantry. She was gone some time, and when she reappeared Lylie glanced up from the ironing of her turned satin slip. Sophie caught the glance, and fore-stalling a question, remarked carelessly:

"I have been stirring the gruel and eating some of the oatmeal out of it, for I've taken a great fancy to it. I believe I shall often eat from my father's gruel."

She stirred it round over the fire as she spoke.

"I'll take it overstairs," said Lylie, who viewed the friendlier relations between father and daughter with dislike. Sophie turned the gruel out into a basin and set the saucepan down on the hob.

"I will see to it," she retorted hurriedly, but Lylie seized the basin and bore it out of the kitchen.

Not a quarter of an hour later the Squire's screams echoed through the house. He was very sick, hiccuped like a person bitten by a mad dog, and cried out that he was burnt up with fire. Sophie, terrified, insisted on James riding at once to St. Annan's for the apothecary, and herself banished from the Squire's room by the commands he managed to articulate, she stayed against his door outside, every now and then pressing her fingers to her ears when a more awful sound than common came from within.

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He was a trifle easier when the apothecary arrived and applied remedies, and Lylie took advantage of the lull to creep swiftly to the kitchen and pick up the saucepan Sophie had left on the hob. Hester, whom all the outcry had brought from her bed, watched her movements curiously. Lylie lit two candles and bore the pan to the light.

"Come and look here, Hester," said Lylie slowly, feeling some of the sediment from the pan between her finger and thumb, as she spoke, "Did you ever see oatmeal so white?"

"Oatmeal!" said Hester, "why, 'tes as white as flour."

"'Tes more gritty'n flour. I see et all, Hester. Have 'ee never heard that poison's white and gritty? Measter's poisoned, and tes Miss that's done et."

A slight sound came from the kitchen door and both women looked round, but Sophie, whose foot had been on the threshold, had turned and fled upstairs to the door of her father's room again, where she flung herself on the floor and pressed her forehead against the wooden panel. In that long drawn moment of listening the truth had rushed in over her consciousness—and overwhelmed reason and self-control.

The door opened and the apothecary stumbled over her.

"Miss Bendigo—" he began in compassion, then some words to which the Squire had just given vent flashed back at him and he hesitated.

"Bring her in," ordered the patient hoarsely.

Sophie scrambled to her feet and went towards the bed. She fell on her knees beside it.

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"Oh, sir, forgive me, I didn't know, I didn't know," she babbled, "send me where you will, only forgive me and get well . . . I'll never see or hear from or write to him more, if you'll but forgive me, I shall be happy. Papa, papa!"

Over Sophie's head the Squire beckoned the apothecary into the room. Then:

"I do forgive thee," he murmured, speaking with difficulty and veiling his eyes with his thin wrinkled lids, "but thou should'st have remembered I am your father. As for the villain Crandon, hadst thou loved me thou wouldst curse him and the ground he walks on."

"Oh, sir," said Sophie, to whom the words of pardon alone had penetrated, "your kindness strikes at my soul. Sir, on my knees I pray you will not curse me."

"I curse thee!" gasped the Squire, forcing his distorted mouth into a semblance of the old bland smile, "no, child, I bless thee and hope God will bless thee, and I pray thou mayest live to repent and amend. . . . Leave me, lest thou should'st say something to thy prejudice—" apparently,

thought the apothecary, who was himself trembling with horror, this martyred father had forgotten the presence of a listener. "Go to the clergyman, Mr. Le Petyt, he will take care of thee. Alas, poor man, I am sorry for him. . . ."

"Papa, I am innocent, I swear to you I am. I never knew. I am innocent of this. . . ."

"I fear thou art not quite innocent and that there is some powder in such hands as will appear against thee. Harvey take away my poor misguided child."

Sophie stumbled blindly from the room and went upstairs. Mr. Harvey hesitated a moment, saw the patient almost comatose, and went down to the kitchen. There Lylie still pored over the saucepan, which she thrust out at him.

[74] "See, Mr. Harvey," she demanded, "what's this stuff in wi' the gruel? Can 'ee tell me that?"

Mr. Harvey examined the contents of the pan carefully, tried some on his finger, and shook his cautious head.

"I cannot be very positive," he replied at length, "but at least it can have no business in the gruel. Give me white paper and I will take some home and test it when it is dry."

Lylie helped him scrape the sediment into a sheet of paper, and he folded it up and pocketed it. He then gave instructions to the two women to heat more water for fomentations while he returned to the sick room. Finding the Squire still comatose, he sat with his fingers on the intermittent pulse. Meanwhile Sophie, in whom fear, the most sickening of all emotions had awakened, crept downstairs, holding her breath past her father's room, down to the kitchen. Lylie happened to be in the scullery at the moment, Hester, still weak from morbid excitement as well as illness, was seated in a shadowy corner of the kitchen. Sophie crept in, looked fearfully round her, listened, and then began to stuff some papers into the grate. She thrust them into the heart of the flames and then breathed a deep sigh of relief. "Now I am more easy, thank God," she murmured, and slipped out of the kitchen as cautiously as she had come. Lylie, from behind the crack of the scullery door, went towards the grate, where she was joined by Hester. . . .

A little later all was noise again, the Squire had been seized with violent spasms, raving and hiccuping like a madman, unable to swallow as much as a sip of water. Towards the small hours he grew delirious, then sank gradually; with the dawn he died.

[75] Sophie sat rigid in her room, paler than the paling day. She looked back over the past, recalling little speeches of Crandon's which, had she been less simple, less adoring, must have warned her of his plan. She saw the skill with which he had trapped her, she saw what he hoped to gain, she saw how he would lose nothing. It was she who had to pay. At the thought fear, natural, human fear, caught at her again and she sprang to her feet, a thing distraught. Escape—she must escape, get away from this dread that was closing in on her. She tied on cloak and hood and feverishly crammed all the money that for months she had been saving against her marriage into a little bag. On the stairs she ran into James Ruffiniac, and with her hands on his coat, pressing, begging, silent suppliants, she made him come into the dining-room.

"James," she said, "do you want to make your fortune? You do, do you not? If you will come with me, it is made."

"What do you want me to do?" asked James.

"Only to hire a postchaise to go to London, and I'll give you fifteen guineas now, and more when we come there. Only to do that. And in London you would make your fortune."

"Not on my life," he told her. "What you've done you must see the end of. 'Tis your guilty soul makes you flee. I'll have to tell of this."

"I—I was merely jesting," faltered Sophie, "to see if you would. James—" but he had swung on his heel and left her.

[76] No one molested Sophie, but towards midday Hester put her head in at the bedroom door to inform her, with a hardly restrained gusto, that Dr. Polwhele had come over from Penzance and was going to open the body. Sick to the soul, Sophie put on her outdoor things once more and struck out over the moors, walking blindly to try and get away from the horror that was in her. As she went all the strength of her nature, inherited from the father who could keep up a pose and plan a revenge on an agonized death-bed; the strength, which had concentrated itself during her girlhood on her ambitions, that had then made her love for Crandon, now turned to a deep hatred and rage that seemed to settle, cold and hard, on the very muscles of her body. She knew the hatred, the fierce resentment, that the trapped thing feels against the trapper, and added to it was the shame of a woman whose love has been made a mockery. And if, unacknowledged even to herself, was the pricking feeling that, could she have been spared discovery, she would not deeply have minded being the innocent cause of her own release, who is there with heart so uncomplex as to be in a position to condemn her. . . .

She tramped on and on, and presently found herself out on the St. Annan high-road. The thought of Charles came to her as a point where she could turn for help, for he had been absent all night at a distant part of the parish, ministering to a dying man, but he would surely be back by now; if she were not quick he would already have set off for Troon on hearing the news. Battling against the rain-laden wind, she bent her head and made her way into the village. There

little groups of people were standing about, intent, arguing. At sight of her a common feeling animated them, the various little centres of discussion broke, joined together, swept towards her. She had an impression of shaking fists, angry sounds, rude contacts, and the smell of many rain-wet bodies pressing in around her. The panic of crowds seized her, she screamed, and screamed again, not recognizing the voice of Charles Le Petyt answering her as he made his way through the press. He struck the faces away from him right and left, and his blazing passage made men fall back. Putting an arm round Sophie he drew her up the steps of the inn and through the door, which he shut and barred.

"Take me away, Charles, take me away," she moaned, and he, his arms round her dear trembling body, answered:

"I will take you home. You are quite safe with me, Sophie. When we get back you must tell me everything and I will think of a way to help you. Stay here a moment, dear."

He put her in a chair, sent the frightened host for a glass of wine, and ordered a chaise to be got ready at the back. Sophie drank the wine passively, and passively let Charles put her in the chaise. She lay silent against him all the way back to Troon, but once there, in the parlour, her brain cleared, and she told him everything. Charles Le Petyt listened, always keeping his hand tenderly over hers, though when she let him understand what for months she had been to Crandon, his free hand gripped hard on the edge of his chair.

"What am I to do?" she asked when she had made an end.

"Is there no way by which the guilt can be fastened where it belongs—on Crandon?" he asked passionately, and in her distress Sophie sprang up and, walking to the window, hit the shut pane with her hand.

"I have destroyed everything that could have taken him," she said. "Take my key—here it is—search my press, my box, see if you can find anything. I will come with you."

Alas! Sophie had ravished her room too well, and search fell fruitless. The two desisted at last and stared at each other with pallid faces.

"Oh—Sophie!" cried Mr. Le Petyt, and, breaking into tears, she flung herself into his arms. They were clinging together, wet cheek against wet cheek, when the town-sergeant came thundering at the door.

VI

ATTAINMENT

(Account taken from a contemporary journal)

"SATURDAY, April 4. This morning Miss Bendigo was executed at Launceston, in the same black petelair she was dressed in at her trial, had on a pair of black gloves, and her hands and arms tied with black paduasoy ribbons. On the Friday night she sent to the sheriff, who, she was informed, was come to town to be present at her execution, and desired that he would give her till eight o'clock the next morning, and she would be ready as soon after as he pleased. On Friday, at about twelve o'clock, she took the Sacrament and signed a declaration concerning the crime for which she was to suffer; in which she denied knowing that the powders she had administered to her father had any poisonous quality in them; and also made therein a confession of her faith. Her behaviour at the gallows was becoming a person in her unhappy circumstances, and drew not only great compassion, but tears, from most of the spectators. When she got up about seven steps of the ladder, she turned herself upon it and had a little trembling, saying: 'I am afraid I shall fall.' After she had turned herself upon the ladder, the Rev. Mr. Le Petyt, who attended her, asked whether she had anything to say to the public. She said yes, and made a speech to the following purport: 'That, as she was then going to appear before a just God, she did not know that the powders, which were believed to be the death of her father, would have done him any harm, therefore she was innocently the cause of his death, but as she hoped for mercy, what she had done had been in innocence and love.' Then she stooped towards Mr. Le Petyt and she was seen to be remarkably eager in taking the parting kiss from him, which she did. The hangman then desired her to pull the white kerchief, tied over her head for that purpose, over her eyes, which she failing to do, a person standing by stepped up the ladder and pulled it down. Then, giving the signal by holding out a little book she had in her hand, she was turned off. Before she went out of the gaol she gave the sheriff's man a guinea to drink, and took two guineas in her hands with her, which she gave to the executioner. Her body was placed in a coffin of maplewood, lined with white satin, on the lid only 'Sophia Bendigo, aged 18. April 4, 1752.' It is understood that Mr. Le Petyt carried the coffin to St. Annan and buried it, by Miss Bendigo's request, in the grave of her mother. At the execution, notwithstanding the early hour, there was the greatest concourse of people ever seen on such an occasion."

THE GREATEST GIFT

THE GREATEST GIFT

EDMOND BERNARDY was in that state of mind when everything joyous is an insult and everything sorrowful an added stab. When the horror had first settled on him he fought it wildly; then succeeded a numbed condition of the nerves, when will and reason lay dormant, and he surrendered himself to instinct—and instinct had brought him to the lonely passes, the snow-enfolded peaks, and the dream-ridden little cities of Provence.

It was in the days before railways were thought of, when gentlemen still did the "grand tour," and did it by post-chaise. Bernardy, whose finances were of the uncertain kind usual with even a successful poet, and whose mood was for the leisurely, preferred, once he had attained the coast of Provence by ship, to strike up inland on foot. In spite of himself, his surroundings began to soothe him, justifying the instinct which led him, and that had its root deeper than he suspected. Bernardy's mother had been a Provençale, and it was in one of the little mountain cities that his English father had met her, and she had only left her birthplace a few weeks before Edmond himself was born. It was owing to her that he possessed a deep love for little cities; though this was the first time that he had ever come to his mother's country.

As a boy he, like all right-minded children, possessed a little city of the imagination where he sat enthroned, king of the be-pennoned turrets and circling walls. With Bernardy the idea of the little city had become an obsession, entering even into his dreams at night, causing him to lead, even more than most children, that curious inner life of which waxing adolescence must so surely lose grip. His peculiar and vivid genius, though technically the joy of his fellow writers, never lost a quality of uncanny vision that sometimes disconcerted an age given over to the flamboyance of Byron, and this quality was the natural outcome of his withdrawal, as a child, into his secret life. That life was a complicated and delicate thing, no mere floating vagueness of dreams, but a fabric deliberately planned and reared, with a wealth of cunning detail to persuade him of reality. He could remember now how convinced he had been that the town his mind had made was as real as any city he and his mother visited in their precarious existence—sometimes he could recall, for a vivid flash, actual streets and houses of his imagination.

Hill cities share with islands the fascination that only aloofness can give, and the thought of the huddled towns cresting the Alpes-Maritimes had tugged at Bernardy's cord of memory, bringing back, not only his mother's stories of her own country, but also the recollections of his dream-city, so like these he was seeing now. They are towns of fluted roofs and mellow walls, of shutters flung wide like wings, of courtyards that are wells of blue shadow, and towers that stand up, golden-white, into the sunshine. Here Bernardy would come to a town perched, eagle-wise upon a crag, with a forest of irregular turrets piercing the sky; there to a little city which fitted over some rounded mountain-top like a cap, the arching outline of its roofs following faithfully the curve of the ground with a fruit-like suavity of contour. Everywhere, away from the cities, lay the olive-slopes, like a great sea, charmed, at the moment of most tumultuous movement, into stillness, the waves of it interfolding in vast hollows that never broke; only now and again a wind tossed the pale undersides of leaves to a semblance of spray.

These valleys, so mysterious at dawn and dusk, and in the day so oddly toy-like with their tiny, red-roofed oil-mills and the striped effect of the olive-terraces; these reticent, though seemingly candid, little townships above them; these mountains that at sunset were stained a burning copper filmed with amethyst—all seemed to Bernardy to be under a spell, caught in a web of magic as real, though not as visible, as the web of dappled shadow each olive-tree flung over the ground beside it. Bernardy told himself that here he could pass a long life happily, instead of which he had to prepare for death, for the deliberate blotting out, for him, of all this beauty.

He had never been a gross liver or a gross thinker, yet many a sensualist would now have been in a better case than he—for he had always used his quality of spiritual vision—in him so strong as to be almost an added sense—merely to beat back upon and intensify material things. An unbeliever or a man of happy-go-lucky nature could have extracted all the savour possible out of what remained to him of life, and left what was to come on the knees of the gods—Bernardy was too ardent a devotee of life, and life, as he understood it, was a comprehensive term. It meant the training and enjoyment of every faculty, the critical appreciation of everything he met, the absorption of beauty and the production of it. Also he feared the physical act of death as an animal fears it, with a contraction of the muscles and a chilling of the blood—feared it so that sometimes the sweat would break out over his face and he would bite back a cry.

Looking back on his life Bernardy could say that it had been good, and he saw for how much more the little things had counted than the big. A sunny day, congenial companions, good wine and tobacco, and, above all, the joy of creation—how well worth while they were. Taken as a

whole they outweighed the fondest woman in the world, and that though Bernardy had been a fine lover. Yet it was because of a woman that he was to kill himself three weeks from now, and the fantastic nature of the affair made him feel like a man in a dream. It amused him that it should have been the one conventional period of his life—a couple of months in an English rectory, which had hurled him into such an extravagant situation.

[87] The Rector, an avowed eccentric, and strongly influenced by the Byronic wave then at the crest, decided it was his duty to brave society and take notice of his brother's son—especially as the said son was a figure in the literary worlds of Paris and London. The Rector's daughter, Lucy, was sweet and fresh and English, and not in the least clever, and Bernardy, who had never met anyone like her before, fell madly in love. The combination of his passion; of a rival deeply bitten with romanticism and a sense of his own importance and of the high-flown ideas of the period, resulted in a violent quarrel and what was then a favoured species of duel. Bernardy and his rival, telling themselves that they were sparing Lucy the shock of an actual encounter, drew lots to decide which should take his own life. Bernardy had lost, and, leaving the bewildered Lucy to her fantastic roll-collared baronet, retired to spend his two months' grace in his own country of France.

[88] Behold him, entered on his last three weeks, toiling up a mountain pass, his shirt open at the chest and his tightly strapped trousers somewhat the worst for dust—a fine figure of a man in a thin, fiery way, with singularly child-like eyes set in a network of wrinkles—the result of having spent his thirty odd years with a lavish though fastidious hand. Sickened suddenly of the ordered olive slopes, he went on and up till he had left the sleek country behind him, and entered the region that looks like a burnt-out landscape of the moon. At last he came to the mouth of a gorge, one side of it rising up sheer into the sunlight, while the other seemed to hang to the earth like a dark curtain. Looking up, Bernardy saw, perched at the rim of the sunlit cliff, a little town. In some places its sloping flanks were built right over the edge, as though they had been poured out, while molten, from a giant spoon. It was so many hundred feet above him that he could only just distinguish it was a town, and not a mere huddle of pale-hued boulders; so high it gave the effect of being on the edge of the world. Bernardy knew, beyond a doubt, that he must attain this town, and he cast about to find a way. Obviously there must be a track on the other side, as the cliff was bare of so much as a shrub, and yet no path was to be discerned on its scarred and abrupt surface. Eventually Bernardy made his way round a fold of gorge and up a steep, winding track to a gently sloping stretch of country that led up to the town from behind.

Throwing himself upon the short, thorn-entangled grass, he locked his hands behind his head and gazed under half-shut lids at the little town which he now saw dark against the sky. He lay, idly counting the towers of it, till his lids grew too heavy to stay open, and his fingers fell apart, and with his head pillowed on his arm, he slept.

When he awoke the day was at its brief height, and he scrambled to his feet with an odd feeling that was more than a mere sense of rest. It was as though a sponge had been deftly passed over his mind, leaving it a clean, smooth surface, ready to receive new impressions, unbiased by anything that was past, the confiding, expectant attitude of a young child. He had forgotten nothing, it was rather that all his old arrangement of values had been swept aside, leaving him free to assess things anew. And, although, for all he could remember, his sleep had been dreamless, yet he was haunted by half-recollections which pricked at and eluded him. As he went towards the town something in the sweeping lines of the fortifications seemed vaguely familiar, and again fragments of a dream, at which he snatched in vain, floated by him.

[89] Passing under the cool shadow of the gateway he stood wondering which way to go; then, saying to himself, "I'll go past the Mayor's house, I always liked it because of the painted walls," he turned to the right, and walked several paces before the strangeness of his own words struck him. "What can I have meant?" he asked himself, "and yet—I seem to remember a house, a white house, with a painted frieze of fruit and birds, and the Mayoress was a funny, fat old thing who made *échédets*. . . ."

With his heart beating fast, he turned the corner and found himself at the house he sought. The more he looked at it the more he remembered it, and details crowded on him. He walked down the alley at the side, and found a stone stairway he knew quite well, a stairway that led to a carved door. He stumbled into the street again like a man distraught.

"Has the horror turned my brain?" he thought. "Well, what matter, if it makes it easier to die?"

The whole street struck him as familiar, but not until he turned into the Square did knowledge flash upon him.

"It's my town!" he cried aloud, "it's my town!"

[90] He felt no perplexity at the incredible nature of the thing, a calming influence, too gracious to be akin to his former stupor, stole over him; he moved as in a dream, with no responsibility, but full enjoyment. The naked plane-trees made a silvery network against the cold, pure blue of the winter sky; into a raised washhouse across the Square the sun shone obliquely, and the many-hued skirts of the stooping women made vivid blotches of colour that harmonized with the rhythmic splash of the water as only music of sight can with music of sound. Dark against the cream-washed wall of the church, that seemed almost lambent in the glare of the sun, sat a row of burnt-out old men with shrivelled throats, and on the steps of the fountain were two old women in black, one wearing a white cap of folded wings, the other the wide-brimmed black

straw hat common to the peasantry. The lady of the hat plunged her brown old fingers into the thin arc of water, and Bernardy saw how the drops that clung to her hand glittered like diamonds before she shook them off to pit the dust with pock-marks. With that intense sympathy which had done much to make him an artist, Bernardy tried for a moment to think himself into the mind of the black-hatted old woman, and to imagine the Square and his own figure from her mental and physical point of view. It was a favourite trick of his, but one of which latterly the strain had been too much for him. Sometimes he would succeed so well for a flash that it only made the impalpable but stern barrier of personality more definite even while almost seeming to overleap it. "If I could only achieve the thing properly," thought Bernardy, "I suppose I should attain exchange of identity, or at least be absorbed into that of the old lady. And then—no more of this black horror, and the shell of me would, I suppose, disfigure the gravel."

[91] He lifted the heavy, leathern curtain over the church door and entered. Within the air struck cool, though heavy with stale incense; gradually the gleam of gilding, then separate colours and degrees of dusk and pallor detached themselves from the darkness, and he saw he was in the typical little church of the neighbourhood—a rococo affair decked with rows of plaster saints on painted brackets, each with its little bunch of flowers in a china mug in front of it. Beneath all the superfluous decoration there was a pleasing austerity and sturdiness of line; solid pillars and a low-groined roof made a square-set, beetle-browed little building, at once tawdry and stark. To Bernardy's receptive mind there was something peculiarly charming about these churches where everything spoke of religion being taken in the right way—as a mere matter of course. A lighted wick, floating in a jam-jar of oil, caught his eye and, moving forward, he saw it burned before a crèche.

[92] For a few minutes he stood before it in silence, then he laughed aloud in sheer enjoyment. All the other crèches he had seen boasted figures of plaster or china; here, apparently, the expense had been too great, and the characters were represented by dolls, ordinary wooden dolls with shiny, painted, black hair and stuff clothes. The Mother herself was dressed in stiff, spangled muslin, with a veil like a *première communiant*e, and a wreath of orange blossom—a confusion of ideas that had its humour. St. Joseph, in good broadcloth coat and the tightest of trousers, held the other post of honour, and nearer the spectators, though facing away from them to the little Christ-Child, were ranged the shepherds, with—surely an innovation—their wives. The shepherds themselves supplied the crowning touch, for they wore real knitted stockings of worsted, and shoes with stitched leather soles, a fact admirably displayed by the kneeling position of their wearers. The wives held little baskets full of beads, meant to represent eggs; and woolly lambs with red-cotton tongues stood about at regular intervals. All the dolls looked old, and as though they had seen a less gentle service, and Bernardy wondered what child in that remote place was of sufficient wealth to own dolls. He was charmed into mirth, and as he thought how tenderly and kindly the real personages represented must laugh as they looked down at the little set-piece, he tried to trace, in some trick of light and shadow, a fleeting smile on the doll-faces. Without warning, his horror closed on him again, and turning he went heavily down the church.

As he neared the door the two old women of the market square came in; still laughing and chattering, they went past him, slowly and stiffly, with the uneven clumping of old feet. Some curious premonition—a feeling that something was about to happen—made Bernardy watch them.

Suddenly the old woman in the hat caught sight of the crèche, and with the swift transition of the South, she stopped short in her chatter and clutched her companion's arm:

"Ah!" she said, "*c'est le bon Jésus, qui donne courage!*"

[93] Every note of her harsh old voice thrilled Bernardy's nerves like a sudden clarion. It seemed to him the most luminous moment of his life. There are brief seconds when a rent in the outer film of this world comes against a rent in what we are pleased to call the "next," though it is really co-existent with our own. Then it is that we can catch a glimpse of something that is at another angle, a differently tilted spiritual plane, so to speak, from our own, and for which our minds would, ordinarily, need a different focus. The old woman had torn a peephole for Edmond—perhaps, for all he knew, in that moment of sympathetic concentration in the Square, their personalities had mingled, and so made him sensitive to the premonition that gripped him as she passed. He only knew that her phrase—and being a phrase-monger himself he had a passion for them—struck him as magnificent. He would have thought less of it had she said it of the Christ on the Cross, but she spoke of the Christ-Child. Or if she had spoken of peace, but her words were "qui donne courage."

"*C'est le bon Jésus, qui donne courage!*"

Bernardy stood quite still, wondering what her life had been that "courage" should be the word that instinctively sprang to her lips. The two women were still peering in at the crèche, but while White Cap was recognizing all her acquaintances, so to speak, and hailing them by name, the other old woman stared straight in front of her, repeating her phrase very fast, over and over again. Suddenly she turned, and coming down the church to where Bernardy stood, peered up into his face. For the last time she repeated it, but with a slight difference, her hand on his wrist:

"Tu sais, mon brave," she said, "tu sais, c'est l'Enfant qui donne courage!"

Bernardy went out into the sunlight feeling at once calmed and exhilarated, yet still with that odd sense of waiting, as of something holding its breath. All the afternoon he haunted the little

wind-swept town, and towards evening he leant upon the parapet that hung over the sheer mountain-side. Hundreds of feet below him the valley was lapped in darkness and he watched the shadow thrown by the opposite range creep up towards him, the edge of it in deeply curved waves, like a purple tide. The chill of sunset was in the air when he made his way to the inn, and he noted that, although the sight of a stranger must be of the utmost rarity, he excited no comment. Could it be, he wondered, that they instinctively knew him for one of themselves, these people of his dream-city, or were they dreams too? In how leisurely a manner they passed along the streets—the Faun-like youths, brown-necked and bold-eyed; the firm-set women with their black hair so sleekly and heavily massed about their heads that it seemed carved out of ebony, and the quiet-eyed old people with indrawn mouths!

When he reached the inn, a grey pile of round-flanked towers that was built on the eastern edge, his memories awoke again, and in the courtyard they surged over him—memories of sitting enthroned in just such a castle as this. He remembered, too, that there had always been something he was not allowed to know—was it a door that had been kept locked, or a forbidden book, or some hidden person whom he had perpetually tried to meet and never succeeded? Whatever it was, he felt he would soon discover it.

Nothing occurred to stimulate his memory during supper. The stout patronne chatted to him of her inn, which had been the Seigneur's chateau till thirty years before, when the last owner died in great poverty. Had Monsieur seen and admired the beautiful crèche in the church? The little figures were the dolls which once belonged to Mademoiselle de Clerissac. The patronne was not old enough to remember it very distinctly, but she believed Mademoiselle had met with trouble, which was why she went away. After all, it was natural, she had red blood in her, both the old Seigneur and his father having married peasant girls. If Monsieur was interested in such things old Marie, who had been Mademoiselle de Clerissac's nurse, still lived in a room in the chateau. She was fabulously old, and had to be tended like a baby by her granddaughter, and it was true she had long wandered in her wits, but undoubtedly she could see visions, both of the past and future. No, Bernardy not only felt no interest in the actual history of the place, but even shrank from knowledge. It seemed to make his dream-city less dream-like and less his.

Once in the dim passage leading to his room, he found he had forgotten which was his door. Carrying his lighted candle head-high, he explored the far end of the passage, and came on a rather smaller door than the rest, studded with nail-heads set in a peculiar pattern. It flashed on Bernardy that it led to the room he had never been allowed to enter—he even remembered the scar where one nail was missing. Pushing up the latch, he opened the door and passed through, the light of the candle he carried shining full on his face, so that he was plainly visible to anyone in the room, while he himself was too dazzled to see. There was a table at his left hand, and he put the candle down on it before advancing into the room.

There was a fire of smouldering logs on the hearth, and beside it sat an old, old woman. Her hands, with their knotted and discoloured veins, hung over the arms of her chair, under her chin a hollow cut up sharply. She stared at Bernardy from red-rimmed, rheumy eye-sockets, mumbling her mouth with a sucking movement grotesquely suggestive of a baby. Behind her, wrapped in the soft shadow, with fugitive gleams of firelight bringing out now a cheekbone, now the curve of chin, or of breast, stood a much younger woman—she seemed about thirty or perhaps a little more. They gazed at Bernardy in a calm silence for several seconds, while he stared at them. Then the younger woman stepped forward into the light, and Bernardy saw how big and strong she was, deep-chested and long-flanked, with a wide forehead and heavily folded lids. Against the white of her apron her hands and wrists showed coarse and reddened, but the big neck, where it disappeared into the kerchief, was white as milk.

"Monsieur mistakes the room," she said, in a deep voice whose Provençal twang was blurred into softness. "My grandmother is very old, and Monsieur will excuse her not wishing him good evening."

Bernardy, confused and bewildered, hesitated a moment, and it was the old woman who broke the silence. She seemed to be staring not so much at Bernardy as at some mental vision of him.

"Candide, he has come at last," she said, slowly and clearly, "you must give him the letters."

The woman called Candide dropped her heavy lids for a moment, while, to Bernardy's wonder a blush mounted to the roots of her pale, smoothly banded hair. Then she went to a cupboard, unlocked it, and took out a packet of letters and a small, paper-covered book, which she handed to him in silence. The old woman had closed her reddish lids, thickly woven over with small, raised veins, and there was nothing left for Bernardy but to take the packet and go to his own room. He found it easily, for the door stood open now, and he sat himself by the fire and began to read. In spite of the instinct which had led him, he still had not guessed what he should find. The breath of dawn was stirring the curtains before he put the papers down.

The entries in the journal were very brief, and the first bore a date of some thirty-five years earlier:

"It is now two years since I left school," said the journal, "and I think I have improved in my hand-writing, also my crewel stitch. Papa was vexed with me to-day because the soup was too thin. It was the second straining from the same fowl, but we could not afford to kill another. I hear there is a stranger, an Englishman, in the town. He is voyaging for his education. I wish that was how they educated women."

The next entry was written the following night:

"Papa found there was an English Milord staying here, and has brought him to the chateau to dinner. He says even if the de Clerissacs have lost their wealth that is no reason why they should lose their manners. I had a fresh fowl killed and wore my muslin. I hear skirts are getting full and mine are very narrow. He has nice eyes and is so young—almost as young as I am."

Several months elapsed before the next entry. Bernardy read it with dimmed eyes.

[98] "I am going away—I am going to try and find him. It is not his fault that everything has happened; I ought to have known, because I am the woman. He will be miserable when I find him and tell him what I have gone through, and I cannot bear to make him miserable. I would protect him from it if I could. But there will be the baby, and I must protect that too. Papa says I am no daughter of his, but I cannot see what I have done that is dreadful. I have done right—I am a woman now, and I know. How could it have been better for me to grow old and thin and never give to anyone? It is always good to give. I am leaving this behind me in the secret shelf of my cupboard, with all the letters I wrote him—the ones he gave me back and the ones I never sent. . . . I shall never come here again, and I love it like my soul. I will always pray our child will come here. He will not be born here, but perhaps he will come here to die, even if I cannot. The candle is guttering and I must go. Papa says I may not bear his name any longer, and old Marie is letting me take hers. I am no longer de Clerissac, but must sign myself

"CANDIDE BERNARDY."

The first few letters were mere formal little notes—inviting the Milord to dine, at the instance of Monsieur de Clerissac, thanking him for taking herself and old Marie out driving in his post-chaise, suggesting an hour when he might care to go wild-cat shooting with old Marie's son. Then came a letter in a more intimate key.

"You should not have sent to Nice for the books" (it ran), "yet I should be ungrateful not to thank you. If you care to come and see the violet-bed I was telling you of I will thank you in person. Papa says would you like one of Minèrve's next litter, but I say you will not be here then? Besides, in England, are not your dogs of the chase of the best? Accept, Milord, my most grateful thanks and remembrances.

"C. DE C."

[99] There was only a fragment of the letter next in sequence, that ran as follows:

". . . and if you really wish it, I will with pleasure embroider a collar for the pup. Papa says I am to say he is glad you are staying on, as he never meets a gentleman here. It is amiable of you to admire my singing, though I fear it is sadly uncultured after what you are used to, but I too love the Provençal songs. You suggest Sunday evening to come and begin translating them into French, that would suit us admirably. My father is, alas! in bed with the gout, but perhaps you would be kind enough to go up and see him? It is true our garden is lovely by moonlight—you do not see then how neglected it is, but I am not sure if I ought to show it to you then. Perhaps if . . ."

The rest of the page was missing, and Bernardy picked up the next letter.

"Bien-aimé" (he read), "how can I write you and what can I say? What do the women of your world say when they feel as I do? Ah! I hope you do not know, I hope you have never made any other woman feel what I do. Every one must adore you, but only I must love you. There, I have said it! Edmund, I love you. But it is not so very dreadful to say it, is it, since, you love me? I cannot play with the truth to you, Edmund. To you I must always be

"CANDIDE."

A week later a frightened chord was sounded.

[100] "Edmund," she wrote, "do not again kiss me as you did last night. I feel wicked creeping out to meet you as it is, and last night—Edmund, you made me feel ashamed. It was not like kissing, it was as though you wished to eat me. Do not think me unkind, but I am feeling afraid, even of you. That is unkind—forgive me.

"CANDIDE."

Another week, and the key had shifted again.

". . . it is true. I love you so that you can kiss me even like you did that time. It terrifies me and I feel cold and weak, but it is enough that you say it is the most splendid thing you have ever known. Edmund, will you be angry if I say that I regret the days before we knew we loved? Everything was in a golden mist like you see in

the valley at sunrise, and now I keep on feeling I do not understand you. Why do you say you cannot tell your father you love me? I am well-born, though it is true I have no *dot*, but, indeed, I am a good manager, and you say I am even prettier than the English ladies. Oh! I am lonely and frightened, and I want your arms round me. Now that I have said that, you cannot reproach me with being cold. . . ."

"Your note has just come" (ran the next letter), "and I am oh! so miserable for you. You are not to think I am unhappy—I am happy to have loved you. If thinking about me adds to your unhappiness, I can even say—do not think about me. I can understand you cannot marry unless your fiancée has a *dot*, because of your estate. It is best that you should go, but you may see me to say good-bye. My dear one, my poor heart, what can I do to help you?"

That was all of the letters to Milord—the letters he had given back. Next came letters that were never sent.

[101]

"Chéri" (ran the first of them), "at last I can write out all that is in my heart, since you will never see these pages. I must write, or I shall go mad. . . . I don't regret, in spite of my shame and bewilderment, for I gave to you. I cannot even feel wicked, but I should not care if I did. I love you all the more now I know you are not what I thought. You are not a god or even a hero, you are a man, and so you are a child—my child, whose head I held on my breast. You have told me to write to you if I need your help. How can that be? All that is left to me is to live out my life here in dreams. I imagine your presence all day. If the door opens behind me and some one enters, I pretend it is you till the last moment possible—until Papa or one of the servants comes round my chair and speaks to me. I have been loved, and I love—that is a great deal to live on."

That night she went on with the same letter.

"Edmund, Edmund, it is not enough—I want you. My heart is breaking. I can only lie with my eyes shut and my face pressed down, and something beats out. 'I want you, I want you.' My heart broke when you wrote me your last note and I had to reply cheerfully because of you. I am not so cowardly but that I can still be glad you do not know my heart broke. *Edmund, I want you, I want you.*"

The last of the unsent letters to Milord was written several months later.

[102]

"Why did I say hearts broke? They don't break, they go dead. Edmund, I wonder if, wherever you are, you are thinking of me? You are certainly not thinking that soon you will see me. I have been trying to decide what to do for the best, and now Papa says I shall not stay here till what he calls my shame is born. I will not stay where my hope and my joy is called my shame, and though I would never ask you anything for myself, I must ask if for the child. I am coming to England, and I must start now or I shall not arrive in time. I shall leave all my letters behind with my journal. I do not even know what I feel when I think of seeing you again.

"CANDIDE DE CLERISSAC."

There was still one paper more, an envelope that had come by courier and was addressed to Marie Bernardy. It had been opened, but inside was an enclosure of which the seals were still unbroken. Without any shock of surprise Bernardy saw it was addressed to him.

[103]

"My son" (he read), "my little son, who, when you read this, will be a grown man, I who have not quite lost my birthright of prevision, know that some day you will go to my town and read this. Will you be in trouble, my little son? Something tells me you will be near the end, and so I write this to help you. You are lying on my lap now, and I think we shall have many years to wander in together, and you will grow away from me, but when you read this you will find me again, and something more as well. My son, I got no further than Paris, bearing you beneath my heart. There I heard from his priest-brother that he had been killed hunting, and there you were born. So you are mine, you belong to no one but me. Listen, my son. Life is good, but a clean death is good too. Never be afraid of one or the other. And when you read this in the home that was mine, put fear away and be a man. Find the one with whom you can face whatever comes without flinching, and when you have found her, never let her go till your arms must loose for good. My son, I was wrong to say that hearts went dead, they are merely numbed for a time if only we are never weak enough to regret. Always remember that it is the good woman who gives and the good man who creates, and take what is left to you of life and make with it. I am not merely imagining you as you read; I am actually with you, I have fused the present and the future into one, and I can see the dawn-light barring the floor through the slats of the shutters, and you are sitting by an empty hearth. Go out, my child, into the dawn. Edmond, my son, however long it is before you join me, I am to all eternity

"YOUR MOTHER."

Bernardy staggered to his feet and went to the window, and the steel-cold bars of light from the slats ran up over him as he approached. Flinging the shutters wide, he leant out, and drew deep breaths of the chill, sweet air. The yews and overgrown hedges of the garden were still velvety with shadow, but beyond the ramparts the delicate pallor of dawn was already tinged with a faint fire. So had his mother, half-timid child, half peasant, and entirely woman, often watched with him beneath her heart. Yet as Bernardy saw the rose light strengthen, his thoughts left his mother for that other Candide who had reddened so unaccountably the night before—that Candide who must be called after his mother. He was still thinking of her as he went downstairs and through the open door that led into the garden.

He crossed to the furthest rampart of it, that hung over the cliff edge, and sat down to watch the dawn. Away to a line of silver that told of the sea the country looked as though dappled in grey and gold, for the valleys were pools of shadow veined by the brightening ranges of the mountains. There was a transparency about the morning, a clarity of young green in leaf and grass, a glimmer of fragile dew globes and gossamer webs on the brambles, that all made for an agreeing lightness of that bubble the soul, and Bernardy was soothed to the core of him. Cupping his chin in his hands, he sat there, drenched in the ineffable light that seemed to make of the air some divine element, enveloping every edge in brightness, refracting from each leaf and vibrating with a diamond quality on the mists in the valley below. The pattern of events was beginning to clear for him as the world was cleared by the sunrise—it only needed some master event to be complete. He thought of the sleep into which he had fallen outside the town, and which had wiped his mind clear of resentment, and freed it for new impressions: he remembered the shock when he had first recognized the walls, his growing excitement as thing after thing was familiar to him, the blinding flash of the moment when he realized he had found his dream-city. On the crest of receptiveness he had entered the church, and the phrase of the old peasant woman had caught at his imagination. Looking back, he saw how it was the extraordinary serenity of the townsfolk that seemed their dominant characteristic—they were wrapped in it as in an atmosphere, they were clear-eyed, clear-skinned, clear-souled. From the moment when he recognized the nail-studded door till he put down the last of his mother's letters, his comprehensions had flowed outward in widening circles. In his new knowledge of his father and mother he saw himself more clearly than ever before. He remembered his mother, a silent, quiet-eyed woman, nearly always bent over her needlework—and he saw her as the eager, ignorant girl, full of romantic dreams; saw her change into the half-timid, half-reckless lover; followed her through her lonely grief to the attainment of quiet. She, too, could say it had been good—and with how far more reason than he! He saw his father—weak, hot-headed, swayed by passion and selfishness and regret—his father who had preferred conventional safety to this hill-hung garden in Provence, where he could have dreamt the greatest dream of all. He saw himself as he was, and there followed a twin-vision of how he would be lying cold and pulseless in a few weeks' time, and of how he might have lived in this city of dreams had he found it with his life still his own. He would indeed have dreamt the greatest dream of all—the dream that was life at its fullest. "It is the good woman who gives and the good man who creates. Take what is left to you of life and make with it" . . . so wrote his mother, and like an answer flashed the words of the peasant woman in the church, "C'est l'enfant qui donne courage!"

The greatest dream of all!

He looked up and saw Candide, large and serene, coming towards him down the path, her skirts swinging from her broad hips. He stood up, and for a moment they faced each other in silence.

She was just thirty and in some ways looked more, because of the solidity of her well-poised figure; and her clear eyes, rimmed with black round each iris, were not the ignorant eyes of a child, they were the eyes of a woman who faces knowledge naturally and patiently. Big-boned, and, but for the whiteness of her skin, with a something rockhewn about her face, her only beauty was that of health and a certain assurance which spoke of perfect poise. She was what Bernardy, in that moment's clarity of vision, knew her for—a woman born to be mother of men. He took a step towards her with the gesture of a frightened child, and with her big hands over his she drew him to the stone bench and sat beside him. He told her everything, simply and quickly, because he hated explanations, and was impatient that they were necessary to her. When he had made an end she said:

"Do you know why I blushed last night when my grandmother recognized you?"

"No," replied Bernardy, startled out of himself yet pricked to interest.

"Because my grandmother has always made me wait for you. . . ."

"Candide! Candide!" cried Bernardy, the child merged in the waxing possessiveness of the man, "shall we dream my last few weeks together, you and I?"

"You do not love me, that is so, is it not?" she asked.

"I am not in love with you, no. That is all spent. If you were any other woman I would lie to you. But it seems to me it matters very little whether I am or not. It is not that I feel I cannot love, but as though I had got through it and out the other side. . . ."

"No, it does not matter," said Candide. "What matters is that I can give to you and you to me. We will make life, you and I."

[108] "Yes," agreed Bernardy, "we will make life," and as his arms went round her and his lips found hers everything that had puzzled him fell naturally into its place. He had always created in his verse, but it was for this his mother had borne him, it was this that the old woman in the church had meant, it was for this that the woman at his side had waited. It mattered very little that he himself would not live to see the life he made, the chief thing was to create, and he saw life as the greatest gift man could make to God.

[109] **THE MASK**

[110]
[111] **THE MASK**

WHEN Vashti Bath was "led out" by the two most eligible young men in the village, the other women spoke their minds pretty freely on the subject; and when she progressed to that further stage known as "arm-a-crook," and still refrained from making the fateful choice, comment waxed bitter. The privilege of proposal belongs in Cornwall to that sex commonly called "the weaker"—a girl goes through the various stages of courtship conducted out of doors, and if she decides to marry the young man, asks him to "step in" one evening when he has seen her home, after which the engagement is announced. Vashti, in the most brazen way, was sampling two suitors at a time, and those two the most coveted men in Perran-an-zenna, and therein lay the sting for the women-folk.

"What is there to her, I should like to know?" the lay-reader's wife demanded of her friends at a somewhat informal prayer meeting. "She'm an ontidy kind o' maid who don't know one end of needle from t'other. When her stockin' heels go into holes she just pulls them further under her foot, till sometimes she do have to garter half way down her leg!"

[112] "She'm ontidy sure 'nough," agreed a widow woman of years and experience, "but she'm a rare piece o' red and white, and menfolk are feeble vessels. If a maid's a fine armful they never think on whether she won't be a fine handful. And Vashti do have a way wi' her."

That was the whole secret—Vashti had a way with her. She was a splendid slattern—showing the ancient Celtic strain in her coarse, abundant black hair, level brows, and narrow, green-blue eyes, with a trace of Jew in the hawk-like line of nose and the prominent chin curved a little upwards from her throat. A few years, and she would be lean and haggard, but now she was a fine, buoyant creature, swift and tumultuous, with a mouth like a flower. For all the slovenliness of her clothes she had a trick of putting them on which an Englishwoman never has as a birthright, and rarely achieves. Vashti could tie a ribbon so that every man she passed turned to look after her.

Perran-an-zenna is a mining village, and some of the menfolk work in the tin mines close at hand, and some in the big silver mine four miles away. James Glasson, the elder and harsher-featured of Vashti's lovers, worked in the latter, and there was every prospect of his becoming a captain, as he had a passion for mechanics and for chemistry, and was supposed to be experimenting with a new process that would cheapen the cost of extracting the silver. Willie Strick, the younger, handsomer, more happy-go-lucky of the two men, went to "bal" in the tin mines, and was disinclined to save, but then his aged grandmother, with whom he lived, had been busy saving for twenty years. Strick was an eager lover, quick to jealousy—Glasson was uncommunicative even to Vashti, and careless of her opinions. Though the jealousy irked her it flattered her too, but on the other hand, Glasson's carelessness, even while it piqued her, made her covet him all the more.

[113] This was how matters stood one evening in late March when Vashti had gone up to the moors to fetch in the cows—not her own, no Bath had been thrifty enough for that, but belonging to the farm where she worked. As she walked along in the glowing light, the white road winking up at her through a hole in her swinging skirt, and a heavy coil of hair jerking a little lower on the nape of her neck with each vigorous stride, Vashti faced the fact that matters could continue as they were no longer. At bottom Vashti was as hard as granite, she meant to have what she wanted; her only trouble was she had not quite settled what it was she did want. Like all her race, she had a strain of fatalism in her, that prompted her to choose whichever of the two men she should next chance to meet—and the woman in her suggested that at least such a declaration on the part of fate would give her the necessary impetus towards deciding upon the other.

Lifting her eyes from the regular, pendulum-like swing of her skirt that had almost mesmerized her lulled vision, she saw, dark against the sunset, the figure of a man. She knew it to be either James or Willie because of the peculiar square set of the shoulders and the small head—for the two men were, like most people in that intermarrying district, cousins, with a superficial trick of likeness, and an almost exact similarity of voice. A prescience of impending fate weighed on Vashti; the gaunt shaft of the disused Wheal Zenna mine, that stood up between her and the approaching man, seemed like a menacing finger. The man reached it first and stood leaning up against it, one foot on the rubble of granite that was scattered around, his arm, with the miner's bag slung over it, resting across his raised knee. Vashti half thought of going back, even without the cows, but it was already time the poor beasts were milked, and curiosity lured her on. She went across the circle of greener grass surrounding the shaft, and found Glasson awaiting her.

To every woman comes a time in life when she is ripe for the decisive man; and it is often a barren hour when he fails to appear. For Vashti the hour and the man had come together, and she knew it as she met Glasson's look. Putting out his hands, ingrained with earth in the finest seams of them, he laid them heavily on her shoulders, like a yoke. His bag swung forward and hit her on the chest, but neither of them noticed it.

"Vashti, you'm got to make'n end," he said. "One way or t'other. Which es et to be?"

She shook under his gaze, her lids drooped, but she tried to pout out her full underlip with a pretence of petulance. Suddenly his grip tightened.

"So 'ee won't tell me? Then by God, I'll do the tellin'! You'm my woman, do'ee hear? Mine, and neither Will Strick nor any other chap shall come between us two."

Wheeling her round, he held her against the rough side of the shaft and bent his face to hers; she felt his lips crush on her own till she could have cried out with pain if she had been able to draw breath. When he let her go her breast heaved, and she stood with lowered head holding her hand across her mouth.

"Now we'll get the cows, my lass," said Glasson quietly, "and take'n home, and then you shall ask me to step in."

* * * * *

During the short, fierce courtship that followed Vashti saw very little of Willie Strick, though she heard he talked much of emigrating, vowing he would disappear in the night and not come home until he had made a fortune. All of Vashti's nature was in abeyance save for one emotion—a stunned, yet pleasurable, submission. It was not until several months after her marriage that she began to feel again the more ordinary and yet more complex sensations of everyday life. If she had to the full a primitive woman's joy in being possessed, she had also the instinctive need for possessing her man utterly, and James Glasson was only partly hers. It was borne in on her that by far the larger side of him was his own, never to be given to any woman. Ambition and an uncanny secretiveness made up the real man; he had set himself to winning his wife chiefly because the want of her distracted him from his work and fretted him.

He bent the whole of life to his purposes, without any parade of power, but with a laborious care that gradually settled on Vashti like a blight. When she realized that no matter how rightly she wore her little bits of finery, he no longer noticed them, realized that she was merely a necessity to him as his woman—something to be there when she was wanted, she began to harden. He still had a fascination for her when he chose to exert it—his very carelessness and sureness of her were what made the fascination, but gradually it wore thinner and slacker, and a sullen resentment began to burn through her seeming submission.

The Glasson's cottage was tucked away in a hollow of the moor, only the chimney of it visible from Perran-an-zenna, and Vashti began to chafe under the isolation, and to regret she had never been at more pains to make friends among her own sex.

As summer drew to its full, Vashti watched the splendid pageant of it in the sky and moor with unappreciative eyes. If anyone had told her that her soul had been formed by the country of her birth and upbringing, she would have thought it sheer lunacy, but her parents were not more responsible for Vashti than the land itself. The hardness and bleakness, the inexpressible charm of it, the soft, indolent airs, scented with flowers, or pungent with salt; above all, that reticence that makes for lonely thoughts, these things had, generation by generation, moulded her forbears, and their influence was in her blood. Even the indifference with which she saw arose from her oneness with her own country, and in this she was like all true Cornish folk before and since—they belong to Cornwall body and soul. The quality of reticence had become secretiveness in James Glasson—he took a childish pleasure in keeping any little happening from the world in general and Vashti in particular, and the consequence was that, in her, strength was hardening into relentlessness.

One market day she was returning from Penzance—a drive of some eight miles, accomplished in the cart of their nearest neighbour—with a paper parcel on her knee, which she kept on fingering under the rug as though to make sure it was still there. At the neighbour's farm she got out, thanked him, and started to walk the remaining mile over the moor, with the precious parcel laid carefully on the top of the basket of household goods. It had been one of those days when the air seems to have a misty quality that makes it almost visible—a delicate effulgence that envelops

every object far and near, blurring harsh outlines and giving an effect as though trees and plants stood up into an element too subtle for water and too insistent for ether. The cloud shadows gave a plum-like bloom to the miles of interfolding hills, and inset among the grey-green of the moor the patches of young bracken showed vivid as slabs of emerald. Lightly as balls of thistle-down the larks hopped swiftly over the heather on their thin legs, the self-heal and bird's-foot trefoil made a carpet of purple and yellow; from the heavy-scented gorse came the staccato notes of the crickets, while in a distant copse a cuckoo called faintly on her changed, June note. As Vashti rounded the corner of the rutted track and the cottage came into view, she paused. The deeply sloping slate roof was iridescent as a pigeon's breast, and the whitewashed walls were burnished with gold by the late sunlight, while against the faded peacock blue of the fence the evening primroses seemed luminous. Even to Vashti it all looked different, transmuted. Her fingers pressed the shiny paper of the parcel till it crackled and a smile tugged at her lips. After all, it was not bad to be young and handsome on an evening in June, to be returning to a home of her own, with, under her arm, a parcel that, to her, was an event. Vashti had bought that thing dear to the heart of the country-woman, a length of rich black dress silk; she meant to make it up herself, and though her stitches were clumsy, she knew she could cut and drape a gown better than many a conscientious sempstress. And then—then she would take her place as wife to the most discussed man in all that part of Penwith and hold up her head at Meeting. Even James himself could not but treat her differently when she had black silk on her back.

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She went through to the outhouse, which James used as a workshop, and tried the door. It was locked. "James!" she cried, rattling the latch, "James!"

She heard him swear softly, then came the sound of something hastily put down and a cupboard door being shut. Then Glasson opened the door a few inches, and stood looking down at her.

"Get into kitchen," he said briefly, "can't 'ee see I'm busy?"

Already Vashti's pleasure in her purchase was beginning to fade, but she stood her ground, though wrathfully.

"You needn' think you'm the only person with secrets," she flashed: "I'd a fine thing to show 'ee here, if you'd a mind to see it—now I shall keep'n to myself."

"Woman's gear!" gibed Glasson, "you'm been buying foolishness over to market. Get the supper or I shan't have time for a bite before I go to see t' captain."

"That's all you think on," she retorted; "you and your own business."

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"That's all you should think on, either," he said, pulling her towards him with a hand on the back of her neck, and kissing her on her unresponsive mouth. She stood sullenly; then, when he dropped his hand, went into the house. She heard him turn the key in the lock as she went. That night she cried hot tears of anger on to the new dress length, and next day she went across the moor and met Willie Strick on his way home to Perran-an-zenna.

That was the first of many meetings, for Willie's resentment faded away before the old charm of Vashti's presence. In spite of his handsome face, he was oddly like James. The backs of their heads were similar enough to give Vashti a little shock whenever she passed behind her husband as he sat at table, or each time that Willie lay beside her on the moor, his head on her lap. She would pull the curly rings of his hair out over her fingers, and even while she admired the glint of it, some little memory of a time when James' hair had glinted in the sun or candlelight, pricked at her—not with any feeling for him except resentment, but at first it rather spoiled her lover for her. They had to meet by stealth, but that was easy enough, as James was now on an afternoon core, and Willie on a morning one. To do the latter justice, he had tried, at the beginning, a feeble resistance to the allure that Vashti had for him, not from any scruple of conscience, but because his pleasure-loving nature shrank from anything that might lead to unpleasantness. And, careless as he seemed of his wife, James Glasson would be an ugly man to deal with if he discovered the truth. So far there had been nothing except the love-making of a limited though expressive vocabulary, and Vashti curbed him and herself for three whole weeks. She was set on possessing Willie's very soul—here, at least, was a man whom she could so work upon that he would always be hers even to the most reluctant outpost of his being. By the end of those weeks, her elusiveness, the hint of passion in her, and the steady force of her will, had enslaved Strick hopelessly: he was maddened, reckless, and timid all at once.

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"Vashti, it's got to end," he said desperately, as he walked with her one evening as near to the cottage as he dared, and as he spoke he slid an arm round her waist. To his surprise, she yielded and swayed towards him so that her shoulder touched his; in the sunset light her upturned face glimmered warm and bewilderingly full of colour.

"Wait a bit, lad," she breathed. "James goes up to London church town to-morrow to see one of the managers—happen he'll be gone a week or more. . . ."

He felt her soft mouth on his cheek for a moment and his arms went round her—the next moment came a crash that seemed to split the sky, and from the outhouse leapt a whistling column of flame.

Stricken with a superstitious terror, Willie screamed—loudly and thinly, like a woman. Vashti recoiled, flung up her hands, then rushed towards the burning outhouse.

"James is in there!" she cried. "Oh, get'en out, get'en out!"

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The flame had been caused by an explosion, but there was not much inflammatory stuff for it to feed on, and a thick smoke, reeking of chemicals, hung above the outhouse. As Vashti, followed by the shaking Strick, reached the door, it swung open and a Thing stood swaying a moment on the step.

It seemed to the lovers' first horrified glimpse that all of Glasson's face had been blown away. The whole of one side of it was covered by an enormous blister, a nightmare thing, which, as the woman gazed at it, burst and fell into blackness. The same moment Glasson dropped his length across the threshold.

"The doctor, go for doctor," whispered Vashti with dry lips, "as quick as you can—I—I dursn't turn 'en over."

So Glasson lay with what had been his face against a patch of grass, while Willie ran, horror-ridden, to Perran-an-zenna for the doctor.

Dry-eyed, Vashti watched by her husband for three nights, and all praised her wifely devotion. She sat by the gleam of a flickering nightlight, her eyes on the bandaged face—the linen was only slit just as much as was necessary for breathing.

"Well, Mrs. Glasson," said the doctor cheerily, as he finished his inspection on the third night, "I can give you good news. Your husband will live, and will keep the sight of one eye. But—though of course wonders can be done with modern surgery—we can't build up what's gone. He'll always have to wear a mask, Mrs. Glasson."

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When he had gone Vashti went and stood by the bed, looking down on the unconscious man, who lay breathing heavily—how easy it would be to lay a hand over that slit in the linen—a few minutes, and this nightmare would be over. She half put out her hand, then drew it back. She was not yet capable of cold-blooded crime.

Lighting a candle, she took from a drawer a paper parcel, which she unfolded on the little table. As the still untouched folds of the black dress length, with a few little hard-edged blots on it that meant tears, came into view, Vashti's self-control broke down. She wept stormily, her head along her arms. Release had flaunted so near to her, and was withdrawn, and her horror of the Thing on the bed was mingled with a pity for it that ate into her mind. She dried her burning eyes, and picking up the scissors, began to cut a mask out of the tear-stained breadths; her invincible habit of considering herself forbade her, even at that moment, to use the good yards for such a purpose.

The candle-flame was showing wan in the grey of the dawning when Vashti put the last stitches to the mask—she had made it very deep, so that it would hang to just below the jawbone, and she had laboriously buttonhole-stitched round the one eye-hole, and sewn tape-strings firmly to the sides, top and bottom. The mask was finished.

James Glasson's figure, a trifle stooped and groping, with that sinister black curtain from cap to collar, soon ceased to be an object of fearful curiosity in Perran-an-zenna; even the children became so used to it that they left off calling out as he passed. He grew more silent and morose than ever, and his secretiveness showed itself in all sorts of ingenious petty ways.

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Vashti had the imaginative streak of her race, and life in the lonely cottage with this masked personality took on the quality of nightmare. She felt his one eye watching her continually, and was tormented by the thought, "How much does he know?" Who could tell? Had he seen anything from the outhouse window when she had rashly let Willie come so near, or did he know who it was who had fetched the doctor? Sometimes a meaning word seemed to show that he knew everything, sometimes she argued that he could only guess. The black mask filled the whole of her life, the thought of it was never out of her mind, not even when she was working on her old farm, for she had to be breadwinner now. She found herself dwelling on what lay behind the mask, wondering whether it could be as bad as that black expanse, and once she woke herself at night, screaming: "Tear 'en down, Willie! Tear the black mask down!" and then lay trembling, wondering whether her husband had heard. For days he said nothing and she felt herself safe; then one night he turned to her. "There's no air," he complained. "Can't 'ee take down t' curtains? If 'ee can't do anything else, why—tear 'en down, tear 'en down!"

He had mimicked her very voice, and silent with fear, she took down the curtain, her fingers shaking so that the rings jingled together along the rod. One day, when he was working in the garden, he turned to face the wind. She saw him sideways against the sky, and the black mask, held taut at brow and chin by the strings, was being blown inward. She never forgot the horror of that concave line against the sky.

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She came to regard the mask with superstitious awe; it seemed James Glasson's character materialized—the outward expression of the inner man. Nervous and cowed to abjectness as she was, she felt near the end of her endurance. The perpetual scheming to meet Willie unknown to her husband—a difficulty now the latter was nearly always about the house-place, and the wearing uncertainty of "How much does he know?" were fraying her nerves. Some two months after the accident the crash came.

James had gone to Truro to see a surgeon there, and had announced his intention of spending the night with cousins. The utter bliss of being alone, and having the cottage free from the

masked presence for even one day acted like a balm on Vashti. She forbade Willie to come near her till the evening, partly from motives of prudence, but chiefly because she craved for solitude. By the afternoon she was more her old, sufficient, well-poised self, and when evening drew on she busied herself about her little preparations in the kitchen with a colour burning in her cheeks and a softened light in her eyes. That evening Vashti Glasson was touched with a grace of womanliness she had never worn for her husband. Every harmless and tender instinct of the lover was at work in her, making her choose her nicest tablecloth, arrange a cluster of chrysanthemums in an ornate glass vase, put a long-discarded ribbon of gaudy pink in her hair. Then she took off her working frock of dirty, ill-mended serge, and shook out in triumph the folds of the black silk, now made up in all its glory, and hideous with cheap jet. It converted her from a goddess of the plough to a red-wristed, clumsy girl of the people; and when her hair was dressed in the fashionable lumps, with a fringe-net hardening the outlines, she looked like a shop-girl, but she herself admired the effect intensely.

When three taps at the window told that Strick was outside, the colour flew to her face, making her so beautiful that she triumphed even over her costume; she had become a high priestess of Love, and was not to be cheated of any of the ritual. She was decked out as for a bridal; no more rough-and-ready wooing and winning for her. But Strick's passion was somewhat daunted by all the preparations for his welcome; the kitchen looked unusual, and so did she, and he hung back for a moment on the threshold.

"What's come to 'ee?" he asked, foolishly agape.

"'Tes a weddin' gown made for you," said Vashti simply.

"But 'tes black!" he stammered. "'Tes ill luck on a black bridal, Vassie."

"Ours is no white bridal, lad," she told him. "Come in and set down—yes, take that chair," and she pushed Glasson's accustomed seat forward for her lover.

Conversation languished during the meal—Willie Strick was bewildered by the oddness of everything, Vashti included; his was no level head to plan any details or set a scene—Vashti won by stealth, anywhere and anyhow, was all he had thought of or wished for. Hers was the master-mind and he was helpless before it, and while she inflamed him she frightened him too.

A full moon swam up over the line of distant sea that showed in a dip of the moorland, and the lamp began to smell and burn low. They had finished supper, and Willie was drinking rather freely of the whisky she had set before him. Vashti turned out the lamp, and as she did so a sudden harsh noise sent the heart to her throat, while Willie sprang up fearfully. It was only the poker, that, caught by the full skirt of the black silk frock, had been sent clattering to the ground, but it made them stare at each other in a stricken panic for a speechless minute. The white light of the moon shone clearly into the room, throwing a black pattern of window-shadow over the disordered supper table, where the chrysanthemums, overturned by Willie's movement, lay across an empty dish, and in the silence the two startled people could hear the rhythmic sound of the water as it drip-drip-dripped on to the floor.

Vashti was the first to recover herself. "Us be plum foolish, Willie!" she said, with an attempt at a laugh. "Do believe us both thought it was James, and him safe to Truro."

"If 'tes," said Strick madly, "he shan't take 'ee from me now. I'll have 'ee, I swear it."

Vashti did not answer—with fascinated eyes she was watching the door slowly open—she could see the strip of moonlit brightness, barred by the darkness of an arm, grow wider and wider. She knew, before the form—so terribly like Willie's, now its masked face was against the light—appeared, that it was her husband.

Quite what happened next she could not have told. The little room seemed full and dark with fear—blind, unreasoning fear, that beat even about her head. The long-drawn-out crash of the overturned table added to her confusion—then quite suddenly the sounds of struggling ceased and one man rose to his feet. In the dimness of the room, seeing only the shape of him, she could not tell whether it were James or Willie, until he turned his face to the moonlight, and she saw, with a throb of relief, Strick's face.

"Get a light, Vassie," he whispered. "I fear he's dead."

She lit a candle and they knelt down by Glasson. In falling his head had hit the fender, and blood was trickling on to the floor. She ripped open his shirt and felt for his heart as well as her trembling fingers would allow. She lifted his arm and let it fall—it dropped a dead weight on to the tiled floor. It seemed to her excited fancy that already he was turning cold.

"Willie, you've killed 'en!" she whispered. They both spoke low, as though they thought the dead man could overhear.

"I didn't hit 'en," babbled Willie. "He stumbled and fell and hit his head—they'll make me swing for this—what shall us do, what shall us do?"

"Wait—I must think," commended the woman. She pressed her hands to her forehead, and sat very still.

"Have 'ee thought?" whispered Willie anxiously.

"Yes—I've thought. Willie, you'm rare and like—he—and that'll save us."

"What do 'ee mean?" asked Willie, thinking the shock had turned her brain.

"The mask!" replied Vashti, "the mask!"

Then, kneeling by the still body, they talked in whispers—she unfolding her plan—he recoiling from it, weakly protesting, and then giving way.

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They were to take the dead man between them to the disused mine shaft and throw him down, then Willie was to wear the black mask, and take Glasson's place, until they could sail for America together. Like all simple plans, it had a touch of genius. Willie's constant talk of emigrating, his oft-heard boasts of slipping away in the night and not coming back till he had made a fortune, would all help to cover up his disappearance. And who was to connect it with Vashti and her silent, eccentric, black-masked husband—who would speak to him or her on the subject? And if they did—she could always invent a plausible answer, while he was safeguarded by the fact that the strongest point of likeness between the two men was their voices. The most dissimilar thing about them had been their faces.

"I won't wear his mask," said Willie shuddering; "I couldn't put 'en against me. You must make me another."

"I'll make 'en now," said Vashti. She rose to her feet, and setting the candle on the seat of a chair, looked about her.

"You must put the room to rights," she commanded. "Make 'en look as though James and I had just had our bit o' supper. Mop up the water and sweep all the broken cloam together—and—and take him to the passage-way."

"You'm not going to lave me alone wi' he?" cried Willie aghast.

"Edn room for me to work here. I'l be up overstairs making the mask. Keep t' curtain over the window."

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Upstairs, she seized scissors and hacked a square out of the front of her gown. Then she sat and sewed as she had sewed once before, when her husband had lain motionless on the bed. Every now and then came small sounds of things being moved from down below, then a heavy fall and the sound of something being dragged.

"How's et goin', Willie?" she called out.

"'Tes all right," he called back. "I've put 'en in passage."

The moon was near setting when the mask was finished, and she went to the top of the stairs with it in her hand.

"There 'tes," she whispered. "I'll drop it down. Put it in your pocket and I'll change my gown. 'Tes time we were stirrin'."

The mask fluttered down in the darkness, and she went back to her room and changed swiftly into the old serge.

It was a ghastly journey to the old mine shaft, the heavy form of the dead man sagging between them. They dared have no light, and went stumbling over tussocks and ruts; but as both would have known the way blindfold, they found the shaft without difficulty. They scrambled up the sloping rubble of stones and tipped the body over the jagged hole in the side of the shaft, and after what seemed an interminable silence there came a thud from several hundred feet below them, then another, as though the body had rebounded, then all was stillness.

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Vashti leant up against the side of the shaft, as she had leant when James kissed her there, and shut her eyes; the sweat running down her brow had matted her lashes together into thick points, and the drops tickled her neck so that she put up her hand to it. Both she and the man were drawing the deep, hoarse breaths of exhaustion, and for a few minutes they rested in silence—then he spoke. "You must be comin' back along o' me now," he told her, "the dawn'll be showin' soon."

"Yes, yes," cried Vashti, starting up, "us may meet some one going to bal, sure 'nough."

"'Tes all right—I've got t'mask on. Come."

He closed his fingers over her arm so harshly that she winced, and together they made their way back in the cold, bleak hush that preceded the autumnal dawn. Gradually, as they went, some glimmerings of what her life would be henceforth appeared to the woman. The fear of neighbours, the efforts to appear neutral, the memory of that slowly opening door, and the still thing by the fender, the consciousness of what lay at the bottom of the disused shaft; and, above all, the terrible reminder of her husband in the masked Willie—it would be like living with a ghost. . . .

Once back at the cottage, he drew her within and let the door swing to behind them. She moved away to find a light, but he caught her.

"Won't 'ee give me so much as a kiss, and me with red hands because of you?" he asked.

She felt the mask brush her cheek, and broke away with a cry. She heard him laugh as she lit a candle, and turned towards him.

"A black bridal!" he cried wildly; "did you think 'twas a black bridal? 'Tis a red one, do 'ee hear?"

"Willie," she begged him, "take off t'mask now we'm alone."

"Aren't 'ee afeared?" he asked.

"'Tis safe enough till mornin', and I do hate that mask more'n the devil. Take 'en off."

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"I'll take 'en off—to please you, lass."

He seized the mask violently by the hem and ripped it away—and she saw it was her husband.

"You fool!" he said slowly, following her as she backed away from him, her mouth slack with fear, her eyes staring, her whole being showing her as almost bereft of her senses. "You fool to think to fool me! You was quick enough to say I was dead; I'm not so easy killed, Vassie. No so easy killed as your lover was—just the carven'-knife between his shoulders when he was stoopin' down, that's all. He was fearful of lookin' at the dead man; he never knew the dead man was lookin' at he. You heard him fall, Vassie, and thought it was him movin' me——"

"Put t'mask on," wailed Vashti, pressing her fingers against her eyes; "put t'mask on again, for the love o' God!"

"There's been enough o' masks," he retorted grimly. "You've got to bear to see me now; me, not your lover that you've helped to tip over Wheal Zenna shaft. Eh, you fool, did 'ee think I didn' know? I've knawed all these months; I've seen 'ee meet 'en; I told 'ee I was going to stop the night over to Truro so as to catch 'ee together; I listened outside the house; I let 'ee think I was dead, and heard t' the plan you thought to make. Only half a man am I, wi' no mouth left to kiss with? I've an eye left to see with, and an ear to hear with, and a hand to strike with, and a tongue to teach 'ee with."

"I'll tell on 'ee," said Vashti, "I'll tell the police on 'ee. Murderer, that's what you are."

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"I doan't think 'ee will, my dear. 'Tedn a tale as'll do you any good—a woman who cheats her husband, and tries to kill 'en, and helps to carry a body two miles over moor and tip 'en down shaft. And what have 'ee to complain on, I should like to know? When I wear t'mask you can pretend I'm Willie—handsome Willie. Willie who can kiss a maid and make a fine upstandin' husband. Willie was goin' to be me, why shudn' you think I was Willie? Do 'ee, my dear, if 'tes any comfort to 'ee."

He slipped on the mask as he spoke and knotted the strings. The door had swung open, and the candle flame shook in the draught as though trying, in fear, to strain away from the wick. The steel-cold light of dawn grew in the sky and filtered into the room, showing all the sordid litter of it; the frightened woman, with a pink ribbon awry in her disordered hair, and the ominous figure of the masked man. He came towards her round the table.

"'Tis our bridal night, lass!" he said. "Why do 'ee shrink away? Mind you that 'tes Willie speakin'! Don't let us think on James Glasson dead to the bottom 'o the shaft. I'm Willie—brave Willie who loves 'ee. . . ."

As his arms came out to catch her, she saw his purpose in his eye, and remembered his words, "A red bridal, lass, a red bridal!"

At the last moment she woke out of her stupor, turned, and ran, he after her. Across the little garden, down the moorland road, over heather and slippery boulders and clinging bracken, startling the larks from their nests, scattering the globes of dew. Once she tried to make for a side-track that led to Perran-an-zenna, but he headed her off, and once again she was running, heavily now, towards Wheal Zenna mineshaft. He was gaining on her, and her breath was nearly spent. Both were going slowly, hardly above a stumbling walk, as the shaft came in sight; the drawing of their breath sounded harsh as the rasping of a file through the still air. As she neared the shaft she turned her head and saw him almost on her, and saw the gleam of something in his uplifted hand. She gathered together all her will, concentrated in those few moments all the strength of her nature, determined to cheat him at the last. Up the rubble of stones she scrambled, one gave beneath her foot and sent her down, and abandoning the effort, she lay prone, awaiting the end.

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But Vashti's luck held—it was the man who was to lose. A couple of miners who had been coming up the path from Perran-an-zenna had seen the chase and followed hot foot, unnoticed by the two straining, frantic creatures, who heard nothing but the roaring in their own ears. They caught Glasson as he ran across the patch of grass to the shaft, and he doubled up without a struggle in their arms. Physical and mental powers had failed together, and from that day James Glasson was a hopeless idiot—harmless and silent. Vashti had won indeed.

Admirable woman of affairs that she was, she took a good sleep before confronting the situation; then she made up her story and stuck to it. Willie's name was never mentioned, and his disappearance, so long threatened, passed as a minor event, swamped in the greater stir of Glasson's attempt to murder his wife. His madness had taken the one form that made Vashti safe—he had gone mad on secretiveness. How much he remembered not even she knew, but not a

[134] word could anyone drag from him. He would lay his finger where his nose should have been against the mask, and wag his head slyly. "Naw, naw, I was never one for tellin'," he would say. "James Glasson's no such fool that he can't keep 'enself to 'enself."

[135] He lived on for several years in the asylum, and Vashti, after the free and easy fashion of the remote West, took to herself another husband. She went much to chapel, and there was no one more religious than she, and no one harder on the sins and vanities of young women. One thing in particular she held in what seemed an unreasoning abhorrence—and that was a black silk gown.

[136] A GARDEN ENCLOSED

[137] A GARDEN ENCLOSED

[137] WHY Sophia Jervis went to Sant' Ambrogio she herself could not have told; to all outward seeming she merely drifted there, influenced by the many little urgencies of travel—the name seen casually in a guide-book and all unnoticed stamping itself on her brain; a chance mention of the place caught from some fellow-traveller, aided by the fact that the time-table had happened to open at the words "Sant' Ambrogio"—these were the trifles by which the power stronger than herself guided Sophia, with such cunning manipulation, such a fine lack of insistence even on the trifles, that she was unaware of any power at work. Also she was in that numbed condition which mercifully follows any great straining of emotion; even pain lay quiescent, though rather in a swoon than a sleep—a mere blankness from which it would struggle up more insistent than before.

[138] When Sophia alighted from the train at the nearest station for Sant' Ambrogio, and found the carriage she had ordered awaiting her, she was not in the mood to take joy in anything she saw; and yet, as the wiry little Tuscan horse trotted swiftly along she found herself, though not actually responding, at least offering no blank wall of resistance to the country around. To say country, as though a landscape consisted of mere earth and vegetation, is to make an incomplete statement; the quality of the light, the harmony or discordance where man's work meets Nature; and, above all, the intangible atmosphere, rarer and more vital than the actual enveloping air, that is the soul of a country—all these are of more potency than the position of a clump of trees or the existence of a particular crop. And nowhere is this atmosphere more elusive but more compelling than in Tuscany at spring time. Sophia was too deadened to respond, but she felt the echo of the thing, as it were, in much the same way that a stone-deaf person feels vibrations run through the floor and up his chair to his spine when certain chords are played on an organ.

[139] It is a drive of about five miles from the railway station to Sant' Ambrogio, and the road winds across the plain, sometimes rising and falling, always leading towards the rim of interfolding hills. In the vineyards the vines, naked at first glance, were just beginning to flower, and the rows of pollarded planes from which they were festooned showed a glory of young leaf. The maize was a couple of feet in height, and where the sun shone through the blades of it they looked like thin green flames. The heat was intense, and the air seemed stifled with the subtle smell of the dust that lay thickly over the road and powdered the grassy edges. The whole plain of Tuscany, apparently empty of human life, and consequently filled with a sense of utter peace, seemed a vast green platter brimming with a divine ether and held up towards the heavens by the steady hands of genii. Only Sophia's carriage showed like a black insect winging a course fast enough to itself but slow to the gaze of any being who, looking down on this dish held for the gods, could see the whole expanse of it at once.

Everywhere was a sense of light—light steeping the sky, drenching the earth, and vibrating in the spaces between; light that gave a gracious blur to edges, that refracted from each subtle difference of plane and angle; light that permeated the very shadows so that they seemed semi-transparent. One with this sense of light, as body is one with soul, was the sense of colour—tender greens, at once pure and delicate; blues that paled to the merest breath or merged in a soft purple. The wideness of the view gave full value to the exquisitely fine curves which composed it—the curves of outline where hills and long sweeping slopes came against the sky, and the curves of surfaces, which inter-folded and led into each other like the waters of a vast lake where Time has stayed his foot and the spellbound water holds for ever the slopes and gradations blown into being by an arrested wind.

Something—an emotion impersonal in itself yet arousing the personality in her—began to stir

at Sophia's heart; then, as the carriage rounded a curve in the road and she received the shock of Sant' Ambrogio against the distant arch of the sky, sudden tears burned in her eyelids. Leaning back as well as she could against the uncompromising cushions, she gazed from between lids half-closed so as to narrow her vision on the one thing.

[140] Sant' Ambrogio is a little city of towers, some twenty of them, varying in height, all clustered together within the circling walls and pricking the sky like a group of tall-stemmed flowers in a garden. The town seems to have grown rather than been built on the crest of the only great hill for miles, but the ripples of the plain all converge towards it, leading the eye naturally up to this little crown of Tuscany. When they considered a tower a reminder of God, the ancients were not without a deeper spiritual foundation than they knew of; there is nothing of more direct psychological significance than line, and the many upward-springing lines of Sant' Ambrogio made it seem a thing so lightly poised as almost to be hanging from the heavens. A sense of something winged, which, though just resting on the earth, yet had plumes ready pricked for flight, impressed itself on Sophia's brain as she gazed.

[141] "This might have been beautiful for me if only I could still feel," was her swift thought, and she closed her eyes to let the gleam of light thus evoked sink into her mind. As she lay with her consciousness turned inwards, the deadened fibres of her began to stir; pain moved in its swoon, and, waking, took the keenest form of all—remembrance. Quite suddenly there flashed before her mental vision the loggia at the top of the old palace in Florence where she and Richard had said good-bye. She, who was to see the cords of passion grow slack, had there seen them stretched at their tensest, and the memory of it clutched at her heart with that pity for him which had kept her calm for his comfort. Now, mingled with it, was her own pain, which, at the time, her thought for him had overwhelmed. She saw again his face as she had seen it then—his thin, hawk-like profile dark and sharply-cut against the evening sky. With the memory of the pain that had gone through her at that moment, the power to feel stirred again, and it was that moment which struck at her anew. Her hands fastened suddenly on the hot sides of the carriage.

"Oh, oh!" she said in the low voice that overwhelming sorrow can wring from the tongue, a soliloquy terrible in its unself-consciousness: "oh, oh! I can't bear it; I can't bear it!"

As the horse slowed down at the beginning of the hill, the first poignancy of Sophia's reawakened feeling passed off, and she lay back, her hands laying palm upwards in her lap. With entry into the town came coolness; the ancient architects of the South knew better than to favour the broad streets planned by their descendants, and the narrow ways threaded so cunningly between the tall cliffs of houses were cool as shadowed streams. The greyness of the paved street fell like a suggestion of peace on Sophia after the searching sunlight of the plain, and the acuteness of her mental trouble subsided in response to the sense of physical ease; she had regained her grip of herself when the carriage drew up at the door of the Albergo Santo Spirito.

The Albergo is a whitewashed building set round a courtyard; clean, unfretted by detail, full of dim, sweet spaces and gay domestic sounds. Sophia, aware of its charm, yet realized, on looking back afterwards, that she had also been aware that the inn was for her but the ante-chamber to some other place or state, as yet unrevealed. At the time she was only conscious that a sense of waiting held the calm air, though, if she had thought to ask herself the question, she would have said that life held nothing for which it could be worth her while to wait.

[142] After she had washed her face and hands in the bare little whitewashed room assigned to her, she went out to wander about the town till dinner. Motorists have not yet spoiled the population of Sant' Ambrogio, and, unmolested by any clamour for alms, Sophia passed along the shady street, where the black-haired, kerchiefed women, with their fine, rock-hewn faces and deep-set eyes, were knitting at their house doors. In the big, cool church, whose walls of banded black and white marble were quieted by the dim light, which just showed the dark gargoyles writhing like things of a dream over cornice and capital, Sophia knelt down, more to wrap herself in the peace of it than to pray. The very keenness of her cry for peace made her fail, and rising she wandered round the church till she came to the little chapel on whose walls the life of the town's saint, Beata, has been painted by some "Ignoto" who must have had a touch of genius. Sophia stood and gazed at the various scenes. Santa Beata, a child with corn-coloured hair lying along her back, running away from her resentful playmates, a set of curly-headed, sly, pinching, clear-eyed ragamuffins, such as those who quarrel and play in the streets of Sant' Ambrogio to this day. Santa Beata, wrapped in a cloud, conversing with the Beloved, while the children search the field vainly for her—the Beloved Himself being naïvely expressed by what looked like a small bonfire, but proved, in a strange medley of legend and Old Testament story, to be a burning bush. Santa Beata vowing herself to virginity and lying down on the narrow maiden bed she never left again; Santa Beata being visited by cherubim—little burning heads with awful eyes and folded wings—blown in at the door, while through the window showed the plain of Tuscany, pale silvery greens and blues, and in the distance Sant' Ambrogio himself, wafted on a cloud, approached the town to bear the saint away. By her side crouched her old mother, a knotted burnt-out woman with long wrists, just a literal transcript of many a prematurely old peasant mother before and since, her patient eyes seeing no one but her daughter.

[143] The more she looked at Santa Beata the more Sophia, who without thinking much about it had a realization of her own type, was struck by the resemblance between them. The red-brown hair folded about Sophia's head was darker than the locks that lay combed out over the saint's pillow, but the long oval of the faces, the girlish thinness of modelling and the narrow eyes set in heavily folded lids over rather prominent cheekbones, were the same; and the same, too, were the

[144] pointed chins and the delicately full lips tucked in at the corners like those of a child. Santa Beata had only been sixteen at the time of her death and Sophia was twenty-two, but the earlier ripening of the South made the apparent years swing level. Suddenly Sophia turned away, fierce envy of this untroubled girl who had finished long ago with the business of life surging in her heart. The memory of the past weeks seemed shameful and she herself not fit to hold intercourse with other girls—girls to whom things had not happened. In that moment Sophia knew she had lost her girlhood none the less surely for having saved her virginity, which three things had helped to guard—a clarity of pre-vision which bade her not give Richard even what he most desired, because it showed her that it must inevitably work him misery; the knowledge that he did not love her finely enough for such a gift to be fitting; and thirdly, the strongest thing of all—that no one who is accustomed, however imperfectly, to walk in the spiritual world, can lightly forgo the privilege. "I should have been afraid of losing touch," Sophia said long after, when she saw how that fear had constrained her. Now, looking at Santa Beata and realizing more vividly than ever before the power which virginity, as an idea, has always swayed, she felt she had forfeited, by her gain in experience, communion with those who were still virginal in soul as well as in body. On the steps of the church she passed some children playing—children still at the age when their heads are very big and round—and she remembered how, in a half-ruined castle Richard and she had visited together, two little peasant girls, clear-eyed, freckled young creatures, had taken them for husband and wife; and how one demanded shyly whether she had a baby at home. "No, I have no baby," Sophia had said quietly, and the child replied: "What a pity! He would be sweet, your baby. . . ."

[145] "He would be sweet . . . my baby," thought Sophia, staring at the big round heads and little necks with that pang of yearning pity without which she could never look on children. It is a great truth that no woman has ever loved a man unless she has wanted to bear him a child, and the knowledge that she would never make this greatest of all offerings to Richard pressed on Sophia's heart. She was not one of those women who desire children as an end in themselves, to whom they would mean more than the husband; she was of those who long to bear them to the loved man because for him the utmost must be suffered and given; but for any other man it would be a thing unspeakable. Therefore she saw the best put out of life for her, and she hurried away from the children on the steps. Turning down a narrow lane she came to a door in the wall, and pushing it open she looked into what seemed a lake of green light, flecked with swaying rounds of sun and chequered with deeper green shadows—a garden run luxuriantly wild. Sophia stepped inside, and on her right, built half against and half on the wall, she saw a little ochre-washed house with faded blue shutters. Wandering on, she came to some lilacs in hard, red bud that hung over a well, and passing under the arch they made she found the further end of the garden. There a flight of uneven old steps led to the top of the wall, and she went up them. At the head of the steps, the wall—which was the outer fortification of the town—widened into a circle some twenty feet across, with a stone seat inset in the parapet that ran round it, and a sundial without a hand in the middle. Sophia stood still and drew a long breath—the place, in its look of eld and aloofness, was so exactly like some enchanted spot in a fairy-story. Crossing the flagstones she looked out over the miles of plain lying below her; here and there were patches of olive-trees, not growing in masses like a grey-green sea as they did further north where he and she had seen them, but planted far apart; from where Sophia stood they looked like nothing so much as clouds of dust puffing up from the ground.

[146] Sophia stretched herself long and slowly; then throwing off her hat, she laid her arms along the parapet and her sleek head down upon them.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't come," she moaned. "I'm going to feel again. . . ."

Her hand went out to the little hanging bag she carried and drew back again, then setting her mouth, she made herself unfasten the clasp and take out a bundle of letters which she laid on the seat beside her. As her eyes lit on the familiar writing a deadly nausea took hold of her, she felt physically sick and put her hand up to her throat to check its contraction. A letter from him always affected her in that way, so that she sat, sick and faint, unable to open it, and now these oft-read letters were as potent as ever. She noted with a vague, impersonal surprise that her hands were shaking, and folding them in her lap she sat still, forcing her thoughts, in spite of the pain it stirred in her, to go back over the past two weeks.

II

[147] On looking back the whole time seemed set in a clear, sunlit atmosphere of its own as in a magic sphere where the present had always taken a more than normal clearness of edge and the past and future ceased to be. It struck her as curious that the prevailing note of those weeks should have been a sense of utter peace; not realizing that, peace being the thing his frayed nerves craved, she therefore supplied it, wrapping him round with it, living so in him and for him that while with him she received the impression of peace herself, only having sensations of her own when they were apart. His need—that was the great thing, and though she had not stopped to analyse what his need was, she had felt it was for soothing and rest.

She was a writer, and on the money made by her first book she came to Italy, and in Florence she met him, a painter of some note, of whom she had vaguely heard in London. Although he was twenty years older than she, their minds chimed from the first; one of them had only to half say a thing for the other to understand it. At the beginning there was nothing between them but

friendship, tinged—though for her quite unconsciously—with the element of sex. For him, he had since told her, things were very different from the moment he met her; to the average woman the term "physical attraction" is so meaningless that she stared in uncomprehension when he told her how profoundly she had troubled him from the first. For this girl, whose pulses had never been fluttered to quickness, and who, though in imagination she could project herself into passion, always shrank from any sign of it in actuality, was reserved the doubtful compliment of stirring the passionate side of the man's nature more violently than it had ever been before. He kept the ugly thing well hidden, and she never guessed at it until her own pity and trust and affection made her unwittingly tempt him beyond endurance. Pity, allied to the intellectual pleasure they took in each other, moved her first, for he was unhappy, and she, too, had the habit of pain. She remembered the first whole day they had taken together; how they climbed up to San Miniato and found a field in which they lay and talked, and how he came back with her to the thirteenth-century palace beside the Arno where she lodged. She had a little room with a painted ceiling, and the infant Bacchus and adoring nymphs disporting themselves in bas-relief on the mantelpiece, a room looking over the brown fluted roofs of Florence; but the great loggia where he and she sat faced the Arno, and they had coffee and cigarettes and watched the swift blue night fall over Florence while the swarm of lights waked broken reflections in the swirling water. On the loggia they exchanged a brief mention of their troubles, both commonplace enough; hers a childhood with parents who perpetually quarrelled, the mother a hard worldly woman who eventually took to drugs, and a father who had at last left for another woman the home which was so unbearable; while Sophia herself had only shaken off the horrors of it and earned her own living, barely enough at that, a few months earlier.

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Richard's trouble was his wife, who seemed not unlike Sophia's mother. He was both too kindly and too weak—for his was one of those temperaments that shrink from any display of unpleasantness—to have mastered her brutally and for good—and strong enough to go on living in the same house with her because, although she made his life a weariness, she was an intensely conventional woman to whom the position of a wife separated from her husband before all the world would have been intolerable. Between him and Sophia the fact that they both knew the terror of not being able to slip out even to post a letter without dreading what they might find on going back, made a bond of sympathy.

Sophia, ignorant as she was, could not be a young, and, for some people, a beautiful woman, without having learned a few stray scraps of wisdom, and one was that when a man began to confide his troubles to her it was as well to see less of him. But Sophia let herself drift, because she liked being with the man so much; and also the fact that he was from her own place, that the relentless gods had brought him to Florence to meet her, and would, in due course, send them both back to where, henceforth, they would know each other, gave her a curious feeling of being entrapped in some web too powerful to break. She never blamed him or let him blame himself for what inevitably happened.

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"Sophia, my sweet," he wrote her in one of the letters she now picked up at random. "I didn't deliberately set to work to make love to you. I knew your beauty inflamed me and your wit delighted me. But when we first met I thought we should just see each other a few times and quarrel and laugh, and I should revel in your looks and no harm done. And now little Miss Jarvis has turned into Sophia, and either I must have Sophia for ever and ever mine, or I ought to have stuck to an elderly uncle line and come away with no tears for her and no self-loathing for me, and no need to lie and shuffle and make her share in the lies and shuffles for the future."

"You'll never do that, dear," thought Sophia, laying the letter down. "When I have to come back to London we'll meet honestly, or not at all. For there's nothing on earth that's worth living in a sea of lies for. . . ." She remembered how he had asked her if she would come and see his wife, so that he and she might meet on an accepted footing, and how the doubtful taste of the proposition had jarred her. He argued that because they would be honestly "playing the game" by his wife, Sophia need not mind the meeting; his knowledge of women was curiously insensitive and blunt, and he had no conception of how impossible it would be for Sophia to sit quietly and see another woman doing the honours of his house. In this he was not entirely to blame, for Sophia so contrived to hoodwink him that he never quite knew she loved him, certainly never knew the force of her love. He thought of her as a reckless, innocent child stung to lavish giving out of affection and pity, and so, to begin with, she had been. The woman Sophia kept up what had become a pose, not only from the pride of a maiden, but also because some instinct told her that sooner or later he would rather be able to think she had not given more.

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For the first few days either of them would have declared that all was well and there was no danger, yet each day marked a distinct step further on, a definite phase passed through. Sometimes they wandered about Florence, in the Boboli and the Cascine gardens, or upon the windy heights of Fiesole; sometimes he hired a queer little carriage with swift, bedecked horses, and they drove far out into the country, not getting home till night. The day before the revelation came was one of the most exquisite they spent together, one of which Sophia could still hardly bear to think. Leaving the carriage at a little village, they wandered on foot into a lovely valley, and laughed because he called it "old mastery," pointing out the Turner-esque effect of a ruined castle set high amidst a mass of olives which were being blown pale against it. Presently they came to a stream that stormed down the valley and fell into seven successive pools; deep, still pools, as green as ice, with sunlit bubbles sent driving through them by the impetus of the clear arch of descending water. Beside the largest pool, on a smooth grey slab of rock screened by the over-hanging cliff, they sat and ate their lunch of bread and hard-boiled eggs and wine, and the

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sun shone on the glossy red-brown hair so cunningly folded about Sophia's head, and shone in the depths of her grey eyes and on her tanned skin. When they had finished she lay a little below him, closing her eyes to feel the blown spray drift against her lids, and she never knew till he told her that his hand had been on her hair the whole time, and never knew till later still that she had been loving him even then. The day passed in a perfect harmony of speech and silences, and all the time Sophia was giving—giving peace and mothering and delight, giving the sky and the earth and the very air they breathed. Only some one who has ever made a gift of a day knows the joy that it is—how each golden moment, conscious of its own beauty, hangs poised like a held breath; how the sun and wind and flowers and the upward curves of the supporting earth are all parts of the gift, making the giver a god who pours out creation for his friend.

The next day they took train to Pisa on a more sophisticated errand, since he had undertaken to make a sketch of the tower for a friend who was "sheeking" some Italian backgrounds. Sophia wandered happily about the town while he did so, and then they met for lunch in the garden of an old inn.

"I'm afraid of to-day," he told her, "because it can't be as perfect as yesterday. Nothing could—that's the worst of a day like that."

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"I'll *make* it as perfect," Sophia replied, and she kept her word. She still had no idea she loved him, she only knew that she wanted to shield and protect him, that she was happy with him and felt the power to make him happy, and that she trusted him utterly. Without realizing it, she tempted him cruelly by her very trust, and that day her calm recklessness of speech, her gaze that meeting his so straight and untroubled, disturbed him so profoundly, were too much for him.

"Take off your glove," he said suddenly.

Sophia's notions of love had been culled from books, and she considered it inseparable from what she termed "thrills." How was she to know that a woman, especially what is called a "nice" woman, can love without the promptings of the pulses? Because she felt no sensuous "thrill" as the tone of command, it never occurred to her to think she could be in love, wherein she was making another common literary mistake—that of thinking that every woman enjoys being mastered. Sophia found her joy in ready compliance with the demands of the beloved, not in arranging set scenes of clashing wills and conciliations. Taking off her glove, she gave him her hand.

"When I say that I want to kiss you now," he said, "it doesn't mean in the way it would have, even a day or two ago. I told you then you affected me . . . but now it would be because I love you."

Sophia's hand moved slightly in his.

"Yes," she said hesitatingly, "in a way—of course. I know you're very fond of me—and all that."

"In *the way*," he returned, "and I'm not fit to hold your hand. D'you know what the life of an average man is like—especially of a man in my circumstances?"

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"You mean—women?"

"Yes—bought women," he said brutally. "Does it make a lot of difference to you?"

Sophia, refusing to let her mind so much as dwell with any effort of realization on his confession, closed her hand firmly over his.

"It doesn't make any difference. Nothing does. If I could look after you—if you were free to be looked after—you wouldn't have to go to other women any more. I care about you more than about any man I've ever met."

"And I don't care about you more than any woman I've ever met. You're unique and you're you, but I've been in love a good many times. And there's always the big one I've told you about. I feel I've so little left to give, and yet—by God, Sophia! I *could* give to you, even battered old I!"

"I'd be such a wife to you," said Sophia proudly, clenching her free hand, "that I should fear no other woman on earth."

"And you wouldn't need to . . . Sophia!" he cried. "How you would give!"

"And we mustn't, either of us," said Sophia, and to soften the speech she bent her head swiftly and kissed the hand she held.

"My dear . . . !" he said huskily, and Sophia led the way out of the garden.

That night, after he had left her at her shabby old palace, he went back to his hotel and sat up, smoking heavily, most of the night. Towards morning, he wrote her a letter—the first in order of those beside her on the seat. She took it up now and read it once again:

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"Sophia, Sophia," it ran, "I'm in the depths of misery. What have I done to you and what is going to come of it all? When this time is over? When we're back in London and out of lotus land? You know—stolen interviews and weeks without meeting, and that old and awful struggle between the 'game' at home and my inclinations abroad. And I've hardly written so far when I'm feeling better. Dear, what does all that matter? I feel the shadow of that coming gloom on me already, but how glorious the sunshine's been for me! I'm not going to think or worry—yet. What

will happen when I'm back in London must happen, but if I had you by me now I shouldn't care a damn for that. I feel stupid and stockish. There are such millions of things I want to say to you, Sophia—and they're mostly middle-aged things. That's the worst of it. Warnings I feel I ought to give you about myself and my temper and my terrible ease in giving way to adverse circumstances. I've told you I'm not big enough or strong enough for you to care for me except as a useful old pal. You'll find me out and hate me. All sorts of ghastly bogies are waiting to jump out at me. They'll get me. But you, dear, you gracious, reckless woman-child, whatever you think of me in the future you can't rob me of to-day and yesterday and all those days, and especially to-day. Things like that are too sacred to write about, almost to think of. And we're deadly honest with each other, that's a great thing. The more I dream of you the more I want you here, now. I simply can't write, I've been nearly as high this afternoon as I shall ever get, perhaps quite—and one has to pay for that. Oh, my dear; please God, you'll never pay for me! Sophia, you're very dear to me. Richard. You poor child—you glorious woman!"

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The next day both fell from their high altitude. They had driven to a little half-deserted town, a white, dead, staring, crumbling place—a place of blind windows and glaring silences. Both felt a sense of tension, and leaving the carriage they wandered round the walls, and climbing over a broken gap sat down on a grassy spur of the hillside, with their backs to the terrible little town. As usual, by now, they talked about themselves, chiefly of him, and he told her that though several women had been fond of him as a friend and liked to "mother" him even as she did, no one of them had cared for him in another way or kissed him as a lover kisses. He slipped an arm round her shoulders as he spoke. Sophia was as ignorant as an infant of what kissing like a lover might be, and in a rush of pity and affection she turned her face up towards him.

"Oh, it isn't as if we were going on afterwards like this," she said; "this is just a bit cut out of life for me to give you. It's taking nothing from her, she doesn't want to give you anything. And I want to make this bit as splendid as I can for you."

He felt her shoulder touch his as she leant her warm young body towards him, he saw the glory of her eager eyes and mouth, and he caught her to him, crushing her fiercely. . . . Sophia wondered if this awful kiss were ever going to stop; she had never known there was such a way of kissing—a hard pressure, a sucking of her very soul—and she was filled with horror under it. When he loosed her she turned and buried her face against the wall. For a while they sat in silence, then she saw him kissing her coat, her sleeve, then her head was pressed back against the wall and his mouth came to hers again. She stayed passive, dazed. In silence they went to the carriage and drove away, and almost silently they parted. Sophia spent the night in a misery of shame, he spent it in mingled excitement and remorse: fearful lest he had aroused in her a passion which would need to be satisfied at the cost of social disaster.

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Next day they talked of nothing in particular in a desultory way and did not refer to what had happened until, wandering through one of the wooded mountain slopes beyond Florence, they came on a tiny sportsman's hut with a roof of red-fluted tiles and a huge chimney. Sophia peeped and went in; he followed. Within, the hut was only about five feet square; flame-coloured leaves had drifted in through the open doorway and lay piled on the hearth; on the wall were some names rudely scrawled in charcoal.

"How did you sleep?" he asked suddenly.

"I didn't. I was thinking what I should say to you to-day."

"What was it?"

"Never, never again be like you were yesterday. I didn't know it was like that. It was dreadful. I can't bear it."

He took her hands and held them.

"Never, I promise you. I had an awful night. I didn't know what to think or wish or do. Let's get out of this hut. It's too small."

The rest of the day they spent happily under the trees, and it seemed to her that the sense of rest and peace was stronger than if it had never been broken. Very soon came their last day together. They drove to a deserted castle on a hill, called Castello di Luna, and as they went Sophia turned to him.

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"To-day's the last," she said, "and I'm going to make it the most beautiful present of all to you. We'll pretend, like children. We'll pretend there's only to-day in the world, that there are no obligations beyond here and now, that we are happy people—we'll pretend."

He gathered her in his arms and kissed her again and again fiercely, but not with the abandonment which had frightened her before, and her heart turned heavy within her and she knew she loved him. They stayed till evening in the neglected garden of the old castle, left discreetly alone by Lucia and Amadea, the little peasant custodians who lived with a beetle-browed mother and a score of younger children in the tower over the gate. It was Lucia who ventured an opinion as to Sophia's baby, and Sophia emptied her pocket-bottle of lavender water over the little girls' blue-check handkerchiefs and told Richard to give them five *lire* apiece against the day when they should have babies of their own.

Then, in the quiet old garden, he and she sat and talked and were silent, and, with her arms round him, she drew his head on to her breast, and they played the dangerous game of saying

what they would do when they were married.

"Your baby would be sweet!" he quoted to her. "Would you dare even that for me, Sophia?"

"Would I not?" she breathed.

"Oh, I can't give up hoping it may all become possible!" he cried at last, but she shuddered a little. "Don't," she said, "it's building on a grave."

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But her heart ached at the sweetness of the vision. She never felt any temptation to fling her cap over the windmill for him, partly because it is very true that "*Les bonnes femmes n'ont pas ces tentations-là*," partly because of the much greater things she wanted to give—a hearth that would always warm him, a pillow that would always rest him, and on the hearth a cradle—and these were things that he could not come at through a back door.

They said good-bye on the loggia in Florence, and that night he left for Leghorn. He wrote to her in the train; and bringing her thoughts back to the present by an effort, Sophia picked up the letter now.

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"Sophia, Sophia," she read, "is it only you who pay? My sweet, I hope you will never feel what I felt as I went home. The bare truth is I am a coward and a cad, besides being a fool. I began it, and if I didn't know where it was going to lead to I was a fool to play with fire, and I was a cad to go on. Dear, I'd rather go through years of anything you feel than ten minutes of what I'm feeling. But I've got to stick it henceforth when I'm not buoyed up with your presence. It's been so gorgeous, you've been so heavenly, that I'd do it all again. But now besides the awful want of you there's the clear vision of what I am, and it's hideous. I haven't the pluck or the passion to carry you right off before all the world whether you would or no, nor the sense and the honesty and the decency to be just friends with you. Oh, Sophia, I hate myself for it, and hate myself most for being glad, deep down, that I *did* get what you gave me. I can't find anything solid or honest in me anywhere, except my feeling for you and my joy in our time together, and I've no right to that. This is cruelly unlike what I've preached to you about possessing for ever past joys. I suppose I shall forget my own wickedness and even come to regret that I didn't take more—take *all* by force or guile—for perhaps, after all, it's better to be a downright brute than a half-and-halfer. If so, shan't I be even more unworthy of all you've given me, you sweet, foolish, lavish child? If you were here now, Sophia, I shouldn't be feeling all this. You'd only have to smile at me and I should get back my pride in having won what I have won. But without you I seem to see more clearly what I am. My sweet, wouldn't you be happier if you saw me so, too? All I feel now is a desperate need of you, your hands and your hair and your eyes and your mouth and your voice and your wit and your dear mothering. And next month? Secret meetings and concerted lies, and all the rest of the filthy game? And I drag you into it all because I want you and because my affairs make it necessary to do it or part for good. I'm trying to look at it clearly and see all the worst—misunderstandings, preoccupation, work, moods, fears, all the things that are going to prevent a wretched thing like me from being where he wants to be and doing what he could for you. I wish from the bottom of my soul the train would smash up and kill me to-night. Oh, if there were only the past few weeks to consider it would be simple enough. I've had such a time as I've never had before, and you made it. You said you would and you did. You've given me such a time as a woman never gave a man in our circumstances before. But there's you and the world and the future to consider. It's very small moral satisfaction to me that I didn't deliberately set to work to make love to you. It grew, as you showed me more and more how adorable you were, how gracious and desirable and generous and trusting, you dear nymph of the woods, virgin-mother, friend and lover and comforter. It's no good going on like this, man's a self-deceiving kind of brute, and perhaps before long all the glory of the days of you, you, you, will fit in quite comfortably and the poison of self-hatred cease to hurt. I stop to-morrow night at the Grand Hotel, Livorno. Will you write to me there, sweet? If I could really be sorry for it all I should like myself better. But I can't. I can only hate myself for glorying in what I got by such means. Write to me—I'm frightened and alone.

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"RICHARD."

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"My sweet," the next letter began, "your letter has come. It's what I knew it would be, so brave and sweet and good that I can only wonder at you all the more. It soothes and heals and cheers me, and once more I am drinking your life-blood and using your youth and splendour to live on. Is there anything you wouldn't do for my comfort? When I fell asleep this morning about dawn I dreamt of you and woke all hot and frightened, because I thought I heard you moaning, a horrible, strangled moan. Did I? Oh, my dear, I hope not. I can't get at the truth all these miles away. You see, that brave, wise letter of yours might have meant a huge effort of the will and brain, and not be a direct outflow from the you that gave me those days. Shall I ever see that you again, I wonder? Your letter's like the touch of your lips on my forehead—cooling, healing, bracing and most sweet. Dear, you're not only all I've told you before that you are, but you're wise as well. Oh! child, girl, most wonderfully woman-wise. My sweet, what you could do for me if only we could belong to each other. Sophia,

I'm trying hard to knock it into my head that we can't, but I can see now that the trouble's going to be, not remorse or anxiety, but just the big, aching lack of you, and not of your beauty so much as of your tenderness and wit and your weak, clinging strength. Oh, Sophia, I'm writing a lot of rot, but it isn't rot really. I mean, you understand. D'you remember the day when you said you'd exactly fitted that long body of yours into the ground? That's how I feel when I rest my mind on yours, only it's the ground and not me that does the shaping."

The next letter was from Marseilles. The last page, which Sophia read through twice, ran thus:

[162] "So good-bye to it all, but not good-bye to Sophia. Dear, I believe very strongly in spiritual converse (I can't find the word I want for it). But don't you feel that my arms *are* round you? I can feel your head on my shoulder and your hair against my cheek. I mean that it isn't just cheating oneself with vain imaginations to meet like that. I mean to go on thinking of you hard and the vision soothes, not aggravates, the longing, and I will meet you like that at our Castello di Luna. But oh, my dear, I wish it were really true *now!* There is so much I want from you and must go on wanting. Come to me in thought, my sweet, until we can see and touch and hear each other again. We will always say to each other whatever is in our hearts and minds. And so I'm just starting to go back—Sophia, I can't say 'home.' Home means what you are. Oh, I thought I should go back gaily and take it all up, but it makes me sick with dread. I ought never to have got out of harness. It's better to go on till one drops than to taste freedom and have to give it up. Sweet, your eyes and your mouth and your hair are with me always. Don't call me a materialist, and say it's only your body's beauty that I value. You're sweet to me through and through. Oh, Sophia, come often to meet me in Monte Luna. And there is Lucia to say sweet, impossible things to make us dream. *Ti bacio gl'occhi.*

"RICHARD."

Sophia opened the last sheet of paper. It enfolded three primroses, and on it was written "*Primavere per la Primavera.*" She looked at them a moment, then wrapped them up again and put letters and flowers back in the bag. Behind her the sun was near to setting, and the blaze of it lay full on the towers, making them a bright tawny-grey against the sky of deep steel-colour, and turning to tongues of flame the tufts of yellow gillyflowers—Santa Beata's own plant—that sprang out here and there from the sheer masonry. Some jackdaws flew out of the nearest belfry, and circled round it, black amid the brightness. Sophia sprang up and walked to and fro.

"I shall feel again, if I stay here. Unbearably. I wish I hadn't come. I'll go away to-morrow. *Richard, Richard, Richard!*"

[163] But on the morrow, instead of leaving Sant' Ambrogio, Sophia moved from the inn to the little house in the walled garden. Not until she was installed there did she discover that though the house was comparatively modern, the garden was the very one where Santa Beata had seen her visions and dreamed her dreams.

III

The first morning she spent in the place in the wall, writing him a letter.

[164] "My dear boy," she wrote, "by the time you get this you will be back in the thick of things. If I have given you anything that will help you to go on it's all I want. You must just look on this past month as a holiday snatched from the lap of the gods, and realize, what you're always telling me, that what one's once had one has for always. For there can't be any more, and I'm not even going to write to you. Oh, I feel as though I were failing you in not writing, but I always meant not to, even when you were making plans about it. Letters keep up an atmosphere, and that's better not. Yes, I know what you mean about spiritual meeting. I'm sort of fused with you as I write. I'm not here—or even in the future with you—as you read, for I've pulled the future to me and made it now, now, now, and I'm with you, in the present, as you read this, and I'm drawing your tired head to me, and I feel the very way the thick stuff of your coat arches up under the pressure of my arm. I am you in every bit of me as I write; not yours, but you. But, for the future, in that way only. I felt nothing wrong in all I gave you here, because you needed what I had to give and we were hurting nobody. I'm sure that's the great thing, to hurt nobody, and that includes you and even me. It would be hurting both of us if we were to go on writing because it would keep it all up and we shouldn't be able to meet again just as friends, and if we make the break we shall; we are strong—or weak—enough for that. Richard, let your answer to this be a long one, won't you? Try and tell me everything I shall want to hear in it because it will be all I shall have to live on. Dear child, take care of yourself, don't overwork and don't forget that open windows are the best thing for that throat of yours. Don't let things at home worry you more than you can help, and always remember there's no need to worry about me at all.

"SOPHIA."

During the time that she was waiting for the answer to her letter Sophia lived at tension, finding relief in the making of her last gift to him—for she wrote him a poem, and in spite of the deliberate placidity of the thing it eased the fierce pressure of her thoughts in the way that only creation can. Sophia was soon to enter on her greatest strength of feeling. Richard felt more intensely at the time than at looking back, when his emotions were stale to him, and he marvelled at the strength they had had; Sophia never knew till the actual hour was past what the depth of her emotion was. Partly this was that in their weeks together the need for calm and clarity on her side was so great, that when with him her being was absorbed in his and so her own feelings had no room for conscious movement until afterwards. There are times, when affairs are at the crest, when, by its intensity, sensation seems numb, but all the while each little thing seen by both inward and outward vision is registered on the mind with peculiar sharpness of edge; only to be realized when the wave of incident has passed, and even then a period of numbness may intervene before realization enters the soul, deep-driven by the intolerance of memory. Sophia was living in that tense numbness now, but through it external things made their potency felt. She grew to know every corner of the little town, and during the day she would wander several times into the cool dim church, to breathe the silence and the peace of it. And "Richard . . ." she prayed, "Richard . . ." She knew of no definite thing to ask for him, she could not pray he might be free, and happiness was an illusion she had learned to dread; she could only turn his name over and over in her mind, lift it up, hold it up and out with all the strength of her will. Still, in spite of this focusing of her life—a focusing that was to grow even more passionate in long, hot London months to come—there was no unity about it, little sights and impulses fraught with value, yet failed to show any coherent reason; some great cord that could bind everything together was still not gathered up.

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One afternoon she wandered out of the town by the big gates, and turning to look back at the sweeping wall she saw a narrow path that girdled its base, rising and falling over the rippling flanks of the hill. As she looked at it some dim memory stirred in her—she remembered having read in her childhood that in olden days a man might own as much land as he could encompass in one walk, returning to his starting-point. The root-instinct of enclosure was in the idea, and Sophia had a sudden fancy to make the unconscious town her own by the old method. Without thinking of much beyond the physical act, she started along the little track noting idly yet definitely the look of the stones along the spreading base of the fortifications and the sickles of light made by the sky's reflection on the curving-over grass blades on the other side of the path. She went slowly and when she had half-girdled the town she lay down on a smooth slope, and, locking her hands behind her head, gazed over the fertile plain. On an almond-tree near a nightingale began to sing; against the first pink of sunset she saw his little body as a slightly ruffled blot. She let her mind fill with the song so that it became the accompaniment to her thought, and slowly the first glimpse of comprehension began for her.

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First she fell to wondering what the plain would look like seen from above—from the point of view of God. "The human mind, looking from such a standpoint, would have to concentrate on one thing at a time if it wanted to attain any idea but a general vagueness," thought Sophia. "One would have to focus on mountain-ranges, or rivers, or railway-lines. . . ."

She lay imagining it, seeing how the shining network of railroads formed a web over the roundness of the world; thinking how it would seem to this poised mind a mere web and nothing more. A meaningless web; instead of thousands of roads each leading to a different destination and intent on its own business. But if the mind, as well as the point of vision, were that of a god, then each line would be fraught with its individuality—and not merely because each led somewhere; there was more to it than that—Sophia struggled towards it. . . . A different time had seen the making of each railroad, different men worked at the making of them, men with souls which had thought and felt as they laid the steel ribbons on which other souls would be rushed along without guessing anything of the thoughts and feelings. And yet, surely those emotions could not die. . . . Perhaps, one evening, a workman, straightening his back and drawing his hand over his wet forehead, had looked towards the sunset, and in the vague irrational way some scenes are registered on the mind for always, that aspect of sky and darkening hedge against it would stay in his memory, oddly mixed with the feel of the wet drops on his hand and the easing of the muscles across his back, to be recalled by any similar moment for the rest of his life. If so, how steeped with humanity those few yards of steel would be! And, apart from the emotions connected with it by the sense of sight, what an important part the railroad must play to the men and their wives and children to whom it meant food and fire! And then, the lines finished, each train going over them would pile the human associations thicker yet, heaping up all the feelings, according to their intensity, of the people in the trains. A god, looking down, instead of merely seeing the network of steel, would see as well all the human emotions still clinging to the places where they were lived—a mystical web woven over tangible things, growing deeper with the years. "Which," said Sophia, the first gleam of personal light flashing through her, "is why walking round a place makes it yours if you do it for that. My seeing of this path will be here always, I'm making a belt of consciousness round the town. It's my city! My city set upon a hill!"

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She scrambled to her feet and for a moment leant her cheek against the rough stone of the wall, then she went on round the town and in at the great gate.

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That evening she sat in Beata's garden, finishing her poem to Richard. Elate as she was, she still had no hint of what her discovery meant, or of how the garden would bring the final

revelation to her, but even then she felt the soothing influence that held it and her as she wrote out her poem. It went to him without a title, but for herself she headed it:

TO THE FORBIDDEN LOVER

That time I gave you half-a-moon of days
In the dear Southern land of many moods
She lured us up among her hill-ringed ways
Far from the ordered gardens, far from where,
Sacring the sky, the Christs hang on their roods.
We saw the sea-grey slopes of olive-trees
Blown foamy-pale, from the cloud-ridden air
Fell the swift shadows on those leafy seas.

To lakes of hardened lava we would come,
Scarred, as by whirlpools, with cold crater-rings
Or packed in furrows, like mammoth slugs grown
numb
At some disaster of creation's dawn—
A burnt-out lunar landscape of dead things.
And there some kindlier whim of path would show
Rocks that might echo to a piping Faun,
Or hide a huntress nymph with spear and bow.

Pan-haunted is that valley where we lay
(Lay, till lulled senses slid into a dream)
Watching sun-wrought reflections of ripples play
And break in shining scales through that green pool,
Deepest of seven strung on a ribbon of stream
That seven times wings the air in curving flight.
And from the gleaming arc blew spray to cool
Lids that were rosy films against the light.

A hut with fluted roof we found one morn,
A fairy-story hut; an empty shrine
Haply once dear to comrades less forlorn,
For on the walls were names of lover-folk.
And there we ate our bread and drank our wine,
A Sacrament of Fellowship; only dregs
We poured to envious gods, and laughing broke
Thrush-like, against a stone, our brown-shelled eggs.

Dearest that castle set in sun and winds
Remote as though upon Olympus hung,
Yet with a human tang that drew our minds
To gentle restful things; an open door,
Warm hearths, silk-curtained beds, and shutters
flung
Wing-wide to let us watch the stars pulsating.
Now through closed slats their light must bar the
floor
And on the hearth the ash be grey with waiting.

And when for daily troubles you make dole
(Now that the miles have set you far away)
Then to our little castle come in soul.
There, where the two girl-children thought us wed,
There, surely, I need never say you nay;
But, where the hollow curves between the breast
And rounded shoulder, draw your weary head,
And, when the day's lid droops, there give you rest.

The weakness of you I can hold to me,
For since at the world's door the babes unborn
Must vainly beat for us; oh, I will be
A Virgin-Mother to the child in you. . . .
And comradeship is good when sweetly sworn,
Being no less tender for its commonplace
And for its lack of fetters no less true—
Take what you may, my dear, and with good grace.

It was Sophia's first and only love-letter, and she sent it when she got back to England, as a summons to that friendship in which she could have given as richly as in love; and for which, although he had planned it so eagerly, he had too much knack of passion and too little depth of feeling.

The following evening his letter came, and Sophia, noting the thinness of it compared with those others she had had, knew how his need of her had slackened. She took the letter to her refuge on the wall and sat for a while unable to read it, the old nausea upon her. Then she took a firm grip of herself and opened the envelope. As she read it seemed as though a great blow were struck at her heart. She knew she had expected this, yet the actuality was worse to bear than she had thought.

Richard laughed at her intention of not writing, and himself wrote her little over a page. He began, as usual, "Sophia, my sweet," and made a brief reference to his wife—"She has not had a bad phase yet—and things are quiet, but what is that when one wants sympathy and passion? I feel I am caught up in the old life again and something seems to have gone snap in me. Write to me—for you will write—to my club." The assurance of his tone jarred Sophia, but what hurt her cruelly was his brevity. The fact that she had wanted this letter to be a long one had honestly seemed to him of no importance when set against the fact that he was not in the mood to write it; for he was the creature of his moods and consequently unheeding of those which other folk might wish to have indulged.

[171] Sophia read the letter over and over, and then quite suddenly felt she could not look at it again, and for the first time since the whole affair began, she cried. Crouched on the seat she hid her face while the sobs tore at her and the tears ran over her crossed wrists, and she heard the sound of her own sobs coming to her from a great distance. After a while she sat up, dried her wet face and made herself confront the new aspect of things. She saw that up till now she had not been wholly unhappy, for she had had the past. If he were going to prove unworthy the past would no longer be hers to glory in but would become a time of shame. If—as prevision showed her—she was to know him as unfit for what she had given, the giving would cease to be her happiness. For Sophia was still so ignorant she thought mere companionship and the spiritual force of her feeling had been a continuous giving. The knowledge that from a man's point of view she had given nothing at all was spared her. Since the parting she had repeated over and over to herself two sentences from his letters—"Virgin Mother, friend and lover and comforter" and "*Home means where you are.*" If he could still mean those things she would be perfectly content that he should never again express them; if he were to mean them less as the old life and the old allegiance gripped him, then they would cease to be true and she could not live on them in memory. Few men are strong enough to leave the past alone, many are so afraid of its re-appearance that they try to bury it alive—was he going to deal this last and most cruel blow, a future that would destroy the past? The pitiful part of it all was that Sophia would never have seen him again sooner than try to revive what had happened; had he continued to make love to her she would have refused to let him—all she asked was that the past might be unprofaned. [172] Reading his letter she began for the first time to realize the selfishness of his brilliant, lovable drifting nature, and in that moment her love of him took its firmest hold of her. The merciful phase of numbness was over, and she entered the deep waters at last. She had no strength left to struggle, she could only let them go over her head and await their passing. For her month of joy she was to pay in a year's pain, and she entered on the payment now.

It was the payment for what she had gone without that hit Sophia hardest. In what she had given was the supreme comfort—"It was for him"; and this upheld her even when her want of him was worst, when she lay the whole night through on the floor of the wall-refuge, thoughts and pulses knocking out "I want you . . . I want you . . ." against the stones. It upheld her when, towards dawn, she paced the garden, pausing every now and then to lean her cheek against the dew-wet lilac leaves; or when she tangled her hands in the grass till the damp blades whimpered as she pulled her fingers up them. Sound was a help to her, and when she roused the grass to cries or stirred the bushes to quick whispering the voice in herself was quieter. She was never violent to anything in the garden, and when action became hurried she turned it upon herself, beating her hands against her thighs. And always "It was for him" upheld her through the darkest times of paying for what she had given.

[173] For what she had gone without that help was lacking. It was not passion, which, when with him, she had never felt, that plucked at her unbearably, it was the thwarted fruit of passion that haunted and reproached her. Before his letter came, dream-babies had clustered round her, wringing their little hands behind a closed transparent door, but these were visions of what might have been had circumstances been different—they she could bear. Now thought narrowed and gained in meaning: one baby surged towards her, cried to her, smiled at her, lay in air always just away from her breast—one baby that was what might have been even as things were. How would it matter what other women he loved better if she had only given him what no other woman had? She saw herself his slayer in that she had not made life for him in the way a woman can make it for her lover, by taking it of his and creating afresh with it. Her own life would be such a small price to pay. For Sophia was a born creator, and the seeming futility of all she was undergoing, and the barrenness it bound her to, filled her with a sense of waste.

It was not until the compulsion which bread-winners know was making it clear to Sophia that her last days at Sant' Ambrogio were come, that the influences at work upon her ever since her arrival, that had first revealed themselves to her in her walk round the town, fused and concentrated.

The day had been unbearably hot, and Sophia lay behind closed *persiani*, the green of the leaves without reflecting on to the whitewashed walls so that the room seemed a pool of green

dusk. Sophia read a little old Latin *Vita Sanctæ Beatæ*, which she pondered over when, in the cool of the evening, she sought the place in the wall.

[174] "She found something," thought Sophia; "I wonder what it was? Peace, of course, but what got her to it? For outwardly her life was as bare as mine—and she had never known even what I know of—things. And yet, they say that in religion there is every experience. . . . I wonder if the babies she might have borne if she'd married some fellow-peasant ever beat at her reproachfully? And if so, what it was she found? She lived here, I suppose, walked in the garden and sat in my place in the wall—I wonder what she felt here. . . ."

All was very quiet and still on the wall, and for the first time since Richard's letter had come Sophia's aching was a little soothed, the taut fibres of her relaxed and her mind slid into receptivity. Then a more positive change began to make itself felt to her, though she could not have traced its birth or growth if she had tried.

The first note of difference was a physical one. Sophia was short-sighted and saw the world in a blur; now her sight began to take precision of outline and then the things at which she was looking changed too. The towers were more numerous, and from some of them flags fluttered out, and not till long after did Sophia remember that there had been no breeze that evening. Looking for the house over the tree-tops of the garden she saw that it had shrunk oddly, and an outer stairway crawled up its wall. On the sundial lay a rosary of dark beads—Sophia could see its steel cross glitter in the evening light.

[175] These were outward changes, on their heels came the inward change that made them seem natural to her. It was as though she were in one of those dreams when the dreamer knows who he is and that he will soon wake up, and yet does and says the most incongruous things; with this difference—Sophia had a curious feeling that it was some one else's dream which had taken hold of her. She struggled against it at first as against an anæsthetic, but the thing crept over her like a tide.

A child's cry came from the town, and Sophia felt a sudden contraction at the heart, and with a thrill realized that this new Person in her felt it also—that they were at one. With that shock of mutual sensation the fusion became more nearly complete; of Sophia's own consciousness was left only enough to know that she was still herself, hearing, seeing, and feeling what some one else had heard and seen and felt before her in that place. She knew, too, that the drama played in her soul ever since she came to Sant' Ambrogio, a wordless drama in which no human being had taken part, was drawing to a climax, and that the human element had invaded it at last. She was about to learn what it was for which those weeks, especially that hour outside the wall, had prepared her.

[176] The air was very clear, and to the long sight with which Sophia was seeing, seemed preternaturally so, as though everything were set in a vast crystal which made visible each pebble and grass-blade. A numbness stole over her body, her hands ached with cold before they, too, lost sensation, and in this numbed frame her consciousness gathered intensity. Then with a shock, as sudden as a plunge into cold water, her mind slid on to what seemed another though not an alien plane. Her mind's eye saw all the old points of view, the accepted angles of vision, as though torn up and scattered like flung wreckage over the shining shore of the world that swung below her; things which had seemed big were small, all relative sizes were altered, perspective itself seemed run mad, except that after the first breath the knowledge that this was the true angle swept over her—that she, or rather, the Person whose vision she was receiving, was looking at the spiritual world from the point at which she herself had vaguely imagined gazing at the physical.

Round this spiritual globe she saw the Breath of God hang as the air hangs round the earth, and she saw it full of ebbing and flowing like a current-whorled river. She saw how no wind left emptiness where it had been, but how the elastic tissue thinned out, spread, gathered together, ran here and there so that no outflow was without its inevitable influence of contraction: the whole sphere of air was a medley of pattern, always rhythmic and interchanging. She felt how this elasticity was brought into play over the surface of the spiritual world, how actions, sins, pains of mind and body, rack this way and that as they would, were always enveloped by the divine Breath, even as on the material globe not a wave can break or a leaf stir but the river of air holds true. Always the movements of the Breath made a pattern, as invisible to the soul in the midst of it as the wind-pattern is to those on earth, a pattern inevitable in the sense that achieved beauty always strikes the eye, as being inevitable in its rightness.

[177] Then, this measure of universal comfort given, sensation narrowed and concentrated, not on her soul, but on the soul which had felt long ago, probably far more intensely, what she was seeing by it and through it now.

As Sophia felt the anguish of the Person who had absorbed her, she realized it was the same as hers—the fear and pain of barrenness. Whether she had known all along that it was the repeat, the echo, of a vision of Beata's that was on her, or whether she only knew it then, she could never have told. No actual child that might have been cried to the Beata consciousness, only natural longings apart from any one person, yet the anguish bit keenly, for with it went fear—the deadly fear lest barrenness should be deliberate sin against life. Powerless to help, Sophia saw the thought turn in the other's mind, and with that they both entered into the last phase of the vision. Here Sophia, who had not trained herself, like Beata, to prolonged sustaining of the will, flagged and began to fail. A brightness that was too strong for her, a sense as of great Shapes, a looming

Presence, swept on to her, wrapped her round, overweighted her. She struggled to keep up with the Beata consciousness, for she knew if only she could succeed in that she would find the answer to her own sorrow and Beata's fear. The outer world had begun to come back, the towers of the town showed as through a mist, some growing more and more definite; some, those of Beata's day, wavering uncertainly. . . . She strained her flagging nerves, caught at her subsiding energies in one last effort. . . . A divine warmth suffused her breast; sky and air were filled with the gleam of a fiery Child that flashed towards her, filled her arms; and sank, not away, but into her very soul and, like quick stars, she saw the wounds on His hands and feet.

With that she knew, as Beata had known, that this was the reward of virginity, that each virgin could mother the Christ-child afresh. She knew that to those to whom the joy of making a living body with its corresponding soul is denied, creation is not stilled, that there need be no barrenness in a garden enclosed. For she saw that there is no sterility save that of the wilful mind.

[178] With a shock the present reeled into its place; spiritual vision was past and physical vision lost keenness as her own blurred sight swam back to her; and, worn out, hardly conscious of her own life, but filled with peace, Sophia lay along the seat in the kindly dusk.

She was still to know month upon month of pain; sometimes acute as when she stayed out of doors all night and made sounds and hurt herself physically to distract her mind's distress; but mostly an ache that bore on her like a weight, sometimes invading dreams and always by her bedside when she awakened. She was to find that for the friendship she could have made so exquisite he had no gift; she was to feel the many hurts his lack of thoughtfulness inflicted; she was to bear the unhappiness of seeing him unworthy of all that might have been so good in him as he let himself drift into flirtations where not one of his finer senses was touched. She was to feel one sharpest hour of any, when the time came, which, if she had given herself would have seen his child in her arms. . . .

[179] And through everything, through the dreadful London months of loneliness and the cruder physical hardships of extreme poverty; through her weary clear-eyed knowledge of him she was to come back perpetually to the refrain—that surprised herself after a few weeks of comparative calm when she hoped she was "getting over it"—of "How I love him." She had no high-flown theories of love; she knew he was not what is tritely called "the right man," he was more—he was the one she loved well enough to forgive for not being the "right one," and in those moments there was no evading the simple fact that she would have given all the rest of her life to have been his wife for one year and have borne him a child.

[180] But, through and above and around all that, went the memory of Beata's vision which she too had seen. The vision itself was often dark and meaningless to her in the actuality of her love and pain, but of the knowledge that she had had it she was never bereft. Also, it was hers to create those pleasant fruits and chief spices of which the greatest love-song in the world tells as growing only in a garden enclosed.

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THE MAN WITH TWO MOUTHS

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THE MAN WITH TWO MOUTHS

ON a grey day a girl was walking along a crescent of sand that curved at the cliff's base. As she went the water welled up in the slanting hollows left by her feet, and the fat, evil-looking leaves of the cliff plants glistened with spray moisture; even the swollen fingers of the marsh samphire, that all seemed to point at the girl as she passed, each bore a tremulous drop at the tip. At the end of the little beach the girl paused, and then turned to look out to sea, balancing herself on a slab of wet shiny granite, where the cone-shaped shellfish clustered and from which the long green weed floated out and in on the heave of the tide. The girl held back the red hair that whipped about her forehead and stared from under an arched palm.

"Tes naught but a plaguey dolphin, d'believe," she muttered, yet still stayed for one more glimpse of the dark thing that was bobbing up through the curdling foam-pattern. A stinging scatter of spray blew into her eyes, blinding her, and when she looked again the dark thing had come nearer, and she saw it to be the body of a man caught in the ratlines of some shrouds that the sea's action had lapped around the mast they had once guarded. Were it not that his chin was hitched over the ratlines, so that he was borne along with his face—a pale blot among the paler

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blots of the foam—upturned, he would doubtless have sunk, for he was not lashed to the mast in any way. A huge foam patch had formed in the web made by the tangled shrouds, so that his head and shoulders showed clearly against the creaming halo, on which his long hair, dark with wet and released from its queue, lay streaked away from his tilted face. The girl called to him twice in her strong, rough voice; then, since even if he still lived he was past any consciousness of doing so, she kept her energies for the saving of him. Wading in as deep as she dared—not more than up to her hips, for even then the heave and suction of the water threatened to knock her off her feet—she clung on to a ridge of rock with one hand, and, leaning forward, made snatches at the spar whenever it surged towards her. To her dismay she saw that with every heave his legs must be catching against some rocks, for his head began to sink away from the supporting ratlines, and when at last she caught one end of the spar she only succeeded in drawing it away from him. His head disappeared; for a moment the dark hole in the midst of the foam-circle held, then broke, and was overrun as the whiteness closed upon it. The next minute a surge of undercurrent brought him knocking against her legs; she just managed to hold on with one hand while with the other she plunged down at him. Her fingers met the cold sleekness of his face, then caught in his tangled hair, and, drawing herself up backwards against the rock-ledges, she pulled him with her, step by step. A few moments more and she had staggered up the narrow strip of beach with her burden dragging from her arms. Tumbling him along the drier sand at the cliff's foot, she knelt beside him, and with hands trembling from the strain that had been put upon the muscles, she pulled apart the clinging shirt that was so sodden it seemed to peel from off him. She felt at his heart, then laid her ear to the pale glistening chest where the dark hair was matted to a point between the breasts; she beat that pale chest with her hand, and at last saw the faint red respond to the blows of her fingers. On that much of hope she desisted, seemed to hesitate, then half-hauling him up by a hand beneath each shoulder, she began dragging him towards where the cliff curved outwards again to the sea. At a point some three or four feet from the ground the cliff overhung so that it was possible to imagine creeping beneath it at low tide, though a curtain of glossy spleen-wort hung down so thickly it was difficult to tell. Going upon her knees, the girl crawled backwards under the dripping dark green fringe, and pulled the man in after her. Within, a tunnel, in which it was soon possible to walk upright, led at a gradual incline up to what was apparently the heart of the cliff, which here was honeycombed into those smugglers' caves of the West of which even now all the secrets are not known. Up this incline she got herself and him, and at last dragged him triumphantly into the big cave where she and her father, Bendigo Keast, stored the smuggled goods in which they traded so successfully. It was very dark, but with accustomed hands she felt for the small iron box in which the flint and tinder were kept; soon a tiny flame sprang to life, and she passed it on to a wick that floated limply in a little cup of stinking fish-oil on the floor. In the mere breath of light thus given the rows of stacked barrels loomed dimly, the outermost curve of each gleaming faintly, while between them the shadow lay banded.

Thomasin Keast ran some brandy from a little keg near into her palm and tilted it between the man's teeth, then slopped the raw spirit over his shirt, drenching it again. Then—not stripping him, for the modesty of a Cornish woman, who thinks shame to show even her feet, prevented that—she filled her hands with brandy and ran them in under his clothes, rubbing tirelessly up and down till the flesh began to dry and tingle. Around his reddened neck, where the soft young beard merged into wet curls, she rubbed; over his shoulders, where the big pectoral muscles came swelling past his armpits like a cape, then down the serried ribs that she could knead the supple flesh around, past the curve-in of the whole body beneath them, to the gracious slimness of the flanks and the nervous indentation of the groins between the trunk and the springing arches of the thighs. So Thomasin knelt in the gloom of the cave, and all the time that his life was coming painfully and reluctantly back to him under her strong, glowing hands, she felt as though some presage of new life were flowing into herself. The old saw has it that the saving of a drowning man brings ill-luck to his rescuer; but Thomasin, as she watched grow in his features that intangible something which makes the face human instead of a mere mask, scorned the superstition; and still more she scorned it as her urgent hands felt the rising beat of his pulses and arteries. For during that time his hidden form became so known to her that his every curve and muscle, the very feel of the strong-growing hair upon him softening into down as his skin dried, all impressed themselves clearly on her memory for ever, and she felt him hers—hers by right of discovery as well as right of salvage.

* * * * *

Thomasin Keast and her father lived in a little four-square cottage set about half a mile from the headland—a half-mile of thorn and bracken, of tumbled boulders and wedges of furze almost as solid. Here in the spring the yellow-hammer and the linnet, the stonechat and the whinchat, shrilled their first notes, and at dawn the greybird thrust a thirsty beak into the dewy blackthorn blossoms; here the dun-coloured rabbits darted in and out of their burrows with a gleam of white scuts. Here, too, Keast and his daughter herded the moorland ponies that, well-soaped, were loaded with the barrels of spirit and packets of lace which had been brought from France at dark of the moon. The cottage was of rough grey granite, with a roof crusted with yellow stoncrop that looked as though it had been spilled molten over the slates. On either side of the door a great wind-buttress, reaching to the eaves, swept out like a sheltering wing.

This was the place to which Thomasin Keast brought her man on that stormy evening. Dusk was already making the air deeply, softly blue, and through it the whitewashed lintel gleamed out almost as clearly as the phosphorescent fish nailed against the wall. Half-leading, half-supporting

him, Thomasin steered the stranger between the buttresses and through the narrow doorway into the living-room. A peat fire glowed on the hearth and against it the figure of a crouching man showed dark. At the noise in the doorway he thrust an armful of furze on to the fire, and the quick crackling flare that followed threw a reflection like the flashing of summer lightning over the whitewashed walls, sending the shadows scurrying into the corners and revealing the man whose big hand, ridged with raised veins that ran up to the wrist, was still upon the furze-stem.

Bendigo Keast was not long past his prime of strength and could still have out-wrestled many a younger man. Through his jersey the working of his enormous shoulders showed as plainly as those of a cat beneath her close fur, and under his chin the reddish beard could not hide the knots of his powerful throat. His eyes, blue and extraordinarily alert, were half-hidden by the purpled lids, and the massive folds of his cheeks that came down in a furrow on either side of his slightly incurved mouth, looked hard as iron. Like most seamen when within doors, he was in his stockings, and as he rose and his bulk swayed forward his feet broadened a little and gripped at the uneven flagstones like those of a great ape.

Thomasin spoke first.

"'Tes a man I found drownen', da," she said, and in her voice uneasiness mingled with a readiness for defiance. "He'm most dead wi' salt water, and cold. Us must get en to the bed to wance. Da . . ."

"Where did ee find en?" asked Bendigo Keast, without moving.

"To cove."

"Did a see aught?"

"How should a, and him nigh drowned?" evaded Thomasin; then, as the stranger sank on to the settle and let his wet brown head fall limply back against it, she went over to a crock of milk that stood in the window-sill and poured some into a saucepan.

"Get en to the bed, da," she said more sharply. "I'll see to your supper. He must have nawthen but milk for the night."

Bendigo came forward, and, swinging his long arms round the man, carried him off up the stairs that led from the living-room into the first of the two tiny bedrooms. He soon came down again.

"Tell me how tes a smells of brandy?" he demanded.

"I rubbed en down wi' et to put life into en." Thomasin spoke quietly, but the sound of her stirring spoon grew less rhythmical.

"Then a did see?"

"Da, listen to me," said Thomasin, turning round. "S'pose a did see, what then? He'm naught but a foreigner from up-country, and wouldn't know to give we away. And—s'posen he'm minded to stay by us—well, you d'knew we'm needing another hand. We must find one somewhere, and there's none o' the chaps to the church-town would come in wi' us, because us have allus stood by oursel' and made our own profits. But now Dan's dead, you d'knew as well's I us must get another hand to help in the *Merrymaid*. If you wern't so strong and I as good as a man, it would ha' needed four of us to ha' run her."

"How can us know whether to trust en?" asked Bendigo suspiciously. "Tes bad luck to save a man from the sea, they do say."

"Don't decide nawthen tell you've talked wi' en," advised Thomasin. "May be the poor chap was too mazed to take notice o' what he saw. Us'll know to-morrow."

And next day the rescued man was sitting by the hearth, somewhat stiff from bruises, but otherwise with his wiry frame none the worse. His looks had strikingly improved, for now that the soft beard, which had never known a razor, was dry, it peaked forward a little, whereas when wet it had clung to his too narrow jaw and revealed a lax line of chin.

His story was soon told—the brig on which he was mate had been returning from France when a squall overtook her, and she became a total wreck. He had clung to the floating spar for several hours before losing consciousness, when the tangled ratlines had borne him up and the tide had swept him into the shoreward current which set round the headland.

"And the first thing I knew," he ended, "was your face, mistress, bending over me in your cave. . . ."

Keast shot a glance at his daughter. They had exchanged looks before, at the man's mention of France, and now Bendigo flung a few veiled phrases, with here and there a cant term common to smugglers, at his guest, who understood him perfectly, and himself became entirely frank. His name, he said, was Robin Start, and that there was mixed blood in him he admitted. A more gracious race showed itself in his quick turns of wrist and eye, his ease of phrase, in his ready gallantry towards Thomasin. Yes, said Robin Start, his mother was a Frenchwoman, and had taught him her tongue—a fact he found useful in his dealings on the other side of the Channel.

A bargain is an intricate and subtle thing in Cornwall, a thing of innuendoes and reservations,

[191] and the one Bendigo Keast struck with the stranger was not without subtleties on both sides. Robin Start had quite understood all he had seen in the cave, and had made a mental note of the way out, which gave him a hold over Bendigo. On the other hand, Robin, who suffered paroxysms of craving for safety in the intervals of delighting in danger, knew it was safer to come in with Bendigo and make something for himself smuggling than it would be for him to think of escaping from that muscular father and daughter if he declined. As for Keast, it was true that since his nephew Dan had been knocked on the head by a swing of the boom, he needed some one to take the lad's place. A bottle of smuggled rum sealed the bargain, and then, for the first time in her life, Thomasin was talked to as a woman. To her father a partner; a mere fellow-man to the dark, silent Daniel who now lay in the lap of the tides; shunned by the envious villagers, and looked at askance by the Government men, Thomasin had never known of the sphere which began to be revealed to her that evening. For one thing, she was plain, though in certain lights or effects of wind she looked fine enough in a high-boned, rock-hewn way. She was what is called in that part of the world a "red-headed Dane," and her broad, strongly modelled face was thickly powdered with freckles. Though she was only twenty-two, hundreds of nights of exposure to wind and wet had roughened her skin, but at the opening of her bodice, where a hint of collar-bones showed like a bar beneath the firm flesh, her skin was privet-white. The slim, brown-haired Robin with his quick eyes was a contrast in looks and manners to anyone she had ever met, and mingled with her awe and wonder of him was the fierce sense of possession that had entered into her when she passed her hands over and over him in the cave. Also she felt maternal towards him because, though he must have been nigh upon thirty, he was one of those men who have a quality of appeal.

[192] It was a stormy autumn that year, and little was possible in the way of business; but for Thomasin, who up till now had lived so whole-heartedly for her partnership with her father, it became that time of which at least the mirage appears to every one once in life. For her happiness she and Robin repainted her other love, the *Merrymaid*, together; giving her a new black coat and a white ribbon, and changing the green of her upright stem to blue. The *Merrymaid* was constantly adopting little disguises of the sort, running sometimes under barked sails, sometimes under white, and alternating between a jib and a gaff-topsail with a square head. Then in the long winter evenings the Keasts and Robin would sit by the fire, Bendigo pulling at his clay pipe, and Thomasin knitting a perpetual grey stocking—surely as innocent and law-abiding an interior as could have been found!—while Robin told them tales of all he had seen and done. Bendigo now and then gave a grunt that might have been of dissent, interest, or merely of incipient sleep, but Thomasin sat enthralled by the soft tones that to her mind could have lured a bird from the egg. Robin told of the thick yellow sea towards the north of China, so distinct from the blue sea around that it looked more like a vast shoal of sand, stretching for mile upon mile. He told, too, of the reddish dust, fine as mist, which once fell for days over his ship when he was far out at sea; it fell until the decks seemed like a dry soft beach, and lungs and eyes and at last their very souls seemed filled with it. His captain said it was blown along the upper air all the way from the Mongolian plains, but he himself thought it came from Japan, that country of volcanoes. Thomasin's ideas of volcanoes were derived from a broadside she had once seen which represented Vesuvius apparently on fire from the base, but she felt sure the mysterious sand was of the devil, and must come from somewhere hot.

[193] So Robin talked and Thomasin listened, and with the coming of spring new portents woke in her blood and stirred the air. Robin began to slip his hand up her arm when he stood beside her in the shadow of the wind-buttresses, and when they went down to the caves he would make opportunities to press against her in the passages. The sheer animal magnetism of the girl allured him, and he found her crude and hitherto fierce aloofness going to his head. Though frequently now he felt a sudden passion of distaste for the physical strength of this father and daughter sweep over him, yet would come another passion, waked by the wonder of it that still lay in Thomasin's eyes—and he would think of what a pleasure was at his hand in Thomasin's potentialities for passion and the freshness of her. . . .

[194] She herself was reluctant yet, for all her hot blood and untrained nature, partly because of the ingrained suspicion of soft things her upbringing had engendered, partly because of the eternal instinct which prompts withdrawal for the purpose of luring on. But in her heart she knew—she knew when the spring was on the cliffs, and he and she lay on the thymy grass watching for the fish-shoals; when around Robin's turf-pillowed head the rose-specked, flesh-hued cups of the sea-milkwort stood up brimming with the jewelled air as with a divine nectar; when among the cushions of silvery lichen and grey-green moss the scented gorse flung a riot of yellow, and the mating birds answered each other on a note like secret laughter. Then Thomasin would sometimes close her eyes for the happiness she dared not yet acknowledge; yet those days of soft joy and beauty were as nothing to the night of hard work and danger that finally brought her surging blood to acknowledge him as lord—that night when all the dominant male in him was of necessity stung to the surface by danger.

They were running a cargo of thirty barrels over from France—he, she, and her father. The *Merrymaid*, which was sloop-rigged and of about twenty tons burden, was quite enough for the three to handle, laden as she was with the corded tubs slung together with the stones already attached; for it was proposed to sink the cargo and then run on to harbour openly, a thing frequently done when the Preventive men were known to be on the watch. Robin was suffering from one of his nerve-revulsions; he dared show no sign of it, but as he sat in the bows, keeping a look-out through the darkness, he told himself that if this trip were brought off in safety it would be the last as far as he was concerned. He could stand the portentous figure of Bendigo looming

at him through the little cottage no more, and he knew what to do. . . . As for Thomasin, he would not lose her—a woman surely sticks by her man. And if not, she would never harm him; and there were other women in the world—for the appeal Thomasin had for him was of sex, and not of personality.

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Thomasin sat with her arm along the tiller, keeping the *Merrymaid* on a nor'-nor'-west course so as to make the Lizard light. They were running under their foresail and close-reefed mainsail only, for the south-west wind for which they had waited was swelling to storm-fury. The *Merrymaid* lay right over, the water scolding past her dipping gunwale and the clots of spindrift that whirled over the side gleaming like snowflakes in the darkness, which was of that intense quality which becomes vibrant to long staring. Robin, straining his eyes, was only aware of the danger when they were almost on it, but his voice shrieked out on the instant to Thomasin: "Hard-a-port!" and again, in a desperate hurry of sound, "Hard-a-port!"

Thomasin jamed the helm up as Bendigo, with the agility of long use to sudden danger, eased off the sheets; and then Thomasin could see what menaced them. A Preventive boat, like themselves with no light save the wretched glimmer over the compass, had been lying to under her mizzen, and already her men were making sail. Thomasin sat gripping the tiller while the voices of her menfolk came to her ears.

"The topsail!" shouted Robin; but Bendigo's voice made answer: "Not till us has to—it might rip mast off in this gale. Try the jib. . . ."

They set the jib and shook out the reefs in the mainsail, and the *Merrymaid* answered to it like a racehorse to the whip. She quivered all her length, the tiller pushed like a sentient thing against Thomasin's palm and they went reeling on.

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For nearly an hour they ran before the wind, helped by the flood-tide, and all the time the Preventive boat was slowly gaining on them, for she was carrying a larger stretch of canvas. She was nearly upon them when the sound of breaking surf told that they were nearing the Manacles, and the tide was still fairly low. Suddenly Robin's voice came again, this time with a thrill in it: "Now's our chance!" he called. "We'll hoist the topsail and make a run for it inside of the Manacles."

He was at the mast as he spoke, and Thomasin heard the thin scream of the uncoiled sheave as the topsail halliards ran through it. The next moment the mast creaked and bent; the almost useless jib slackened as the other sails took all of the wind, and the *Merrymaid* shook her nose and plunged into the broken water that gleamed between the blackness of the mainland and the Manacles.

"They'll never dare follow!" cried Bendigo; and even as he did so, the Preventive boat, trusting to her superior speed to make good, began to come round to the wind so as to pass the Manacles on the outer side. The added strain proved too much, and her mast snapped with a report like a gunshot—the one clean, sharp sound through all that flurry of rushing, edgeless noise, and it told its own tale to the eager ears on the *Merrymaid*. She, under the influence of the topsail, was burying her bows at every plunge, and Thomasin knew, by the sudden cessation of the tiller's tug, that the rudder had lifted clear of the racing water, only to drive into it again with a blow that sent her reeling. Thomasin's fight with the boat she loved began in real earnest. Yawing stubbornly, the *Merrymaid* pulled against the tiller so that the rough wood seemed to burn into Thomasin's flesh, so hard had she to grip it to keep the boat's head from going up into the wind.

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With the breath failing in her throat, she had none left to cry for help; she could only wrestle with the tiller, which, all the weight of the yawing *Merrymaid* against it, seemed about to crush her.

Then hands came over hers in the darkness, and even at that moment her flesh knew Robin's.

"Tell me if I make a mistake; you know this hell-pool better than me," he called to her through the noise of the surf; and, with an easing of the muscles so exquisite as to be almost a pain in itself, she felt him absorb the weight of the boat into his grip. With the lifting of that strain from her shoulders and arms came the realization of how mercilessly his hands were grinding hers against the tiller, yet that pain sent the first tremor of unadulterated passion through her that she had ever felt, because it was the first time he had hurt her. There was no need for her to call directions to him—he and she were so welded in one at the tiller that the unconscious pull of her arm beneath his told him, in his state of receptive tension, what to do more surely than any words. That was their true mating—not what followed after—but there in the stern of the reeling *Merrymaid*; for all that was least calculated and finest in Robin had leapt to the need of it, and their consciousness was fused as completely in the fight for life as the pain in their hands was at the tiller.

They were through—through and safe, and five minutes more saw them round the point and in the calmer water, where they slipped the cargo, and soon after they had made the harbour under easy sail, innocent of contraband from stem to stern.

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All danger over, Thomasin felt oddly faint, and let her father go on ahead across the moor while she hung heavily on Robin's arm, her numbed hands slowly tingling back to life as they went. Arrived at the cottage, a faint light, that went out even as they looked, told of Bendigo's entry, and Robin set the lantern he carried on the flagstones between the buttresses. Thomasin leant back against one of them, and the dim light, flickering upwards, softened her marked bones and

brightened her eyes. Every defect of skin was hidden; it showed pale, and her mouth velvet dark upon it. Robin's lips fastened on her throat below her ear and stayed there till she stirred and gave a little cry, then his mouth moved on and up till it found hers. The kiss deepened between them; his head bent, hers upstretched. Time stayed still for one moment, during which she wanted nothing further—she was not conscious of the ground beneath her or the pain in her back-tilted neck, not even of his supporting arms or the throbbing of him against her—all her being was fused at the lips, and she felt as though hanging in space from his mouth alone.

* * * * *

[199] Robin Start waited till the cargo had been safely run and sold, and then he went across the moor to the village and made a compact with the Preventive men. The excitement of that night had had its usual way with him, and he wished never to meet danger again as long as he lived. He was suffering from a somewhat similar revulsion as regarded Thomasin, though there he knew the old allure would raise its head again for him. Bendigo's suspicious guard of him had relaxed, partly because the elder man admitted that it was Robin's nerve which had planned the dash that saved them, partly because he guessed how it was with his daughter, and thought Robin safely theirs. . . . And Robin had at last done that which had been in his mind ever since the beginning, and had sold the secret of the caves to his Majesty's Government. Nervous of being overheard in the village inn, Robin took the two head men with him over the moor to the headland, safe in the knowledge that Bendigo was drinking heavily in the cottage—the way in which he always rewarded himself for a successful run. Robin showed the men the cunningly hidden entrances to the passages, and then for a few minutes they all three stood making their final arrangements. Robin found it wonderfully simple, the step once taken. It was agreed that the officers of the law were to surround the cottage that night after its inmates were abed, all save Robin, who was to be sitting in the kitchen ready to open the door. No harm was to be done to the girl—and, indeed, the Preventive men knew enough of Cornish juries to know that Bendigo Keast himself would get an acquittal; but his claws would be drawn, which was all they wanted. Robin, unaware of this peculiarity of a Cornish jury, would have been considerably alarmed had he known of it. Bendigo free to revenge himself had not entered into the scheme of the man from up-country, where the law was a less individual matter.

[200] "At ten o'clock then, my man," were the last words of the Preventive officer; but he added to his companion as they walked away: "The dirty double-mouth!" and the distaste of the official for the necessary informer was in his voice. "At ten o'clock," echoed Robin, and then was aware of a quick rustling behind him—much the noise that a big adder makes as it leaves its way through a dry tuft of grass. The sun was already setting, and the glamorous light made vision uncertain, yet Robin thought he saw a movement of the gorse more than the breeze warranted. The bush in question was one of those which concealed an opening to the caves, and Robin pulled it aside and peered into the darkness. Silence and stillness rewarded him, and he swung his legs over and descended a little way. All was quiet and empty in that passage; he turned into another—that, too, was innocent of any presence save his. He went through up that exit, and, still uneasy, stared across the moor. If anyone—if by chance Thomasin had been in the passage, she could have slipped out that way while he was entering by the other, and be out of sight by now. . . . The sweat sprang on to Robin's brow. Then he took counsel with himself. There was no reason why Thomasin should be at the caves; nothing was doing there. It would be the most unlikely thing on earth, because neither she nor her father ever ran the unnecessary risk of going there between the cargoes. Robin knew this, and felt reassured—how, after all, could he imagine that Thomasin, sick at the reaction she felt in him, might have gone to re-gather force at the place where she had first felt him hers? . . . He thought over what he had said, and took still more heart when he remembered he had not let fall a word that showed a light holding of Thomasin; and that, he told himself, was the only thing a woman could not forgive. He felt it safe to count on passion as against the habit of a mere business partnership, which was all her relationship with her father had ever been. Dimly Robin was aware that all her spiritual life had gone into that partnership, into the feeling of her family against the world that had become an obsession with her until he had brought another interest into her life; but Robin Start would not have believed an angel from heaven who had told him that the habit of years could be stronger with a woman than a new passion. And, as regarded most women, Robin would probably have been right. Besides, it was impossible that any one could have been there, and Thomasin was his. . . . He gave himself a little shake and set off to the cottage, and such was the force of his revulsion against a life of dangers and the sinister suggestiveness of the Keasts' muscular superiority, that he felt his heart lighter than it had been for months past. He was even pleasurably, though subconsciously, aware of the poignant beauty of the evening, and noted the rich shrilling of a thrush from the alders by the stream. It was one of those evenings when, for a few minutes, the light holds a peculiarly rosy quality that refracts from each sharply angled surface of leaf or curved grass-blade; steeps even the shadows with wine-colour, and imparts a reddish purple to every woody shoot, from the trunks of trees to the stray twigs of thorn piercing the turf. Wine-coloured showed the stems of the alders, the lines of blackthorn hedges, the distant drifts of elms whose branches were still only faintly misted with buds. Beneath Robin's feet the yellow red-tipped blossoms of the bird's-foot trefoil borrowed of the flushed radiance till they seemed as though burning up through the ardent grass, and on the alders the catkins gleamed like still thin flakes of fire. The whole world for a few magic moments was lapped in an unharmed flame that had glow without heat, and through the gentle glory of it Robin went home.

[201] At ten o'clock that night, with no lanterns to betray them, half a dozen Preventive men,

[202] followed by several of the leading men in the village, who had got wind of the affair and were eager to see the self-sufficient Keasts brought to book, all came up over the moor through the darkness. No light showed in the cottage as they neared it, but that was merely because the buttress, sweeping at right angles to the window, obscured it from the approach. The buttress once rounded, the men saw the light shining as Robin Start had promised. The officer motioned the others to stay quiet, and then—he was a mere lad, and eager to be the first in everything—he tiptoed to the window and peeped through.

Robin Start was sitting quietly in the armchair, a candle burning on the stool beside him. There was nothing alarming in that, yet the next moment the boy at the window stepped back with a great cry.

"He's got two mouths!" he shrieked. "He's got two mouths!"

* * * * *

Far out on the dark Channel father and daughter were drawing away in the *Merrymaid*, the rising wind and some other urgent thing at their backs, but the sense of justice done as their solace.

And in the cottage, his wrists tightly roped to the arms of the chair and his silky beard shaved away, sat Robin Start. The footlight effect of the candle eliminated all shadow under his sloping chin, making it seem one with his throat, and that was cut from ear to ear. For the only thing on which he had not calculated was that before such treachery as his passion drops like a shot bird.

[203] The candle flame flared up as the last of the tallow ran in a pool round the yielding wick, and for one distorted moment the edges of the slit throat flickered to the semblance of a smile. Then the flame reeled and sank, and, spark by spark, the red of the glowing wick died into the darkness.

[204] WHY SENATH MARRIED

[205] WHY SENATH MARRIED

ASENATH LEAR was neither a pretty woman nor a particularly young one, but having in the first instance embraced spinsterhood voluntarily, she was cheerfully resigned to its enforced continuance. All the world knew she had been "asked" by Samuel Harvey of the Upper Farm, and though all the world considered her a fool for refusing him, it still could not throw in her face the taunt that she had never had a chance.

She had said no to Samuel because at that time she was young enough—being but twenty—to nurse vague yearnings for something more romantic than the stolid Sam, but the years fled taking with them the bloom that had been her only beauty, and romance never showed so much as the tip of a wing-feather.

"I'm doubtful but that you were plum foolish to send Sam'l Harvey to another woman's arms, Senath," her mother told her once, "but there, I never was one for driving a maid. There's a chance yet; ef you'll look around you'll see 'tes the plain-featured women as has the husbands."

[206] "'Tes because the pretty ones wouldn't have en, I fear," said Senath on a gleam of truth, but with a very contented laugh, "men's a pack of trouble in the flesh. I would ha' wed sure 'nough ef et hadn' been that when you get to know a man you see him as somethen' so different from your thought of him."

"Eh, you and your thoughts . . ." cried the petulant old mother, quoting better than she knew, "they'll have to be your man and your childer, too."

Senath, the idealist, was well content that it should be so, and when her mother's death left her her own mistress, she went to live in a tiny cottage up on the moors with no companions but those thoughts—the thoughts at once crude and vague, but strangely penetrating—of an untaught mind whose natural vigour has been neither guided nor cramped by education.

Her cottage, that stood four-square in the eye of the wind, was set where the moorland began, some few fields away from the high road. At the back was the tiny garden where Senath coaxed

some potatoes and beans from out the grudging earth; and two apple trees, in an ecstasy of contortion, supported the clothes-line from which great sheets, golden-white in the sun, bellied like sails, or enigmatic garments of faded pinks and blues proclaimed the fact that Senath "took in washing."

On the moor in front of the cottage stood nineteen stones, breast-high, set in a huge circle. Within this circle the grass, for some reason, was of a more vivid green than on the rest of the moor, and against it the stones on the nearer curve showed a pale grey, while the further ones stood up dark against the sky, for beyond them the moor sloped slightly to the cliffs and the sea.

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These stones were known as the "Nineteen Merry Maidens," and legend had it that once they were living, breathing girls, who had come up to that deserted spot to dance upon a Sunday. As they twirled this way and that in their sinful gyrations, the doom of petrification descended on them, as it did on the merry-makers of old when Perseus dangled the Gorgon's head aloft. So the nineteen maidens stand to this day, a huge fairy-ring of stone, like those smaller ones of fragile fungi that also enclose a circle of greener grass in the radius of their stems. Two luckless men, whom the maidens had beguiled to pipe for them, turned and fled, but they, too, were overtaken by judgment in a field further on along the road, and stand there to this day, a warning against the profanation of the Sabbath.

When Senath was asked why she had taken such a lonely cottage, she replied that it was on account of the Merry Maidens—they were such company for her. Often, of an evening, she would wander round the circle, talking aloud after the fashion of those who live alone. She had given each of the stones a name, and every one of them seemed, to her starved fancy, to have a personality of its own. Senath Lear, what with the mixed strains of blood that were her Cornish heritage, and the added influence of isolation, was fast becoming an old maid, and a wisht one at that, when something happened which set the forces of development moving in another direction. Senath herself connected it with her first visit to the Pipers, whom hitherto, on account of their sex, she had neglected for the Merry Maidens.

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One market day—Thursday—Senath set off to a neighbouring farm to buy herself a little bit of butter. The way there, along the high road, lay past the field where the Pipers stood in their perpetual penance, and Senath could see them sticking up gaunt against the luminous sky for some time before she came up with them. For, as was only fitting, the Pipers were much taller than the Maidens, being, indeed, some twelve feet high.

Senath walked briskly along, a sturdy, full-chested figure, making, in her black clothes (Sunday-best, "come down"), the only dark note in the pale colours of early spring that held land and air. The young grass showed tender, the intricate webs made by the twisted twigs of the bare thorn-trees gleamed silvery. On the pale lopped branches of the elders, the first crumpled leaves were just beginning to unfold. The long grass in an orchard shone with the drifted stars of thousands of narcissi, which a faint breeze woke to a tremulous twinkling. The road was thick with velvety white dust, for it was some time since rain had fallen, and the black of Senath's skirt was soon powdered into greyness. As she went, she wondered what it was that gave the air such a tang of summer, until she suddenly realized it was the subtle but unmistakable smell of the dust that brought to her mind long, sunny days, when such a smell was as much part of the atmosphere as the foliage or the heat. Now there was still a chill in the air, but she hardly felt it in the force of that suggestiveness.

"Sim' me I'm naught but a bit of stone like they Pipers," she said to herself, as she paused to look up at them, towering above her. Then a whimsical thought struck her. "I'll lave the Maidens be for a while and take my walk to the Pipers," she thought, "tes becoming enough in a woman o' my years, I should think."

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She smiled at her mild jest and plodded on to the farm.

It was a fairly large house, with a roof still partly thatch, but mostly replaced by slate. In front of it, a trampled yard reached to the low wall of piled boulders and the road. Senath found the mistress of it leaning on the wall, ready to exchange a word with the occupants of the various market-carts as they drove homewards, and the business of the butter was soon transacted. Yet, for some odd reason, Senath was not anxious to take up her basket and go. Perhaps it was that touch of the unusual in the false hint of summer; perhaps, too, her decision to vary the course of her evening walk and the playmates of her imagination; but, whatever it was, she was vaguely aware of a prompting towards human contact. The two women sat on the low wall and chatted in a desultory fashion for a few minutes. Then the farmer's wife, shading her eyes with her hand, looked along the road.

"Your eyes are younger'n mine, Senath Lear," she said. "Tell me, edn that Sam'l Harvey of Upper Farm comen in his trap?"

Senath turned her clear, long-sighted eyes down the road and nodded.

"He'll be driving out Manuel Harvey to the Farm," Mrs. Cotton went on. "You do know, or maybe your don't, seein' you live so quiet, that since Sam's been a widow-man, Upper Farm's too big for he to live in in comfort. He's comin' to live in church-town and look after his interests in building. You do know that he's putting up a row of cottages to let to they artisesses. And Upper Farm he's let to Manuel Harvey."

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"Is he any kin to en?" asked Senath, interested, as any woman would have been, in this budget

of news about her old suitor.

"No, less they'm so far removed no one remembers et. There's a power of Harveys in this part of the world. Manuel do come from Truro way."

The high gig had been coming quickly nearer, and now drew up before the two women.

"Evenen, Mis' Cotton. Evenen, Senath," said Sam, with undisturbed phlegm. "Could'ee blige we weth some stout twine? The off-rein has broken and us have only put en together for the moment wi' a bit o' string Mr. Harvey here had in's pocket."

Mrs. Cotton bustled off into the house, and Sam climbed down, the gig bounding upwards when relieved from his weight. He was a big, fair man, his moustache distinctly lighter than his weather-beaten face, and since the days when he had courted Senath the whites of his eyes had become yellowish round the muddy hazel of the iris. Senath looked from him to Manuel, still in the gig, and as she did so, something unknown stirred at her pulses, very faintly.

Manuel Harvey was dark, and though his eyes, too, were hazel, it was that clear green-grey, thickly rimmed with black, that is to be seen in the people of that part of the world who have a strain of Spanish blood in them, dating from the wrecks of the Armada. Those eyes, beneath their straight brows, met Senath's, and in that moment idle curiosity passed into something else.

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Many women and most men marry for a variety of reasons not unconnected with externals. There has been much spoken and written on the subject of "affinities," a term at the best insecure, and often pernicious, but very occasionally, when the two people concerned are elemental creatures with little perception of those half-shades which are the bane of civilization, there does occur a flashing recognition which defies known laws of liking, and this it was which came to Manuel and Senath now.

"Falling in love" is ordinarily a complex, many-sided thing, compact of doubts and hesitations, fluctuating with the mood and with that powerful factor, the opinions of others. It is subject to influence by trivialities, varying affections and criticisms, and the surface of it is an elastic tissue setting this way and that, as thoughts ebb and flow from moment to moment, even though far beneath it may remain unperturbed. Yet every now and then come together two of that vanishing race who are capable of feeling an emotion in the round—the whole sphere of it. This sense of a spherical emotion came to Senath as she would have pictured the onslaught of a thunder-ball, save that this fire had the quality of warming without scorching utterly.

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Looking up, as she stood there stricken motionless, she saw him transfigured to a glowing lambency by the blaze of the setting sun full on his face; and he, staring down, saw her against it. Her linen sun bonnet, which had slipped back on her shoulders and was only held by the strings beneath her chin, was brimming with sunlight, like some magic pilgrim's pack; and her eyes, opened widely in her worn, delicately seamed face, gained in blueness from the shadow her face and neck made against the brightness. Even so, to most people she would have appeared only a wholesome-looking woman in early middle life, who had kept the clear and candid gaze of childhood; a woman rather ungainly and thick-set. Manuel saw her as what, for him, she was—a deep-bosomed creature, cool of head and warm of heart—a woman worth many times over the flimsy girls who would pass her with a pitying toss of the head. Manuel thought none of this consciously; he was only aware of a pricking feeling of interest and attraction, and had he been asked his opinion would have said she seemed a fine, upstanding woman enough. Then, when Mrs. Cotton came out again with the twine and a big packing-needle, he, too, climbed down and, his fingers being younger and more supple than Sam's, attended to the stitching of the rein.

"Must be gwain on, I b'lieve," announced Sam, when this was in progress. "Can't us giv'ee a lift, Senath? I'm sure us wont mind sitten familiar if you don't, will us, Manuel, my dear?"

"Why, no, thank'ee, Sam," said Senath quickly, "I do rare and like a bit of a walk before goin' to the bed. Evenen to you, and thank you, Sam. Evenen, Mr. Harvey."

He raised a face into which the blood had come with stooping over the rein.

"Evenen, Miss Lear," he muttered.

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She started down the road at a good pace so as to have turned off before they came up with her, but she heard the clip-clop of the horse's hoofs as she drew alongside with the Pipers, and she turned in towards them through a gap in the hedge. She pushed a way among bracken and clinging brambles, and as she reached them the sun slipped behind the S. Just hills, and in the glamorous mingling of the afterglow with the swift dusk she stood, as the gig, the two men in it apparently borne along level with the top of the hedge by some mysterious agency, passed by.

For a while she stood there, the dew gathering on stone and twig and leaf. She glanced up at the two dark columns reared above, her hand against the rough surface of the nearer one.

"Must give en names, too," she said, with a backward thought for her Merry Maidens. "Why shoulden I call they after Sam and his new tenant? That one can be Sam,"—looking at the stumpier and wider of the two, "and the tall one, he can be Manuel."

* * * * *

There is little to tell of the love of Senath and Manuel save that it was swift, unspeakably dear,

and put beyond the possibility of fulfilment by the death of the man. The slight accident of a rusty nail that ran into his foot, enhanced by the lack of cleanliness of the true peasant, and Manuel, for such a trifling cause, ceased to be. They were fated lovers; fated, having met, to love, and, so Senath told herself in the first hours of her bitterness, fated never to grasp their joy. The time had been so short, as far as mere weeks went, so infinitely long in that they had it for ever. After the funeral in the moorland churchyard, Senath went into her cottage and was seen of no one for many days. Then she reappeared, and to the scandal of the world it was seen that she had discarded her black. She went about her work silently as ever, but seemed to shun meeting her fellow-creatures less than formerly. A bare year after Manuel's death she had married Samuel Harvey.

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No one wondered more than Sam himself how this had come about. If the marriage had been a matter of several months earlier, the common and obvious interpretation as to its necessity would have been current everywhere, and Sam would have had his meed of half-contemptuous pity. As it was, no one knew better than Sam that the other Harvey's wooing had gone no further than that wonderful kiss to which middle-aged people, who have missed the thing in their youth, can bring more reverential shyness than any blushing youth or girl.

Had it been any other than Senath, folk would not have been so surprised. A woman may get along very well single all her days if she has never been awakened to another way of life, but give her a taste of it and it is likely to become a thing that she must have. Yet few made the mistake of thinking that that was how it was with Senath. A strongly spiritual nature leaves its impress on even the most clayey of those with whom it comes in contact, and all knew Senath to be not quite as they were. Yet she married the red-necked Samuel Harvey, and they went to live together at the Upper Farm. And, as to any superior delicacy, Senath showed less than most. A few kind souls there were who thought, with the instinctive tact of the sensitive Celt, that it might hurt her to hear the name "Mrs. Harvey" which would have been hers had she married Manuel. On the contrary, just as though she were some young bride, elated at her position, she asked that even old friends should call her by the new title.

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Sam was genuinely fond of Senath, and mingled with his fondness was a certain pride at having won what he had set out to win so many years ago; yet, it was so many years that he had been in a fair way to forget all about it till, one evening, he met Senath as he was driving home from market, much as when he had been with Manuel a year before. It had struck him as odd, for Senath was not apt to be upon the highway at that time, and although she was going in an opposite direction she asked for a lift back in his gig. When they came to the track that led off to her cottage, he tied up the mare and went with her to advise her as to her apple-trees, which were suffering from blight, and by the time he left, half an hour later, they were promised to each other. How it came about, Sam never quite understood; the only thing he was sure about was that it had been entirely his doing. Yet he couldn't help wondering a bit, though it all seemed to follow on so naturally at the time, that it was not until he was on his way back to the Upper Farm that he felt puzzled. He was still wondering about it, and her, when the parson joined their hands in the bleak, cold church, and Senath stood, beneath her unbecoming daisied hat, looking as bleak and cold as the granite walls around her.

Later, Sam found this to be a misleading impression. Never was bride more responsive, in the eager passive fashion of shut eyes and quiet, still mouth, than was Senath. Only now and again, in the first weeks of their life together, she would give a start, and a look of terror and blank amazement would leap across her face, as though she were suddenly awakened out of a trance.

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Men of Sam's condition and habit of mind do not, by some merciful law of nature, make ardent lovers, and life soon settled down comfortably enough on the farm. Senath was a capable housewife, and, what with the dairy-work and cooking and superintending the washing, and such extra work as looking after any sickly lamb or calf, she had plenty to do. And yet, in the midst of so much activity, every now and then Sam was struck by a queer little feeling of aloofness in Senath—not any withdrawing physically, but a feeling as though her mind were elsewhere. He might find her sitting on the settle with her eyes closed, although she was obviously awake, and an expression of half-fearful joy on her face, as on that of a person who is listening to some lovely sound and holding his breath for fear lest the least noise on his own part should frighten it into stillness.

However, Sam was not an imaginative man, and since the house shone with cleanliness such as it had never known, the shining not of mere scouring, but of the fine gloss only attained by loving care, he did not trouble his head. Women were queer at the best of times, and besides, a few months after the marriage, reason for any additional queerness on the part of Senath became known to him. After she had told him the news, Sam, ever inarticulate, but moved to the rarely felt depths of his nature, went out into a field that was getting its autumn ploughing, and his heart sang as he guided the horses down the furrow. Even as he was doing now, and his father had done before him, so should his son do after him, and the rich earth would turn over in just this lengthening wave at the blade of the ploughshare for future generations of Harveys yet to come. Like most men with any feeling for the land in them, Sam was sure his child must be a son.

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And to him, who had not hoped for such a thing in marrying Senath, to him this glory was coming. Everything seemed to him wonderful that day; the pearly pallor of the dappled sky; the rooks and screaming gulls that wheeled and dipped behind his plough; the bare swaying elms, where the rooks' nests clung like gigantic burrs. Dimly, and yet for him keenly, he was aware of all these things, as a part of a great phenomenon in which he held pride of place.

When he came in, his way led through the yard, where a new farm-cart, just come home, stood under the shed in all the bravery of its blue body and vermilion wheels. Senath had crept round in the shed to the back and was studying the tailboard, one hand against it.

"Looken to see all's well to the rear as to the front?" called Sam jovially. "That's a proper farmer's wife."

Senath started violently and dropped her hand, looking away before she did so. "It looks fine," was all she said, and went within doors, passing him. A small portent, so slight Sam did not even know it for what it was, and yet something in her look and manner seemed to chill him to the bones of him. Then, and after, he put anything unfathomable in her ways down to her condition, and so turned what might have been a source of discomfort to the account of his joy.

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The blossom was thick upon the apple-trees when Senath's boy was born. He had a long fight of entry, and when the sky was paling and flushing with the reluctant dawn, Sam, who had spent the night alternately snoring on the settle and creeping upstairs in his stockinged-feet, heard the first wailing of his son. He heard, too, the clank of the milk-pails in the yard without, the lowing of an impatient cow, and the crowing—above all sounds the most melancholy to anyone upon a sleepless pillow—of a triumphant cock. As he heard all these common noises about his own place, he realized how much more dear they had all become to him by reason of what was in the room above. He knew that his wife had what is inadequately called a "bad time," but although the boards over his head had creaked for hours to the anxious tread of doctor and of nurse, not a cry had come until this one that heart and ear told him was from his child. He went upstairs once more, creeping less this time, and knocked timidly at the door, then coughed to show who it was. The nurse, a thin, yellow-haired London woman doing parish-nursing for her health—a woman he hated while he feared her—opened the door a slit and looked unsympathetically at him.

"I was wanten to knaw . . ." began Sam.

"None the better for hearing you," snapped the nurse. "She must have absolute quiet."

"I dedn't go for to mane that," explained Sam naively, "but the cheild? 'Tes a boy?"

"Oh, it's a boy, and doing all right," said the nurse, and shut the door in his face.

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Sam went downstairs and put his head under the yard-pump, and laved his bare red arms in its flow, as men might bathe in the waters of perpetual youth. The great rejuvenation of a new birth had come upon him. For that is what it resolves itself into—the advent of a son to a middle-aged man. Sam felt his term of life taking immortal lease.

Later in the day, the news that his son was weakly was broken to him, but made very little impression. The child could not die, because it was his. To other men, the common lot of humanity, but not so near home.

The morning was at its height, all around romance and mystery had dissolved in the broad shining, when they told Sam his wife wished to see him, but that he must be careful not to excite her as she was not yet beyond the danger-point.

When he saw her, the burning colour in her face strong against the white of her pillows, he thought they must be exaggerating, and he patted her hand cheerfully.

"You've done fine, Senath, lass," he assured her. "'Tes a brave an' handsome chap, is young Samuel."

"Not Samuel," answered Senath. Her voice, though low, was composed.

"What then?" asked Sam, remembering his wife was at a time when she must be humoured as far as speech went, anyway.

"Manuel," said Senath. Then, at his start of dissent: "Yes, Manuel."

"You'm my wife, not his," said Sam. "The cheild's my cheild, not his, and et shall be called for ets father."

"I'm Manuel's wife," said Senath, "and et's Manuel's cheild."

Sam calmed down, for he was now sure that his wife was light-headed. It was a common symptom, he had been told.

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"No," said Senath, answering his thought, "I'm not that wisht, Sam. I'm in my right mind, and I'm only waiten on you to go. I'm waiten to go, Sam, I'm waiten to go."

"What do you mean, lass?"

"I'm waiten till I've told 'ee why I wedded you, Sam. It was because of Manuel."

She lay still a moment and then went on:

"Of course I had et in my thoughts to die a maid and go to him as he left me. A woman allus thinks that to begin with. And then et began to come clear to me—all the future. How I'd go on getting older and more withered and wi' nawthen to show for my life. And when I saw Manuel agan, he'd say: 'Where's the woman I loved? Where's her blue eyes, and the fine breast of her?' And I'd have to say: 'Wasted, gone, dried-up, Manuel.' I wanted him. I wanted Manuel as I never

thought a woman could want anything but peace, and he was taken from me. So I determined in my heart I'd go to Manuel, and go with somethen to take to en. I married you, Sam, because you had the same name, and was the same height, and when I shut my eyes, I could fancy my head was on his breast, and that et was his heart beaten at my ear. That's why I made folk call me 'Mrs. Harvey': so I could force myself to think et was Manuel Harvey's wife I was. That's why I used to look at your name painted up, ef et was but on the tailboard of a cart. I used to hide the front of et, so that I could pictur' 'Manuel' written under my hand. Sometimes I'd pictur' et so hard and fierce that when I took my hand away, I expected to see er there, and the sight of 'Samuel' was like a blow. I got to knaw that, and to look away before I took my hand off."

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Again she stopped and lay awhile as though gathering energy; then the indomitable voice went on:

"At first, when you took me in your arms, et was near to turning me mad, and I thought I couldn't go on wi' et; but I got better and better at imagining et was Manuel, though et was like to kill me every time I woke up. For et was like waking up every time I had to let the strain of my imagining go for a moment. And each time et left me feelen weaker and more kind of wisht than before. But I was glad of that, for et all brought me nearer. When you wedded me, I swear I'd got so I made et Manuel, and not you, who was holding me, and for nine months I've borne his cheild beneath my broken heart. I've made et his."

She drew the little sentient bundle nearer to her, as though to defend it from him. He stared at her, then spoke slackly, trying to urge force into his voice.

"'Tes all nawthen but in your mind, all that. It's what's real as matters."

"Don't you remember, Sam, how the wise woman to church-town had a spite against Will Jacka's Maggie, and told her her cheild was goin' to be an idiot; and how et preyed on the mind of her, and the boy has no mouth-speech in him to this day? That was only in her mind. And how, in the Book, Jacob put the peeled wands before the eyes of the sheep, and the lambs came all ring-straked and speckled? I've put the thought of this before the eye of my mind; I've thought et into bein' Manuel's cheild, even as I belong to him and him only. And 'tes to him I'm taken et."

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Sam turned and stumbled from the room, down to the kitchen, and dropped upon the settle. The next moment, a sudden flash of fear sent him to his feet. He tore up the stairs, knocked into the nurse as she came out of her room, and swept her along with him.

Senath had her shawl folded thickly over the baby's face, and she had turned over so that her body lay upon it as she clasped it to her breast. But the baby still lived, and when they had taken it from her, she fell into a sullen silence, through which the tide of her life, too, began to creep back steadily.

* * * * *

Ten years later, three little boys were playing in the yard at the Upper Farm. One was a few years older than the other two, who were obviously twins, fair and round and apple-cheeked, with bright brown eyes like little animals, and slackly open mouths. The other boy was of nervous make, with black hair that fell into eyes at once more human and more forlorn. He was very dirty, but he had stuck a yellow jonquil through a hole in his jersey. They were playing at moulding little men out of the mud, and setting them about an inverted flower-pot which did duty for a house. Suddenly, one of the little boys pushed away the mud-farmer which the eldest had placed at the arched break in the rim, which was the house door, and stuck his own much more primitive effort there instead.

"You'm not to put your man there, Manuel," he screamed. "That's the door like where father do stand of a Sunday. My man must stand there, because every one do say you'm a changeling and no proper son at all."

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Manuel scrambled to his feet and ran across the yard; his hard little boots clattered as he went. He ran into the kitchen, where his mother, stout and comfortable-looking, was baking. The dim room was filled with the good smell of hot bread and pastry.

"Mother, mother," sobbed Manuel, "Sam's said et again. He says I'm not like da's son; that I'm naught but a changeling."

Senath raised a flushed face from her work and kept the rolling-pin still a moment while her eldest-born spoke, but she did it mechanically.

"If you'd only try not to be so odd-like and so different to the rest o' the family," she complained, "the boys would'n say it so often. There, take this hot split and lave me be."

At ten years old, neither wounded pride nor the worse hurt of always feeling a something unexplained about himself that did not fit in with his surroundings, was proof against hot pastry, and Manuel went away with it, though slowly, to a spot he knew of beside the mill-lead. There a robin was building her nest in the alders, and there, too, if he lay very still, with shut eyes, he could imagine all sorts of wonderful things that the brook was saying. How he was really not the son of these people at all, but of some wonderful prince, who would come upon a coal-black charger, like the one in the old fairy-book, and take him away, away from this discordant house where he felt such a very lonely little boy. . . .

[224] In the kitchen, Senath, about to resume her work, saw that the jonquil had dropped from his jersey to the floor, where it lay shining, a fallen star. Senath stood staring at it for a minute. For one flash, bewildering and disconcerting, like the sudden intrusion of last night's dream into the affairs of to-day, she saw herself again—that self she never thought of as being the precursor of the present Senath, but as a totally different person altogether, whom, try as she would, she could not connect up. She had long ago given up trying, busy with her man and the boys. The two younger were little trouble enough beyond the ordinary vexatiousness of childhood, but there was something about Manuel which was different, and which often annoyed Sam, who liked to brag about his eldest boy, and tried always to make him out as exactly like himself. But she was conscious that the Senath of long ago would have understood. Now, as she stared at the jonquil, it seemed to her that that Senath was she herself again, though she had grown to despise the dreaming, fanciful creature of her muffled memory—perhaps there had been something fierce and great about her, that the present Senath could never capture again.

The moment passed, and she let the flower lie where it was, and presently, when Sam, the successful husband, came in ruddy and clamorous for his tea, his heavy boot trampled it, all discoloured, into a crack of the stone flags. The little boys came tumbling in, too, also clamorous, after the way of men-folk.

"Where's Manuel?" demanded Sam.

Both little shrill voices were obsequious with the information that he had gone towards the leat.

"Day-dreamen, I'll be bound," said Sam, his mouth full of hot split. "Eh, well, so were you, missus, at one time of day. Life'll soon knock et out of him, like et has of you. And you'm all the better wi'out et, arn't 'ee, lass?"

[225] She said "Yes," and would have thought so if it had not been for the memory of that moment, already faded, when she had seen the jonquil. As it was, she sent a quick thought out to the boy who lay playing with imaginings by the alders; a thought of vague regret and a faint hope that it might not be with him quite as it had been with her. And whether the thought reached his unknowing self or not, to Manuel's fancy the leat had a finer tale and brighter hopes to tell him that evening than usual, and he was at the age when, although he knew the corresponding fall on entering the house must be the more severe, he never doubted that the dreams were worth it.

[227] **THE COFFIN SHIP**

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OF all the ships that traded from the Islands to the mainland, the *Spirito Santo* had the worst reputation. She was known as a "hungry" vessel; her chief mate was a French Creole from Martinique who had been trained aboard a Yankee clipper, and her captain was a blue-nose who behaved as such. Since, on the outward voyage, the crew generally consisted of men who had made the Islands too hot to hold them, and, on the return trip, of half-dazed sailors who had been doped by crimps, there was a certain superficial variety about it—a variety merely of individuals and not of kind.

The *Spirito Santo* had been a good enough ship in her day, and had weathered a typhoon in the China seas and a hurricane in the Atlantic, but she was one of the earliest steam vessels built, and had started life as a side-wheeler; her paddles having been changed for a single screw and simple engines, of the kind guaranteed to combine the greatest possible consumption of fuel with a correspondingly large waste of steam.

[230] She was a wooden vessel, iron still being looked at askance when her keel was laid, and her lines were those of the true sailing-ship, with bows that bulged out almost square from either side of her cutwater, above which her long bowsprit raked the air. The result was that she steamed as a wind-jammer, with her bows delaying her speed by their large surface of resistance; and went better under canvas, with her screw running free. She was barque-rigged, that is to say she carried trysails on her fore and main, below the lovely tower of royals, topgallant sails and top-sails which even her stumpy sticks and too-wide yards could not make ungraceful. Her long thin funnel amidships looked as though it had got there by mistake, and indeed she belonged rather to the class of auxiliary steam than that of auxiliary sail, in spite of the motive with which

she had conceived. In fact, her trouble was that in a world where steamships, and iron ones at that, were beginning more and more to snatch at trade, and where the great racing clippers still broke records, the *Spirito Santo*, being neither one thing nor the other, had become a losing proposition. Her owners grudged tar on her sides as sorely as kids of meat to the men, and no shabbier trader than the *Spirito Santo* nosed her way from Port of Spain to the Golden Gate. Yet she got there all right, bullied and driven, got there on cheap coal and rotten rigging, though her engines seemed as though they must beat a hole in her straining sides and her planks part from sheer exhaustion. She held together as a coherent and reliable whole partly because, with all her lack of grace, she was a sweet ship in a seaway if one knew her idiosyncrasies, partly because her skipper could nurse a ship through anything while the hull stayed afloat. And the *Spirito Santo* took some handling, for in spite of her wide yards and tonnage to the tune of seven hundred, she only drew fourteen feet and was as tricky as a cat. Her skipper coaxed her and humoured her, bullied her at just the right moment, in short, treated her as though she had been a woman—only Joab Elderkin would not have taken the trouble over any she-thing of flesh and blood.

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Elderkin was the best-feared man in the Caribbean. He had a thin sinewy frame and a very soft voice which he never raised in ordinary conversation, and this gave a curious effect of monotony to whatever he was saying. Never drunk at sea, he was always perfectly sober on land except for the first twenty-four hours after landing, when he soaked steadily. Even his movements were gentle, as though to match his voice and the dark eyes, deep-set in his prematurely wizened face, held the wistful puzzled sadness of a monkey's. His language was unparalleled for profanity, and to the most hardened there was something of terror in the appalling flow of words issuing on such an unruffled softness of intonation. In those days the master of a vessel had almost unlimited power within the area of his ship's rails. If, goaded by ill-use, a man struck his officer, he was quite likely to be shot straightway, and on reporting the matter the captain would be praised for his promptness in quelling mutiny at its rising. Floggings with the cat or the yoke-rope, brutal mishandling with knuckle-dusters and belaying-pins, were the quick and common resort on the slightest count, and Captain Joab Elderkin was famous for his technique in all these methods. His ship literally merited the trite description of a floating hell, and one boy aboard her had died of a broken heart. The child had failed in an attempt to get ashore at Frisco, been brought back and flogged at the mizzen rigging, and afterwards turned his face to the dark fore-castle wall, refused food and died. The little incident had added to Elderkin's unsavoury reputation, but it was this reputation which made him a man after his owners' hearts. He was not likely to suffer from scruples, and it is needless to say that the *Spirito Santo*, a free-lance trading from what port she chose, carried a good deal now and again on which she never paid duty. Her skipper's only form of conscience was his seamanship. The owners might grudge paint, but every bit of brass-work on board shone like gold, and the decks were holy-stoned till the men sobbed over their aching knees. At twenty-three he had held command of a full-rigged ship trading to China. Now, since the *Spirito Santo* was becoming more and more of a falling investment, he rarely made the passage round into the Pacific, and, Atlantic-bound, dodging from the Islands to Colon and down the coast as far as Rio, Elderkin was wont to refer to the time when he really had been a sailor. . . .

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It was his conscience as a seaman that the owners were up against when they called the captain into consultation over the diminishing returns of the *Spirito Santo*, and proposed to him the course that is regarded by sailors the world over as the great betrayal.

To anyone without a nice sense for spiritual values, everything is merely a matter of price, and Elderkin's fee for the loss of his ship and with her his soul was higher than the partners could have wished. They were greasy men, with the Spanish strain, that too often, in those latitudes, means a hint of the negro as well, and their office was on the outskirts of the dirty vulture-ridden Port of Spain of those days. The room was bare, and upon the blotchy whitewash of the wall there hung nothing but a map and a few advertisements. The mosquitoes sang through the unscreened windows; outside, in the dusty strip of bleached earth between the house and the road, a hedge of hibiscus was in bloom. In the glaring sunshine the flaunting back-curved blossoms seemed afire as they shot their thin vermeil tongues out into the air made so alive with light. To Elderkin, as he sat in the dimmed room, full of green reflections from the vegetation without, came the unpleasant thought that it was as though he were under seas . . . and the flaming tongues of the hibiscus were some evil sea-growth, mocking at his plight.

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He leaned forward and helped himself again from the bottle of whisky that stood upon the bare table. When he lifted it a crescent of gold fled across the table, slipping back again when he set the bottle down, as a ripple of reflected light runs through water. Elderkin had often seen a gleam like it when watching a small bright fish flash through a pool.

His reluctant mind responded to the kick of the liquor: the dirty little room, the watchful eyes of the partners as they sat on either side of him in their soiled linen suits, no longer seemed so unpleasant to him, accustomed as he was to the sordidness that, if care is not exercised, so soon overtakes an interior in the tropics. His caution still remained to him, and he sounded the scheme at every point, finding the partners were prepared, full of urgings, advices, rosy forecasts, cunning details. On the homeward voyage, that would be best . . . he could take her out in ballast, bring her back loaded to her limit and beyond it. . . . Those were days before the Plimsoll mark, and vessels often left port—even great English ports—so loaded that their scuppers were all but awash, and not only left but perhaps attempted the passage round the Horn itself. There would be no difficulty about that, but Captain Elderkin must, of course, not sail from a Peruvian harbour

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as the authorities there had an unpleasant habit of marking a load-line on every ship that cleared and seeing that she did not go above it. Besides, a cargo was awaiting him in Chili, and the partners were prepared about that too. It was to be a double deal, the actual copper and nitrates, with a small amount of gold, which she would go out to take was, by arrangement with a certain official known to the partners, to be changed for sand and stones. Just a sprinkling of nitrate at the top, perhaps, since nitrate is loaded in bulk. It was risky, but on the other hand it was a thing often carried through with success, and Elderkin, who knew all the tricks and possibilities of both coasts, could see his way with reasonable clarity. The partners advised Captain Elderkin not to attempt bringing the *Spirito Santo* round the Horn, as he might have more difficulty in saving himself; if the accident occurred on the Pacific side it would be better for many reasons. If he were picked up by a passing ship he must, of course, see to it that the *Spirito Santo* was too far gone for salvage, or that would indeed make matters worse with a vengeance. An accident with the steering-gear—they had reason to know that Olsen, the chief engineer, would come in on it—when off a weather shore, would probably be the best solution. But, naturally, there was no need to instruct so clever a sailor as Captain Elderkin in his part of the affair . . . more smiles and whisky.

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Joab Elderkin sat and absorbed it all, with little expression on his sad, gentle face, his thin mouth remained imperturbable under the heavy dark moustache, only in his high and narrow temples a pulse beat. As he drank he raised his price, till at last the point was reached above which the partners refused to go and below which he would not descend. At that point they came to their agreement, and Joab Elderkin went out of the office having sold his only form of honour on a gamble which stood to put him on the way towards attaining a ship of his own. For that was the desire of his heart, and until now had seemed as impossible of realization as the phantom vessel of a dream. Probably for no other inducement under the skies would he have given another ship's salvation.

* * * * *

The month of August found the *Spirito Santo*, all sail set, running down the Pacific coast before a north-westerly wind. Elderkin watched the weather carefully, for he had no idea of losing his life, or, for the matter of that, the lives of any of his crew who could be allowed to retain them with safety to himself and the partners. For there is always the personal equation to be studied in a matter of this kind, and Elderkin had given much thought to the members of his crew. He had hoped, while always fearing the futility of it, that the first mate, Isidore Lemaire, might be kept in ignorance. For a while it seemed as though this were so, but since leaving port Elderkin had felt doubtful of the creole. Lemaire had a furtive way with him at the best of times, a hint as of something that crept and glided rather than walked normally, but then so had many of his race. He was supposed to be a white—in the expressive Island phrase, he "passed for white"—but on the French and Spanish and even the Danish islands the objection to racial mingling is not nearly so strong as in the colonies that have always been English. Also, Lemaire came from Martinique, which, after Haiti, is the headquarters of Obeah, and worse, of voodoo. Even quite good families in decaying Martinique had dealings with the unclean thing, and St. Pierre was known, even among sailors, for a hotbed of strange vices. All this was why Lemaire made such a powerful mate, for the crew, except for the red-headed Danish engineer from St. Thomas, were either half-castes from the Islands and the southern continent, or full-blooded negroes; which was to say that superstition was so part of them that the last vestige of it would only run out with the last drop of blood from their bodies. Elderkin knew better than to penetrate the fore-castle, but he was aware of the bottles filled with dead cockroaches, bits of worsted and the rest of the paraphernalia for the casting of spells, which hung there. He himself had found that the only way to keep his steward off his whisky was to decorate his locker with a similar charm, and since he had done so had suffered no more from pilfering. All this was obeah, harmless enough, and if now and then, a white cock was sacrificed in the fore-castle and a seaman went somewhat mad on its blood, Elderkin ignored the matter. But Lemaire was, he knew, suspected by the crew of darker dealings. There had been a rumour that the reason Lemaire left Martinique was because the disappearance of a planter's child was like to be laid at his door, and the rumour was enough to make the niggers cringe before him. This was a master, perhaps the friend of papalois and mamalois, with the power of life and death. Elderkin loathed him—there are things from which the most hardened white man shrinks, and it would have to be one utterly unregenerate who could dabble his hands in voodooism. Nevertheless, the suspicion made Lemaire the best nigger-driver in the length and breadth of the Caribbean, and Elderkin made use of him for that reason. Now, for the first time, he began to feel the man's peculiarities getting on his own nerves. A word dropped now and again, odd looks from the protuberant and opaque brown eyes, were making him wonder if the mate guessed, whether it would be better to take him into the secret and trust to his never reaching shore. . . .

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They were nearing the forties when Lemaire spoke. The day was wet, with a strong wind, all the morning they had been driving through tingling veils of rain and spray, shipping green water that sloped over the holds and poured in foaming torrents along the dipping scuppers. All day the wind—which till then had thrummed through the rigging and held the sails in their stiffened curves so steadily that the *Spirito Santo* kept a fairly even keel—had been falling on fitfulness. Loaded as she was, the seas that raced past her, almost level with her deck, seemed higher than they really were. An odd darkness held the air and through it everything bright—the flashes of foam, a wheeling bird, or rare shoal of flying fish—showed up with startling pallor. In the second dog-watch Lemaire came to Elderkin in the chart-room.

Most men have a weakness and Elderkin's—probably because he never made a confidant of a human being—was the dangerous one of pen and paper. He was making calculations on the fly-leaf of an old Bible which had been unearthed with a lot of other junk from a locker. Calculations about ships—the varying costs of handling a four-masted schooner and a barque, the advantages of chartering a small screw steamer; calculations of routes and cargoes, of many things, but always calculations. . . .

The curious darkness had swamped the chart-room, and made the discoloured clasps of the Bible and the brighter brass of the ship's fittings gleam out; made the captain's always pale face seem waxen, showed two sallow flames in the mate's ophidian eyes. For a moment the two men looked at each other in silence, then Lemaire spoke.

"I see you figger it all out," he observed. "Don't forget me, dat's all. I come in on dis, my friend. *Sacré nom de Dieu*"—on a sudden flash of menace—"did you think I was going to get not'ing out of it? Or perhaps you was going to drown me, eh?"

Elderkin had got to his feet, and was watching the other man steadily. When he spoke, his voice was as low and tired as ever.

He asked what the blank the blank mate thought he was talking about. Lemaire explained that he was talking about the scuttling of the *Spirito Santo*, and that the captain knew it as blank well as he did.

"While the ship remains afloat, kindly remember that I am in command, Mr. Lemaire, and address me with proper respect. If you do so I'll discuss business with you. If not, I'll see that you go to hell along with the ship. Savvy, you herring-gutted son of a frog-eater, you?"

Lemaire savvied. He had grown sickly hued with anger, but he spread his dark hands in apology, so that the pinkish palms seemed to flash in the unnatural gloom.

Then they got to business. What Elderkin had feared had happened—Lemaire's suspicions were aroused in port over the loading of the *Spirito Santo*, over the paucity of the stores taken aboard, over the many oddnesses that reveal themselves to a cunning mind when something beyond the normal is in progress. Elderkin remembered the night when Lemaire and the successfully bribed official had gone together, as he had then thought, to a rowdy house—it must have been on that occasion that the stronger man won definite confirmation from the weaker. Now there was nothing for it but to let Lemaire in on the deal—for the present.

"You are not t'inking of a storm, no?" asked the mate, when both men had laid their cards upon the table. "With our boats we should not stand a chance. . . . A fire, perhaps? We are car'n some cotton, sah, and it might have been packed damp."

"Too risky. I thought of all that. We can only trust our boats to takes us a little way. I must pile her up near the mainland. There's a reef I know of—"

"A reef!" scoffed Lemaire, "and you de best skipper on either side! Who d'you s'pose believe dat? Not unless we first had an accident to de engines, anyway. What about Olsen? Does he—know?"

"Yes. It could not be carried through without him."

"Ah, I see. . . . Only poor Lemaire was to be kept out. . . . And dis reef?"

"It's uncharted. I found it years ago. I had reasons for not wanting it known where I'd been and I never reported. It's a tricky place, the sea don't break true on it, sets in sideways. Beyond it's flat to the shore. No risk of salvage; it's out of the course, and a wooden ship goes to pieces at once, anyway."

"Where is it, dis reef?"

Elderkin drew his pencil down the chart to an indented bit of coast not a couple of degrees below the fortieth parallel. Lemaire sweated to think how near he had been to risk.

"If this north-west gale holds, and we are to have an accident which made her unmanageable," went on Elderkin, "we should be driven ashore, on to that reef. Or at least we could always say so afterwards."

"We might arrange so's Olsen was neber able to give us de lie . . ." suggested Lemaire, glancing sidelong at the other.

"If needful."

But when the tussle over terms was ended and Lemaire had gone forth, Elderkin swore to himself that it was the mate who should never again see the Islands rise above the rim of the sea. He cursed, and for a few moments as he sat at the chart-room table, he allowed himself the luxury of hating the course on which he had embarked. A man cannot give his soul into the keeping of any one idea, whether that idea be embodied in another person or in a mode of life, without suffering a profound disturbance if he violently part from it; and for many years now Elderkin's soul had been one with his ship. She was ugly, cranky, she bore a name as a hell-ship that he had earned for her, but together they had won through much; men had died on her, blood run upon her decks, misery and pride and drunkenness and strange doings permeated her very frame. She was as the flesh of his flesh, and only that dream-ship of his own which floated in a

mirage before his mind could have made him unfaithful to her. He was in the position of a man who has lived with a despised but deeply felt mistress, and who at last thinks he holds the ideal woman, the bride, the untouched, within his grasp, at the price of the severance of the old ties. And, like a reproachful ghost, as though she were dead already, the appeal of the old reprobate of the seas kept pricking at him, day and night, throughout the ordered watches that drew her towards her end.

[242] He had sold his soul to gain his soul, a not altogether uncommon bargain. "If I can only have this one thing I will Be Good ever after," is a cry that must have caused amusement above and below as many times as there are mortals upon the earth. In Elderkin's case the "one thing" was a ship of his own, and now that she loomed at last over his horizon, he found that it was this old Hagar of the high seas, the mistress and not the wife, who, in spite of himself, absorbed his consciousness. All the ugliness of his betrayal of her was thrown sharply into notice by the compact with his mate; and, shot by a sharper distaste than ever before, he covered his eyes for a minute, in an attempt to focus his will undistracted. It was successful; Elderkin, little as he knew it, was an idealist, however perverted a one, and idealism was with him in this venture, beckoning to him in the dip and curtsy of a dream vessel, her bright canvas burning with perpetual sunlight. . . . He dropped his hands and straightened himself, and his eye fell on the Bible in which he had made his calculations, and where he had also noted down his covenant with Lemaire. It had fallen open, by the chance movement of his arms, at a different place, and he found he was reading a few lines before he knew what he was about.

Too imperceptibly for him to have noticed the progress of it, the light had strengthened in the chart-room, for a stormy sun had penetrated the gloom, and the heavy black letters stood out distinctly on the yellowed page. A sudden flash of memory leapt through Elderkin's mind—the memory of a day long ago in his childhood.

[243] He had been brought up in New England by a rigid old grandmother until he ran away to sea, his Nova Scotian blood too strong for him. But his mother's Puritan strain was with him nevertheless, had held by him if in nothing else but a certain Biblical flavour in his oaths. Now there flashed across his mind a dreary Sunday when he was a little boy—one of many like it, but this particular one had stuck in his memory. And, probably because of the yellow light flooding the chart-room, the memory surged up at him, for on that Sunday he had escaped to the barn, although with no better spoils than a book of Old Testament stories, and lain there, heels in the air and elbows on the straw, reading the story of the Flood in just such a stormy yellow glow as this. A gale had followed, rain-laden, and his childish mind had half-feared, half-hoped, that a flood was coming, down which he could float triumphantly in some makeshift ark . . . as to his grandmother, he might rescue her and he might not, but if he did, of course, she would be so overcome with gratitude and admiration that she would never again abase his dignity with a certain limber cane. Then, in a lull of the gale, the gleam had shone out once more, and by its light he read on; read how God had promised there should never come a flood over all the earth again, and had made a rainbow as a sign of it. Rather dull of God, he thought in his disappointment. The storm raged so that he dared not slip back to the house, not because of any fear of the elements, but because his grandmother would notice if his clothes got wet; so he had stayed on, his mind thronged with imaginary adventures, till the storm was over. Then he had gone back to the house, feeling curiously flat after the excitement wind always produced in him. A faint yet, pictorially, a vivid memory of that strained hour of varying emotions swept across him now in a moment's space, as he gazed at the page before him. The next moment he understood why—it was not only the light that reproduced that afternoon of long ago, but also the words at which he was looking—the two things together had fused a section of time from thirty years earlier into a section of the present. He read the verses through, but a few phrases knocked at his mind to the exclusion of the rest. The word "covenant," especially, so hard upon his pact with Lemaire, seemed to stare up at him. . . .

[244] "And I will establish a covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood. . . . And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you. . . . I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be the token of a covenant. . . . And it shall come to pass when I shall bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I shall remember the covenant which is between me and you. . . ."

Elderkin sat at gaze like a man in a trance, unable for a few moments to disassociate that hour in the barn from the present—not sure which was the present, so vivid was the illusion and so sharp the knock on his dormant spiritual sense. His hands, which were trembling oddly, went out to grasp the edge of the table, not for the physical support, but more that a common sensation should reassure his mind. Then he rose, and backing away from the Book as though it would spring at him, he went out.

The wind had dropped, but the *Spirito Santo* was rolling her bulwarks—those solid structures which were traps for all the water shipped—into the confused sea that the dead wind had left. She was travelling badly, her heavy load robbed her of the elasticity which would have enabled her to rise to the onslaught of each successive wave.

The *Spirito Santo* boasted no bridge, the roof of the chart-room, which was situated on the poop, just forward of the mizzen-mast, doing duty instead. The wheel, which was uncovered, was set at the break of the poop, between the rail and the chart-house. Elderkin climbed the ladder to the top of the chart-house, and then stood there, struck to sudden stillness. He never glanced at

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the binnacle to see if the man were keeping the course, or noted the wiry figure of the mate as he tramped back and forth; his whole being was arrested by the portent which held the sky. And all the long-dormant but never wholly cast-off beliefs of his childhood awoke in his blood.

A curtain of luminous, ashen-pink cloud was drawn across the sky from horizon to zenith, absolutely smooth and unbroken, and against it arched a rainbow, spanning the horizon and coming down mistily into the sea. So close the opalescent feet of it looked that it seemed as though the ship's bows were heading through the phantom portals of some new world, but high in air the summit of the curve, clear and burnished as cut-glass, looked infinitely far away. As Elderkin stood at gaze, particles of sun-bright cloud floated slowly across the right of the arch, like little morsels of golden wool.

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Elderkin, his fingers clutching a wet stanchion, was aware of a curious feeling coming over him. He felt he had seen just that effect before—that curtain of ashen pink, the rainbow against it, the flock of little golden-bright morsels, floating slowly across it . . . and had seen it in connexion with something of vital importance. Yet, try as he would, he could not capture the thought—memory—dream—whatever it was, of which he was so sure in the back of his mind that he felt it waiting for him to recognize it every moment. . . . All sorts of bewildering little half-memories flitted across his mind, and refused to be captured or placed. Queer, irrational little things they were, incongruous and wildly senseless; he felt dizzy chasing them, but he knew if he gave up concentrating even for an instant, the whole thing would be gone. Yet piece together these half-memories that pricked at him he could not, they were elusive as moths and as unsubstantial. He knew that there was one key to them and that if he could only find it they would become sense, though not sense of this world—it was as though they were in a different focus and on a different plane, but they would become clear if only he could find the key. . . .

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As he stared the little particles of cloud in front of the rainbow slowly dissolved and melted into the ashen pink of the cloud-curtain, from that, too, the glow was fading, and the arch itself began slowly to die into the air. Elderkin found himself in the chart-room again; he sat down and shut his eyes, striving to remember. He could not recollect having dreamt such a thing, and yet the feeling aroused in him was exactly that provoked when, on the day following a very vivid dream, it will keep on intruding in fragments, each time to be shaken off as the mind readjusts itself to the normal after the moment's blurring of edge. Suddenly it occurred to him that he must have seen that effect only a few days before and he opened his diary, in which, his vice being pen and paper, he noted down matters not important enough for the "Remarks" space in the log. He hunted the pages back and forth, and in the midst of his futile search his mind seemed to give a click and he was switched back into the normal again. He sat looking at the book in his hands and realized that he had never seen that especial effect before, that he had most certainly never noted it down; the mere idea that he had now seemed as silly as a dream when the mind has struggled fully awake, though when he had first thought of it and taken the notebook up, it had seemed as possible as the same dream when the sleeper is in the midst of it. He still felt curiously dizzy, though his head was clearing slowly: things seemed commonplace around him once more; he could not even remember distinctly what his sensations had been. He only knew that in that trance-like state, of a moment—of æons—earlier, he had known he had seen before that which he then saw, and seen it connected with something he could not catch. Whether he ever had seen it, perhaps on that incompletely remembered day of storm which had flashed back to him on this afternoon; or whether, already worked up by his conscience, by the interview with Lemaire, and, to his sensitized mind, by the words in the Bible, the sudden effect on him of seeing that bow set in the flaming cloud, had produced a brainstorm, he could never know. He would have thought it blasphemy to wonder whether nothing more spiritual than the driven blood in his skull was responsible for that queer switching off the track; but whatever it was, the effect of it, on his awakened moral sense, was prodigious. He did not doubt that he had received a divine visitation, that for him the heavens had been decked with pomp, that the workings of God, in particular and exquisite relation to himself, were manifest in the ordered sequence of that day. His own stirrings at the violation of his solitary code had gone deeper with him than he knew, preparing him for further troubling, then the pact with Lemaire, driving in all the distasteful side of the business more keenly still, the coincidence of that word "covenant" coming on the heels of his covenant with the mate, that word used in the Bible passage to suggest the eternal pact between man's soul and its creator, the memory it evoked, and, to crown all, the finding of the seal of it set in the heavens themselves—all these things rushed together, fused, and struck into his being.

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He fell on his knees in the chart-room and praised God; praised Him in the phraseology of his Puritan forebears, as he had heard Him praised when a little boy, whose heedless ears had not seemed to take in the words battering about them.

Joab Elderkin had got religion. He had been converted.

When he scrambled to his feet he came to, so to speak, on a different sphere from any he had ever known. He seized up the Bible again, his hands shaken by the strongest passion known to civilized man, the only acquired attribute, besides the making of fire, and of intoxicating liquor, which marks him off fundamentally from the other mammals. He read again the passage that had flamed into his ken earlier, he read the promises of the Almighty, he read of how men were called the Sons of God. He saw himself and all his fellow humans not merely calling God Father by a kindly sufferance towards adopted children, but as beings created of the same substance, their souls as much made of the essence of God as their bodies of the essence of their earthly fathers, and the thought mounted to his head like wine. The swift darkness of the tropics had fallen, but full of his new conception of his fellow-creatures—"every living creature that was with him" of the

verses—he, when he opened the chart-room door, flared forth into a night of gods.

[249] All the next day the glory held, both in the air and in Elderkin's mind. The Pacific was rainbow-haunted; phantom archways through which the bowsprits seemed about to soar; pillars of prismatic colour that melted into air; broken shafts of it that flashed out in every sunlit burst of spray upon the decks. Even in the two plumes of spray for ever winging from either side of her cutwater, a curve of burnished colours hung, as though piercing down into the translucent green, through whose depths the drowning surf was driven in paler clouds. The wind still held on and the *Spirito Santo* made what way she could under steam and canvas, through the confused seas that slopped aboard her and buffeted her from all sides at once. It was of supreme significance to Elderkin that the north-westerly wind on which he had counted for his purpose, should have died away in the self-same hour that, as he phrased it, the wind of the spirit blew into his soul. The barometer was falling rapidly, in spite of the stiller air, and he had had the royals and outer jib and gaff-topsail stowed. What with her reduced sail, the influence of her steam, and the lumpy seas, the *Spirito Santo* was behaving her worst, riding sluggishly with a heavy reluctant motion as though she hardly considered it worth the effort of keeping her blunt nose above water at all. Elderkin felt her sulkiness, and it seemed to him as though, instead of helping to save her, she was possessed of an evil spirit bent on thwarting him. He watched her closely, and spent the day on the poop, and though he said little, every one was aware of something new and strange about him. The crew commented among themselves on his abstraction and the poverty of his abuse; Lemaire thought he held the key to it, but Olsen, the freckled Dane, grew uneasy. He was having trouble with his engines, which should have been overhauled long ago, and would inevitably have been renovated this trip had it been undertaken with a normal objective. If the voyage were unduly prolonged he would be hard put to it for fuel; it would not take very much to send his boilers crashing from the rusty stays that held them; added to which every degree further south, now they were in the forties, diminished their chances of safety. As there was no longer any wind to contend with, Olsen was all for steaming towards shore at once, for his sea-sense combined with the barometer to tell him of trouble ahead.

[250] Olsen was a taciturn creature, who cared for no one in the world but his half-caste children—bright, large-stomached little creatures, whom he had left playing in the dust in front of his gaily painted wooden house in St. Thomas. For their sakes he put up with his fat, slovenly wife and her swarms of relations of various shades of brown. It was only for the children's sake that he had stuck to the *Spirito Santo*, for it suited him to be able to get home as often as he might, and even when the *Spirito Santo* did not touch St. Thomas he could always pick up with a mail-packet or a sailing ship of some kind. It was his ambition to send both boy and girl to New York for their education, now that the Civil War had made it possible for anyone with a touch of colour to make good. Therefore he nursed his crazy engines as though he loved them, but he decided that the sooner the accident occurred the better. In the second dog-watch, he, as Lemaire had done the day before, went to Elderkin in the chart-room.

[251] He found the captain with an open book in front of him: he was not reading, but making calculations on the margin. He glanced up at Olsen and his tired eyes brightened for a moment. Then:

"Ask Mr. Lemaire to come here," he ordered, "and come back yourself."

Olsen made his way to the top of the chart-house, where Lemaire was pacing, full of anxiety, and delivered the order. Lemaire came with a mixture of civility and an assumption of confederacy in his manner, but Elderkin took no more notice of it than of Olsen's waiting stolidity. He closed the Bible and confronted the two men.

"Well, Olsen," he said, "you were wanting to see me about something?"

"It is about this affair," answered Olsen, "there is no good to be got by waiting, sir. I tell you plainly my engines will not stand so very much. And the way she is loaded, if we come up against anything in the way of a sea——"

"And you?" asked Elderkin of the mate.

"I am sure dat what Olsen say is right. It must be now or never."

"It is going to be never," replied Elderkin in his usual soft tones.

The two men stared at him, then the quicker Latin flashed into speech. He demanded, with a lapse into Island patois now and again, what the blank blank blank the captain thought he was doing. Elderkin sat through it unmoved.

[252] "I will not speak to you as you have just done to me," he began, "because hairy, forsaken Frenchy as you are, you are still a son of God, even as I am. Praise the Lord with me, for He has shown me into what an abyss of sin I had fallen. Do you hear what I say? I am captain aboard this ship, Mr. Lemaire, and I order you to praise God for having delivered us while there is yet time."

Lemaire stared at his superior officer in total silence for a moment instead of complying. Then he turned to Olsen. The freckled Dane grasped the situation the first. He saw that the skipper was not trying to do them down as Lemaire, when he found his tongue again, accused him: that this was not some deep-laid trick to keep them out of the profits. Olsen had seen many religious revivals in the Islands and he knew the signs.

"See here, Mr. Elderkin," he said, stepping forward; "I've my side of it to think of. I've not

suddenly got holy. I'm thinking of my children, same as I was before. You've never thought for anyone but yourself. I only shipped this voyage because it meant being able to do what I want for them. I've only stuck to this hell-ship for them. There's been things done aboard here that would have sunk the ship if sin could sink her. You can't clean your bloody ship by talking of God now. We all made an agreement and let's stand by it like men. Sink the ship, sir, and the top of the sea'll be the sweeter for it."

"I've been a sinful man all my days," agreed Elderkin, "but my eyes have been opened, the Lord be thanked. . . . I have been saved and by the grace of God I mean to save the ship."

"It'll take more than the grace of God to keep my engines working," commented Olsen.

[253] "And suppose we refuse?" asked Lemaire. "We are two to one, Mr. Elderkin. Remember, sah—if the captain is sick it is de mate who take charge of de ship. . . ."

"Mutiny? You? Do you imagine, Mosssoo, that I couldn't hold my own ship against any half-breed afloat?"

"Damn you!" screamed the mate, his skin darkening with his angry blood. "If you not take care we will say you are mad, yes, mad. De men have only got to hear religion coming out of your face to believe it. De ship's not safe, and we must scuttle her now, d'you hear?"

"The men!" repeated Elderkin. "Let me tell you there never was a dago crew yet that I couldn't lick. I'll save this ship against the lot of you, I'll save her against herself—God helping me," he added.

"But we shall be ruined, all of us," urged Olsen. "What do you suppose they will say to us at Port of Spain, Mr. Elderkin? They won't be pleased to see the *Spirito Santo* come crawling into the roadstead with a faked cargo and all that good insurance money wasted. . . . We shall all be ruined men, I tell you. . . . What will become of us?"

"We shall never get into Port of Spain," spoke Lemaire, "we shall never round the Horn. It's coming on to blow now. She can't live through it, I tell you. It's sinking her now and saving ourselves and making a damn-big pile out of it, or it's all going down togeder."

"Then we will all go down together," said Elderkin; "if my repentance is too late the Lord will not let me save the ship nor yet my soul."

[254] "I don't give a curse in hell for your soul, or anyone else's," cried the mate. "I tell you it's madness. Only a miracle could keep de ship afloat."

"There has already been one miracle aboard her," said Elderkin. "Who are we to set limits to the power of the Almighty? It is a small thing to keep a senseless structure of wood and iron afloat in comparison with making the blackest of sinners see the true light, which the Lord has done between two dog-watches. Yesterday I was profaning the Book with my calculations of sinful gain made out upon its pages, to-day I have been calculating how many years I have spent in following my lusts, and were the years as many as the waves of the sea, I have prayed the Lord that the weeks of striving in front of us may wipe out the years."

"He is mad," remarked Olsen, philosophically.

Lemaire turned swiftly on the engineer. "We must take charge," he urged in a low voice, his back to the captain, "and then you must do what I say. We will run her close inshore, and . . ."

Whether Elderkin heard above the growing clamour of the ship or not—for the woodwork had begun to crackle like a wheezy concertina and the slap of green water breaking sounded in a scurrying frequency—he knew what the mate was planning. A rim of something cold on the back of Lemaire's neck made his speech fade on his lips, and he and Olsen stood motionless while Elderkin spoke, Olsen's light eyes looking at the fanatical dark ones above the gun.

[255] "I am master of this ship, and what I say goes, or I'll put daylight through your dirty body," said Elderkin, pressing the muzzle in till the dark seamed skin on the mate's neck turned greenish in a circle around the iron. "As for you, Olsen, you're white, though you're a Dutchman, and I look to you to stick. What about the engines?"

"I am sorry about this," replied Olsen, with seeming inconsequence, "but what must be will be. I will do the best with my engines. But if ever we see port again, I have done with you and your ship and your religion. I have my children to think of. I will go below."

And he pulled the chart-room door open. As though his doing so were the signal to some malignancy without, a sudden blow of wind struck the ship; a crash sounded along her decks and on the moment a surge of water flooded into the chart-room. A sudden squall from the south-west, such as sometimes arises like a thunderclap in those latitudes at that time of year, had caught the *Spirito Santo* in the confusion of the heavy cross seas. That first blow heeled her over, over, over . . . it seemed as though she were dipping swiftly far beyond the angle of safety; further and further. There was nothing to be done for the moment but clutch on to whatever was nearest; cries of terror from the dagos sounded thinly even through the clamour of wind and sea and crashing of gear. Then came that agonizing moment when a vessel, heeled over as far as possible, seems to hesitate, remains poised for the fraction of a second that partakes of the quality of eternity, between recovery and the hair's-breadth more that means foundering.

[256] Then, with a groaning of timbers like some mammoth animal in pain, a thick jarring of machinery, and a clattering of everything movable aboard her, the *Spirito Santo* came slowly up again. If that gust of wind had held a minute longer she would have rolled herself, her faked cargo, and her huddled lives, down towards the bed of the Pacific; sins and religions, material hopes and spiritual aspirations, alike marked by one fading trail of air bubbles.

Elderkin found he was holding Lemaire round the waist, while Olsen was on his hands and knees in the lather of water streaming off the floor.

"The Lord has decided," said Elderkin, "we have now no choice. Get below, Olsen." He was heaving himself into his oilskins as he spoke, ordered in his movements but speedy, considering the terrible lurching of the vessel. His fight to save the *Spirito Santo*, to save her against herself, had begun.

He found her topgallant sails thrashing out like blinds from a window, for the topgallant sheets had carried away, while the foresail and fore-topmast-staysail were like to flap themselves to rags. He bellowed his orders above the clamour of the ropes and guys, that were all shrieking and wailing on different notes as though the ship were suddenly endowed with the gift of tongues. The men fought their way up the rigging, and, lying along the slippery yard-arms, wrestled with clew-lines that whipped about as if possessed, while the wet and iron-hard canvas beat back and forth with reports like gunshots. But the men succeeded at length and Elderkin felt that the first tiny stage in his great battle was won.

[257] Already the sea was running in great slopes of blackish green, streaked and scarred with livid whiteness; from the poop the whole of the ship was filled with a swirling mist of spray that wreathed about the masts, only parting here and there to show one boiling flood of broken water that poured across the waist from upreared starboard rail to submerged port scuppers. The forecabin was flooded; from the forecabin head, as the ship pitched, a torrent poured on to the hatches, and when the next moment she dived forward, rushing down a long valley that seemed to slope to the heart of the ocean, two rivers poured out of her hawse-holes. Elderkin, as she dived, called down the tube—the only means of communicating with the engine-room except the still more primitive one of messengers—to stop her. And when it looked as though she could never recover to meet that oncoming mountain, but must dive into it and be smothered, her bows rose once more, up and up, till they raked the swollen clouds, while a wall of whiteness thundered past on either side. As Elderkin called for "full" again, his face was as calm as that of a little child. All that night the storm increased, and wove air and water into one great engine of destruction, and all night Elderkin stayed lashed to the rail of the chart-house, which was momentarily in danger of being washed away like a rabbit-hutch. It was impossible to keep the binnacle alight, and no stars were visible; steering was a mere groping by the feel of the wind. Dawn seemed hardly a lightning, so dark hung the massed clouds, of a curious rusty-brown colour, packed one above the other, overlapping so as to form a solid roof. Only between their lower rim and the slate-grey sea, an occasional glimpse of horizon showed where a thin line of molten pallor ran. Brown, white and steel-grey, with the masts and rigging sharp and black against it all, and the decks, dark and wet, now refracting what light there was as the ship rolled one way, now falling on deadness again as she rolled the other.

[258] With the dawning, Elderkin was unlashd and took the wheel himself, aided by a seaman, for it took two men to stand its kicking. To him came Olsen, still phlegmatic, almost as black as one of his dago squad. Gripping the poop-rail with one hand, with the other he laid hold of the captain's oilskin, and leant as near as possible to shout his news, but even so Elderkin could only catch a word here and there.

"Won't stand . . . stays parting . . ." came to him.

"Keep her at it," he yelled back.

But a sudden shout came from Olsen, while the man at the wheel literally turned colour and closed his eyes. Only Elderkin, with a look that seemed queerly of exultation on his face, stared ahead to where a vast wall of water, so high it glimmered greenly, was rolling towards them over the broken, tossing sea. That was exactly what it looked like, as though it were a body distinct and separate from the rest of the raging water, some great fold pushed up from the Antarctic region and urged across the ocean, on and on. . . . It bore down on the infinitesimal ship and her clinging ants of crew, bore down, blotting out the sky, till suddenly it was so near it became one with the rest of the sea, as though the whole surface were curving over into a hollow sphere. It thundered upon them; then, its glassy concavity reared to an incredible height, it toppled over and broke in one roaring cataract of foam.

[259] What happened next no one remaining in the *Spirito Santo* could ever have told. Three men were washed overboard; one had his legs so broken that the splintered bones drove into the deck where he was hurled down. There were a few long-drawn seconds when all thought she had gone under, for the rushing sea had climbed level with the chart-house roof, while the air was so thick with spume and spray it would have been difficult to say where the sea left off being solid and became fused with the wind. Then, with a roaring and a sucking like that when a wave, shattered, streams off a cliff, the water poured off decks and hatches in long lacings of dazzling white. The *Spirito Santo* still lived.

But it seemed she was mortally wounded, for she was jarring all her length, even the twisted stanchions vibrated as though some malignant force within her had broken loose; and when

Elderkin tried to bring her head up to the wind, the wheel spun in his hands as easily and uselessly as a child's toy.

"The rudder . . ." cried Olsen, "she is gone. . . ."

[260] Elderkin retained his clarity of aspect and gave his orders collectedly; only when the dago crew clung miserably to any support and refused to obey, he pulled out his gun and drove them to their stations. Hove-to, with only her spanker, close-reefed main-topsail and fore-staysail set, there was a chance of keeping her off the coast till the sea should quiet down enough to allow of a jury rudder being rigged. Meanwhile, as the men were setting the sails she rolled horribly in the trough of the sea; rolled fit to break her heart. Elderkin, on the poop, shouting at the men reefing the topsail, saw something that for the first moment of horror seemed fraught with the supernatural. Years of neglect, of rust, of corrosion from salt, had in reality gone to bring about what he then saw, with dishonesty and money-grubbing meanness behind the rust and corrosion. For, with a scream of ripping iron and the sharp snapping of guys, the *Spirito Santo* rolled her funnel clean off at the root, the casing along with it. It crashed upon the deck, and the next moment was swept overboard, carrying away the port bulwarks. A gust of heat and a murky torrent of foul smoke blew flatly from the cavity that gaped in the ship's vitals; then a flood of water, luminously pale in the growing daylight, filmed across the deck amidships and poured over the ragged rim of the wound. The *Spirito Santo* rolled upon the water, little more than a helpless wreck.

[261] Lemaire, who was lying on the top of the chart-house, gripping the rail, screamed out that they were done for; even Olsen, turning his blackened face to the captain, shouted that the game was up; as to the dagos, each yelled where he lay. This time Elderkin had to use his gun before he could get the ship hove-to. At sight of one of their number lying limp in the scuppers, the crew obeyed once more, while Olsen, sticking by his caste, and Lemaire, seeing still a faint chance for life, worked with them to cover the jagged hole with the stoutest timbers they could find. What was left of the fires was drawn, the planks over the hole shored up from below with timbers, tarpaulins stretched a-top of all and fastened down by a great batten bolted through the sodden deck; and, during all the hours of work amid wind and water, Elderkin watched the ship, saw that she did not come too much up into the wind nor fall off into the trough of the sea; kept the men at it when, time and again, they would have given up. Gun in one hand and Bible in the other, he read out threats of the Almighty's, intermingled with his own. And, at last, the jury-hatch was finished, and a further stage of the battle won.

[262] Now came the most trying hours of all, when there no longer remained anything possible to do, when hands fell on inaction and bodies were free to feel sore and cold, and minds were vacant of everything but an animal despondency. Olsen lit a fire on the iron floor by the boilers, and here, for the most part, the miserable men crouched during the rest of the day and the following night. Elderkin, after he had slept the sudden and over-powering sleep of the worn-out man, awoke to his first doubts. As long as there had been continuous need for action, that and the stern joy of a fight had shut out everything else for him; now that there was nothing to be done but hoist the inner jib when she came up too much into the wind and lower it when she paid off again, a need so recurring it was almost mechanical, he became as much a prey to inner questionings as his ship was to the winds. What tormented him was the thought that if the *Spirito Santo* had foundered in this south-west gale all hands would have inevitably been lost, whereas had he kept by his agreement to scuttle her earlier all could probably have been saved. Was he then become a murderer by having decided as he had, and would it have been more righteous to keep on his evil course? Elderkin, to whom for the first time the lives of his men had become of a value other than commercial, was tormented by the thought of the three washed overboard by the great wave; and the curses of the man who had died a few hours after his legs were shattered re-echoed through his mind. It was not so much that these men had met death—Elderkin had too often stared it in the face to think overmuch of that—but that they were cut off in the midst of their sins, with blasphemies on lip and soul. Elderkin's creed allowed of no gracious after-chances, he saw the entities he had known and bullied in the flesh, as having become blind particles of consciousness burning in undying fires. . . .

[263] With dawn and a further dropping of the wind, which had been lessening all night, he searched again the pages of his Bible, and he followed the instinctive trail of human nature when he thrust the niceties of values from him and determined to hold by what was right and wrong at the springs of his action. When he went out on to the poop and met the crisp but now friendly wind, saw the glitter of sunshine on peacock waves, that still broke into white crests, but without malignance, he knew that the Lord was on his side. How was it possible he had ever thought otherwise? He must indeed be weak in the ways of grace that his first testing should awake such questionings within him. As the weight of despondency and sick dread fell off him in the cold sunlight, Elderkin flung up his arms and shouted for joy. Lemaire, crawling up, found him on his knees upon the top of the battered chart-house, improvising a paen of thanksgiving.

[263] All that day the men worked at rigging a jury rudder and patching up the port bulwarks. Then Olsen, who kept them as doggedly at it as the skipper himself, conceived a plan whereby his engines could once again play a part. He collected sheet-iron and stout pieces of wood, and with these he contrived a jury-funnel, fitting steam-jets at the base to maintain the draught to the furnaces. The freakish erection held together well, though it looked oddly stumpy in place of the thin, raking smoke-stack; Olsen secured it by guys of iron chain. At last all was complete, and once again a plume of dirty smoke trailed from between the sticks of the *Spirito Santo*. The men slept as they fell, but by then the rudder and smoke-stack had converted her from a blind cripple

into an intelligent whole which could work independently of the direction of wind and current. A further stage of the battle was won, and with every victory Elderkin felt greater confidence in the Lord and in himself.

[264] By the next day it had grown very cold, and the men began to prepare shapeless and weather-worn garments against the bitterness of the Horn. Even Lemaire, who kept on repeating sullenly that they could never round it, knew that the only chance now was to carry on, and, his face seeming to pale with the first breath of the cold, hugged himself in a great padded coat. Food was already beginning to run short, and only by serving out double quantities of the raw West Indian rum were the men kept going at all. The ship herself could be heartened with no such encouragement, and although she was now snoring at a fair pace through the smother of foam that kept the lee-scuppers covered with a running river, yet her foul sides and wicked loading absorbed half her speed. She was a wet ship at the best of times, now she was sodden to her trucks, and the showers of icy rain that blew down on the westerly gale every now and then, wetted in a worse fashion, for rain-water chills to the bone right through oilskins. One day an exhausted Cape pigeon fell on board, and the little bird was eaten raw by the first man who got to it; sometimes a great albatross sailed on level unmoving wings around the labouring ship, and mollymawks screamed and circled, but none fell a victim to the hungry crew. There was a certain amount of salt junk left aboard, but the chief diet was nothing but hard-tack, and that was mouldy. Elderkin remained unmoved by any consideration save how to get her round the Horn, and he made Olsen save the dwindling fuel as much as possible for the attempt, lest they should be kept beating back and forth for weeks till exhaustion of ship and men sent them under. So the days went on, and the great Cape Horn greybeards rolled up with glistening flanks and white crests that broke and poured down them in thunder. Cold rains, wind squalls, her own condition and that of the men aboard her, all fought against the *Spirito Santo*, till it seemed as though the strongly set will of her captain were the only thing that kept her alive—alive and obedient however sulky, to the intelligence that drove her.

Still she kept going, steaming and sailing into the stormy sunsets till at last she was off Cape Stiff itself, showing unspeakably bleak and gaunt through the driving mist; only now and then were the black cliffs visible, going down into a smoking line of foam.

[265] If a bad storm had hit her off the promontory nothing could have saved her, but the wind, though the strong westerly gale of the "roaring forties," held less of violence than ordinary, and although she rolled till it seemed she would dip her yards, and the water could hardly be pumped out of her as fast as it poured in, yet she pulled through, as she had pulled through the south-westerly gale and the disasters that followed. Elderkin, who had somehow expected his great tussle off the Horn, felt an odd sensation that was almost disappointment.

On looking back afterwards, Elderkin saw that the voyage was, as it were, divided clearly into two by the passing of the Horn—on the Pacific side the actual physical blows of material damage and storm, on the Atlantic the more wearing struggle against spiritual opposition. The men, headed by Lemaire, began to murmur.

For one thing, the last possible scrap of fuel had been burned by the time they were passing the Falklands, and they were left with nothing but their canvas to carry them home. As far as keeping her steady went, she was better under sail than steam, and also, like every true sailor, Elderkin felt more in harmony with the weather when using only canvas. For a steamer goes independently of the wind, ignores it, shoves her nose in its face, and the wind pays her back by becoming an enemy, but a sailing-ship lives by wind, humours it, coaxes the last hair's-breadth of it, and the wind, flattered, ignores that all the time it is being managed and made of use.

[266] But the sails of the *Spirito Santo* were old and mildewed, she carried little spare canvas, and, worst of all, if they should come into a calm, those on board her might starve to death before they sighted help. All these things the men knew, and knowing, began to rebel. Lemaire, too, no longer seconded Elderkin, and he and Olsen bore the burden of nigger-driving alone—and Olsen, although he was loyal, made his discontent apparent. A terrible loneliness of mind fell upon Elderkin. He felt himself accursed of all men, but he still held on; each successive incident of his fight, instead of wearing his resistance down, went to strengthen it. The crisis came when after weeks of crawling and standing still, hurrying on with any advantage of breeze that presented itself, yet afraid to carry too much canvas, the *Spirito Santo* was nearing the fortieth parallel once more.

[267] It was a grey, squally day, with the south-westerly wind keeping the sails bellied forward, and the gusts of rain driving so hard that the water in the brimming scuppers was lashed to paleness; the pumps were in pretty constant use now, and the fetid bilge-water washed over the decks in floods of a dark reddish colour, as though the *Spirito Santo* were bleeding internally. A sullen moodiness held air and sea and mind of those who looked; that grinding reluctance of the *Spirito Santo* had passed into the men's bones, they moved slowly if ordered to do anything, their shrunken flesh was a mass of sea-boils and, since the lime-juice and potatoes were exhausted, scurvy had broken out. Elderkin himself looked like some mediæval picture of the Baptist: he had grown a beard that came to a sparse point, and his sombre eyes glowed from behind the disordered streaks of hair that fell over them, while his skin, so tightly stretched over the bones, had taken on a waxen texture. To the men who came crowding on to the after-deck to voice their resentment, he had the air of a madman, as he stood erect at the break of the poop, his figure dark against the grey pallor of the sky. For a few minutes he stood scanning them quietly, and they stared back at him. In marshalling them where he had, Lemaire had made an error in

psychology; for the mere fact that they had to look up to Elderkin on the poop affected both him and them unconsciously.

"What do you want?" asked the skipper quietly. Lemaire stepped forward as spokesman.

"We want to get out of dis shop and make for the shore, dat's what we want, and dat's what we'll do."

"Ah . . . how?"

"We'll take de law into our own hands. If we sink her now we can make for the mout' of de Plate, or we might be picked up sooner. I've told de men; I've told how we was all goin' to be rich an' safe and would have been trowin' our money around ashore by now if you hadn't got de praise-de-Lord bug in your head."

"What Massa Lemaire say quite true, sah," called out a burly negro, whose black face was greyed over in patches from disease, "an' we aren't goin' to stand dis any longer. If you won't sink her we're goin' to, or we'll all be dead men."

"We're dead now, dead and rotting," shrieked the bo'sun, on a sudden note of frenzy that pierced the air like a thrown blade, "who ever saw live men rot?" And he held up a hand which scurvy, on an open wound, had literally rotted so that the tendons hung down like weed. He shook the maimed thing at Elderkin. "Look at this"—"And this . . ."—"And this . . ." came up to Elderkin in angry shouts. The men, intoxicated by the sudden venting of their wrongs, began to swarm up the ladders to the poop deck.

[268]

Elderkin felt new life urge through his veins, the pressure of the dead weeks behind sloughed off him, as the thinning veils of sleep drop away from the waking consciousness in the morning. He did not pull out his gun, but kept his hands in his pockets and faced the snarling, tentative, ugly pack of them.

Then he talked, not raising his voice more than was needful for the grinding and creaking of the ship's labour and the weary complaining of the wind-tortured rigging.

"So you'd mutiny, would you?" he began in his soft voice, "well, first you'll listen to me. Down off that gang-way, you there . . . that's better. Well, I guess I know what you men are saying to yourselves—that I'm one man against the lot of you, and now we're no longer fighting to keep the ship afloat for our lives, you can easy get the better of me. That's what you're thinking, isn't it?"

A murmur of assent, half-threatening, half-shame-faced, came from below. To Elderkin, looking down, the men appeared as blots of deeper colour against the pale glimmer of the wet deck; their upturned faces had the abrupt fore-shortening that imparts a touch of the ludicrous, but those faces were set in folds which told of hardened determination, behind the swellings and boils which glistened in the watery light, so that Elderkin could see each disfigurement as clearly as pebbles in a pool unshaded from the sky.

"The mate tells you you'll get a lot of money if you go home and say you've sunk the ship. You won't. He will, as Judas did for betraying his Lord, but you'll just be got rid of, if you don't keep your mouths shut. You're wrong, as you've been all your lives, as I've been till now. But I've a stronger man on my side than all of you herring-gutted sons of a gun would make rolled together. I've the Lord on my side. You think nothing of that, do you? The Lord's up in heaven and won't notice what you do, and you ain't feared of the likes of Him anyway. . . . Aren't you? Why d'you think it is you have bloody sacrifices there in the fo'c'sle—oh, yes, I know about it all—why d'you suppose you cringe to that nigger there"—pointing to the mate—"with his black history of murdered children and flesh eaten in secret when the sacred drum beats at the full of the moon? Why d'you suppose you're scared sick of a dirty bug and a bit of wool in an old bottle, or of my Bible that I've set up on a shelf? It's because you know there's something behind—behind your ju-jus and behind my ju-ju. . . . You not fear the Lord! Why, you fear Him with every devilish performance you concoct. You're afraid all the time—of the something behind. And my ju-ju is greater than your ju-ju, so you're more afraid of mine, and of me. Could your ju-ju bring you through the great storm alive? All of you—and that damned baby-eater there—you was all yelling at your ju-jus and they couldn't wag one of their accursed fingers to help you. Who saved you and brought you out alive? White men and the white men's God. You know there's something behind, and what's behind me is bigger'n what's behind you. . . ."

[269]

He suddenly pulled his hand out of the capacious pocket of his coat, and the men cowered swiftly, but instead of a gun he held his Bible out over the rail, threatening them not with its insignificant fabric but with its unknown import. A couple of Jamaican negroes fell on their knees and writhed upon the deck, making uncouth noises, their eyes turning palely upwards, their limbs convulsed.

[270]

"Praise de Lord!" they yelled. "Praise de Lord wid us, brudders! End of de world and judgment comin'. Save us, massa, save us. . . ." And a dago from the southern continent fell to crossing himself and gabbling his prayers.

"You fools!" cried Lemaire, thrusting through the heaving knot of men, "don't you listen to his talk. Talk won't fill our stomachs or cure our skins. How's he going to feed you? Ask him dat."

"Yes—what are we to eat? Give us food and we'll keep on!" shouted the bo'sun. "Can your God make food?"

"My God provided manna for the children of Israel in the wilderness and He'll provide for us now if we trust in Him. He will send us meat for our bellies and drink for our throats."

"How . . . ? Where is it, dis food?" taunted Lemaire; and Elderkin, his hand pointing, answered, "There . . ."

[271]

The men swung round to gaze, and saw a fugitive gleam of sunlight on her shining tower of cotton canvas, a great four-masted American barque beating to windward only a few miles away. Elderkin and his ju-ju were saved, and Lemaire's vision of dollars was routed by the men's vision of food. The distress signals were run up, and by that night the *Spirito Santo* carried enough provisions of a rude kind to last her, with care and luck—meaning a rigid discipline of practically wreck-rations and fair winds—to see her safely home again. Elderkin thought that at last the testings of his faith were over, that the weary ship would blow towards port on a divinely appointed wind, and that his sacrifice and conversion were accepted on high. For the image he had had in his mind on that day of revelation in the chart-house had been of one Titanic struggle, not of this succession of conflicts which sometimes rose to crisis point but more often meant fighting against the terrible depression of day after day's inaction, driven half-crazy by the unceasing moaning of the rigging. Sustained bad weather gets on a sailor's nerves not because of any danger but simply by dint of the repetition of noises; there is only one thing more unbearable to mind and temper, and that is to be becalmed. Thought of any such happening was far from those on board the *Spirito Santo*, for the south-westerly wind urged her on past the Plate, and then a baffling head wind blew her out of the treacherous skies, and for over a week she beat back and forth, making hardly any headway. The rations were still further reduced, and then just as the men were beginning to make trouble again, the *Spirito Santo* caught up with the south-west trades. Once again she made the seas roar past her, for now, regardless of her depth in the water, Elderkin made all the sail he could. Day after day slipped past with the slipping foam, and the gaunt creatures aboard felt a stirring of relief. And then, in the Doldrums, they ran into a dead calm. . . .

[272]

Only anyone who has been becalmed on a tropical sea knows the terror that it is. Of all feelings of helplessness it is probably the most acute. Without steam or motor a ship is as powerless as though she were anchored to the sea-bottom with iron cables. Men have gone mad of it, and men did go mad of it in the starving *Spirito Santo*. She lay, as famished for a breeze as they for bread, upon a surface of molten glass, her sails limp as a dead bird's wing, the pitch soft in her seams, and the only sound in the circle of the horizon the faint creak-creak of her yards against the masts. Cabins and forecastle were unbearable, yet on deck the vertical sun had driven all but the thinnest lines of shadow out of being. The nights were almost as hot as the days and always the false cross gleamed from a cloudless sky, and the true Cross swam up lying on her back and trailing the pointers behind her, slowly righting herself as she rose and driving the pitiless brilliancy of the Milky Way before her. The drinking-water, what there was of it, stank; and the dried mouths of the men could hardly manage the mouldy hard-tack which captain and crew shared alike. And there was nothing to be done, nothing that could be done. The men were past revolt now, they could only shamle dizzily about. There was nothing to be done—except pray, and Elderkin prayed, though his lips moved almost soundlessly. He thought much these days, and he remembered—probably because of the dead stillness around—an old seafaring fable that in the calm heart of a cyclone life is to be found—that there birds and butterflies of every size and colour crowd, till the air is hung with brightness. He saw the individual soul of man as the hollow calm in the midst of life, cut off by the circling storm from all other air, and told himself that it could be the refuge for beauties of praise . . . he strove to make this aching solitude of mind wherein he was, rich as the fabled heart of the cyclone. . . .

[273]

Then, just as the first faint breath made her ripple the water at her bows, he discovered that, worn out by her successive batterings, the *Spirito Santo* was literally falling apart. He looked over her side and saw that she was spewing oakum from her seams, while she settled lower and lower in the water.

The discovery acted like cool wind on Elderkin—it was unthinkable that they should perish now, not so very far from home, after all he had won through, and he prepared to meet this disaster also. He had prudently kept one last cask of rum unbroached, and this fluid life he now served out to the men. Then he drove them, as before with gun or Bible, but this time with rum; drove them to the task of frapping the leaking ship. Four great chain cables were passed under her and hove tight with Spanish windlasses on deck—a series of giant tourniquets to keep in her life. And when that too was accomplished, it was as though the power above at last was satisfied, and the wind strengthened that was to bear the *Spirito Santo* home.

[274]

Nearly six months after leaving port with provisions enough for one; with her rotten ratlines hanging in little tags, her jury smoke-stack idle between the patched sails that seemed as though one more puff of wind would tear them from the battered yards, her spewing sides kept together with cables, and her broken bulwarks level with the water—a nightmare vessel manned by ghosts—she crawled into the roadstead at Port of Spain.

* * * * *

For a few years after, a ragged white man haunted the drink-shops of the Islands and hung about the ports—a man without a ship. The owners of the *Spirito Santo* were broken by the safe return of that faked cargo, but they had passed the word round that her skipper was to be broken

too. He who had been so self-controlled in the old unregenerate days now drank steadily, but it was only when he was very drunk he talked. And even then it was difficult to make out what he said—it was all such a jumble of some strange fight between two ships, and of how the ways of the Lord were so mysterious that it was often impossible for a man to tell upon which side righteousness might be found.

FOOTNOTES:

- [A] Here follows in the original a minute description of the post-mortem.
- [B] Pronounced Roughneck.
- [C] At that date Prisoner's Counsel was not allowed to make a speech for the defence.

PRINTED AT
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
LONDON & EDINBURGH

Transcriber's Note:

Spelling and hyphenation have been retained as they appear in the original publication, except as follows:

Page 62

She carries the water from St. Ann's *changed to*
She carries the water from St. [Annan's](#)

Page 95

Once in the din passage leading *changed to*
Once in the [dim](#) passage leading

Page 151

Pisa on a more sophiscated errand *changed to*
Pisa on a more [sophisticated](#) errand

Page 209

Seneath turned her clear, long-sighted *changed to*
[Senath](#) turned her clear, long-sighted

Page 241

was an idealist, however preverted a one *changed to*
was an idealist, however [perverted](#) a one

Page 252

Then he turned to Oslen *changed to*
Then he turned to [Olsen](#)

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