

FICTION

Louis Tracy

Flower of the Gorse

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION

FLOWER OF THE GORSE

BY

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THE WINGS OF THE MORNING,
ONE WONDERFUL NIGHT, Etc.



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*Dans la ville des meuniers,
Pont Aven, pays d'Amour;
Au Bord des ruisseaux d'eau claire,
Fleur d'Ajonc chante toujours.*

--BRETON SONG.

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FLOWER OF THE GORSE

CHAPTER I

THE TOWER AND THE WELL

"O, la, la! See, then, the best of good luck for each one of us this year!"

Although Mere Pitou's rotund body, like Falstaff's, was fat and scant o' breath, and the Pilgrims' Way was steep and rocky, some reserve of energy enabled her to clap her hands and scream the tidings of high fortune when the notes of a deep-toned bell pealed from an alp still hidden among the trees.

Three girls, fifty paces higher up the path, halted when they heard that glad cry--and, indeed, who would not give ear to such augury?

"Why should the clang of a bell foretell good luck, Mother?" cried Barbe, the youngest, seventeen that September day, and a true Breton maid, with eyes like sloes, and cheeks the tint of ripe russet apples, and full red lips ever ready to smile shyly, revealing the big, white, even teeth of a peasant.

"Mother" signaled that explanations must await a more opportune moment.

"Madame Pitou can't utter another word," laughed Yvonne, the tallest girl of the trio.

"She has had some secret on the tip of her tongue all day," said Madeleine, who was so like Barbe that she might have been an elder sister; though the sole tie between the two was residence in the same village. "Don't you remember how she kept saying in the train?--Now, little ones, ask Sainte Barbe to be kind to you. She'll hear your prayers a kilometer away, even though you whisper them."

"Yes, and Mama would have liked us to begin singing a hymn when we started from the foot of the hill, but she thought Monsieur Ingersoll and Monsieur Tollemache would only be amused," put in Barbe.

"They would certainly have been amused before Madame Pitou reached the top, singing!" tittered Yvonne.

"Is it possible that I shall ever be as stout as Mama?" murmured Barbe, and the mere notion of such a catastrophe evoked a poignant anxiety that was mirrored in her eyes.

"Ah, Mignonne, now you know the form your petition to Sainte Barbe must take," smiled Yvonne.

"It's all very well for you, Yvonne, to chaff us smaller ones," pouted Madeleine. "You're tall, and slim, and fair, and you carry yourself like the pretty American ladies who come to Pont Aven in the season, the ladies who wear such simple clothes, and hardly look a year older than their daughters, and walk leagues in men's boots, and play tennis before *dejeuner*. Of course you can't help being elegant. You're American yourself."

The recipient of this tribute turned it aside deftly. "Sometimes I think I am more Breton than American," she said.

"Yes, everyone says that," agreed Barbe loyally. "Next year, Yvonne, they'll make you Queen of the Gorse."

With the innocence of youth, or perhaps with its carelessness, Barbe had raised a topic as prickly as the gorse itself, because Madeleine had been a maid of honor that year, and might reasonably expect the regal place in the succeeding Fete of the Fleurs d'Ajonc. Happily, Yvonne, if endowed with a sense of humor, was eminently good-natured and tactful.

"Nothing of the sort," she replied. "My father will never allow me to be photographed, and there would be a riot in Pont Aven if the shops couldn't sell picture postcards of the Queen."

"Hurry up!" cried single-minded Barbe. "Let's pray to Sainte Barbe before Mother comes, or she'll be telling me what I must ask for, and I mean to take your advice, Yvonne."

Two faces were turned instantly toward the invisible shrine of the puissant saint, and it would place no heavy strain on the intellect to guess what favors were sought. But Yvonne hesitated. She had not been reared in the precise religious faith of her companions. Opinions garnered in the Bohemian atmosphere of John Ingersoll's studio were in ill accord with the uncompromising dogma taught in the convent on the hill overlooking the estuary of the Aven and labored by every sermon preached in the picturesque church near the bridge.

Yet at that instant some words uttered by her father reached her ears, and, moved by sudden impulse, she raised her eyes to the tiny arch of light that marked the spot near the summit where the interlacing branches of the avenue of elms came to an end.

"Sweet Lady Barbara," she breathed, "if you have it in your power to favor us poor mortals, please give my dear father a happy year!"

The bell, after a few seconds of silence, renewed its clamor, and the pretty unbeliever accepted the omen. Her friends, of course, regarded the answer as more than propitious: it was an assurance, an undoubted promise of saintly intercession.

"I love Mama more than anyone in the world, but I couldn't bear to measure a meter round my waist," said Barbe confidently.

"Even though I may never be Queen, it is something to have been a maid of honor," said Madeleine, demurely conciliatory now that her prayer was safely lodged.

Yvonne heard, but paid no heed. She was looking at the three people approaching the ledge of rock on which she and the others were standing.

Madame Pitou, like the girls, wore the costume of Brittany, conforming, of course, to the time-honored fashion that allots a special headgear to womankind in each district. Thus the coif supplies an unerring label of residence. A woman from Pont Aven would recognize a woman from Riec and another from Concarneau though she had never seen either before in her life; while all three would unite, without possibility of error, in saying of a fourth, "She comes from Auray."

The two men in Mere Pitou's company were just as surely classed by their attire as the women by their coifs. Both were artists, and each obeyed the unwritten law which says that he who would paint must don a knickerbocker suit, wear a wide-brimmed felt hat, disregard collar buttons, and display a loosely knotted necktie. Ingersoll, the elder, was content with clothes of brown corduroy which had seen many, if not better, days. His boots were strong and hobnailed, and his easy stride up the rough and uneven track would reassure one who doubted the stamina of his seemingly frail body. Tollemache, who affected gray tweed, a French gray silk tie, gray woolen stockings, and brown brogues, looked what he was, a healthy young athlete who would be equally at home on springy heather whether carrying an easel or a gun.

Tollemache had caught Mere Pitou's arm when she announced the message of the bell.

"One more outburst like that, my fairy, and we'll have to carry you up the remainder of the hill," he grinned.

"*Mon Dieu!* but I'm glad I made the best part of the pilgrimage in a train and a carriage!" twittered Madame. "Yet, though I dropped, I had to warn the little ones that the dear saint knew they were coming to her shrine."

"Is that what it means?"

"What else? A pity you are not a good Catholic, Monsieur Tollemache, or you might be granted a favor today."

"Oh, come now! That's no way to convert a black Presbyterian. Tell me that Sainte Barbe will get my next picture crowned by the Academy, and I'll fall on my knees with fervor."

"*Tcha!* Even a saint cannot obtain what Heaven does not allow."

Ingersoll laughed. "Mere Pitou may lose her breath; but she never loses her wit," he said. "Now I put forward a much more modest request. Most excellent Sainte Barbe, send me some mad dealer who will empty my studio at a thousand francs a canvas!"

Yvonne heard these words; yet, be it noted, she asked the saint to make her father happy, not prosperous. It was then that the bell rang a second time.

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed Madame Pitou. "The saint replies!"

"Like every magician, you achieve your effect by the simplest of contrivances--when one peeps behind the scenes," said Ingersoll. "Old Pere Jean, custodian of the chapel, who will meet us at the summit, keeps a boy on guard, so that all good pilgrims may be put in the right frame of mind by hearing the bell accidentally. The boy saw our girls first, and then spied us. Hence the double tolling. Now, Madame, crush me! I can see lightning in your eye."

"Mark my words, Monsieur Ingersoll, the saint will send that dealer, and he will certainly be mad, since none but a lunatic would pay a thousand francs for any picture of yours."

Ingersoll seized her free arm. "Run her up, for Heaven's sake, Tollemache!" he cried in English. "Her tongue has scarified me every day for eighteen years, and age cannot wither, nor custom stale, its infinite variety."

Laughing, struggling, crying brokenly that *ces Americains* would be the death of her, and tripping along the while with surprising lightness of foot,--for Mere Pitou had been noted as the best dancer of the gavotte at any *pardon* held within a radius of ten miles of Pont Aven,--she was hurried to the waiting girls.

"Ah, that rascal of a father of yours!" she wheezed to Yvonne, relapsing into the Breton language, as was her invariable habit when excited, either in anger or mirth. "And this other overgrown imp! When they're beaten in argument they try to kill me. *Gars!* A nice lot I'm bringing to the holy chapel!"

"Never mind, *chere maman*," said the girl, taking her father's place, and clasping the plump arm affectionately. "When we descend the other side of the hill you'll have them at your mercy. Then you can tell them what you really think of them."

"They know now. Artists, indeed! Acrobats, I call them! Making sport of a poor old woman! Not that I'm astonished at anything Monsieur Ingersoll does. Everybody admits that he is touched here," and she dabbed a fat finger at her glistening forehead, "or he wouldn't bury himself alive in a Brittany village, because he really has talent. But that hulking Monsieur Tollemache ought to be showing off his agility before you girls instead of lugging me up the Pilgrims' Way. *Cre nom!* When little Barbe's father--Heaven rest his soul!--met me here one fete day before we were married, he wouldn't rest till he had swung himself round Sainte Barbe's tower by the shepherd's hooks; and me screaming in fright while I watched him, though bursting with pride all the time, since the other girls were well aware that he was only doing it to find out if I cared whether or not he fell and broke his neck."

"What's that?" inquired Tollemache; for Madame Pitou was speaking French again. "Where is this tower?"

"Oh, you'll shiver when you see it! You Americans eat so much beef that you can never leave the earth. That's why Frenchmen fly while you walk."

"Or run, my cabbage. You must admit that we can run?"

"The good Lord gave you those long legs for some purpose, no doubt."

"Well, *Maman*, we offered our petitions. What did you ask for?" said Yvonne.

Madame flung up her hands with a woebegone cry. "May the dear saint forgive me, but the monkey chatter of those two infidels put my prayer clean out of my head!"

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed Tollemache. "This time I'll run in earnest, or I'll catch it hot and strong," and he made off.

"No harm done," said Ingersoll. "Mere Pitou has all she wants in this world, and will enter the next with pious confidence."

For once the elderly dame kept a still tongue. Like every Breton woman, she was deeply religious, and rather given to superstition, and the momentary lapse that led her to forget a carefully thought out plea for saintly aid caused a pang of real distress.

Yvonne guessed the truth, and sympathized with her. "Father dear," she said, "promise now, this minute, that you will bring us all here again next year on Barbe's fete day, and that we shall fall on our knees while Madame offers her prayer, or she will be unhappy all day."

Ingersoll read correctly the look of reproach his daughter shot at him, and was genuinely sorry. He too understood the tribulation that had befallen his friend.

"By Jove!" he said instantly, "better than that, though I make the promise willingly, Madame Pitou and I must do immediate penance for our sins--she for neglect and I for irreverence--by going halfway down the hill again and toiling back."

He was by no means surprised when Mere Pitou took at his word. Away they went, and Yvonne did not fail to grasp the meaning of her father's significant glance toward the belfry as he turned on his heel. On no account was the boy to miss the arrival of yet a third batch of pilgrims!

Now, the belfry stood on the farther edge of a tiny plateau of rock and gorse that crowned the summit. On the left was Pere Jean's cottage with its stable and weaving shed. Among the trees in the background rose the diminutive spire of Sainte Barbe's chapel, and it was evident that the slope of the hill was precipitous, because spire and treetops, though quite near, were almost on a level with the girl's eyes. From the side of the belfry a paved causeway led to a quaintly carved and weather-beaten open-air altar, and long flights of broad steps fell thence on one hand to the door of the chapel and on the other to the first of many paths piercing the dense woodland of the hillside.

Pere Jean, a sprightly and wizened old peasant dressed in white linen, was already chatting with Tollemache and the other two girls. The boy, thinking the avenue was clear, had gone to the cottage for a tray of picture postcards.

Yvonne followed, and sent him to his lookout with definite instructions. "Make no mistake," she said, "and we'll buy at least a franc's worth of cards later." Then she rejoined her friends.

"Yes, I've seen it done," Pere Jean was saying. "Sailors were the best; but the shepherds were brave lads too. Nowadays it is forbidden by the prefect."

"Why? Were there many accidents?" inquired Tollemache.

"Oh, yes, a few. You see, it seems easy enough at the commencement; but sometimes the heart failed when the body was swinging over the cliff. It is fatal to look down."

Madeleine's shoulders were bent over a low parapet. Yvonne, leaning on her, saw that the caretaker was talking of the feat that Barbe's father had accomplished many years earlier. The altar at the end of the causeway was shielded by a squat, square tower. In its walls, about six feet above the causeway, some iron rings were visible. They hung loose; but their staples were imbedded in the masonry, and each ring was about a yard apart from its fellow. A mass of rock gave ready access to the first pair; but thenceforth the venturesome athlete who essayed the passage must swing himself in air, gripping a ring alternately in the left hand and in both hands.

On one side, the left, the tower sank only to the level of the path beneath; but a glance over the opposite parapet revealed an awesome abyss.

Madeleine shuddered when she felt Yvonne's hand. "To think that men should be so foolish as to risk their lives in such a way!" she murmured.

"I suppose that anyone who let go was killed?" said Tollemache.

"*Mais, non, M'sieu'*," Pere Jean assured him. "The blessed saint would not permit that. No one was ever killed, I'm told. But the prefect has forbidden it these twenty years."

"Are the rings in good condition?"

"Certainly, M'sieu'. Where now does one get such iron as was made in those days?"

"Let's test some of 'em, anyhow," said Tollemache, and before the horrified girls realized what he meant he had leaped from parapet to rock, and was clinging to a couple of rings.

"Oh, Monsieur Tollemache!" screamed Barbe.

"Please come back, Monsieur!" cried Madeleine.

"Hi! Hi! It is forbidden by the prefect!" bellowed Pere Jean.

But Yvonne, though angry and pallid with fright, only said, "Don't be stupid, Lorry. I should never have thought you would show off in that silly manner."

She spoke in English. Tollemache, gazing down at her in a comical, sidelong way, answered in the same language.

"I'm not showing off. Do you think that any Frenchman ever lived who could climb where I couldn't?"

"No one said a word about you."

"Yes. Mere Pitou said I'd shiver when I saw the place. Now watch me shiver!"

He swung outward. Even in her distress, Yvonne noticed that he took a strong pull at each ring before trusting his whole weight to it. But she made no further protest, nor uttered a sound; though Madeleine and Barbe were screaming frantically, and the old caretaker's voice cracked with reiteration of the prefect's commands.

Tollemache was soon out of sight round the angle of the tower, and the two Breton girls ran to the other parapet to watch for his reappearance. Not so Yvonne. The dread notion possessed her that she might see Laurence Tollemache dashed to his death on those cruel rocks some sixty feet beneath, and she knew that, once witnessed, the horrific spectacle would never leave her vision. So she waited spellbound in front of the altar, and gazed mutely at some tawdry images that stood there. Could they help, these grotesque caricatures of heavenly beings, carved and gilded wooden blocks with curiously inane eyes and thick lips? Her senses seemed to be atrophied. She was aware of a feeling of dull annoyance when the boy, attracted by the screams and Pere Jean's shrill vehemence, came running from his post, and thus would surely miss the second appearance of her father and Mere Pitou. But the young peasant was quick witted. He had seen the "pilgrims" turn and resume the ascent; so he dashed into the belfry, because he could thence obtain a rare view of an event that he had often heard of but never seen,—a man swinging himself round Sainte Barbe's tower by the shepherd's hooks, such being the local name of the series of rings.

So the bell tolled its deep, strong notes, and simultaneously Madeleine and Barbe shrieked in a wilder pitch of frenzy. Tollemache had just swung round the second angle of the tower. His left hand had caught the outermost ring on that side; but the staple yielded, and he vanished.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* he has fallen!" cried Barbe, collapsing forthwith in a faint.

Fortunately Madeleine saved her from a nasty tumble on the rough stones; though she herself was nearly distraught with terror. Pere Jean raced off down the right-hand flight of steps, moving with remarkable celerity for so old a man, and gasping in his panic:

"*Mille diables!* What will *M'sieu' le Prefet* say now?"

Evidently the caretaker feared lest Sainte Barbe's miraculous powers should not survive so severe a test. Yet his faith was justified. A shout was heard from the tower's hidden face.

"*Je m'en fiche de ca!*" was the cry. "I'm right as a nail. I've got to return the way I came—that's all."

Yvonne listened as one in a dream. She saw her father and Madame Pitou crossing the plateau. For an instant her eyes dwelt on the features of the frightened boy peering through an embrasure in the belfry. From some point beneath came the broken ejaculations of Pere Jean, who was craning his neck from some precarious perch on the edge of the precipice to catch a glimpse of the mad American's shattered body. Madeleine was sobbing hysterically over the prostrate Barbe, and endeavoring with nervous fingers to undo the stiff linen coil round the unconscious girl's throat.

Now, after leaving the cottage, Yvonne had looked at the chapel, the entrance to which lay at the foot of the left-hand stairway. The sanctuary had a belfry of its own, a narrow, circular tower, pierced with lancet windows beneath a pointed roof. These windows were almost on a line with and about ten feet distant from the top of the wall of rock left by the excavation that provided a site for the building. Through one of them, which faced the causeway, could be seen a tiny white statue of Sainte Barbe. No more striking position could have been chosen for it. The image was impressive by reason of its very unexpectedness.

Hardly conscious of her action, Yvonne turned to the saint now to invoke her help. She murmured an incoherent prayer, and as she gazed distraught at the Madonna-like figure, so calm, so watchful in its aery, she heard the rhythmic clank of iron as the rings moved in their sockets. One fleeting glance over the left parapet revealed Tollemache in the act of swinging himself to the pair of rings above the rock that gave foothold.

Again he peered down at her, twisting his head awkwardly for the purpose. "Nothing much to it," he laughed, jerking out breathless words. "Of course it was a bit of a twister when that ring came away; but----"

He was safe. Yvonne deigned him no further heed. She hurried to Barbe's side.

"For goodness' sake help me to shake her and slap her hands!" she cried to Madeleine. "Monsieur Tollemache has spoiled the day for us already, and Mere Pitou will be ill if she thinks Barbe is hurt."

Barbe, vigorous little village girl, soon yielded to drastic treatment, and was eager as either of her friends to conceal from her mother the fact that she had fainted.

Tollemache, feeling rather sheepish in face of Yvonne's quiet scorn, strolled to the top of the steps down which Pere Jean had scuttled. The old man's voice reached him in despairing appeal.

"*M'sieu!* Speak, if you are alive! Speak, *pour l'amour de Dieu!*"

"Hello there!" he cried. "What's the row about? Here I am!"

Pere Jean gazed up with bulging eyes, and himself nearly fell over the precipice. "Ah, *Dieu merci!*" he quavered. "But, M'sieu', didn't you hear me telling you that the prefect----"

"What's the matter?" broke in Ingersoll's quiet tones. "You all look as if you had seen a daylight ghost."

"I behaved like a vain idiot," explained Tollemache, seeing that none of the girls was minded to answer. "I tried to climb round the tower by those rings, and scared Yvonne and the others rather badly."

"How far did you go?"

"Oh, I was on the last lap; but a ring gave way."

Ingersoll knew the place of old, and needed no elaborate essay on the danger Tollemache had escaped. His grave manner betokened the depth of his annoyance.

"What happened then?" he said. "I went back, of course."

"Where did the ring break?"

"It didn't break. I pulled the staple out. That one--you see where the gap is."

Ingersoll leaned over the parapet. A glance sufficed.

"You crossed the valley face of the tower twice?" he said.

"Couldn't help myself, old sport."

"Then you described yourself with marvelous accuracy,--a vain idiot, indeed!"

"Dash it all!" protested Tollemache. "I've only done the same as scores of Frenchmen."

"Many of whom lost their lives. You had a pretty close call. Lorry, I'm ashamed of you!"

Mere Pitou added to Tollemache's discomfiture by the biting comment that her man had got round the tower, whereas *he* had failed.

Altogether it was a somewhat depressed party that was shown round the quaint old chapel of the patroness of armorers and artillerymen by Pere Jean, who had lost a good deal of his smiling bonhomie, and eyed Tollemache fearfully, evidently suspecting him of harboring some fantastic design of dropping from the gallery to the floor, or leaping from the chapel roof to the cliff.

Their spirits revived, however, as they descended a steep path to Sainte Barbe's well. Every chapel of Saint Barbara has, or ought to have, a well, and that at Le Faouet (three syllables, please, and sound the final T when you are in Brittany) is specially famous for its prophetic properties in affairs of the heart. Thus, a spring bubbles into a trough surmounted by a canopy and image of the saint. In the center of the trough, beneath two feet of limpid water, the spring rises through an irregular orifice, roughly four inches square, and all unmarried young people who visit the shrine try to drop pins into the hole. Success at the first effort means that the fortunate aspirant for matrimony will either be married within a year or receive a favorable offer.

So, after luncheon, which had been carried by a boy from the village on the hill opposite the Pilgrims' Way, the girls produced a supply of pins. Barbe was the first to try her luck. Three pins wriggled to the floor of the well; but a fourth disappeared, and Mere Pitou took the omen seriously.

"You will be married when you are twenty-one, *ma petite*," she said, "and quite soon enough, too. Then your troubles will begin."

Madeleine failed six times, and gave up in a huff. Yvonne's second pin vanished.

"*O, la, la!*" cried Mere Pitou, still deeply interested in this consultation of the fates. "Mark my words, you'll refuse the first and take the second!"

The old lady darted a quick look at Ingersoll; but he was smiling. He had schooled himself for an ordeal, and his expression did not change. Tollemache, too, created a diversion by seizing a pin, holding it high above the surface of the water, whereas each of the girls had sought apparently to lessen the distance as much as possible, and dropping it out of sight straight away.

"Look at that!" he crowed. "My girl will say *snap* as soon as I say *snip*. Here's her engagement ring!"

Plunging his left hand into a pocket, he brought to light the ring and staple torn from Sainte Barbe's tower. When hanging with one hand to the last hold-fast, on the wall overlooking sixty feet of sheer precipice, he had calmly pocketed the ring that proved treacherous.

Evidently Laurence Tollemache was a young man who might be trusted not to lose his head in an emergency.

Mere Pitou was not to be persuaded to tempt fortune, and Ingersoll, who was sketching the well rapidly and most effectively, was left alone, because Barbe, who would have called him to come in his turn, was bidden sharply by her mother to mind her own business.

Tollemache and Yvonne climbed the rocky path together when they began the return journey to Le Faouet. In the rays of the afternoon sun the rough granite boulders sparkled as though they were studded with innumerable small diamonds.

"Haven't you forgiven me yet, Yvonne?" he said, noticing her distraught air.

She almost started, so far away were her thoughts. "Oh, let us forget that stupidity," she replied. "I was thinking of something very different. Tell me, Lorry, has my father ever spoken to you of my mother?"

"No," he said.

"Do you know where she is buried?"

"No."

She sighed. Her light-hearted companion's sudden taciturnity was not lost on her. Neither Madame Pitou, Ingersoll's friend and landlady during eighteen years, nor Tollemache, who worked with him daily, could read his eyes like Yvonne, and she knew he was acting a part when he smiled because Sainte Barbe's well announced that she would be married at the second asking. And the odd thing was that she had endeavored to drop the first pin so that it would not fall into the fateful space. None but she herself had noted how it plunged slantwise through the water as though drawn by a lodestone.

Even Tollemache nursed a grievance against the well's divination. "I say," he broke in, "that pin proposition is all nonsense, don't you think?"

For some occult reason she refused to answer as he hoped she would. "You never can tell," she said. "Mere Pitou believes in it, and she has had a long experience of life's vagaries."

From some distance came Madeleine's plaint. "Just imagine! Six times! In six years I shall be twenty-five. I don't credit a word of it--so there! At the last *pardon* Peridot danced with me all the afternoon."

Even little Barbe was not satisfied. "Mama said the other day," she confided, "that I might be married before I was twenty."

Ingersoll and Mere Pitou, bringing up the rear, were silent; Madame because this hill also was steep, and Ingersoll because of thoughts that came unbidden. In fact, Sainte Barbe had perplexed some of her pilgrims.

CHAPTER II

THE FEAST OF SAINTE BARBE

On the morning of December 4 in that same year a postman walked up the narrow path leading to the front door of Mere Pitou's house in the Rue Mathias, Pont Aven, and handed in a bundle of letters. The family was at breakfast, the *petit déjeuner* of coffee and rolls that stays the appetite in every French household until a more substantial meal is prepared at noon. The weather was mild and bright, though a gusty sou'westerly wind was blowing; so door and windows were open.

Barbe saw the postman ere he unlatched the garden gate, and rose excitedly, nearly upsetting a cup in her haste.

"Why, what's the rush?" cried Ingersoll. "And who in the world are all these letters for?"

"Father dear, have you forgotten the date? This is Barbe's name day," said Yvonne.

"Oh, that's the explanation of tonight's festivity," laughed Ingersoll. "Sorry. It quite slipped my mind. Of course she has wagonloads of friends who make a point of remembering these things. Lucky Barbe! And, by the way, Madame, what about those pictures which the Lady of Le Faouet was to dispose of? It's high time she was getting busy. Here are three months sped and--if anything rather a slump in Ingersolls. Actually, my best commission thus far is a series of picture postcards of Le Pouldu--with benefits deferred till next season."

"Perhaps the good saint knew that you kept your tongue in your cheek while you were seeking her help," retorted Madame.

"Impossible. It was lolling out. You ungrateful one, didn't I climb the hill twice for your sake?"

Barbe exchanged a friendly word with the postman, who was well aware of the cause of this sudden increase in the mail delivery at the cottage. Then she ran in.

"One for you, M'sieu'--all the rest for me," she announced gleefully.

Ingersoll took his letter. It bore the Pouldu postmark and the printed name of a hotel. Usually such missives came from brother artists; but the handwriting on the envelop was essentially of the type that French hotelkeepers cultivate for the utter bamboozling of their foreign patrons. Yvonne glanced at it with some curiosity, and was still more surprised to see the look of humorous bewilderment on her father's face when he had mastered its contents.

"I take back everything I said, or even thought, about Sainte Barbe," he cried. "Learn how she has squelched me! The proprietor of the chief hotel at Le Pouldu offers four hundred francs for a picture of the *plage* with his hotel in the center. Certainly four hundred is a heap short of a thousand, which was the sum I named to her saintship; but then, a *hotelier* isn't a dealer, and he promises to pay cash if the sketch is delivered in a week, because he wants it for a summer poster. Yvonne, have you finished breakfast? Run and find Peridot, there's a dear, and ask him if we can sail to Le Pouldu this morning. It'll save time to go by sea, and the tide will serve, I know. If Peridot says the weather is all right, drop in at Julia's, and invite Tollemache. We'll lunch gloriously with my hotel man, rub in the best part of the drawing afterward, and be back here in good time for the feast."

Yvonne hurried out. The hour was half-past eight, and the tide in the estuary of the Aven was already on the ebb. But she had not far to go. The Rue Mathias (nowadays glorified by a much more ambitious name) was not a minute's walk from the bridge that gives the village its name. Another minute brought her to the quay, where the brawling river escapes from its last millwheel, and tumbles joyously into tidal water. She was lucky. Peridot was there, mending a blue sardine net,--a natty, square-shouldered sailor, unusually fair for a Breton, though his blond hair was French enough in its bristliness, as a section of his scalp would have provided a first-rate clothes brush. He touched his cap with a smile when she appeared, and in answer to her query raised to the heavens those gray-green eyes which had earned him such a euphonious nickname.

"Yes, Mademoiselle Yvonne, we can make Le Pouldu by ten o'clock with this wind," he said. "We may get a wetting; but it won't be the first. Is--er--is Madeleine coming?"

"Not today. She promised to help Mere Pitou with tonight's supper. You will be there?"

"Wind and weather permitting, Ma'mselle. We go in your own boat, I suppose?"

"Yes. Can you allow fifteen minutes?"

"There will be plenty of water for the next half-hour."

Yvonne raced off again, this time to the Hotel Julia, not the huge modern annex,--that dominates the tiny marketplace of Pont Aven,--but the oldtime hostelry itself, tucked in snugly behind its four sycamores, like some sedate matron ever peering up in wonderment at its overgrown child across the street. In winter the habitués--the coterie of artists and writers who cluster under the wing of the famous Julia Guillou--eat in the dining room of the smaller hotel.

Crossing the terrace, a graveled part of the square shielded by the trees, Yvonne met Mademoiselle Julia herself, bustling forth to inspect eggs, poultry, and buckets of fish. This kindly, outspoken, resourceful-looking woman has

tended and housed and helped at least two generations of painters. In her way she has done more for art than many academies.

"Is Monsieur Tollemache at breakfast, Mademoiselle?" inquired Yvonne.

Julia smiled broadly. Evidently it was the most natural thing imaginable that the pretty American girl, known to everyone in the village, should be asking the whereabouts of the stalwart youngster who would never be an artist, but was one of the hotel's most valued guests.

"*Oui, ma cherie!* I heard him shouting to Marie for three boiled eggs not so long ago. Out of three eggs one hatches a good meal. And how is your father? I haven't set eyes on him this week."

"He is so busy, Mademoiselle. There is so little daylight."

"Bring him to dinner on Sunday. We're roasting two of the biggest geese you ever saw!"

"He will be delighted, I'm sure."

Then Julia marched to conquer the venders of eatables. There would be a terrific argument; but the founder of modern Pont Aven would prevail.

Yvonne looked in through an open window of a delightful room, paneled in oak--on every panel a picture bearing a signature more or less eminent in the world of color. Tollemache was there, tapping his third egg.

"Lorry," she said, "Father and I are sailing to Le Pouldu. Will you come?"

"Will a duck swim?" was the prompt reply. "When do we start?"

"Soon. Be at the quay in ten minutes."

"By the clock. Plenty of oilskins in the locker?"

"Yes."

She sped away. A Frenchman, an artist who knew the Breton coast in all weathers, shook his head.

"Dangerous work, yachting off Finistere in December," he said. "What sort of boat are you going in?"

"Ingersoll's own tub, a *vague*--a sardine boat, you know."

"First-rate craft, of course. But mind you're not caught in a change of wind. The barometer is falling."

"Oh, as for that, we'll probably have Peridot in charge, and he was born with a caul; so he'll never be drowned. Even if he's not there, Ingersoll and Yvonne are good sailors, and I'm no fresh-water amateur."

"Well--good luck! I only ask you not to despise the Atlantic. Why is Ingersoll going to Le Pouldu at this time of the year?"

"Don't know, and don't care. It's an unexpected holiday for me; so my Salon study of the Bois d'Amour in winter must miss a day."

The Frenchman sighed; whether on account of the doubtful prospect before Tollemache's Salon picture or because of his own vanished youth, it would be hard to say.

"What a charming peasant girl--and how on earth did she acquire English with that perfect accent?" said a woman, a newcomer.

"She is the daughter of a celebrated American artist," explained the Frenchman.

"But why does she wear the Breton costume?"

"Because she has good taste."

"Oh! Is that a hit at current fashions?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "Madame asked for information," he said. "To wander off into an essay on clothes would be impolite."

Before nine o'clock the Hironnelle, registered No. 415 at Concarneau, was speeding down the seven kilometers of the Aven estuary on a rapid-falling tide. Owing to the force and direction of the wind it would have been a waste of time to hoist a sail, even in those reaches of the winding river where some use might have been made of it. Tollemache and Peridot (whose real name was Jean Jacques Larraidou) rigged two long sweeps, and Yvonne took the tiller, keeping the boat in mid-stream to gain the full benefit of the current. In forty minutes they were abreast of the fortlike hotel at Port Manech, the summer offshoot of the Hotel Julia, and a steel-blue line on the horizon, widening each instant, told of the nearness of the sea. It was an uneven line too, ever and anon broken by a white-capped hillock.

Peridot, pulling his oar inboard, poised himself erect for a few seconds with an arm thrown round the foremast, and gazed steadily seaward. "She'll jump a bit out there," he said; though the fierce whistling of the wind drowned his words. He was aware of that, because he converted both hands into a megaphone when he turned and shouted to Yvonne. "We'll take the inside passage, Ma'mselle."

Before attempting to hoist the foresail he rummaged in a locker and produced oilskin coats and sou'westers. There was no delay. The four donned them quickly. Yvonne had changed her Breton dress for a short skirt and coat of heather mixture cloth, because coif and collar of fine linen were ill adapted to seagoing in rough weather.

Peridot held up three fingers. The girl nodded. Peridot and Tollemache hauled at the sail, and Yvonne kept the boat in the eye of the wind until three reefs were tied securely. Then the Hironnelle swung round to her task. She careened almost to the port gunwale under the first furious lash of the gale, and a sheet of spray beat noisily on oilskins and

deck. But the stanch little craft steadied herself, and leaped into her best pace.

Ingersoll dived into the cabin, and reappeared with his pipe alight, the bowl held in a closed and gloved hand. Tollemache made play with a cigarette. Peridot clambered aft to relieve Yvonne.

"We'll make Le Pouldu in little more than the hour," he said.

"It's blowing half a gale," said the girl.

"Yes. If the wind doesn't veer, we should have a record trip. But we shouldn't start back a minute after three o'clock."

"Oh, my father will see to that. Moreover, we're due at Mere Pitou's at six."

Peridot showed all his white teeth in a smile. Madeleine would be there. He meant to marry Madeleine. There was no use in asking her to wed until after the Festival of the Gorse Flowers next August, since her heart was set on being Queen. Once that excitement was ended, Heaven willing, Madeleine Demoret would become Madame Larraidou!

In taking the rudder the man was not showing any distrust of Yvonne's nerve; but there was just a possibility that a crisis might call for instant decision, when the only warning would come from that sixth sense which coastal fishermen develop in counteracting the sea's fitful moods.

Perhaps once during the hour--perhaps not once in a year--some monstrous wave would roar in from the Atlantic, seeking to devour every small craft in its path. No one can account for these phenomena. They may arise from lunar influence, or from some peculiar action of the tides; but that they occur, and with disastrous results if unheeded, every fisherman from Stornoway to Cadiz will testify. Their size and fury are more marked in a southwesterly gale than at any other time, and the only safe maneuver for a boat sailing across the wind is to bring her sharply head on to the fast-moving ridge, and ride over it. Yvonne knew of these occasional sea dragons, but had never seen one. She knew what to do too, and for an instant was vexed with Peridot. He read her thought.

"I'd trust my own life to you, Ma'mselle," he said gallantly; "but I'd never forgive myself if anything happened to you."

She smiled in spite of her pique. To make her voice heard without screaming, she put her lips close to his ear. "This time, if anybody goes, we all go," she cried. He shook his head. "No, no, Ma'mselle. The sea will never get me," he said. "Hold tight here. This is the bar."

Certainly, even among experienced yachtsmen, there would not be lacking those who might have regarded the Hironde's present voyage as a piece of folly. There is no wilder coast in Europe than the barrier of shaggy rock that France opposes to the ocean from St. Malo to Biarritz. At Finistere, in particular, each headland is not a breakwater, but a ruin. During heavy storms the seas dash in frenzy up a hundred feet of shattered cliff, the Atlantic having smashed and overthrown every sheer wall of rock ages ago.

Of course the adventurers were not facing a No. 8 gale. That, indeed, would have been rank lunacy. But the estuaries of the Aven and the Belon, joining at Port Manech, were sending down no inconsiderable volume of water to meet a strong wind, and the opposing forces were waging bitter war. A mile farther on a channel ran between the mainland and a group of rocks called Les Vêres. There the tide and wind would not be so greatly at variance, and the partly submerged reef would lessen the force of the sea; though the only signs of its existence were a patch of high-flung spray and a small tower, with a black buoy at its easterly extremity. This was what Peridot had called the "inside passage." To the landsman it was a figure of speech. To the sailor it meant seas diminished to half their volume as compared with the "dirt" outside.

The Hironde raced through the turmoil at the bar as though she enjoyed it, and, once the islets were to windward, the journey became exhilarating. None of the four people on board displayed the least concern. Indeed, they reveled in the excursion. When their craft swept into the sheltered cove at Le Pouldu, not without a tossing on another bar, and was brought up alongside the small quay, their flushed faces and shining eyes showed that they looked on the outing as a thoroughly enjoyable one.

They were ready for an early luncheon too, and did full justice to the menu. Afterward, while Ingersoll planned his picture, Yvonne and Tollemache strolled along the right bank of the Laita to the hamlet of Le Pouldu.

The girl told her companion of the singular coincidence that brought her father an unexpected commission by that morning's post; but Tollemache pooh-poohed it.

"You're becoming almost as superstitious as these Bretons," he said. "It's high time your father took you to New York for a spell. Spooks can't live there since the automobile came along. They don't like the fumes of petrol, I fancy. But these silly Bretons appeal to a saint or dread a devil for every little thing. One stained-glass proposition can cure rheumatism in a man and another spavin in a horse. It's unlucky to gather and eat blackberries because the Crown of Thorns was made out of brambles. You can shoot a wretched tomtit; but you mustn't touch a magpie. If you want to marry a girl, you pray to Saint This; if you're anxious to shunt her, you go on your marrow-bones to Saint That. I'm fond of Brittany and its folk; but I can't stomach their legends. Look at that pin-dropping business at Sainte Barbe's well! Poor Madeleine couldn't get a pin home to save her life; whereas everybody knows that she and Peridot will make a match of it before this time next year."

Yvonne did not like to hear her friends' amiable weaknesses exposed thus ruthlessly. "If Homer nods, a poor girl who has watched ever so many love affairs since A.D. 235 may surely be forgiven an occasional mistake," she said.

"Has she been at it so long? What is the yarn?"

"Please don't speak so disrespectfully of Saint Barbara. Because she wanted to marry someone whom her father didn't approve of he imprisoned her in a tower, and when she was converted to Christianity beheaded her."

"The old rascal! Did the other fellow--the one she liked--climb the tower? Perhaps that accounts for the rings."

"It is possible. I have no doubt men were just as foolish seventeen centuries ago as they are today."

"Thanks. That personal touch helps a lot. But, supposing I asked your father to sanction----"

"If you will apply the moral, I must remind you that I am to refuse my first offer. But don't let us talk nonsense. It is time we made for the harbor."

"Crushed again!" murmured Tollemache, assuming an air of blithe indifference. He was only partly successful. Stealing a glance at Yvonne, he noted her heightened color and a curiously defiant glint in her blue eyes. Unconsciously she quickened her pace too, and Tollemache interpreted these outward and visible tokens of displeasure as hostile to the notion that had sprung into thrilling life in his mind that day at Le Faouet, when he peered down into Yvonne's agonized face when he was clinging like a fly to the wall of the tower.

"She regards me as a silly ass," he communed bitterly, "and not without good cause. What place do I fill in the world, anyhow? God created me a live-wire American, and the devil egged me on to spoil clean canvas. I'm little better than a hobo, and she knows it. Well, I'll swallow my medicine.

"I say, Kiddie," he cried aloud, "you needn't go off in a huff just because I was talking through my hat. Wait till I light a cigarette."

Though he was not sure that the bantering protest had deceived her, she pretended that it had; so the object aimed at was achieved. But Tollemache was of the tough fiber that regards no sacrifice as worth while unless it is complete.

"If you knew the facts, Yvonne, you'd never get mad with me when I talk about marrying anybody," he went on. "Why do I live in Pont Aven all the year round? Because it's cheap. Last year I earned three hundred and twenty francs for three pictures. At that rate of progress any girl who married me would jolly soon starve."

Yvonne remembered the famous three. Two were portraits of the oleograph order, in which Tollemache had shamelessly flattered his sitters. For these he received the three hundred francs. The twenty were paid for a sketch of a new villa which the builder wished to send to his mother-in-law! Still, she allowed herself to be surprised.

"Of course I knew you were only joking, Lorry," she said. "And while we are on the subject, I may as well tell you that I shall never leave my father. What you say about your means is rather astonishing, for all that. How can you possibly hire autos and live as you do?"

"Oh, I don't," he explained, with a sudden grimness of tone that she had never heard before. "My father pays all my bills,--living expenses, tailors, and that sort of thing, you know. The moment I marry without his approval I revert to my pocket-money allowance."

The girl knew they were trenching again on a dangerous topic. She was so exquisitely sensitive that she felt the imminence of some avowal that it would be better, perhaps, not to hear.

"What does money matter if we are happy?" she cried cheerfully. "And our small community in Pont Aven is a very united and pleasant one, don't you think?"

"Top notch," said he. "There's Ingersoll, coming down from the front. Bet you fifty centimes he has washed in a little gem--something I couldn't touch if I tried every day for ten years!"

"Dad is really very clever," agreed Yvonne, momentarily deaf to the irony of the words. "I often wonder why he has remained in our village eighteen years. People say he would soon find a place in Paris or New York. Sometimes I fancy that my mother's death must have distressed him beyond measure. He never speaks of her, even to me. Perhaps he can't bear to revive sad memories."

"I can understand that," said Tollemache. "I believe I should go dotty if married to a woman I really loved, and I lost her."

Yvonne darted into a shop to buy caramels. She had to escape somehow. When she emerged one side of her face was bulging, and she held out a cardboard box.

"Take one," she gurgled. Not yet twenty, she was sufficient of a woman to play a part when it suited her. By the time the two had joined Ingersoll they were boy and girl again, and the curtain, lifted for an instant on a tragedy, had fallen.

Tollemache, searching for some commonplace remark to relieve the tension of his own feelings, noticed the drift of smoke curling from a cottage chimney.

"What has happened to the wind?" he said.

"It has veered to the southeast, Monsieur," answered Peridot.

"I thought something of the sort had taken place, but was so busy that I did not pay any heed," said Ingersoll. Then his forehead wrinkled reflectively. "Southeast from southwest," he muttered. "On a rising tide that change should kick up a nasty sea. Is the return trip quite safe, Peridot?"

"The sea will be a trifle worse, Monsieur; but we'll travel on an even keel."

"And be swept by an occasional wave from stem to stern?"

"I've heard of such things," grinned Peridot.

"And very uncomfortable things they are too. Yvonne, you must decide. Shall we take the rough passage, or hire the hotel auto?"

Yvonne rounded her eyes at her father, and stepped on board the Hirondele.

He laughed. "That settles it!" he cried. "Of Christian souls more have been wrecked on shore than ever were lost at sea. But I warn you, my merry adventuress. Before half an hour has passed you may be ready to cry with honest old Gonzalo in 'The Tempest,' 'Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, anything,' obviously having the coast of Finistere in his mind."

The behavior of the maritime folk of Le Pouldu showed that there was an element of risk in the voyage. Knots of fishermen watched Peridot's preparations with a professional eye, and spat approval when he cast loose a small jibsail. A few carried interest so far that they climbed the seaward cliff to watch the boat's progress across the Basse Persac and Basse an Hiss, the two nearest shallows on the homeward line across the Anse du Pouldu.

The Hirondele passed the bar of the Laita quickly and safely. A sea that would have smothered her in churning water broke within a boat's length. After that escape she made a drier passage than her occupants expected. She was abreast of Douelan, and Yvonne was listening to the thunder of the Atlantic on the black reef that stretches from Kerlogal Mill to Les Cochons de Beg Morg, while her eyes were watching the changing bearings of the church spires of Moelan and Clohars, when a shout from Peridot recalled her wandering thoughts.

"There's a steam yacht out there, making heavy weather," he said.

Ingersoll had evidently noted the other vessel already, because he had gone into the cabin--not the cubbyhole of a sardine boat, but the hold converted into a saloon fitted with a table screwed to the deck, and four comfortable bunks--and reappeared with a pair of binoculars. From that moment all eyes were fixed on the newcomer.

At a guess she might be coming from Brest to Lorient, because it was safe to assume that her Captain was not a fool, and he must have started the day's run before the change of wind. It must be remembered that the very conditions that helped the five-ton Hirondele were the worst possible for the sixty- or seventy-ton stranger, hard driven into a head sea whipped by a fierce wind. She had shaped a course outside l'Isle Verte, and was well clear of the Ar Gazek shallow when first sighted by those on board the Hirondele. The tidal stream was running strongly there, and Yvonne with difficulty repressed a cry of dismay when the yacht's bare masts and white funnel vanished completely in a cloud of spray.

"If that fellow has any sense, he'll turn while he is able, and make for Concarneau," said Peridot, as the spume dissipated, and the stricken vessel's spars came into view again.

"Perhaps he doesn't know this coast. Can we signal him?" inquired the girl.

"He wouldn't take any notice of a fishing boat. The skipper of a ten-centime steam yacht thinks more of himself than the commander of an Atlantic liner. Of course he should make Lorient tonight--if he understands the lights."

The self-confident Peridot seldom qualified his words: now he had twice spoken with an if. Yvonne hauled herself forward, and joined her father and Tollemache.

"Peridot thinks that the vessel out there may get into difficulties," she said. "I suggested that we should signal her; but he says she would pay no heed."

"What sort of signal?"

"To turn back--Concarneau for choice."

"Let's try, anyhow. Lorry, you'll find a codebook in the chart locker, and flags in the one beneath. Look for 'Recommend change of course' or something of the sort, and the Concarneau code letters. Get the necessary flags, and we'll run 'em up."

Peridot, who missed nothing, understood Tollemache's quick descent into the cabin. His shout reached father and daughter clearly.

"They're signaling from the Brigneau station already. It'll do no harm if we give him a tip too."

During the next ten minutes the situation remained unchanged, save that yacht and fishing boat neared each other rapidly, the Hirondele traveling three kilometers to the yacht's one, while lines of flags, each identical--whereat Tollemache winked at Yvonne and preened himself--fluttered from signal station and mast. The yacht disregarded these warnings, and pressed on.

Ingersoll was watching her through the glasses; but Yvonne's keen vision hardly needed such aid.

"They must have seen both signals," she said. "There are two men on the bridge. What a big man one of them is! Can you make out her name, Dad?"

"No. I've been trying to; but the seas pouring over the fore part render the letters indistinct. You have a look. Mind you brace yourself tight against that stay."

He handed her the binoculars, and Yvonne lost a few seconds in adjusting the focus.

"The first letter is an S," she announced. "There are six. The last one is an A. Oh, what a blow that sea must have

given her! It pitched on board just beneath the bridge. Why, what's the matter? She is swinging round!"

The girl was sufficiently versed in the ways of the sea to realize that no shipmaster would change course in that manner, nor attempt such a maneuver at the instant his craft was battling against hundreds of tons of water in motion.

"*Gars!*" yelled Peridot excitedly. "She's broken down--shaft snapped, or propeller gone!"

At once the fierce and thrilling struggle had become a disaster. The yacht was drifting broadside on, utterly at the mercy of wind and tide. Unless a miracle happened, she would be ground to matchwood on that rock-bound coast within a few minutes. Unhappily she had gained considerable speed in the direction where destruction awaited her before her crew could let go the anchor. The agonized watchers from shore and boat knew when a fluke caught in some crevice of the rocks buried twelve fathoms deep, because the vessel's bows were brought up against the sea with a jerk. Then she fell away again. The cable couldn't stand the strain. It had parted.

"Good God!" groaned Ingersoll. "Every soul on board will be drowned before our eyes!"

Yvonne could not speak. Neither could she see. She was blinded with tears. The suddenness of the affair was appalling. At one instant she had been following a fascinating fight between man and the elements, a fight in which man was gaining ground yard by yard. Now by some trick of Fate man was delivered, bound and crippled, to become the sport of savage and relentless enemies. She heard her father shouting to Peridot:

"Bear a couple of points to port. They may lower a boat."

"No use," came the answer. "Better crack on. They'll strike on Les Vêres. We may pick up one or two in the channel if they wear life belts."

Tollemache had leaped down into the cabin. He was out on deck again now, bareheaded, having discarded oilskin coat and sou'wester. A cork jacket was strapped round his tall, alert body. If any life could be snatched back from the abyss, Tollemache might be trusted not to spare himself in the effort. In that moment of stress the cheery, devil-may-care American artist had become a calm, clear-headed man of action. He looked almost heroic, standing on the sloping deck forward, with one sinewy, brown-skinned hand clasping a mast-hoop, and the other thrust into a pocket of his Norfolk jacket. By a queer trick of memory Yvonne was reminded of her fright when she saw Lorry clinging to the rings of Sainte Barbe's tower. He had come through that ordeal unscathed.

Would he conquer in this far more dreadful test? There he could depend on his own taut muscles and iron nerve. Here he was at the mercy of circumstances. Still, it was helpful to see Lorry's fingers clenched on a ring. Somehow it seemed to offer good augury.

CHAPTER III

THE WRECK

There were brave hearts, too, on board the vessel now seemingly doomed to utter destruction. Each of her two masts carried canvas, and when the cable parted a ready command had evidently sent the crew racing to cast loose both sails from their lashings. But the very trimness and tautness of everything on board proved the yacht's final undoing. Knives were brought into play, and the foresail was hoisted within a few seconds. The yacht answered her helm promptly. There seemed to be a real chance that she might haul into the wind and clear the black fangs of Les Vèrres, in which case she would either run into the small estuary at Brigneau, or at the worst beach herself on the strip of sand there.

At that moment the occupants of the Hironde saw her name, the Stella, and they were on the point of breaking into a frantic cheer of relief when the unlucky craft crashed into a submerged rock, swung broadside on, and was saved from turning turtle only by another rock which stove her in amidships.

"Ah, Les Vèrres have caught her! I thought they would. God help those poor fellows!"

It was Peridot who spoke, and the mere fact that he had abandoned hope sounded the requiem of the Stella and all her company.

Then indeed her plight was like to have passed beyond human aid. She was lodged on the outer fringe of an unapproachable reef, whence a rapidly rising tide would lift her at any minute. Being built of steel, she would sink forthwith, because her bows were crushed and plates started below the load line. She carried four boats; but, with the ingenuity of malice that the sea often displays in its unbridled fury, the two to port were crushed to splinters when she heeled over, and those to starboard, swinging inward on their davits, filled instantly, since the waves poured in cascades over the hull, as though the mighty Atlantic was concentrating all its venom on that one tiny adversary.

The marvel was that no one was swept overboard. Nothing could have saved the men on deck had the Stella lurched on to her beam ends without warning; but the fleeting interval while she was being carried round on the pivot of her fore part enabled them to guard against the expected shock. Nine figures were visible, two standing on the port rails of the bridge, and the others on the deck rails, every man having braced his shoulders against the deck itself. Masts, funnel, and upper saloon were practically vertical with the plane of the sea, and the hull quivered and moved under the assault of each wave. Yet the very injuries that would swamp the vessel instantly when she rolled into deep water now gave her a brief lease of life. The rocks that pierced the hull held her fast. Her plight resembled that of some poor wretch stabbed mortally who breathes and groans in agony, only to die when the knife that causes his distress is withdrawn.

The horror of the sight brought a despairing cry to Yvonne's lips. "Peridot, Peridot, can nothing be done?" she shrieked, turning to the Breton sailor as though, at his prayer, the sky might open and Providence send relief.

The boat was now nearly abreast of the wreck, and running free before the wind. The girl's frantic appeal seemed to arouse the three men from a stupor of helplessness.

"Look out, everybody!" shouted Peridot. "We're going head on."

It was a dangerous maneuver in a heavy sea; but fortune favored the Hironde in so far that no mountainous wave struck her quarter as she veered round. All were equally alive to the possibility of disaster. Ingersoll, though he uttered no word till the boat had reversed her course, was almost moved to protest.

"We are powerless," he said, coming aft to make his voice audible. "Even if some of the yacht's people are swept clear of the reef, they will be smothered long before they drift in this direction. The thing was so unexpected that none of them has secured a cork jacket, or even a life belt."

"There is one chance in a hundred, Monsieur," said Peridot, speaking so that Ingersoll alone could hear. "The point is--will you take it? You and Monsieur Tollemache would agree, of course. Will you risk Mademoiselle's life as well?"

"A chance? What sort of chance?"

"I know every inch of Les Vèrres. A little inlet, not much longer than the yacht, and perhaps forty feet wide, runs in from the south just where she lies. Her hull and the reef itself form a breakwater. We can make it, and get a line aboard."

"Then for the love of Heaven why wait?"

"One moment, Monsieur. We have yet a second or two for decision. You see how the wreck lifts each time a sea hits her. The tide is rising. If she shifts when we are in there, goodbye to the Hironde!"

The eyes of the two met, and Ingersoll wavered, but only as a brave man takes breath before essaying some supreme test of hardihood.

"My daughter would never forgive me if she knew I chose the coward's path," he said. "Go ahead, Peridot! Tell us what we have to do, and it shall be done."

A cheerful chuckle was the Breton's answer as he thrust the tiller over to port and sent the boat reeling on the starboard tack. Once she was fairly balanced, he began to bellow instruction.

"Within a couple of minutes I'll put her head on again, and we'll drift alongside the ship yonder. Monsieur Ingersoll and Monsieur Tollemache will each take a sweep, and fend the after part off the rocks. Mademoiselle will remain forward, and be ready to drop the anchor as a last resource if I find the tide running too strong for the sweeps to hold us back. Leave the rest to me!"

It is a glorious heritage of the English-speaking race that the men of other nations regard sea valor as the birthright of its sons and daughters. Peridot had stated the case for and against the attempted rescue to Ingersoll as a father. When the die was cast, the decision made, he counted on *ces Americains* acting with the same cool heroism he would himself display.

The Hironnelle quickly reached the position from which the Breton judged it possible to drop into a natural dock, the existence of which he had learned when catching lobsters and crabs. Wind and tide carried the boat swiftly backward. At first it seemed that she was simply rushing to destruction, and every eye was bent on the swirling maelstrom toward which she was speeding rather than on the stricken yacht. Even Peridot's face paled beneath its bronze, and he had a hand uplifted as a warning to Yvonne to be ready instantly with the anchor, while Ingersoll and Tollemache were standing, each with a long oar couched like a knight's lance, when the Hironnelle swept past the bows of the wreck; only to be checked immediately by a backwash from the higher part of the reef.

"*Dieu merci!*" sighed Peridot, jubilant because his faith was justified. "Keep her steady now, *mes amis*, and with God's help we'll succeed!"

A tremendous sea dashed over the Stella, and for one appalling moment it appeared that she must roll bodily into deep water, and involve the Hironnelle in her own ruin. But she settled again, with a rending of her framework and inner fittings that was sweetest music in Peridot's ears, since it meant that she was becoming wedged more firmly on the teeth of the rock, and, owing to her construction, possessed no natural buoyancy to be affected by the rising tide.

Already he had a coil of rope in his right hand, and was yelling orders to the crew of the Stella. The noise of the seas pounding on Les Verres was deafening; but a hoarse cry from one of the men on the bridge penetrated the din:

"No *comprenez!* Heave away!"

So they were English or Americans--which, none could tell. Even at a distance of fifteen feet or thereabouts it was hardly possible to distinguish nationality by facial traits owing to the torrents falling continuously over the rounded hull, the smoke pouring from the funnel, the flapping of the loosened sails, and the clouds of spray that lashed the Hironnelle. At any rate, Tollemache, deciding instantly, as was his way, sent back an answering shout:

"Haul in twenty feet of the rope when it reaches you, make fast, and throw back the loose end. You must get across as best you can. No time to rig a safer tackle."

"Ay, ay, Sir!" was the reply.

"Heave away, Peridot!"

Tollemache, though not neglecting his special duty, spared one glance over his shoulder; but the rope did not undertake its spiral flight at once. The resourceful Breton awaited a momentary lull in the wind. Then the heavy coil was flung, and fell into the hands of one of the men on the bridge. As he was securing it to a stanchion, his companion, he whose gigantic stature had first caught Yvonne's attention, climbed into the tiny wheelhouse, and reappeared almost immediately, carrying a woman in his arms.

The sight caused a fresh thrill on board the Hironnelle. Somehow it was totally unexpected.

"Fools!" said Tollemache, meaning, no doubt, that men might, if they chose, venture their lives in fair fight against the storm gods, but they had no right to subject a woman to the ordeal.

Ingersoll overheard, and understood. He even smiled. Lorry regarded Yvonne as a chum to be trusted in fair weather or foul. It did not occur to him that her father might reasonably have urged the same plea against attempting a seemingly mad and impracticable rescue.

Evidently some fierce dispute was being waged on the Stella. The other man on the bridge, who turned out to be the captain, had thrown back the rope to Peridot, and summoned all hands to gather near. Now he was urging the big man to intrust his inanimate burden to one of the sailors, but met with the most positive refusal. Every second was vital, and Peridot blazed into annoyance.

"*Gars!*" he roared. "If they waste time, I'll back out!"

The commander of the yacht, however, was well aware of the greatest peril which threatened now; so without more ado he steadied the giant while the latter raised the woman's body to his left shoulder, grasped the double rope in both hands, and lowered himself into the water.

The passage was not difficult. The ropes were fairly taut, and the distance between the two craft not more than sixteen feet. Indeed, such a Hercules in physique might well regard the task as a mere nothing, and he set out with quiet confidence, extending his left arm in each onward movement, and closing up with the right.

Yvonne, watching his progress, suddenly yielded to another memory of Tollemache swinging from the shepherds' hooks of Sainte Barbe's tower. Suppose the rope were to break--just as one of the rings had come away in Lorry's grip? Of course the notion was stupid. She knew that each strand of that particular rope was sound, that it might be trusted

to hold the Hironnelle herself against the straining of wind and tide, let alone bear the dead weight of two people; but a woman's intuition is stronger than reason. And in this instance her foreboding came true, though from a cause that she had not foreseen.

All at once Peridot uttered a yell that degenerated into a semihysterical shriek; for temperament counts in such crises, and the Breton nature was being strung to a high pitch.

"Hold tight, all hands! Here's a tidal wave!" The monster whose coming the fisherman had feared all day was upon them before Tollemache could translate the warning. It broke against the Stella's hull, and literally dashed solid tons of water on the Hironnelle and the hapless pair now midway between the two vessels. During some seconds the stanch sardine boat seemed veritably to have foundered. Even in the convulsive and choking effort needed to cling with the strength of desperation to the nearest rope or stay, her occupants were aware that she sank appreciably beneath the sheer weight and fury of that tremendous sea.

Then their blinded eyes emerged into blessed daylight again, their lungs filled with air, the flood subsided, the Hironnelle rose, trembling like a living creature, and the wave boomed away across the half-mile of channel to tear at the rocks of Finistere in a last paroxysm.

Peridot, secure in the faith that one born with a caul could not drown, was perhaps the first to regain his senses. When he swept the water from his eyes he looked for the Stella; but that unfortunate little vessel had only been driven still more tightly into the jaws of the reef, though a great gap showed to starboard amidships. She was breaking in two.

"God be thanked for that, at any rate!" he muttered.

The concession was due to the strong commonsense of a Breton, which told him that signs and portents would prove of no avail against instant death if the Stella had rolled over. Then, having ascertained that his own people were safe, he looked for the colossus he had last seen clutching the ropes. The ropes were there; but man and woman had vanished. Something bobbed up among the spume and foam close to the Hironnelle's side. He leaned over and grabbed a huge arm. With one powerful tug he drew a body half out of the water. It was the man; but the woman had been reft from his close embrace at the moment when some chance of safety seemed to have come most surely within reach. His sou'wester cap had been wrenched off, and, even when hauling the limp body on board, Peridot knew that his quickness of eye and hand would avail naught.

He held a corpse in his grasp. The top of the unfortunate man's skull was visibly flattened, and the gray hair was already darkened by an ominous dye. In all likelihood the wave struck him when least prepared, tore his fingers from the ropes, and dashed him head foremost against the Hironnelle's timbers.

Peridot was no sentimentalist. He did not waste a needless sigh over the fate of one when the lives of many were trembling in the balance. Even when he was placing the body at Yvonne's feet, where it would be out of the way for the time, he peered up at her with a grim smile.

"Two gone, Ma'mselle," he said; "but with the help of the Madonna we'll save the rest!"

A shriek from the girl's lips, and an expression of terror in her eyes which assuredly was not there after the gallant Hironnelle had thrown off her mightiest and most vindictive assailant, told him that some worse tragedy was imminent. He turned, and saw Tollemache leaping into the frothing vortex that raged between the stern of the boat and the nearest rock. The Breton guessed instantly that the young American had seen the drowning woman. Leaving the Stella momentarily in charge of Ingersoll and Yvonne, he raced aft, and seized the sweep that Tollemache had dropped. Simultaneously his friend's head rose above the maelstrom; for the cork jacket bore Lorry bravely. He was clasping the woman's apparently lifeless form with one hand, and battling against the sea with the other when the long oar was thrust within reach, and he too was drawn to the side.

Meanwhile Ingersoll, exercising splendid self control, had not deserted his post. After the heavy backwash caused by the tidal wave, a sea had curled in from the open to fill the inlet again, and the Hironnelle was carried so near the reef that the stout oar bent under the strain of fending her off, and might conceivably have snapped had not some assistance been given by the ropes attached to the Stella. Another and more normal backwash came in the nick of time, and the boat retreated to her earlier position. Now, if the Fates were aught but merciless, there might be a breathing space.

Peridot's gray-green eyes sparkled as they met Tollemache's brown eyes, gazing up steadily from the swirl of waters.

"You all right?" he said, seizing the woman's arms.

"Why not?" said Tollemache. "Lift her aboard. Don't bother about me."

Ere Peridot had laid the dead or unconscious woman by the side of the man who had already given his life for her sake, Tollemache was on deck again, and lending a hand to the first sailor to cross by the ropes. The survivors followed rapidly, and the last to leave the Stella was her captain.

Ten men were rescued,—five sailors, including the master, two stokers, an engineer, a steward, and a passenger. The two last were in the saloon when the vessel struck, and had crawled on deck as best they could, the passenger having sustained a broken arm, and the steward a sprained ankle.

It was obvious, from the measures taken to safeguard the injured pair, that they were in urgent need of attention; but

Peridot knew that the lives of all still trembled in the balance. So he bawled to Tollemache:

"Get the lady below, and as many of the others as you can pack in. During the next few minutes I want none but sailors on deck. *Gars!* Be quick about it too! No, don't trouble about that poor fellow. He's gone!"

Already he had cast off the ropes that formed the precarious bridge. Tollemache told the shipwrecked crew what the Breton had said, and they obeyed with the readiness of men who were aware of the paramount necessity of prompt action.

The Stella's captain had already summed up the new problem facing the Hironnelle, and issued his orders with decision. He and a sturdy deckhand helped Tollemache and Ingersoll with the sweeps, which were now to be used as oars, while the others carried the woman to the cabin, and helped their disabled shipmates to make the descent.

Yvonne, though unwilling to leave the deck until the next ordeal was ended, felt that she ought to sacrifice her own wishes to the need of a sister in distress; but Peridot settled the matter by bidding her take the tiller.

"We can't get back to the inside passage on this wind. If we tried it, Les Verres would catch us," he said. "We'll forge out a bit with the sweeps. When clear of the yacht we'll be just clear of the reef too. When you see me begin to haul at the sail put the helm hard over for the seaward tack. We're going outside. You understand?"

"Perfectly," she said.

She ran between the four men laboring at the oars, well pleased to have a task that would absorb her mind to the exclusion of all else, and profoundly relieved because it took her away from the vicinity of the dead body. Even as the Stella's company were climbing on board she could not avoid an occasional glance at the huge and inert form at her feet. It was a dreadful thing to see the soul battered out of such a magnificent frame in such a way. Never before had she set eyes on a man of similar proportions. He was inches over six feet in height, and stout withal, so that he completely dwarfed the tall and sinewy frame of Laurence Tollemache, who hitherto had loomed as a giant among undersized Frenchmen. Oilskins and heavy sea boots added to the dead man's apparent bulk. His face, which wore a singularly placid expression, was well modeled. In youth he must have been extremely good looking; in middle age--apparently he was over fifty--he still retained clear-cut features, and strands of a plentiful crop of iron-gray hair dropped over a broad and high forehead.

The woman whom he had declined to intrust to the care of any but himself was probably his wife. Was she dead too? Yvonne wondered. It was almost equally certain that the yacht was theirs; though perhaps they might have hired it for a winter cruise in the Mediterranean by way of the Spanish coast.

These thoughts flitted through the girl's brain as she followed the last phases of the rescue. Now that her hand was on the tiller, and the open sea began to show beyond the yacht's bowsprit, her mind was occupied by the one remaining hazard to the exclusion of all else. She had every confidence in Peridot's seamanship, having been out with him many a time in weather that, if not quite so threatening as this, offered sufficient test of skill and nerve. But she knew well that once the full force of the tide was felt the oars would be useless, chiefly owing to their unwieldy length, and the doubt remained whether the Hironnelle would gain enough way to win out close hauled into deep water.

Still her heart leaped with high courage as her eyes took in the bold and striking picture presented by the deck of the fishing boat during that brief transit through broken seas. In the immediate foreground a small hatchway framed the weather-tanned faces of two men lodged in the companionway so as to avoid overcrowding the cabin. Behind were her father and the yacht's Captain at one oar, and Tollemache and a sailor at the other, pulling with the short, jerky, but powerful stroke alone possible in the conditions. Ingersoll's sallow, well marked, intellectual features were in sharp contrast with the fiery red skin, heavy cheeks and chin, bullet head, and short neck of the man by his side. For an instant the eyes of father and daughter met. He smiled encouragement, and the odd notion occurred to Yvonne that strangest of all the occurrences in an hour packed with incident was the fact that the thin hands that could achieve such marvels by the delicate manipulation of a camel's hair brush should be able to toil manfully at a cumbrous oar.

Then she looked at Lorry, and he grinned most cheerfully.

Skipper and sailor wore the stolid expression of men who didn't know, and didn't particularly care, what happened next. If anything, their watchful glances betrayed a total lack of belief in the wisdom of intrusting the helm to this slip of a girl.

Amidships, and slightly forward, Peridot was standing, both hands laced in the rope that should hoist the sail. The small jib had not been lowered. It was now flapping in the wind with reports like irregular pistol shots; but Yvonne knew it would fill and draw instantly when the tiller brought the boat's head around.

And beyond Peridot was the body of the man who had been snatched from life with such awful suddenness. The broad back and slightly outstretched legs kept it motionless no matter how the deck tilted; but the front skirts of the oilskin coat crackled noisily in the gale, and a lock of hair, though soaked and thick with salt, freed itself from the clammy forehead, and moved fitfully in every gust.

The artist instinct in the girl's heart dominated every other emotion at that moment. She felt that she could transfer this somber scene to canvas if she was spared. And what a study of action it would make! What staring lights and

shadows! What types of character! The four men in strenuous effort, the anxious faces peering from the semiobscurity of the hatch, Peridot's sturdy figure braced for prompt and fierce endeavor, the still form with sightless eyes peering up at the sky, and all contained within the narrow compass of the deck, with the boat's prow now cutting the horizon, now threatening to take one last horrific dive into a wave overhanging it like a moving hillock! Beyond were a slate-blue sea flecked with white and scurrying clouds tipped with russet and gold by the last beams of a wintry sun.

All this, and more, Yvonne caught in one wide-eyed glance. She saw every touch of color, every changeful flicker of light on the wet deck and glistening oilskins. Tollemache alone supplied a different note. The light brown squares of the cork jacket, and the dust-colored canvas straps that clasped it to his body, stood out in marked relief. He, who had been overboard and submerged for a few seconds, looked bone dry. The others, wet as he no doubt, Ingersoll alone excepted, seemed to have come straight from the depths.

But Peridot, watching the sea with sidelong glance, suddenly bent in a very frenzy of exertion, and Yvonne, thrusting her right foot against the low gunwale, put the tiller to port and leaned against it until her left knee touched the deck. The men at the oars imitated her as best they might, while striving to keep the boat moving.

At the first mighty pull of the partly raised sail the Hironnelle flinched and fell back a little. Then she took hold, as sailors put it, and careened under the strain until the iron socket on the starboard sweep was wrenched off its pin, and Tollemache and the sailor were hard pressed to keep it from swinging inboard and dealing Yvonne a blow. Something black and sinister showed for a second in the yeasting froth beneath the boat's quarter; whether rock or patch of seaweed none could tell, though five pairs of eyes saw it.

Peridot's call came shrilly, "Keep her there, Ma'mselle!" Back swung the tiller, and Yvonne "kept her there," though during a long minute the Hironnelle tore at the rudder as a startled horse snatches at the bit, and it seemed as if she must capsizes without fail.

Again the Breton's cry rang out, "Ease her now, Ma'mselle!"

The boat fell away before the wind. Soon she was on an even keel, save for the unavoidable rolling and pitching that resulted from the furious seas. But, if stout canvas and trustworthy cordage held, they were safe as though tied to the quay in the land-locked harbor at Pont Aven. Already Les Verres were a furlong or more in the rear. It was impossible to see what had become of the Stella, because the spray was leaping high over the reef, until its irregular crests were bitten off by the gale. But a fishing smack which had gallantly put out from Brigneau was signaled back before it crossed the bar, and the signal station was hoisting a fresh set of flags which spelled in the *lingua franca* of the ocean, "Well done, Concarneau 415!" which was as near the Hironnelle's name as the watchers on shore could get on the spur of the moment.

Peridot paid Yvonne the greatest of all compliments by not coming aft to relieve her. But her father, who had betrayed no flurry even when death seemed unavoidable, drew near, and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"You're another Grace Darling, my dear!" was all he said.

But the look accompanying the words was enough, and the girl's eyes began to smart painfully, because the sudden moisture in them revealed how they had suffered from the spindrift.

And again, by sending her below on an errand of mercy, he only added subtly to Peridot's tribute.

"We can spare you now, Yvonne," he said. "Tell those men to come on deck, and you give an eye to the lady. You have some dry clothes down there. If she has no bones broken, she will recover more quickly in a warm bunk than under any other conditions. Get her undressed, and give her a little cognac. Take some yourself,--don't spare it,--and pass the bottle up here."

He took her place at the tiller, and she made off at once, only pausing to pat Lorry's wet and shaggy head.

Six men came up the companion stairway; but two returned at her call to lift the injured men into a lower and an upper bunk on the same side. They had contrived already to bandage the broken arm with handkerchiefs. The sprained ankle they could not deal with. The man with a broken arm was making some outcry; but the other sufferer was patient and even smiling.

"Gawd bless yer, Miss!" he said to Yvonne when he discerned her identity in the dim light of the cabin. "If it 'adn't a been fer you an' yer shipmates, we on the Stella 'ad as much chawnce as a lump o' ice in hell's flimes!"

The Cockney accent was new in Yvonne's ear, and its quaintness helped to soften the speaker's forcible simile.

"You'll soon be all right," she assured him. "We'll reach Pont Aven within the hour, and the good folk there will look after you splendidly. Please lie still now, as I must pin a blanket across these two bunks."

Then she was left alone with the insensible woman, who was alive, the sailors said, but completely unconscious. She had fainted, they believed, when the shaft snapped and the yacht was like to be lost forthwith. The immersion in the sea seemed to have revived her for a few seconds; but she swooned off again in the cabin, and, while the boat was lurching so heavily, they thought it wiser to pillow her head on a coat and not attempt to restore her senses.

On deck the captain of the Stella had picked out Ingersoll as the probable owner of the Hironnelle. He came and stood by the artist's side.

"Is this craft yours, Sir?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"And is that young lady your daughter, Sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, I need hardly say that we owe our lives to her, and you, and your two friends. I've seen some rum things durin' thirty years at sea; but I've never seen anything to ekal your pluck in runnin' into that death trap. And that girl of yours--the way she behaved! Well, there! I never could talk much. This time I'm clean stumped!"

"We did what we could. The real credit for your rescue lies with that cool-headed Breton fisherman yonder. Is the poor fellow who was killed the owner of the Stella?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And the lady is his wife?"

"Yes, Sir. Mr. and Mrs. Walter H. Carmac. Look out, Sir! You must ha forgotten you were leaning against the tiller."

The sailor acted promptly in bringing the Hironnelle back on her course; but, owing to her quickness in answering the helm, she had swung round a couple of points when an involuntary movement, a sort of flinching on Ingersoll's part, caused her to change direction.

Peridot came aft, smiling and debonair. "We're all a bit shaken, Monsieur," he said, noting the increased pallor of Ingersoll's ordinarily rather delicate-looking face. "A tot of cognac, eh? That's what we want. What do you say, Monsieur?"

The bluff English skipper had caught the key word of the sentence, and the Breton's merry eye supplied a full translation.

"Good for you, my hearty!" said he. "Gimme one fair pull at a bottle of decent stuff now, an' I'll load you to the bung with the same once we're ashore."

CHAPTER IV

THE HOME-COMING

Peridot had stipulated that the Hironnelle should start on her homeward run "not a minute later than three o'clock." He had cast off from the wharf at Le Pouldu slightly before that hour; but the wreck of the Stella and its attendant circumstances--not least being the necessity enforced by the change of wind to take the deep-sea course after leaving the reef--cost a good deal of time. As a consequence daylight had almost failed before the bar of the Aven was crossed.

On Pointe d'ar Vèchen, within thirty feet of the Port Manech Hotel, stands a tiny lighthouse which sheds a mild beam over the entrance to the estuary. It is essentially a harbor light. A broad white band covers the safe channel extending from Les Vèrres to l'Isle Vèrte, a red sector forbids the former, and a green one indicates the narrow inside passage between reef and mainland.

In crossing the bar, of course, each color became visible in turn. Ingersoll had seen the light scores of times. Never a week passed in summer that he did not spend a day, or even three days, at sea with the fishermen. His studies of the sardine fleet, in particular, were greatly in request.

Yet on this night of nights, when the return to his beloved Pont Aven might well be reckoned the close of the most notable achievement of his whole life, he seemed to have collapsed physically and mentally. His eyes had a vacant look. Their wonted expression of a somewhat sarcastic yet not intolerant outlook on life had fled for the hour, and he peered at the Breton and the sailor as though he had never before seen either. His slight but usually alert and wiry frame appeared to have shrunk. He remained deaf to Peridot's suggestion as to the brandy, and became curiously interested in the red gleam of the lighthouse which came in sight just before the bar was reached.

The Breton imagined that his employer's bodily resources had been unduly taxed. Catching the eye of the yacht's skipper (whose name, by the way, was William Papple), he nodded toward the tiller, pointed straight ahead, and held up a finger. "Wan mineet," he said.

Captain Papple was not to be outdone in linguistic amenities. "*Comprenny*," he grinned, and took control.

Peridot thrust his head into the hatch. "Ma'mselle," he said, "these poor devils' teeth are chattering with the cold. Will you pass the cognac?"

Yvonne felt the urgency of the request. Nearly every man was wet to the skin, and the wind bit keenly. She abandoned her nurse's work for the moment, opened a locker, and produced a bottle of generous size.

"Here you are," she said. "See that a little is left. I have given some to the men, and I hope my other invalid will soon be able to take a small quantity."

The fisherman removed a plug which had replaced the ordinary cork, and handed the bottle to Captain Papple. The brandy was a fine old liquor, brown, and mellow, and smooth to the palate, and Papple took a draft worthy of a Russian grand duke.

"Gosh!" he said, passing the bottle to Ingersoll, "that's the stuff! It warms the cockles of yer heart."

Ingersoll swallowed a mouthful. It seemed to restore his wits. The eye of the lighthouse had changed from red to green. "It is singular," he said, "how a quality of evil can be associated with certain colors. Red means danger and possible death, while green implies a jealous love perilously akin to hate."

He had not the least notion of the incongruity of such a remark just then. He might have been making conversation for some boarding-school miss whom Yvonne had brought on a summer cruise.

The other man, puzzled, stared stolidly into the gathering gloom.

"When you're plashin' at sea on a dark night you find them colored sectors mighty useful, Sir," was all he could find to say.

Ingersoll roused himself, as though from sleep, and indeed he had been wholly unconscious of his surroundings during the last few minutes. "Oh, doubtless," he said apologetically, "I was thinking aloud, a foolish habit. You were telling me about the owner of the Stella. Carmac is the name, I think? I knew a Walter H. Carmac many years ago. He was very tall, but slightly built. Surely a man cannot change his physique so markedly in the course of, say, twenty years!"

"Well, as to that, Sir, on'y the other day I was talkin' of Mr. Carmac's size to Mr. Raymond, the gentleman with the broken arm (Mr. Carmac's secretary, he is), an' he said the gov'nor used to be thin as a lath once. P'raps it was a case of laugh and grow fat. Very pleasant gentleman, Mr. Carmac was; an' his lady too--one of the best. Excuse me, Sir, but I couldn't help starin' at your girl. She's that like Mrs. Carmac it's surprising. If anyone said they was mother an' daughter, I'd agree at once--if I didn't know different."

There was a pause. Peridot had intrusted the supply of brandy to Tollemache for further distribution. He came aft now, as careful piloting would soon be needed.

"Once we're inside, Monsieur," he said, "we'll set the men at work by turns with the sweeps. That will drive the chill away."

Ingersoll explained the scheme to the skipper, who gave it his hearty approval.

"Did the yacht belong to Mr. Carmac?" went on the artist.

"Yes, Sir. He bought her a fortnight ago. She used to be Lord Aveling's Nigger; but Mr. Carmac didn't like that name, and changed it to the Stella, after his wife's Christian name."

"He didn't care to sail in a yacht called the Nigger, eh?"

A bitterness of aloes was in the words. Apparently they suggested some unpleasing notion to Popple, who branched off to another topic.

"I've a sort of idea his heart was affected," he said. "I know that some bigwig of a London doctor recommended a long voyage, and Mr. Carmac bein' several times a millionaire he just up and grabbed the first suitable craft that offered. Wouldn't wait for a survey. Took everything for granted; though I warned him that white paint may cover a lot of black sins. He an' the missis had planned a regular tour in the Mediterranean, goin' from Gib to the Balearics, and dodgin' in and out of ports all along the north coast until we brought up at Constantinople sometime in April. I advised him to let me meet him at Gib or Marseilles; but he was one of the men who will have their own way, and nothin' would suit but that he should come straight aboard. We left Southampton Tuesday evenin', and made Brest yesterday afternoon. Today we were for callin' at Belle Isle and berthin' at Lorient; but the foul weather met us, an' he was half inclined to put in at this very place we're headin' for;--Pont Aven is the name, isn't it?--on'y poor Mrs. Carmac wouldn't hear of it. She said Belle Isle was no distance, an' made out she was a good sailor--which was hardly correct, because she was ill as could be for the last two hours."

"Why didn't you turn back?"

"There was no turnin' back about Mr. Carmac, Sir. He wasn't built that way, bein' a sure enough American. Though I've never known anybody more devoted to his wife than he was, he ought to have let a younger man take her across to your boat. Not as I mean to argy that anyone could have held up against that sea. Lord love a duck! it was a oner an' no mistake! But there, what has to be will be. Poor Mr. Carmac was fated to hand in his checks on the coast of Finistere, an' we others weren't, and that's all there is to it; though I'd be flyin' in the face of Providence if I didn't say in the same breath that if four of the pluckiest and best hadn't been aboard this 'ere craft, none of our little lot would ever have seen daylight again."

Tollemache joined them. He had just exchanged a word with Yvonne, who had evidently placed her guest in a bunk, because the gleam of an oil lantern came through the open hatch, and, like the good yachtswoman she was, she had passed out the side lights trimmed and ready for use.

"Well, Ingersoll," he said cheerily, "how are you feeling now?"

"Rather tired," was the unexpected answer.

"I'm not surprised at that. You've had a pretty strenuous time."

"Of course you, Lorry, have had the day of your life!"

"Y-yes. I wouldn't go through it again, though, for a small fortune; that is, with Yvonne on board. It was nip and tuck when we were jammed up against the reef."

"It didn't take you long, Sir, for all that, to jump in after Mrs. Carmac," said Popple.

"Oh, is that the lady's name? What a weird specimen one of your sailormen must be! I asked him the name of the yacht's owner, and he didn't know it."

"If it's the beauty I saw you talkin' to, the swine didn't know his own name when he kem aboard at Southampton," snorted Popple indignantly. "Sink me! I've never seen a man so loaded. Took me for his long-lost uncle. Me, mind you! If I hadn't been rather short-handed, I'd have run him ashore to find an uncle in a policeman."

"He is sober enough now," laughed Tollemache. "I had some difficulty in persuading him to take a sip of brandy. He said he was a teetotaler."

"He what? Which one?"

"That fellow there, leaning against the mast."

"Of all the swabs! Look here, Sir, you come with me an' listen!"

"But I don't want to get the poor chap into a row."

"There'll be no row. Just language! It'll be a treat."

Tollemache, an overgrown schoolboy in some respects, accompanied Popple gleefully. Broken scraps of the skipper's comments boomed back to Ingersoll's unheeding ears.

"Guess you signed the pledge when the shaft snapped.... Coughin' up stale beer all Tuesday night, an' all nex' day made you feel you weren't fit to die on a Thursday.... You can't run a bluff of that sort on Saint Peter. He'd smell your breath a mile off, an' say, 'To the devil with any Jack who can't take his liquor decent-like when he's paid off without fillin' up when he's signed on!... You struck a wrong job in goin' to sea. You ought to be a brewer's drayman.'"

"Peridot," said Ingersoll suddenly, "you saw something of the lady's state of collapse when you pulled her on board. She is not likely to recover her senses before we reach Pont Aven?"

"No, Monsieur, I think not. Women are marvels at times; but this one may not even live. Mademoiselle Yvonne is doing what she can----"

"I know, I know! Now do me a great favor. When we berth at the quay Mademoiselle and I will slip away quietly in the confusion and darkness. See to it that none of the strangers learns our name. I'll warn Monsieur Tollemache myself. Get all these people to Julia's. Tell her that the lady, Madame Carmac, is very wealthy, and that the man with the broken arm is Mr. Carmac's secretary; so every sort of expenditure will be met, though Julia's kind heart would leave nothing undone for a shipwrecked crew if they were paupers. There may be some inquiry about Mademoiselle Yvonne; but refer to her only by her Christian name, and say she lives at Madame Pitou's."

"*Oui, M'sieu!*" Peridot promised willingly enough. Nevertheless he was obviously bewildered.

"I ask this," explained Ingersoll, "because my daughter and I will depart for Paris by the first train tomorrow. You see, by extraordinary mischance, this Mr. and Mrs. Carmac and I were not on good terms years ago, and I don't wish old scores to be reopened."

"*Gars!*" spat Peridot. "You're not leaving Pont Aven because we pulled these fools off Les Vèrres?"

"No, no. I need a little holiday, and I'm taking it now. That is all. We shall come back to the old life--never fear."

"You mean that, M'sieu?"

"I swear it."

"Of course, M'sieu', you understand that I cannot silence the tongues of the whole town?"

"I don't care what anybody hears tomorrow. Remember, if poor Madame Carmac dies, no other person will have the slightest interest in my whereabouts. If she lives, and is able to travel, she will certainly endeavor to get away from Pont Aven as speedily as possible. Peridot, it is Yvonne I am thinking of, not of myself."

"Monsieur, you can count on me absolutely."

"And not a word of this to a soul?"

"*Cre nom!* I'll lie like a gendarme, even to Madeleine."

"But you need not lie at all. Simply forget what I have told you--as to my reason for tomorrow's journey, I mean."

"Monsieur, it is forgotten already."

Tollemache came, chuckling. "Sorry you missed the skipper's homily, Ingersoll," he said. "I laughed like a hyena. I hope the people in the cabin couldn't overhear me. By Jove! to tell you the truth, I didn't even remember that there was a dead man aboard."

"The best tragedies indulge in a what is called 'comic relief,'" said Ingersoll dryly. "Give Yvonne a hail, will you? I want a word with her."

Tollemache stooped to the hatch. "Yvonne!" he said.

"Yes," came the girl's voice.

Her father, intent on its slightest cadence, deemed it placid and self-possessed.

"Socrates wants you."

Socrates was a title conferred on Ingersoll by his artist friends owing to his philosophic habit of mind. Nothing disturbed him, they vowed. Once, when the queer little steam tram that jingles into and out of Pont Aven four times daily was derailed, some alarm was created by the fact that Ingersoll, though known to be a passenger, was missing. When found he was perched on the side of the overturned carriage in which he had been seated. On climbing out through a window he discovered that from this precise locality and elevation he obtained a capital view of a wayside chapel; so he sketched it without delay. The chance, no less than the point of view, might not offer again!

Yvonne appeared, her head and shoulders dimly visible in the frame of the hatch. "What is it, Dad?" she inquired.

"We're in the river now, Dearest, and I thought you might join us on deck. You have done all that is possible, I'm sure."

"I simply cannot desert that poor woman until she shows some signs of returning consciousness."

"Oh, is she still insensible?"

"Yes. If only I could get her to swallow a little brandy."

"Well, she will be in the doctor's hands soon. Better leave matters to him."

"But one must try."

"Of course. If you prefer remaining below----"

"Father dear, what else can I do?" She vanished again.

Ingersoll, having ascertained exactly what he wished to know, sighed in sheer relief, and turned to Tollemache. "Lorry," he said, "have you a dry cigar in your pocket? How stupid of me! You're soaked through and through. I hope none of us picks up a stiff dose of pneumonia as the sequel to today's excitement. Now a quiet word in your ear. Yvonne and I are going away tomorrow for a week or so."

"Going away--from Pont Aven?"

Tollemache's voice executed a crescendo of dismay; but Ingersoll only laughed, and, for the first time since that disastrous reef was left behind, his manner reverted to its normal air of good-humored cynicism.

"Why select two words from a sentence and invest them with a significance they don't possess? I put in a saving clause. A week, or even two, can hardly be twisted into a lifetime."

"Does Yvonne know?"

"No. I have decided on the journey only within the last ten minutes. We're taking a little trip to Paris solely to avoid the gush and sentiment that will flow in Pont Aven during the next few days like a river in flood. Moreover, Lorry, if you're wise, you'll come with us."

Tollemache little realized how truly spontaneous was his friend's invitation. "D'ye mean that, Ingersoll?" he said elatedly.

"Why not? Don't let any question of expense stop you. This outing will be my Christmas treat."

"Expense! Dash it all! I've money to burn. Er--that is--enough, at any rate, to afford a jaunt to Paris. When do we start?"

"Soon after seven o'clock."

"By jing! Sharp work."

"If we really intend to escape, why stand on the order of our going?"

"I'm not saying a word. You rather took my breath away at first, you know."

"You should allow for the kinks in the artistic temperament, Lorry. Enthusiasm is too often the herald of despair."

"What sort of job do you really recommend me to take up, Socrates?"

Ingersoll smiled. "I am not in the habit of dealing my friends such shrewd blows," he said. "I was talking of myself--and Yvonne. Make no mistake about her. She has a sane mind in a sound body; but the artist's nature will triumph some day, and she will surprise all of us. By the way--nothing of this project to her till I have explained it. We shall see you at Mere Pitou's, of course?"

"I've promised to shake a leg with Madame herself in a gavotte. You don't suppose that Carmac's death will interfere with the feast?"

"Why should it?" said Ingersoll coldly. "The man is an utter stranger."

Tollemache did not strive to interpret his friend's mood. In so far as it mystified him, and he gave it any thought, he assumed that the tremendous physical exertion and nervous strain of those few minutes when life or death was uncertain as the spin of a coin had affected an ordinarily even-minded disposition.

Peridot interrupted their talk by asking Tollemache to lower the sail. Coming in with wind and tide, the Hironde had scudded across the bar without effort. Hardly a whiff of spray had touched her deck, and pursuing waves lagged defeated in her wake.

The sweeps were manned by willing volunteers, and the wet and shivering sailors soon restored vitality by tackling the work in relays. Usually sardine boats are content to drift up the estuary on a remarkably rapid tidal stream; so the Hironde made a fast trip that evening. The change in the wind had blown away the clouds brought inland by the first phase of the gale. The sky was clear, and stars were twinkling through the violet haze that followed the sun's disappearance. Pinpoints of light from the shores of the narrowing inlet scintillated from Port Manech, the Chateau of Poulguin, and the few tiny hamlets that border the Aven. Ever the opposing cliffs grew loftier, more abrupt, more wooded, until a cluster of lighted windows and street lamps on the water's edge at the end of one of the interminable bends showed that Pont Aven was drawing near. Thereabouts the valley opened out again; though the little town itself has been compelled to lodge its "Place" and half its houses on the first easy slopes of the steepest hill in the district.

Ingersoll, who had taken his turn at the oars with the others, contrived to choke his impatience until the pollard oaks on the Chemin du Hallage silhouetted their gnarled branches against the sky. That night the weird arms, swaying and creaking in a wind that was, if anything, increasing in force, had a sinister aspect in his troubled eyes. Each oak looked like some dreadful octopus, whose innumerable suckers were searching vindictively for an unwary victim. With an effort he brushed aside the evil fantasy, and was about to summon Yvonne when a weird, uncanny, elfin shriek came from the shadow of the largest and blackest tree.

"*O, ma Doue!*" [Breton for "*O, mon Dieu!*"] was the cry. "There he is! See him, then, my brave Jean!" Peridot's mother was greeting her son in a voice rendered eldritch by hysteria.

"*Eh, b'en Maman!*" the Breton shouted back. "What are thou doing there at this time of night?"

A number of running black figures appeared on the quay, an unprecedented thing, except in the conditions that actually obtained.

"*Que diable!*" growled Peridot, who had not bargained for a popular ovation. "They know all about us. Someone must have telephoned from the signal station at Brigneau."

He had summed up the position of affairs to a nicety. Brigneau had told the whole story to Pont Aven, and assuredly it had lost nothing in the telling. The signalers had seen every detail of the rescue through their telescopes, and were of

course keenly alive to the peril into which the Hironnelle had plunged so gallantly and effectively.

The news had not long arrived; but sufficient time had elapsed that Pont Aven was stirred to its depths. Even old Madame Larraidou, crippled with rheumatism and sixty years of unremitting toil, had hobbled down to the quay to welcome her own special hero.

A dense crowd of Bretons, with a sprinkling of the Anglo-American community that remains faithful to Pont Aven in all seasons, had gathered on the broad, low, stone wharf, and surged down to the river itself on the sloping causeway provided for boats carrying passengers. Nevertheless, if the signalmen had brought about this gathering, they had also reported the presence on board the Hironnelle of three men and a woman who were badly injured; so the local gendarmes had procured stretchers, and three automobiles were in waiting.

Ingersoll, whose nerves were already on a raw edge, nearly abandoned the struggle against Fate when he saw the dense concourse of people. "Lorry," he said in an agonized tone that the younger man had never before heard on his lips, "Lorry, help me now, or I'll crack up! Jump ashore and ask those good folk to clear a path. You know what it means if we get among them. I can't stand it. I can't! Bid them let us pass, for the love of Heaven. Tell them we have to deal with death and broken limbs. You go first. They'll listen to you."

Tollemache obeyed without demur. He was completely at a loss to understand his friend's collapse; but its undoubted seriousness called for decisive action. His vibrant, ringing tones dominated the cheers that burst forth when the Hironnelle bumped into the quay.

"*Mes amis*," he cried, "hear me one moment, I pray you. The people we have rescued are suffering. One is dead--others are in great danger. Unless you make way, and permit us to bring the injured ones quietly and speedily to the hotel, some may die on the road."

It sufficed. The cheers were hushed. The throng yielded place without demur. A low susurrus of talk and the sobbing of women were the only sounds that mingled now with the unceasing chant of the gale.

Ingersoll had literally forced himself to stoop into the companion hatch. "Yvonne," he said in a curiously muffled voice.

"Yes, Dad," came the girl's answer.

He could not be sure, owing to his extremely agitated state, but fancied that another voice gasped a word faintly.

"Come now, Dear! Come at once!" he appealed.

Again Yvonne's head and shoulders emerged. "Oh, Dad," she almost sobbed, "Mrs.--Mrs. Carmac is conscious now. She beseeches me to remain with her until--until----."

Ingersoll literally pulled his daughter up the few remaining steps. "We are going straight home!" he cried, savagely impatient of the resistance his plans were encountering at every turn. "I am ill--nearly demented! You must come now!"

Still clasping her arm in a grip that left marks on her white skin for days thereafter, he forced her to the side of the boat.

"Father dear, of course I'll come; but you are hurting me," she said quietly. "Please don't hold me so tight."

He was deaf to her pleading. They raced together up the causeway. To avoid attracting attention, Yvonne did not endeavor to hold back, and bystanders wondered why the two made off at such a furious pace. Madame Pitou, Madeleine, and Barbe, drawn to the quay like the rest of the inhabitants, were divided between concern for father and daughter and desire to witness the landing of the shipwrecked crew.

But Mere Pitou could not contain her anxiety. "*Tcha!*" she cried, bustling through the crowd. "What's gone wrong with Monsieur Ingersoll and Yvonne? They might have seen the devil out yonder. I must hurry after them. I'll hear all the news later when Peridot comes."

The two girls went with her. For once feminine curiosity was less potent than sympathy. Moreover, Tollemache's announcement of a death among the rescued people had terrified them. They shuddered at the notion of the solemn procession of men carrying a limp and heavy body. The mere sight of such a thing would take the heart out of them for the evening's merry-making.

Ingersoll had passed the first mill--or the last--that bridles the river, and was striding through the narrow street leading to the bridge, when he became conscious of the force he was exerting on his uncomplaining companion.

"I'm sorry, Yvonne," he said, freeing her arm immediately. "I forgot myself. Really I hardly know what I am doing. Am I hurting you? Why didn't you tell me?"

He spoke in a queer, choking voice which at any other time would have aroused his daughter's affectionate solicitude. That night, however, probably because she too was in an overwrought condition, she contented herself by a seemingly nonchalant reply.

"It doesn't matter, Dad. A bruise more or less, after all that we have gone through, is not of much account."

"I hurried you away----" he began; but, greatly to his surprise, Yvonne interrupted the labored explanation he had in mind.

"I think I understand, Dad," she said. "Wouldn't it be better for both of us if you left unsaid what you were going to

say--at any rate, till the morning? We are--how shall I put it?--somewhat unhinged by today's events. You are weary and heartsick. I know I am. Let me go and see that Mrs. Carmac is being cared for. I'll not remain long, and we can retire soon after supper. Then, when we have slept perhaps, we shall wake into a new world with nerves not so exhausted, or strained, as at this moment."

Ingersoll, brooding on his own troubles, and feverishly eager to snatch his daughter from a soul-racking ordeal, was wholly unaware of the passionate tumult vibrating in every syllable of that appeal. He caught the sound, not the significance, of the words that irritated him.

"Now you are talking nonsense!" he cried. "You cannot possibly know what course I have decided on. It is this: I loathe the sensational element attached to such an event as the rescue we have taken part in. You hardly realize what it implies to you and me personally. Not only the French but the English and American newspapers will send here a horde of special correspondents and photographers. If we remain in Pont Aven, we cannot escape them. They will take the cottage by storm, or, if we bolt our door against intruders, we shall have to withstand a siege. To avoid this, you and I are going to Paris by the early train tomorrow. Lorry is coming too. He agrees with me--or, if I shouldn't say that--he is delighted at the prospect of the outing."

"Poor Lorry!" said Yvonne.

"Why 'poor Lorry'? He is only too pleased at being invited."

"But, Dad, he doesn't know what you and I know."

A sudden terror fell on Ingersoll. "What do you mean?" he murmured hoarsely, stopping short as though he had been struck by an invisible hand.

During a few fateful seconds father and daughter stood in the center of the four ways that meet as soon as the road from Paris crosses the Aven. No one was near. The eternal plaint of the river was drowned by the fierce wind whistling under the eaves of the old houses with high-pitched roofs, and singing an anthem of its own around the pierced spire of the neighboring church. Yvonne placed her hands on her father's shoulders, and her sweet lips quivered in an irresistible rush of agonized emotion.

"Dad," she said, striving vainly to keep her utterance under control, "if you--wish--to go to Paris tomorrow--I--shall not try--to dissuade you. But I--cannot come with you. I dare not! You see--I have just found my mother--and--she may be dead tomorrow. Oh, Dad, Dad! No matter how my mother may have erred--or what wrong she may have done you in the past--I cannot abandon her now!"

CHAPTER V

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL

It was well that Mere Pitou came upon them before another syllable was uttered, since not all Ingersoll's philosophy could have withstood the earthquake that had destroyed in an instant the carefully constructed edifice of many years. His very soul was in revolt. Heart suggested and brain lent bitter and cruel form to rebellious words; but, such is the power of convention, the unexpected arrival of the sharp-tongued Breton woman silenced him.

"*O, la la!*" she cried breathlessly. "If I had known you two were making off in such a jiffy merely to stand in the Place au Beurre and look at the stars, I wouldn't have waddled after you like the fat goose that I am. What, then, is the matter? I thought you were hurrying home because you were perished with cold, and I find the pair of you stuck in the middle of the road. Monsieur Ingersoll, you at least are old enough to have more sense. Both must be soaked to the skin; yet you keep Yvonne out in this biting wind, to say nothing of a thin scarecrow like yourself!"

Yvonne had dropped her hands when she heard the approaching footsteps. Unconsciously she had raised her eyes to Heaven in agonized supplianee, and her attitude was naturally inexplicable to her Breton friends. She recovered some semblance of self control more quickly than her father.

"Madame," she said, "we were, in a sense, debating whether or not we could spare the time to change our clothes before attending to the wants of the poor people saved from Les Vêres. I think you are right. It would be foolish to take any additional risk. Come, Father dear, let me help you now."

She took her father's arm, and drew him on. He walked unsteadily, and might have fallen if it had not been for Yvonne's support. The first mad impulse that bade him pour forth a vehement protest against the injustice of Fate had died down. He was as a man stricken dumb, and even physically maimed, by some serious accident.

Mere Pitou, imagining that he was benumbed as the outcome of prolonged exposure to the elements, was minded to rate him soundly; but happily elected instead to pour the torrent of her wrath on things in general. "A nice fête we'll have, to be sure!" she began. "There was I, boiling beautiful white meat and roasting fat pullets when the news came that the Hirondelle was acting the lifeboat off Les Vêres! I thought you'd all be drowned, at the very least, and I wouldn't have been a bit surprised, because anything might happen to that light-headed Monsieur Tollemache and that grinning, good-for-nothing Peridot. *Cre nom!* I wouldn't have crossed the street if you two weren't aboard! And now the bottom will be burnt out of the pan, and my four lovely fowls frizzled to a cinder! Barbe, you little minx, run ahead and see that the big kettle is put on to boil! Monsieur Ingersoll and Yvonne must have hot baths, with mustard, and I'll stand over them till they swallow a good tumblerful each of scalding wine. I'll give them Les Vêres--see if I don't!"

Whereat Madame gurgled in momentary appreciation of her own wit, because *verree* means "a tumblerful," and she had blundered on a first-rate pun.

"*Chere maman*, we are not ill, nor likely to feel any bad effects from a wetting," said Yvonne. "My father is shaken because, although successful, we have brought one dead man to Pont Aven, and perhaps a dead woman too."

"Ah, that's sad--that's dreadful!" wheezed Mere Pitou. "Poor things! Who are they?"

"An Englishman gentleman--and his wife."

"They may be Americans. We hardly know yet." Ingersoll was striving bravely to recover his poise. Those few words told Yvonne that he wished their secret to remain hidden from all others--for the present, at any rate.

"*Dieu merci!* You can talk, then?" said Mere Pitou tartly. "Were they coming to Pont Aven? Are they known here?"

"No. Their name is Carmac. They have never been here, I believe. They were making for Lorient; but their yacht broke down and drove on the reef. Had it not been for Peridot we could not have saved a soul on board."

"Oh, he's a good sailor--I'll say that for him. His poor old mother was there on the quay, screeching like an owl. She lost her man at sea, you know. I hate the sea. I'll skin Barbe if she ever so much as looks at a fisherman. Do you hear that, Madeleine?"

"Yes, Madame. But you can't skin every fisherman who looks at Barbe."

"Wait till I catch one at it! He'll find a shark in his nets that day. Hurry now, you, and help Barbe to get those baths ready! I filled the kettle before I came out, and lifted the wheat off, and as I shoved in the damper of the oven the fowls shouldn't have taken much harm."

"Peridot will surely come soon," Madeleine ventured to say.

Mere Pitou, having made sufficient concession to her guests' feelings by that revised estimate of the condition of the eatables, was moved to withering sarcasm.

"Why do you think that matters to me?" she cried.

Madeleine was silenced; so Madame answered her own question.

"No man with eyes like a tomcat could ever turn my head!" she snorted.

For once her gift of biting repartee served a good purpose. It effectually distracted attention from Ingersoll's half-demented state, while father and daughter were given a breathing space before plunging into an explanation that might affect the future in such wise that the stream of life would never again flow on the placid course it had followed during

many happy and uneventful years.

Within the cottage, too, Mere Pitou's bustling ways interposed a further barrier. She drove the artist to his room, set Madeleine to help Yvonne undress, "and rub her till she's as red as a boiled lobster," prepared two steaming glasses of mulled wine, scolded each unwilling patient until the decoction was taken, and wanted to massage Ingersoll; an attention that he avoided only by declaring positively that he would not indulge in a hot bath at all unless she cleared out.

Luckily a wetting from salt water is seldom harmful if accompanied by exercise, and Ingersoll had never been really chilled; while Yvonne had not only kept comparatively dry, but had been shielded from the wind during the homeward voyage. When the two met in the studio, a large room that Ingersoll had built on the north side of the house, the frenzy and tumult of a tremendous discovery had died down, and each was ready to make due allowance for the other's suffering.

Yvonne wore her Breton dress, and her father had discarded his artist's clothes for a suit of blue serge. Seldom, perhaps not twice in a year, did he appear in evening dress. He shunned society, and disliked its livery. For that reason he had removed from the Hotel Julia soon after arriving at Pont Aven with Yvonne, then an engaging mite hardly a year old. Ostensibly he wanted a spacious studio; in reality he sought seclusion.

As for Yvonne, she did not even possess a dinner gown; though she and her father were often welcome guests at the houses of the small artistic coterie that makes the village its abiding place. But pictures, not fashion plates, ruled the roost therein, and no *grande dame* whom chance brought to these friendly gatherings could plume herself that her "Paris model" frock eclipsed the quaint charm of Yvonne's peasant costume.

The girl had grown quite accustomed to the demand invariably put forward by Ingersoll before accepting an invitation that he should be told the names of any strangers who would be present. If she gave a passing thought to the matter, she fancied that her father had early in life quarreled with his relatives, and wished to avoid a haphazard meeting with certain members of his family. Singularly enough, Tollemache, her greatest friend among the men of Pont Aven, did not conceal the fact that he too was at loggerheads with his own people. Only that day had he been on the verge of some explanation of this unfortunate state of affairs. How little did she dream then that the carefully hidden secret which led her own father to bury his talents in a Brittany fishing village soon after she was born would be dragged into light before the sun went down!

When she entered the studio she found her father seated in a roomy wickerwork chair, and gazing disconsolately into the flames of a roaring log fire. He had aged within the hour; his already slight figure seemed to have shrunk; he did not even turn his head when the door opened.

Her heart went out to him in a wave of tenderness. She dropped on her knees by his side and put her arms round his neck.

"Dad dear," she murmured, "don't dwell on our troubles tonight, great as they are. Let us rather be thankful that we were able to render some service to our fellow creatures, and that our own lives were preserved in a time of real danger. God works in His own wonderful way, doesn't He, Dear? It was His will that we should have gone to Le Pouldu today. It was surely by providential contriving that we should happen to be near the reef when the Stella struck. Something more than idle chance brought us there."

"Yes," he said, gazing into her eyes with the sorrow-laden expression of a man who sees naught but misery before him, "it was not chance, Yvonne, but the operation of a law as certain as death. The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations. I had almost forgotten that your mother lived. After eighteen years she was dead to me. So far as you are concerned she might as well have died in giving you birth. Then her memory would have been a blessing rather than a curse."

"Hush, Dear! She may be dying even now. No, no, Darling, you shall not say it!" and her soft lips stifled the terrible wish that his anguish might have voiced.

For a little while neither could speak. Yvonne's head bent over her father's knees, and he knew that she was crying. With a supreme effort he strove to lessen the tension.

"Come, come, Sweetheart!" he said, stroking the mass of brown hair beneath the lace coif. "You and I must face this difficulty together, or goodness only knows what may be the outcome! Tell me now, if you are able, how you learned that Mrs. Carmac was your mother."

"Oh, Dad, she recognized me at once!" sobbed the girl. "Poor thing, the warmth of the blankets and a teaspoonful of brandy I forced between her lips brought her round slowly."

"When?"

"After we crossed the bar."

"I feared as much," groaned Ingersoll.

Even in her distress Yvonne had the tact to avoid the thorny bypath opened up by her father's involuntary cry. "She sighed deeply a few times," she went on hurriedly, "and I could tell by her color that she was about to revive. At last she opened her eyes, and looked at me in a dazed way."

"Yvonne!" she whispered.

"I was so overjoyed to find that she was not actually at the point of death that I felt no surprise. 'Yes, Dear,' I said, 'you are with friends, and that horrid wreck is a thing of the past.'

"But she continued to gaze at me as if I were a ghost. 'Yvonne Ingersoll!' she said again.

"Then it struck me as really remarkable that she should know my name. But I only asked her to drink a little more of the brandy, and rest until we reached Pont Aven.

"Rest!" she said in quite a clear voice. 'Why should I rest when Heaven snatches me from a dreadful death and permits me to see my own daughter after eighteen years? Or is this some other world? Why am I here? Where have you come from?'

"For the moment I was sure her mind was unbalanced, and thought it best to calm her by answering truthfully. 'My mother is dead, Dear,' I said; 'but you and I are living. You hardly realize now that your yacht was wrecked on a reef near the mainland. By the mercy of Providence my father's boat was close at hand, and we rescued you.'

"Me only?" she cried, trying to rise in the bunk, and giving me such a piercing look.

"No," I said, 'we took off all hands.'

"Dad dear, I simply didn't dare say that her husband alone had been killed in trying to save her; so I put it that way, hoping she would not ask me any more. But she did then succeed in lifting herself on an elbow.

"Child," she said, 'they must not meet! God! They must not meet!'

"Who must not meet?" said I, feeling rather frightened, as of something unseen that threatened me in the dark.

"Your father and Walter Carmac," she replied.

"If Mr. Carmac is your husband, he is still unconscious,' I assured her, catching at the first straw that offered in the whirl of things.

"Is your father on board?" she demanded, grasping my wrist.

"Yes," I said.

"Then she sank back into the bunk again, as though I had struck her, and began to sob. 'Oh, it is cruel, cruel!' she wept. 'After all these years my folly has found me out! Yvonne, Yvonne, don't you understand? I am your mother! I left your father eighteen years ago. I left you, my darling little baby! I sought freedom because your father was poor, and I longed to be rich. Look at me! Look at me, I tell you! Can you deny that I am your mother?'

"Oh, Dad, I knew in my heart that she was speaking truly; but even in that moment of torture I tried to be loyal to you, and begged her to close her eyes and let me cover her with the blankets. But she only laughed, in a ghastly way that was worse than tears. Then she heard one of the men in the other bunks groaning, and started up again, asking wildly who was there. I told her that two men were badly injured, and had been brought below. Unfortunately, I added that her husband was on deck.

"Husband!" she cried. 'I am not worthy of such a husband! I bartered my very soul for luxury, and now I am being punished as I deserve. Yvonne, one night in Paris your mother kissed you when you were lying asleep in your cot, and hurried away to what I deemed liberty. I have lulled my conscience for eighteen years into the belief that I was justified, that I had acted for the best, since my extravagant tastes were even then embittering your father's life. Yet the husband and child I abandoned have saved my miserable life, saved the man too who came into my life when I was free to marry again. Oh, why didn't you let me die? Perhaps I am dying now. Yvonne, you have my face; but a kindly Heaven must have spared you from having my nature. You, at least, will forgive. Kiss me once before the end comes. If you are merciful, an Eternal Judge may not condemn me utterly; for I have striven to atone by doing some good in the world. Unhappy myself, I have tried to make others happy.'

"Father dear, I could not refuse. I took her in my arms. I suppose she nearly fainted again, because she only spoke incoherently until she heard your voice in the hatch, when she whispered your name and buried her face in the clothes."

The girl's tremulous voice ceased, and there was no sound in the room save the crackling of elm logs and the pleasant babble of flames in the big open fireplace. At last, fearing lest he should break down completely, Ingersoll gently untwined his daughter's clasp, rose, and fumbled with a pipe,—man's sole harbor of refuge in emotional storms.

"Don't cry, Yvonne," he said brokenly. "It—it hurts. From what you tell me I gather that your—mother—is in a more critical condition than I imagined. Do you want to go to her—now?"

Yvonne too stood up. She brushed away the mist of tears, and looked at him with shining eyes. "Dad," she said, and a vibration rang in her voice that carried her father's memory back half a lifetime, back to the days when youth was golden and love was deemed everlasting, "when my mother was muttering in delirium, my own poor wits wandered. I asked myself what it all meant, and I could not escape the bitter understanding that came to me. Then I remembered what you said one day when a wretched girl had been hounded out of the village because of her transgression."

"What I said?" repeated Ingersoll, baffled in the effort to follow her train of thought.

"Yes. You were speaking to some man who was angered by the merciless attitude of the peasant women to one of their own sex. You blamed the misleading teachings of narrow-minded theologians, and reminded him of Christ's words

to the Pharisees who brought before Him some poor creature who had fallen. They taunted Him with the Mosaic law, which ordered that she and her like should be pelted with stones; but He only said that the man who was without sin among them should cast the first stone. And the crowd melted, and Christ was left alone with the sinner, whom He forgave. I did not know then just what you meant. I did not know until I heard my mother confessing her fault, and asking me, her daughter, for forgiveness."

"Unhappily our everyday world is not ruled by the maxims of Christ. The girl you speak of went to Brest, and her body was found in the harbor a fortnight later."

"I remembered that too."

"If you go to your mother now, you may set in motion influences that may darken your whole life."

"If I did not go, I would never forgive myself--never!"

"Prudence, the merest sort of commonsense, warns me that we ought to get away from Pont Aven by the first possible train."

"Father dear, what did Peridot say to you before he brought the Hironnelle round into the wind off Les Verres? I couldn't hear, of course. But do you think I could not read your face? Had you not to decide whether or not you would risk my life as well as your own? You were sure of Lorry--who wouldn't be? But it came hard to sacrifice me as well. Did you obey commonsense then? Did you even hesitate?"

Ingersoll threw up a hand in a gesture of sheer hopelessness, and pretended to search for a box of matches on the mantelpiece. "So be it!" he said wearily. "Don't think I am afraid of any rival in your affection, Yvonne. Perhaps your woman's heart is wiser than my gray head. But, mark you, I make two stipulations! No matter what transpires, you must come home before eleven o'clock; and it is impossible, absolutely impossible, that your mother and I should ever meet!"

He was choosing his words carelessly that night. How "impossible" it would have seemed that morning had some wizard foretold the events of the succeeding hours! But Yvonne also was deaf to all but his yielding. She ran to him, and drew his face close to hers.

"Dad," she said, kissing him, "you are the best and dearest man in the world. How could your wife ever have left you? If I live a hundred years, I shall never understand that."

She was going; but he stayed her.

"Yvonne, be governed by one vital consideration. Those two men in the cabin must have caught some glimmer of the truth from your mother's ravings. But they are strangers, and their own troubles may have preoccupied their minds to the exclusion of the affairs of others. The only person in Pont Aven who knows something of my sad history is Madame Pitou. She has been aware all these years that my wife was alive, or at any rate that she was living after I came here. She is certainly to be trusted. Take care that none other learns your mother's identity. I ask this for her own sake."

The girl smiled wistfully. "Yet you would have me believe you an ogre!" she said.

A few minutes later Tollemache arrived. He found his friend sitting by the fire, with a pipe that had gone out between his lips.

"Hello, Socrates!" he cried. "You're toggged for the party, I see. Where's Yvonne?"

"She was unhappy because of that poor woman who lost her husband; so I let her hurry off to Julia's. They've been taken there, I suppose?"

"Yes. It was awfully distressing. Peridot carried Mrs. Carmac off the boat, and by some mismanagement the light from a lantern fell on her husband's face. Ill as she was, she realized that he was dead. She screamed something I couldn't attach any meaning to, and her cries as she was being put into the hotel auto were heartrending. By gad! a beastly experience!"

"What did she say, Lorry?"

"I hardly know. It sounded like a cry for Yvonne, and a protest against Heaven that her husband should be taken and she left. 'I am the real offender!' she said. 'The punishment should be mine, not his!' Somehow, not the sort of thing you'd expect from a distracted wife. I guess she's nearly out of her mind."

"Naturally. Think what it meant to a delicate woman to be imprisoned in that deck saloon when the yacht keeled over. You see, Lorry, we were buoyed up with the hope of being able to effect a rescue. She, on the other hand, must have gazed into the opening doors of eternity. Pull up a chair. There's time for a cigarette. Seven o'clock is the supper hour."

Tollemache obeyed. Ingersoll relighted his pipe, and the two smoked in silence for a while. Then the younger man glanced at his companion with a quizzical scrutiny that was altogether approving.

"Glad to see you've bucked up, old sport," he said. "You were thoroughly knocked out by the time we reached the quay. I know why, of course."

Ingersoll stooped to throw back into the fire a half-burnt log that had fallen out on to the hearth. "Do you?" he said calmly.

"Great Scott! I should think so, indeed! It was one thing that we three men should go into that death trap, but quite another that you should bring Yvonne into it. Bless your heart, Yvonne was watching Peridot and you, and told me

what you were saying. 'Dear old Dad,' she said, 'he feels like Jephthah when he had to sacrifice his daughter.' Made me go cold all over. Gee whizz! I was pleased it wasn't I who had to make the choice between turning back and running into safety--where my sister--or my wife--was concerned."

Tollemache stammered and reddened as his tongue tripped on the concluding words; but the older man paid no heed. He was too profoundly relieved by an explanation that differed so materially from the avowal he dreaded.

"By the way, Lorry, that journey to Paris is postponed," he said after a pause.

"Good! It was hardly like you to bolt out of the place when you were most needed. Those sailormen would be at sixes and sevens tomorrow if we didn't show up."

"I must leave that part of the business to you," said Ingersoll slowly. "I mean to efface myself entirely. Indeed, I'm thinking of paying a long-deferred visit to Forbes, at Concarneau. Yvonne and you can manage splendidly in my absence. Now, don't argue, there's a good chap. I rather lost my head on being brought into contact with two people with whom I quarreled years ago; or, to be precise, my animus was not against the poor fellow who is dead. Of course his wife is bound to recall the facts, and it would place her in a difficult position when she discovered that I was one of her rescuers. Women are apt to form curious notions about such matters. It was an extraordinary misfortune, to say the least, that her husband should be the one man whom we failed to save. I think you follow me?"

"Oh, yes--the irony of Fate, and that sort of thing," said Tollemache with an air of wisdom. He was convinced that he understood the position exactly.

Ingersoll stood upright, drew in a deep breath that was curiously like a sigh, and tapped his pipe against the stone pillars of the fireplace. "I hear sounds of revelry by night," he said. "Herri has arrived with the bagpipes."

"Dash it all!" growled Tollemache. "I don't feel a scrap like dancing this evening. That unhappy woman's shrieks are still ringing in my ears."

"We must adjust ourselves to the conditions," said Ingersoll quietly. "Life, like art, is a matter of light and shade. Each of us sails a tiny craft through an unknown sea, and if we can give a brother or sister a cheery hail--why, let us do it, though our own vessel be sinking steadily. I'm in no mood for revel,--goodness knows!--but, with Yvonne absent, you and I must help Mere Pitou to entertain her guests. Some excellent folk are coming here from Nizon and Nevez. Her sister is driving in from Riec. You'll hear some real old Breton ballads tonight. Pity Yvonne isn't here to translate them. My acquaintance with the language is limited; but Madeleine or Barbe will tell you the drift of the words."

"Won't Yvonne be here later?" inquired Tollemache, striving to cloak his disappointment.

"I'm inclined to think she will remain with Mrs. Carmac till eleven or thereabouts."

"But the doctor is there--and a nurse."

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, Mrs. Carmac will prefer Yvonne to any nurse. There is a cousinship of nationality, you know. Now, Lorry, no grumbling. Let's make the best of things."

A knock at the door heralded the entrance of a dozen or more smiling and self-possessed Bretons. The studio was the only room in the house large enough to hold the company that would gather within the next few minutes. The living room was packed with tables and chairs; hence, on fete days, Ingersoll's quarters were invaded.

The artist was acquainted with everyone present, and Tollemache was no stranger to the majority. Nearly all were of the well-to-do yeoman class; for Mere Pitou belonged to an old family, and her husband, a farrier, had been well thought of in Pont Aven. Men and women wore the national costume, and appeared that evening in grand state. The women's full-skirted dresses were of black cashmere, trimmed and slashed with deep bands of black velvet; but this somber setting was merely a foil to aprons and overbodices wrought in gold, silver, and bright-hued silk threads, the whole blended in pretty designs with an oriental lavishness of color and sheen.

The coifs, though bearing a general similarity of design, varied for each district. The abundant and jet-black hair of these Breton dames and demoiselles was waved over the forehead and coiled somewhat toward the back of the head. Round the twisted tresses was placed, in the first instance, the *petite coiffe*, a stiff white linen band three inches deep, which, pinned securely, served as the basis of a dainty superstructure. A strip of silk ribbon, cream, pink, or light blue, hid the *petite coiffe*, and showed its tint through the meshes of the coronet of fine lace and cambric forming the *grande coiffe*, with its coquettish white streamers falling below the neck.

Round the throat, and deeply cut, was the broad linen collar, highly starched, and so wide that its wings projected over the shoulders, leaving a space across the top of the breast to reveal the lace edging of an underbodice. These collars would puzzle any laundress who was not a Bretonne if she were asked to prepare them, because their graceful curves, molded to the slope of the shoulders and the straight line of the back, are obtained by a process of wrinkling, or furrowing, effected by the use of long straws when the linen has been lightly ironed when it is still damp and pliable.

Age does not affect the style of dress. The girl of eight is attired exactly like her grandmother, the only variation being seen in the shoes, the younger people mostly donning white doeskin, and the older ones black patent leather with silver buckles.

The men too, without exception, wore tight-fitting gray trousers, short jackets of black cloth, with tabliers of black velvet and ornamental buttons. Some dandies affected gold, silver, and colored silk embroidery down each side of the

front of the jacket. Their hats were low-crowned, black felt wideawakes, with heavy bands of black velvet, carrying showy buckles of silver on a rosette.

A more light-hearted, jovial, and picturesque company it would be difficult to find, or, considering its nature, one more expensively dressed. (Strangers, especially of the fair sex, who decide to purchase "a Brittany costume" for the next fancy dress ball, are likely to be unpleasantly surprised when they inquire the price. The materials are invariably the best of their kind, and the lace and embroidery are handworked. Naturally one such outfit lasts several years.)

Ingersoll moved among these free-mannered, laughter-loving folk as though he had not a care in the world. Some notion of the disaster to the Stella had spread, and he was called on for particulars, which he gave in sufficient detail. The men appreciated the peril from which the Hironnelle had extricated herself, the women were prodigal of their sympathy with the American woman who had lost her husband. Tollemache, listening to his friend's easy flow of talk, wondered more than ever what sort of nervous attack it was that induced that amazing display of terror at the moment of landing.

Supper was ended when Peridot put in an appearance. His face was flushed, and his gray-green eyes had acquired a rather suspicious luster. In a word. Captain Popple had discovered the excellence of liqueur brandy, and Peridot, ordinarily an abstemious fellow, had proved himself a less seasoned vessel than his host.

Madeleine was the first to notice his condition, and it troubled her. She rather avoided him, and as a consequence he affected a loud-voiced and boisterous good-humor.

"Gars!" he cried, seizing the opportunity when the girl refused to dance the gavotte with him. "Where is Yvonne? She can foot it better than any of you."

Now he had never before alluded to Yvonne by her Christian name. While the Bretons are not toadies, they are polite, and the artist's daughter ranked as an aristocrat in the village. An awkward silence fell. Even Ingersoll shot an inquiring glance at the fisherman.

"Mademoiselle Yvonne is at the Hotel Julia," said Mere Pitou. "Pity she didn't see you as she was going."

"Why?" grinned Peridot.

"Because you might have known then how to address her. By this time you seem to have forgotten."

"*Que Diable!* I meant no offense, Madame. I suppose she's looking after the lady who claimed her as a daughter."

"What sayest thou, Imbecile?"

"Fact," said Peridot, with drunken gravity. "I asked a man who speaks English what the lady was screaming as I tucked her into the auto, and he told me----"

"Larraidou," broke in Ingersoll, pallid with sudden anger, "you had better go home."

Then Peridot too flared into wrath. "What have I done wrong?" he cried. "*Cre nom!* they're as like as two peas in a pod! Come, now, Monsieur--is there any harm in saying that?"

Ingersoll turned to Tollemache. "Lorry," he said, "oblige me by taking our talkative friend to his house. He will be glad of it in the morning."

So, protesting loudly that some people made a lot of fuss about nothing, Peridot vanished with a shattered halo. But the mischief had been done. Next day all Pont Aven would be discussing Mrs. Carmac's strange delusion. In the view of the one man who knew the whole truth, it was the beginning of the end.

CHAPTER VI

A LULL

Peridot lived on the Toulifot, a steep and rocky road that once upon a time was Pont Aven's main avenue to the interior of France. On the way he was consumed with maudlin sorrow that his beloved patron, Monsieur Ingersoll, should have forbidden him to take further part in the feast.

"Tell me, then, what was my fault," he protested to Tollemache. "Name of a pipe! can't a fellow take a thimbleful of cognac to keep the cold out?"

"Thimbleful!" laughed Tollemache. "The sort of thimble you used would make a hat for any ordinary head."

"The skipper of the Stella is a *bon garcon*, and showed his gratitude," said Peridot. "I could have carried the liquor like a drum major if I hadn't fasted at Le Pouldu so as to keep a good appetite for supper."

"Ah! That's it, is it? Well, I'll make matters straight with Monsieur Ingersoll in the morning."

Tollemache had every reason to believe that the fisherman was speaking the truth. He had not seen Peridot intoxicated during five years of fairly close acquaintance.

"The worst thing is that Madeleine will be holding her nose in the air every time she meets me for a month," came the dejected whine.

"I'll tell her too how the accident happened. You'll be joking about it yourself tomorrow, old fellow."

"*Tiens!* I've got it," and Peridot stood stock still in an attitude of oracular gravity. "Monsieur Ingersoll was angry, not because I was a trifle elevated, but on account of what I said about Ma'mselle Yvonne. Queer thing if that lady should really be her mother!"

"Now I know for certain that you're drunk as an owl."

"Not me! *Gars!* Funny things occur. I could say lots if I chose. Why does Monsieur Ingersoll encourage Ma'mselle to dress *en Bretonne*? Why won't he allow her to be photographed? Who has ever heard what became of Madame Ingersoll? And aren't those two the image of each other?"

"Peridot," said Tollemache, "it would be a sad finish to a glorious day if I were to knock you down."

"It would, Monsieur."

"But that is just what I'll do, as sure as Fate, if you utter another word concerning Mademoiselle Yvonne or her father."

"Mad!" declared the other. "All you Americans are mad! A man never knows how to take you."

"Would you stand by and hear anyone running down Madeleine Demoret or her people?"

"Monsieur, I'd chew his ear!"

"Exactly. I'll spread your nose flat if you utter any more stupidities with regard to Mademoiselle Yvonne."

The Breton whistled softly, and staggered on up the hill. Each few yards thereafter he halted, and whistled, evidently expressing unbounded and inarticulate surprise. All this was intensely annoying to the young American; but it had to be endured. Even more trying was the leave-taking at the door of the Larraidou cottage. The Breton caught Tollemache's hand, and was moved to tears.

"Monsieur," he gurgled, "you have my regrets--a thousand regrets! I understand perfectly. A Frenchman comprehends these things quicker than any other man in the world, even when he has filled the lamp. *Gars!* If I chew ears and you flatten noses, between us we'll spoil the beauty of any rascal who dares open his mouth against either Mademoiselle Yvonne or Madeleine."

With difficulty Tollemache got rid of him, and strode back down the hill. He had blundered into that foolish comparison of the two girls without giving a thought to its possible significance. The one consolation was that Peridot would be tongue-tied with shame next day, and would probably remember only that he had made a fool of himself.

Passing the Hotel Julia, he ran into Yvonne hurrying down the steps of the annex. Then, of course, he flung care to the winds.

"Well met!" he cried. "Socrates told me you were not coming home till much later."

"But where have you been?" she asked. "I imagined you were at Madame Pitou's ages ago."

"As though you couldn't tell by my swollen appearance that I had supped on white wheat and fatted fowl," he rejoined. "Of course I was there. I've been escorting Peridot home. He took an extra appetizer on an empty stomach, and it upset him. How are the patients?"

"Dr. Garnier has set the broken arm and bandaged the sprain. He gave Mrs. Carmac a stiff dose of bromide, and she is asleep. She will recover if her nervous system withstands the shock."

"It was an extraordinary misfortune that the owner of the yacht should be the one to have his head battered in. His wife realizes now that he is dead, I suppose?"

"Yes, she knows."

They crossed the square together. To reach the Rue Mathias they had to go round by the bridge and return by the right bank of the Aven. The hour was not late, and many of the inhabitants were astir; but none gave heed to the unusual spectacle of a Breton girl and a young man walking in company, because both were recognized instantly, and in such matters the American and English residents were a law unto themselves. Had they been bred and born in the place, such a thing simply could not have happened.

Somehow Tollemache felt a restraint that night that was both novel and unpleasing. A barrier of some sort had been erected between Yvonne and himself. He cudgelled his wits to find words that would break down the obstacle, whatsoever it might be.

"We've had a lively evening at Madame's thus far," he said. "Riec and Nevez shared the honors in the gavotte; but everybody agreed that Pont Aven would have scored if you had been there."

"I couldn't have danced tonight, Lorry, on any account."

"I don't see why. Your father took a very sensible view. 'Why shouldn't twenty hop because one has hooked it?' he said."

"Did he really say that?"

"Well, something to that effect."

"Poor old dad! He has had to sacrifice himself all his life."

"Don't you think you're making too much of the death of one man? Suppose we hadn't taken Peridot with us? We couldn't possibly have approached the reef, and twelve people would have gone under."

"Ten were strangers, and one cannot grieve for all the people who die around us. But father knew Mr. and Mrs. Carmac years ago. Didn't he tell you that?"

"Yes."

"Then you may be sure he is greatly upset. Now, Lorry, if there is any talk of dancing when I appear, help my excuses by saying that I ought to rest. In one sense I'm not really tired; in another I could fling myself down in a dark corner and weep my eyes out."

"Your eyes are too pretty to spoil in that way," said Tollemache. "I'll give Mere Pitou the tip, and she'll fix things, I have no doubt."

But Yvonne was not pressed to dance. She was so pale, the eyes that Tollemache deemed too attractive that they should be marred by weeping were so dilated and luminous with unshed tears, that these big-hearted Bretons sympathized with her, and she was soon permitted to escape to her own room.

Father and daughter exchanged few words. She supplied a brief account of the doctor's view of the injured, and he only said:

"Thus far things are progressing well. Tomorrow morning I'm going to Forbes's place, at Concarneau, for a few days. Tollemache and you can help Mr. Raymond in his negotiations with the authorities. Mr. Carmac was an American, by birth, if not by domicile; so it is probable that his relatives will wish the body to be embalmed and taken to the United States. I would advise Mr. Raymond to consult a notary, because French procedure differs essentially from American methods. I've told Lorry about our altered plans. Perhaps we three can take a combined trip to Paris after Christmas. Goodnight, Sweetheart. Sleep well, and don't meet tomorrow's cares halfway."

Tollemache heard all that passed. Why, he knew not, but he found himself regretting that they were not leaving Pont Aven by the first train in accord with Ingersoll's original intent. He was more than ever conscious of that invisible wall which was now casting its shadow on their cheery intimacy. Yvonne would never again be a demure Breton maid or straight-legged, long-haired American schoolgirl. She had become a woman in an hour. Life had flung wide its portals, and the prospect thus unfolded had saddened her inexpressibly.

What sinister influence had brought about this change? Could there be any actual foundation for Peridot's vaporings? As he walked back to the hotel through darkened streets he recalled certain vague rumors that had reached his ears in early days. Ingersoll had always posed as a widower; but someone had said that his married life was rather mysterious, since there was no record of his wife's death or place of interment. It would indeed be passing strange if the wreck of the Stella had brought to Pont Aven the woman who was at once Yvonne's mother and the wife of a complete stranger.

Tollemache buttoned the deep collar of an overcoat round his ears as he crossed the river, because the wind was still biting cold. He caught a glimpse of Mere Pitou's cottage on the opposite bank of the Aven. There was a light in Yvonne's bedroom. Frankly in love, he threw her a kiss with his fingers.

The action did him, in his own phrase, "a heap of good." After all, such displays of emotion come naturally in France.

"I don't give a red cent who her mother was, or is, or what she has been, or turns out to be," he communed. "It's Yvonne I want. If Yvonne marries me some day, I'll be the happiest man who ever lived, and the most miserable if she doesn't. So there you are, Lorry, my boy! You must make the best of it, whichever way the flag falls."

Memories of peaceful and contented years flitted through Ingersoll's mind while the steam tram lumbered next morning through tiny fields and across rambling lanes to the quay of Concameau. Other memories, vivid and piercing, came of the period of love and dreams in Paris. Lithe and graceful and divinely beautiful as her daughter was now, Stella Fordyce had been then. An artist to her fingertips, she came to the studio where Ingersoll was working, turning readily to the palette after some slight defect in the vocal cords had put difficulties in the way of an operatic career.

It seemed to be a genuine instance of love at first sight, and they were married within three months of what was practically their first meeting; though Ingersoll had seen her as a girl of fourteen several years earlier. This step was not so foolish as it might have been in the case of two young people without means. Ingersoll had an income of three thousand dollars a year, and complete devotion to art in his student days had enabled him to save a small capital, which he spent on an establishment, and particularly on adorning an exceptionally handsome and attractive wife.

It had been far better were they poverty-stricken. Mutual privations and combined effort to improve their lot would have bound them by insoluble ties. As it was the taste for pleasure and excitement crept into Stella Ingersoll's blood. The first tiff between the two was the outcome of some mild protest on Ingersoll's part when his wife wished to increase rather than diminish her personal expenditure after Yvonne's birth. There were tears, and of course the man yielded: only to raise the point again more determinedly when an absurdly expensive dress was ordered for a ball at the opera.

Thenceforth the road to the precipice became ever smoother and steeper; though Ingersoll did not begin to suspect the crash that lay ahead until his wife left him and fled to her relatives in America. Her callous abandonment of the baby girl not yet a year old crushed to the dust the man who loved her. She told him plainly why she had gone. She was "sick to death" of petty economies. Indeed, her letter of farewell was brutally frank.

"I think I have qualities that equip me for a society that you and I together could never enter," she wrote. "Why, then, should I deny myself while I am young, so that I may console vain regrets with copybook maxims when I am old? I see clearly that I would only embitter your life and spoil your career. Be wise, and take time to reflect, and you will come to believe that I am really serving you well by seeking my own liberty. Meanwhile I shall do nothing to bring discredit on your name. I promise that, on my honor!"

Her honor! All his life John Ingersoll had hated cant, either in dogma or phrase, and this ill-judged appeal stung him to the quick. He threw the letter into the fire, left Paris next day, and his wife's strenuous efforts to discover his whereabouts during the subsequent year failed completely.

Then he heard by chance that she had divorced him, and married Walter H. Carmac in her maiden name, and the tragic romance of his life closed with a sigh of relief, because, as he fancied, the curtain had fallen on its last act. He little dreamed that an epilogue would be staged nearly nineteen years later.

He was in such a state of mental distress that at Concameau he sat a whole hour in a cafe opposite the station, meaning to return to Pont Aven by the next train. But the man's natural clarity of reasoning came to his aid. He forced himself to think dispassionately. Two vital principles served as rallying points in that time of silent battle,—Yvonne must not be reft with crude violence from the grief-stricken and physically broken woman who claimed a daughter's sympathy, and he himself must avoid meeting this wife risen from the tomb. He had acted right, after all, in seeking refuge with his friend.

Yvonne that same morning found her mother sitting up in bed, sipping a cup of chocolate. The nurse, a woman from the village, hailed the girl's presence gleefully.

"Will you be remaining a few minutes, Mademoiselle she inquired, seeing that invalid and visitor were on terms of intimacy.

"Yes, as long as you like, or will permit, Madame Bertrand," said Yvonne.

"That is well, then. I can go to my house for a little half-hour. There only two instructions. Madame must remain quiet. If she shows any signs of faintness, send at once for Dr. Garnier."

"I shall be strict and watchful," smiled the girl, and the two were left alone.

Her mother's first question threatened to disobey at least one of the doctor's instructions. "Does your father know you have come here?" she asked, and her voice trembled with foreboding.

"Yes, Dear. Now if you excite yourself in that way, I shall be expelled by the doctor," for the graceful head collapsed to the pillow in sheer gratitude, and the chocolate was nearly spilled.

"But you must tell me, Yvonne! Will he permit us to meet?"

"Do you think my father would forbid it? How you must have misunderstood his real nature! He has even gone away from Pont Aven for a few days, so that his presence in the village may not be irksome to you. Shall we try and pretend to forget what has passed, Dear? It is useless to grieve now over the mistakes of other years. And you will see, I am sure, that no one in Pont Aven should be able even to guess at our true relationship. I ask that for my father's sake. I love him dearly, and would not have him suffer."

With a splendid effort the older woman raised herself in the bed and summoned a wan smile. "Indeed, indeed," she cried, "I will do nothing more to injure him! Is that a hand mirror on the dressing table? Please give it me."

Yvonne hesitated, and her mother smiled again.

"I shall not grieve because of white and drawn cheeks," she said.

When she held, the mirror in a thin hand, and compared its reflection with Yvonne herself with critical eyes, the girl grasped her true intent. Her abundant hair, only a shade darker than Yvonne's own brown tresses, framed the well-poised head and slender neck. Distress and lack of solid food had lent a pallor to cheeks and forehead which had the curious effect of rendering the clear-cut features strikingly youthful. Mouth and chin had a certain quality of hardness and obstinacy not discernible in the girl's face. Otherwise they resembled sisters rather than mother and daughter.

"Yvonne," she said wistfully, "if we say we are strangers, no one will believe. I shall invent a twin sister. You are my niece. I quarreled with my sister because she married an impoverished painter. Thin ice; but it must carry us. Your father has done the wisest possible thing in leaving Pont Aven today. He refuses to forgive my shabby treatment of a sister; but Christian charity impels him not to forbid you from visiting me. Don't volunteer this information. Let it be dragged from you unwillingly. It is a cruel thing that my first advice to you should be a lesson in duplicity; but I have earned that sort of scourge, and must endure. Now you understand. We are aunt and niece. Don't be surprised if I act a little when the nurse returns. By the way, write to your father and tell him what I have said. I'm sure he will approve, and the fact that I am eager to make this small atonement for the wrong I did him will show that I still retain some sense of fair dealing."

"Yes, Dear, I'll write today. I don't think it is very wicked to adopt a pretense that enables me to visit you without--without setting idle tongues wagging."

"Without causing a village scandal, you might well have said," came the bitter retort. "Very well, Yvonne, I will not say such things," for the girl winced at the unerring judgment that supplied the words that had nearly escaped her. "Now let us talk of other matters. Tell me something of yourself. Where and how do you live? Why are you wearing that costume? Do you dress like that habitually? And how wonderfully it becomes you! Talk, Dear, and I'll listen, and if I fall asleep when you are talking don't imagine that I am heedless and inattentive; for I have been brought nearer happiness in this hour than I would have believed possible yesterday. Do you realize that the wreck was directly due to my folly? The captain wished to put into the Aven estuary when the storm became very bad; but I refused to permit it. Wallie--that is Mr. Carmac--always yielded to my whims, and he imagined I preferred Lorient to Pont Aven. I didn't. I knew that your father lived here. His art proved more enduring than a woman's faith. It has made him famous; though I had the cruelty, the impertinence, to tell him once that he would never emerge from the ruck. I never heard of you. For some reason I thought you had died in infancy. Yvonne, Heaven forgive me, I may even have wished it! But you see now why I wanted to avoid Pont Aven. As though any of God's creatures can resist when He points the way!"

So it was the mother who did most of the talking, and the daughter who listened, with never a word of reproach, and not even a hint that had a wilful and conscience-tortured woman not imposed her imperious will on the Stella's course the yacht would have ridden the gale in safety in a roadstead five miles removed from the village of Pont Aven itself!

When Madame Bertrand bustled in her patient was asleep, and Yvonne's cheeks were tear-stained.

"Poor lady!" murmured the Breton woman. "She's nothing but a bundle of nerves. All night long, after the effect of the bromide had passed, she kept crying out for her daughter--meaning you, Mademoiselle. What a notion! Yet you are so alike!"

"With good reason, Madame," said the girl. "She is my mother's sister. There was a family quarrel years ago. Please keep this to yourself; though Madame Carmac will probably tell you of it later."

Yvonne was glad, when her father's letter arrived, to find that he agreed with the little deception, which hurt none, and explained away the seemingly inexplicable.

On the second day after the wreck Mrs. Carmac, outwardly at least, was restored to good health, and assumed direction of her husband's affairs.

Sending for Captain Popple, she asked if any effort had been made to salve the large sum of money and store of jewelry on board the yacht. The red-faced mariner had evidently been giving thought to the same problem.

"No, Ma'am," he said. "When the vessel struck those on deck had no mind to go below, and those below were hard put to it to get on deck. We all lost everything except what we stood up in. It has been blowin' great guns ever since, and a French gentleman who knows every inch of the coast tells me that the reef may be ungetatable for a fortnight, or even a month, unless there's a change in the weather."

"When you say you lost everything do you mean that you and some members of the crew lost money as well as clothing?"

"No, Ma'am. If any swab has the howdacity to pretend that a sovereign or two has slipped out of his pockets, I won't believe 'im; but it'll be hard to prove the contrary."

"Are you in any special hurry to return home? Have you another yacht in view?"

Some men might have hesitated, but Popple was bluntly honest, both in nature and speech. "Bless your heart, Ma'am!" he said huskily, "I'll get no more yachts unless I'm a luckier man after tumin' fifty than ever I was afore. The Stella was my last seagoin' job, an' no mistake."

"Then you will not suffer professionally by remaining here?"

"I'll stop as long as you like, Ma'am."

"Very well. I have telegraphed to my London bankers for a supply of money, which should reach me tomorrow. I want you to arrange for salvage operations. Employ a diver, and hire such other assistance as may be necessary. It is important that a jewelcase in one of my trunks should be recovered, if possible, also five thousand pounds in French and English bank-notes which is in a leather wallet locked in a steamer trunk beneath my husband's bed. That trunk also contains a number of important papers. I shall be glad if it is brought to me unopened, no matter what the expense. Meanwhile make out a list of all that is reasonably owing to the men, and tell them I shall arrange at once for their return to Southampton."

"I've done that already, Ma'am. Mr. Raymond tole me to get busy."

"Ah! That was thoughtful of him. In future, however, take orders from no one but me."

Captain Pople was evidently about to offer a comment, but checked himself in time. "Right you are, Ma'am," he said.

Mrs. Carmac smiled quietly. This outspoken sailor's face was easy to read. Yvonne was present, and he hardly knew what to say.

"You had something else on the tip of your tongue, Captain," she prompted. "Out with it! I have no secrets from this young lady."

"I don't like contradict'ry sailin' orders, Ma'am, an' that's a fact," admitted the skipper. "Mr. Raymond axed me not to do a thing, no matter who gev the word, without consultin' him."

"His arm is broken, I believe?"

"Yes, Ma'am; but he's able to get about today."

"That simplifies matters. Kindly send him here."

The sailor raised his hand in a clumsy salute, and went out.

"I am not an admirer of Mr. Raymond," said Mrs. Carmac to Yvonne. "He was a useful sort of person to my husband; but he has a Uriah Heep manner which I dislike intensely. Now I shall get rid of him."

For an instant the Breton shrewdness of judgment came uppermost in the girl. "Don't make an unnecessary enemy," she ventured to suggest.

"I simply purpose dismissing him on very generous terms."

"But--have you--forgotten--perhaps you never knew--how wildly you spoke that night in the cabin of the *Hirondelle*? Mr. Raymond was there too. He may have overheard a good deal."

Mrs. Carmac was momentarily staggered. "Do you think so?" she cried rather breathlessly.

"There was every opportunity. I saw the man, and he retained his senses, though in great pain."

"Thanks for the warning, Dear. I'll handle him gently."

"Shall I go?"

"I prefer that you should remain."

"But it might be better if you were to see him alone. He has not met me since we came ashore."

"Well--you may be right. I'll take your advice. Don't leave me too long alone. I mope when you are away."

Yvonne slipped out. She passed Raymond on the stairs; but he gave her no heed, regarding her as belonging to the establishment.

The secretary was a small, slightly built man, and, contrary to the rule that renders undersized mortals rather aggressive in manner, carried himself with a shrinking air, as though he wished to avoid observation. He had an intelligent face; though its general expression was somewhat marred by a heavy chin and eyes set too closely together. He looked pale and ill; which was only natural, because his broken arm, the right one, had not been attended to by a doctor until nearly three hours after the accident. He was about thirty-five, but looked much older that morning, and Yvonne wondered if he had any forewarning of trouble, so compressed were his thin lips and so frowning his brows.

He found his late employer's wife standing at the window, gazing down into the little triangular Place, as Pont Aven calls its public square. Yvonne was passing in front of the four sycamores. She had, in fact, secured a mourning order for her friend, Le Sellin the tailor, and was going to his shop on some errand connected therewith. Her mother noted the girl's free and graceful walk, and approved the proud carriage of her head, on which the white coif sat like a coronet. She sighed, and did not turn until Yvonne had vanished. Then she faced the waiting secretary.

"Ah, that you?" she said carelessly. "Pardon me if I seemed rude, Mr. Raymond. My thoughts were wandering. My niece has just left me, and, as I have not seen her for many years until she and her father saved our lives the other evening, I was minded to watch her crossing the square."

"Your niece, did you say, Mrs. Carmac?"

Raymond's voice was pitched in the right key of hesitancy and interested surprise; but this worldly wise woman was far too skilled a student of human nature to miss the underlying note of skepticism.

"Usually I speak clearly," she said, with a touch of hauteur.

"Yes, of course. I caught the word quite accurately. But may I remind you that you addressed her as your daughter in the cabin of the Hironnelle?"

"Does it matter to you, Mr. Raymond, how I addressed her?"

"No, no. I was only anxious to correct my own false impression."

Mrs. Carmac suddenly bethought herself. "My wits are still wool gathering," she cried. "Won't you sit down? I have a good many things to discuss with you. Is your arm very painful? Happily I have never suffered from a broken limb; but it sounds quite dreadful."

Raymond sank into a comfortable chair, steadying himself with his left hand. "It's not so bad now," he said. "By comparison with the torture of Thursday afternoon it is more than bearable. The chief misfortune lies in the fact that my right arm is out of action. I had no idea how little use I made of my left hand until I tried to write with it."

"The doctor seems to be a very clever man; but if you think it advisable to have your injury seen to by an expert----"

"Oh, it's only a simple fracture. I have every reason to believe that it is properly set. Indeed, all it needs now is efficient dressing--and time."

"How did you come to break it?"

"I was flung down the companionway when the yacht turned on her beam ends."

"But the last thing I remember, and very vividly too, is that you and I were holding to a rail and looking out through the forward window of the deck saloon. We felt a curious trembling of the hull, and the vessel swung round from the wind. There was a strange lull, and Captain Popple shouted something. I asked you what it was, and you said that the shaft had broken, and we should be dashed against the rocks in ten minutes or less. Then, I suppose, I fainted."

"I had not seen the reef. Even Captain Popple thought we should clear it. As a matter of fact, we struck within a minute."

"And you were thrown over then? I must have fallen earlier."

"Yes. My recollection is hazy as to what actually occurred."

"The marvel is that either of us is living," she said lightly. "I gather from Captain Popple that you have taken charge of affairs since we were brought ashore. Will you kindly tell me what you have done?"

"In the first instance I telegraphed to Mr. Carmac's nephew Mr. Rupert Fosdyke, his lawyer Mr. Bennett, his office, and his bankers. The text of each message was practically identical. It ran, 'Yacht wrecked and total loss off Finistere. Mr. Carmac unfortunately killed, but all others rescued. Mrs. Carmac seriously ill, but may recover.' I'm sorry I took an exaggerated view of your state; but the circumstances seemed to warrant it. Then I sent to Paris for an embalmer. Did I do right?"

At that instant her daughter's parting words rang in her ears. "Don't make an unnecessary enemy." Good advice! She must tread warily, or her sky might fall and crush her.

"Yes. As I shall receive Mr. Fosdyke and Mr. Bennett when they arrive, I think I shall rest now," she said faintly. "I am greatly beholden to you, Mr. Raymond. You are so intimately acquainted with my husband's affairs that I should be lost without your help."

She had meant to dismiss him forthwith, with a year's salary, and Raymond himself was prepared for some such action on her part; otherwise he would never have hinted at his possession of a secret so fraught with possibilities as the existence of a grown-up daughter, a daughter too whose father was living, and actually resident in Pont Aven. He was taken aback now, and bowed as courteously as his bandaged arm would permit.

"I shall be only too happy and proud to give you my best services, Mrs. Carmac," he said.

CHAPTER VII

MISCHIEF

Raymond felt that he had taken the step that counts, and resolved to make certain inquiries without delay. Already a cautious experiment with Tollemache had failed. Lorry had said that he knew nothing of Ingersoll's history before the last five years, and had shown some surprise at the question.

Captain Popple, however, had mentioned Peridot; so Raymond climbed the steep Toulifot, and within five minutes of his departure from Mrs. Carmac's quarters was at the Breton's house.

As it happened, Peridot was at home, it being the hour of *dejeuner*, and a grateful incense of grilled haddock and fried potatoes greeted the visitor. He was recognized instantly of course, and invited to enter, and Peridot broke into a voluble expression of his pleasure at finding Monsieur so far recovered that he was able to take a little promenade. Raymond gathered the drift of this speech, as he understood French better than he spoke it.

"I have taken the liberty to call and thank you personally for the aid you rendered on Thursday evening," he said laboriously. "You and the others did a wonderful thing. The captain of the yacht has explained it to me. I was injured when the vessel struck, and knew little of what took place afterward."

"It was lucky for you, Monsieur, that we happened to be out that day. If we hadn't been passing at that very moment, nothing could have saved you. The people at Brigneau tell me that the yacht broke in two and fell into deep water before we were well clear of the reef."

Neither Peridot nor Raymond had any inkling of Mrs. Carmac's projected salvage work by a diver, or the Breton would have added his conviction that the fierce tides racing along the Finistere coast would render the success of any such undertaking doubtful in the extreme.

"The gentleman who owns the Hironde is an artist, I believe?" went on Raymond.

"One of the most renowned," said Peridot.

"His daughter was with him?"

"The prettiest girl in Pont Aven, Monsieur."

"Is there a Madame Ingersoll?"

Now, Peridot was sober as a judge that day, and his Breton wits worked quickly. He did not fail to recall his friend's distress on hearing the name of the Stella's owner, nor his avowed desire to escape recognition. True, Monsieur Ingersoll had not gone to Paris; but Barbe had told him of the journey to Concameau, and everyone in Pont Aven knew of Yvonne's close attendance on Madame Carmac. Moreover, did not Monsieur Ingersoll show terrible anger because of an unhappy reference to the likeness between his daughter and the American lady, and had not Peridot himself promised to lie like a gendarme if any questions were asked? Now was his chance to serve a generous patron. This little fox of a man, with beady eyes and cruel mouth, had come there to pry! Very well—he should go away stuffed with information!

All this required but a fraction of a second to flash across a lively French brain.

"Monsieur Ingersoll is a widower, Monsieur." Peridot was merely stepping back in order to jump farther.

"Ah, yes. I have heard that. His wife died before he came to Pont Aven, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur. Poor lady! I knew her well! Her last words to me were, 'Peridot, you were born with a caul, and will never be drowned; so promise me that when my husband and little Yvonne go to sea you will always be with them.' You see, she went off in a consumption, and---"

"Pardon!" interrupted Raymond, sorely chagrined by the immense significance of the fisherman's words, supposing he had followed their meaning correctly. "Will you be good enough to speak more slowly? What were you born with?"

"*Une coiffe d'enfant, Monsieur.*"

Raymond knew neither the word nor the curious superstition attached to it; but he caught the one thing of vital interest. "So Madame Ingersoll lived in Pont Aven?" he went on, and his rancorous tone betrayed venom and disappointment.

Peridot, convinced now that he was doing the artist a good turn, gave full play to his imagination.

"Certainly, Monsieur," he said. "Never was there a more devoted couple. Quite a romance, their courting! She was a fine lady, as anyone can see with half an eye by squinting at her daughter, and he a poor artist. Her people used to come in the summer to a chateau nearby, and one day when they met he gave her a beautiful pink rose. Her mother was angry, and made her throw the flower away; but an artist was not to be bested by any nose-tilted mama. He knew that they went to the church at Nizon; so he made a paper rose, and borrowed a ladder, and stuck the token between the topmost stones of an arch in the church right above their heads, so that pretty Mademoiselle Adrienne must see it when she lifted her eyes to Heaven. There was a lot of talk about that rose, and no one except the girl guessed who put it there. If you care to walk out to Nizon, Monsieur, you'll see the faded leaves stuck in the arch to this day. Of course I can't vouch for the tale; but the fact that it is told of those two shows what devoted lovers they were."

"Is Madame Ingersoll buried at Nizon?"

That was Raymond's last despairing effort. The fisherman's story tallied accurately with Mrs. Carmac's version of a sister's marriage and a family quarrel.

Peridot thought he had gone far enough: his next effort showed less exuberance. "No, Monsieur," he said, with a solemn wagging of his head, "when she died she was taken back to her own people, somewhere near Paris."

"Was she a Frenchwoman, then?"

"French and American, I believe, Monsieur. Spoke both languages like a native."

Utterly disheartened, Raymond made off. The fortune he had seen within his grasp had melted into thin air.

Peridot gazed after him, and pursed his lips. "Now I wonder what mischief that fellow is up to?" he mused.

"Jean," said his mother, "come and eat; but first ask the good Lord to save you from choking."

"Why, Mother?"

"Because of the lies you told that gentleman. And that yarn about the rose at Nizon!"

"What business is it of his who Mademoiselle Yvonne's mother was, or where she lived, or when she died?"

"But everyone in Pont Aven knows that Monsieur Ingersoll came here from Paris with the little one. And we women have often said to one another it was strange that never a word was uttered about his wife, whether she was alive or dead."

"Then it is high time someone spoke of the lady, and I gave her an excellent character today. All I hope is that it suffices."

It did nearly suffice. But for the tongue of a garrulous woman, Harvey Raymond would have given his close attention to matters that he might rightly deem of more pressing and immediate interest; the salving of the Stella's belongings, for instance, which came to his knowledge almost accidentally.

The more he reflected on Peridot's scraps of history the more he was convinced that he had found a mare's nest, despite Mrs. Carmac's extraordinary outburst in the Hironnelle's cabin. Exhausted and pain-tortured though he had been, he could still distinguish between the raving of dementia and the ungoverned cry of a soul just snatched from death and startled beyond measure by the apparition of a long-forgotten daughter.

Nevertheless he must have been mistaken. Mrs. Carmac had given way to a delusion. He knew that the absence of children had provided the only sorrow in the lives of a most devoted couple, and the thought had evidently taken a subconscious form in the mind of a woman whose faculties were bemused by cold and fear. Reviewing matters in the new light vouchsafed by the garrulous Breton, he saw that nearly every circumstance bore out the theory that Mrs. Carmac and the late Mrs. Ingersoll were sisters. Ingersoll's thoughtfulness in sending Tollemache with a message concerning the peculiarities of French law (the legal procedure with regard to the dead man had been intrusted to a local notary), the fact that the niece visited her aunt, and now the crushing discovery that the girl's mother was actually remembered in the village, seemed to put completely out of court any wild theory of an invalid marriage following an American divorce.

Of course if such a thing could be proved, if Carmac's English will could be upset in favor of Rupert Fosdyke, above all if Harvey Raymond alone knew the whole truth, and could wring stiff terms from Fosdyke before the latter so much as guessed at the grounds for a successful claim, then indeed a new era would open up before the eyes of one who hungered for wealth without having a spark of the genius that might create it honestly.

He was of that large and increasing class which is in many respects the worst product of modern social conditions. He had little to do, was well paid, and traveled far and wide, because Mr. and Mrs. Carmac were restless beings, and seldom lived more than three months of each year on the delightful estate they owned in Surrey. Nevertheless a canker of discontent had eaten into his moral fiber. He was a disappointed man, unscrupulous, greedy, a potential blackmailer.

Mrs. Carmac disliked him, he knew; yet she was retaining his services. That was a puzzle. He must be wary and alert. If not a prior marriage, there was *something*. He must probe and delve into the past. Somehow, somewhere, he would unearth a guarded secret.

Luck would have it that he met Captain Popple, standing on the "terrace," with his hands in his pockets and a pipe clenched between his teeth, gazing up at the sky.

"Good day, Sir," said the sailor. "Glad to see yer movin' around. Now if I could on'y figure out the lingo they talk in Pont Aven, I'd swap idees on the weather with any old charac-ter I saw at anchor."

"What is it you want to know, Captain?" said Raymond, hailing the other's presence as a relief from somber thoughts.

"Well, to my thinkin', the weather's goin' to clear. The wind's a trifle steadier, and gone round a point to east'ard. At this time o' year that means a risin' glass an' frost."

"A frost would be more cheerful, certainly, than a gale howling about the chimneys."

"The sea will fall too. A couple of tides should iron it out, an' I'll have a peep at that reef."

"But why?"

"Mrs. Carmac's orders, Sir. I'm to spare no expense in searchin' for some boxes an' other oddments."

Raymond turned abruptly, and walked to a garden seat beneath the window of the hotel dining room. He moved with a curious swing of the legs, as though his knees were unequal to the task of supporting his body.

Popple followed hastily. "W'at's up?" he cried. "Are ye feelin' bad? Been doin' too much, I s'pose."

"No. It's nothing. Could you--call a maid? If I have a sip of brandy--and rest awhile--the weakness will pass."

The skipper bustled into the hotel and found a waitress. "Cognac--queek!" he said.

The girl smiled. She understood fully.

"*Oui, Monsieur*," she said.

But Popple deemed the matter urgent. "Gentleman eel--vare seek," he insisted.

"Yes, Sir," said the maid, to her hearer's profound surprise. "I've got you. I'll be along before you can say 'knife.'"

"Sink me!" roared Popple. "Here have I been spittin' French all this time, an' you can sling the right stuff at me in that style!"

He received another broad smile, and the linguist vanished. Thenceforth the two held long conversations when they met; but some days elapsed before Popple realized that the chat was rather one-sided. The girl had been taught a few slang phrases by an American artist, which, together with a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the average tourist's requirements, completed her vocabulary.

"Lord love a duck, but it's a treat to hear honest English once more!" he said, returning to Raymond, whose pinched face was a ghastly yellow. "How are ye now, Sir? Gettin' over it?"

"Yes. I'm not what you would regard as robust, Captain, and Thursday afternoon's experiences placed a severe strain on my powers of resistance. Did you say you expected a frost? The weather is quite mild today, don't you think? Sit down, and join me in a drink when the brandy comes."

"Don't mind if I do, Sir. But are you sure you oughtn't to be in bed?"

"Quite sure. I walked a little too far, and I find these hills trying--that is all. Ah, here comes Marie with the medicine."

"Is that your name--Marie?" inquired Popple, eying the girl admiringly.

"Yes, Sir," and a pair of fine Breton brown eyes sparkled.

"An' very nice too!" said he. "Mighty fetchin' rig the gals have in this part," he went on, pouring out some brandy for Raymond, which the latter drank neat. "They look like so many dandy housemaids got up for a fancy ball. Now, if my old woman could see me makin' googoo eyes at a tasty bit like Marie--well, there'd be a double entry in the family log."

"What's this nonsense that Mrs. Carmac has got into her head about salvaging certain articles from the Stella?" said Raymond, whose voice had regained its normal harshness of tone. Small men usually have strong voices. Your giant of a fellow will pipe in a childish treble.

"Why do you say it's nonsense, Sir?" demanded Popple sharply.

"What else can it be? Salvage, in relation to a yacht pounded to pieces on an exposed reef two days ago! I don't think 'nonsense' too strong a term."

"It wouldn't be if every mortal thing had been bangin' on those rocks ever since. But the Stella was partin' amidships afore we were clear of her. She'd slip over into deep water within a few minutes, an' lie there quiet enough. Anyhow, them's my orders."

Raymond might be cantankerous because of his disablement; but Popple had suddenly remembered that Mrs. Carmac had resented the secretary's earlier interference. Raymond, however, helped to smooth over the difficulty.

"Of course I am only expressing an opinion," he said. "I admit it is not worth much. A little while ago I was speaking to Larraidou, the fisherman whom people here call Peridot, you know, and had I known then of your project I should have asked him what he thought of it."

"The sea is one big mystery, an' that's a fact," said Popple, refilling his pipe, and nodding his head to emphasize a bit of sententious philosophy born of experience. "It'll gobble up a ship, an' you'll never find a scrap of timber or a life belt to tell you what's become of her, an' in the next breath it'll show a thing as plain as though it was writ in a book. A friend of mine, skipper of a Hull trawler, missed a deckhand one day, and no one knew what had become of him. That night they shot the trawl in sixty fathom o' water, an' brought up the man's body. That's w'at the sea can do, Sir. Talk of women bein' fickle--they ain't in it with the most changeable thing on this earth."

Raymond poured out a second glass of brandy. "At any rate, you'll not recover a dead body from the Stella's wreckage," he said, with a ghastly grin.

"You never can tell," said Popple.

"But surely, Captain, you don't pretend that the finding of a drowned sailor in a trawl net was other than an accident?"

"That's as may be. S'pose some poor wastrel had been charged with knockin' a matey on the head an' chuckin' him overboard. The doctor's evidence would clear him. Then it 'ud ha been providential."

"I shall refuse to believe that you will retrieve any of the Stella's contents until I see them. Of course I know why Mrs. Carmac is so anxious that the effort should be made. There were thousands of pounds' worth of pearls and

diamonds in her jewelcase. One pearl necklace alone cost ten thousand pounds many years ago, and would fetch far more today."

"Queer you should mention that, Sir," commented Pople.

"Why?" The question came with strange eagerness. The prospect of salvage was either fascinating or highly distasteful to Raymond.

"Because that's the one thing I shouldn't expect to come across."

"You are speaking in riddles, Man. What have you in your mind?"

Pople turned a mildly inquiring eye on this testy companion. He thought, "That drop o' spirit has gone the wrong way, my friend." But what he said was, "I was thinkin' of the sea's whims. It'll hide a six-decked liner an' give up a corpse. If Mrs. Carmac was keen set on pickin' up a pair o' scissors, I'd back them to turn up as ag'in' your ten-thousand-pound necklace. Mebbe that's a silly thing to say in this case. Her jew'ls are in a locked box, an' a strong one at that, because I twigged her baggage when it kem aboard, an' the lot was built for hard wear. But there you are! I'll take care she has a look at the stuff we find, an' that ends my job."

"You can count on me, Captain, for all the assistance I can render," said Raymond, and the subject dropped.

"By the way," he went on, adopting the most nonchalant tone he could command, "have you met Mrs. Carmac's niece since we came ashore?"

"Me, Sir? No. Didn't know there was any such young woman."

"You have not been told, then, that Mrs. Carmac found a long-lost niece in Miss Yvonne Ingersoll?"

Pople slapped a stout thigh, and his eyes rounded in surprise. "Sink me! but that explains it!" he cried.

"Explains what?"

"I wondered where I had seen the girl in bib an' tucker afore."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, these here caps an' streamers an' tickle-me aprons do make a heap of difference! Now what in the world will she think of me? I've passed her a dozen times without ever a 'Thank you, Miss,' or a touch of me hat. Dash my buttons! I thought my eyes were sharper'n that! Of course she was wrapped in a sou'wester an' oilskin the other day, an' so was Mrs. Carmac; so I piped the likeness then, an' even spoke of it to Mr. Ingersoll. But I must ha been rattled when I was in Mrs. Carmac's room a bit since. Of course I remember now. That was her, right enough."

"Would you mind telling me what you are rambling about, Captain Pople?"

Pople grinned. "There's a pair of us, Mr. Raymond," he cried. "You don't seem to know much about the lady, either. You met her on the stairs when you went to see Mrs. Carmac, because I happened to notice that she kem down as you went up."

"A girl in Breton costume?"

"That's it. She's lived here since she was a baby, an' I s'pose she took to the village ways."

Raymond was so astounded by a fact that, after all, was not of vital importance, that he put the next question literally to gain time for the readjustment of his ideas. "You have heard something of her history, then?"

"Oh, ay. She an' her father are well thought of in Pont Aven. A lady who's stayin' in there," and he jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward the hotel, "tole me all about the pair of 'em. Mr. Ingersoll is by way of bein' a great hand at paintin'; but he settled down in this little spot nearly nineteen years ago, and has never left it. Miss Yvonne would be a baby then; but she's grown into a damn fine young woman since--an' she ain't the on'y one in the parish, if I'm any judge."

"Mr. Ingersoll lost his wife here. That probably accounts for his wish to remain."

Pople's face creased in a frown of perplexity. "That isn't w'at the lady said," he explained. "Her story was that Mrs. Ingersoll died in Paris, probably when the baby was born. Anyhow, no one in Pont Aven had ever seen her, as she axed particular. Not that it could ha been any business of hers, but a woman likes to ferret out every atom of gossip, an' there's bound to be a lot of talk about any girl as good lookin' as Miss Ingersoll."

Pople little guessed--he never knew--what a tornado he let loose by those words. "Dear me! Dear me! How very curious!" gasped Raymond.

And at that moment Yvonne herself came across the Place from Le Sellin's, having undergone a process of "fitting" to which her mother was unequal. The two were alike even in height and figure. If anything, Mrs. Carmac was rather more slender than her daughter, because the girl's muscles were well developed by long walks and plenty of exercise in an outrigger, whereas the older woman had been self-indulgent and frail all her life.

Both men stood up. She noticed their action, and protested smilingly.

"Please don't rise, Mr. Raymond," she said. "I hope you don't think I have neglected you, but I have inquired from Dr. Garnier several times as to your well-being, and I knew you were in good hands here, while my own time has been occupied in looking after Mrs. Carmac, who was really very ill until this morning. As for you, Captain Pople, I didn't need to glance twice at you to see that a small thing like a shipwreck hadn't disturbed you in the least."

"Miss," said Pople, "you'll believe me, I know, when I say I didn't reckonize you upstairs. Sink me! I couldn't imagine that any young lady could look so pretty in two different ways."

She laughed delightedly, for the first time since the doleful twin sisters, Sorrow and Suffering, had discovered her. "Now I understand why a sailor has a lass in every port," she said. "You cannot fail to be a success with the girls if you talk to them in that fashion."

Pople had never before been accused of being a ladykiller. He grinned, and his red face grew purple. "Me, Miss?" he cried. "Bless your little heart! I was on'y tellin' the solemn truth. You looked like a seafarin' angel when I saw you through the scud an' spray dashin' over that reef. An' now--well, if the folk hereabout want to advertise Pont Aven, they ought to put you on a poster."

"Captain, I must not have my head turned by such compliments. Wait till Tuesday, our market day, and you will meet dozens of girls who put me in the shade. Is your arm fairly comfortable, Mr. Raymond?"

The secretary, whose eyes had glowered on every unstudied poise and trick of expression that stamped Yvonne as Mrs. Carmac's daughter, even to a markedly clear enunciation, and an almost coquettish sidelong glance when specially amused, had been given time to collect his faculties by Pople's tribute of admiration.

"Yes, thank you, Miss Ingersoll," he said, striving to tune his harsh voice to a note of reverential courtesy. "If I possessed Captain Pople's gift of speech, I should try to vie with him in imagery. May I say that I have always considered Mrs. Carmac as one of the most strikingly handsome women I have ever seen, so I can well appreciate the fact that you are her niece?"

"Lorry," cried the smiling girl, "come out here and tell these flatterers how horrid I can be at times!"

Raymond turned so quickly that he wrenched his arm slightly, and was hard put to it to suppress a groan. Tollemache was standing at the open window directly behind the seat that Pople and himself had occupied. How long had he been there? What had he heard? Certainly the path of the evildoer was not being made smooth, and the scheming secretary had experienced various thrills in the course of one short hour.

"Mr. Raymond is a shrewd judge of womankind, I am sure," said Tollemache quietly, "and he would never accept my estimate of you, Yvonne. Will you be home for tea? And may I come? I have some news for you."

Yvonne simply announced that he would find her at the cottage about four o'clock. Then, with a hand-wave to her friend and a graceful bow to the others, she hurried to the annex, running into Peridot as she went.

"Ah, bon jour, Ma'mselle!" he cried, smiling broadly and flourishing his cap. "Did Monsieur Tollemache tell you what a fool I made of myself the other night?"

"No," she said. "Nothing Monsieur Tollemache could say would shake my high opinion of you. How is Madeleine? I haven't seen her since the supper party."

"Neither have I, Ma'mselle," and the merry Breton face suddenly became woebegone.

"What, then? Have you quarreled?"

"She too was vexed with me."

"I'll put that right, Peridot. *Kenavo*." [Breton for "Au revoir."]

"*Kenavo, Ma'mselle*," and Peridot strolled toward the quay, but not without a sharp glance at the man whom he had gulled so thoroughly.

"Lord love a duck!" sighed Pople. "I wish my eddication hadn't been neglected when I was a nipper. I wasn't brought up. I was fetched up. Just listen to them two! Well, I'll bear in the direction of the telegraph office. I'm expectin' a wire from Brest about a diver. So long, Mr. Raymond!"

"Goodby, Captain. If you want me during the next two hours, I shall be in my room."

Pople lumbered away, and Raymond would have gone to the annex had he not been stayed by Tollemache.

"A word with you, Mr. Raymond. I want to explain that Mr. Ingersoll and his daughter are my closest friends."

The secretary wheeled round slowly. He had no fear of this stalwart young American, whom he classed with the well-dressed, athletic, feather-brained "nuts" of British society.

"I think you are to be envied," he said smilingly.

Tollemache did not smile. His frank features were thought-laden and stern. Yvonne would have read his expression unerringly. Lorry was troubled but determined.

"I am not parading the friendship for any other reason than as a warning that I shall not tolerate any prying into their affairs," he said, evidently choosing the words with care.

Raymond affected vast astonishment. "If you overheard the conversation between Captain Pople and me, you must be aware that I knew little or nothing about Mr. Ingersoll and Mademoiselle Yvonne," he retorted.

"That wasn't your fault, I imagine."

"I don't understand what you are driving at. Suppose I have shown some interest in them, isn't it reasonable--people to whom I owe my life?"

"A most excellent sentiment, Mr. Raymond. Don't forget it, and wander into bypaths, where you will most certainly meet me. And I'm a big, hulking fellow, you know, who is likely to block the way."

"Again I say that I have done nothing to deserve the implied threat."

"And again I say that I'll lick the stuffing out of anyone who so much as tries to annoy my friends."

"I have no wish to feel otherwise than exceedingly grateful to them, and I cannot allow you or any other person to dictate to me in the matter. Your remarks are--incomprehensible."

Tollemache gave him no further reply than a steady stare, which discomfited Raymond far more than any words. With an angry sniff he abandoned the contest, and walked unsteadily across the irregular cobble-stones that paved the roadway.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TIGHTENING OF THE NET

In the ordinary course of events the mortal remains of Walter Carmac would have been inclosed in a leaden shell and transhipped to the United States for burial. But a woman's whim intervened. Mrs. Carmac suddenly decreed that the interment should take place at Nizon. Pont Aven possesses no cemetery of its own. Nizon, perched on the plateau of a neighboring hill, provides a final resting place for dwellers in the valley. Thither was borne in state a huge casket containing the body of the dead millionaire.

Such a funeral had not been seen at Pont Aven in many a year. The village turned out en masse. By that time everyone knew of the extraordinary coincidence that brought Yvonne to the rescue of a wrecked vessel that had her aunt on board. When the news spread that the woman was immensely rich local interest rose to boiling point.

Many and various, therefore, were the conjectures of the crowd as soon as it was seen that the widow, who insisted on attending the ceremony, was not accompanied by her niece. She was escorted to a carriage by her husband's nephew, a tall, slim, dark-featured young man of aristocratic appearance. In a second carriage were seated Bennett, the lawyer, head of the firm of Bennett, Son & Hoyle, an elderly man who had conveyancing and mortgage stamped on his shrewd yet kindly face; Captain Pople, hectic in a suit of black; and Raymond, looking smaller and more dejected than ever in his mourning attire. That was all, in so far as relatives and friends were concerned.

The third and last carriage contained a local notary, the mayor of Pont Aven, and Dr. Garnier.

Mrs. Carmac's unexpected decision that her husband should be buried in Brittany was made known only when it was impossible for others to come from a distance. With one exception, the steward whose ankle was sprained, the crew of the *Stella* had been sent to England; so the millionaire was followed to the grave by few who were acquainted with him in life. But the village saw to it that the cortege lost nothing in dignity or size. Gendarmes, custom house officials, and various town functionaries marched behind the carriages. Half a dozen sailors of the French marine yielded to the national love of a spectacle, and fell into line. Then came the townsfolk in serried ranks, the Breton garb of men and women adding a semibarbaric touch of color.

A Paris correspondent of a New York daily expressed the opinion to a colleague that the bereaved wife had acted right in burying her husband within sight of the sea that had claimed him as a victim.

"At first," he said, "I thought it a somewhat peculiar proceeding. Now I begin to understand. If I had any choice in the matter, I should certainly prefer to find my last home in this peaceful little spot rather than fill lot number so-and-so in a crowded cemetery."

"Tastes differ," said the other. "Personally I'd like to have my ashes bottled and put in a window overlooking Broadway. Who comes in for all the money?"

"The widow, I'm told."

"Doesn't young Fosdyke get a slice?"

"Don't know. No good trying to worm anything out of Bennett."

"Fosdyke looks like a southern Frenchman. He's English, I suppose?"

"Yes, by birth and residence. But his father was an American,—came over with a racing crowd in the '80's,—and married a pretty Creole."

"Oh, is that it?"

"Well, there's a drop of negro blood in the family; away back, perhaps, but unmistakable. Did you ever meet Carmac?"

"No."

"A tremendous fellow; but years ago he was as thin as Fosdyke."

"How did they make their money?"

"Cotton, and backing the North during the Civil War. That's why they left the States. The pure-blooded Southerners didn't like 'em, anyway, and the men who fought under Lee and Stonewall Jackson would have tarred and feathered the whole tribe afterward."

"What's this I hear about a niece discovered in Pont Aven by the lady?"

"Haven't you seen her?"

"No."

"Then take my advice, and quit by the next train. You're too impressionable. One glimpse of her, and your life's a wreck. She's the prettiest ever."

"Why isn't she here today?"

"Ask me another. But if I were Fosdyke, I'd be in no hurry to rush back to smoky London. By hook or by crook I'd keep Uncle's money in the family."

This well informed cynic had not gone an inch beyond the known facts concerning the Carmacs. At twenty-five the man now dead was endowed with that peculiar quality of looks which is often the heritage of men and women of mixed descent, when all other traces of a negroid strain are eliminated save the black and plentiful hair, the brilliant eyes, the strong white teeth, a supple frame, and a definite thickness of skin which makes for perfect complexion and coloring.

As Walter Carmac had been in youth so was his nephew now. Rupert Fosdyke had often been described as "the best-looking man in London society." The tribute came from the opposite sex. Men, for the most part, disliked him because of his egregious vanity. But he was no carpet knight. He played polo regularly at Ranelagh, was a keen fox hunter, and had ridden his own horses in steeplechases at Warwick, Leamington, and other county fixtures. He was a prominent "first nighter" in theatrical circles, and knew a great many musical comedy celebrities by abbreviated versions of their assumed Christian names. This latter weakness had brought him into court as a principal in a somewhat notorious breach of promise case, and his uncle and he had quarreled irrevocably on that occasion.

Rupert regarded the older man as a philanthropic "muff," and dared to tell him so, though such candor was likely to prove expensive. His own income was ten thousand dollars a year, provided by trustees of his mother's estate. He contrived only to exist on this sum, and would not have been guilty of the folly of alienating a millionaire uncle, who had no heir, but for the onerous conditions laid down for his future career. He was to abandon the "fast set," take Raymond's place as Carmac's secretary, and marry.

Rupert laughed derisively. "Goodby!" he said. "Try again when I'm forty."

After that the two remained at arm's length. And now the nephew was following his uncle's body to the grave, and gazing with curiously introspective eyes at the tiny panorama unfolded by the quaint old village as the leading carriage moved slowly onward.

Singularly enough, he was a prominent figure in Pont Aven that day. Not only was he discussed by the multitude, but he was not wholly ignored by a gray-haired man and a girl dressed in quiet tweed, who had walked to the summit of the lofty spur that separates Nizon from the Bois d'Amour, and were watching the long procession climbing the Concameau road.

Ingersoll had returned from Concameau early that morning. Yvonne, troubled in spirit because of certain hints dropped by Mrs. Carmac, had written to her father an urgent request to come home.

"Yvonne," said Ingersoll, breaking a long silence, "why is Mrs. Carmac burying her husband here?"

"She has not told me, Dad, but I am beginning to fear that she means to remain in Pont Aven."

The girl's voice was low and unemotional; but her father was not deceived by its studious monotone. He looked down at the village in which they had passed so many peaceful years, at the cluster of sardine boats,--among them the *Hirondelle*, laid up near the quay,--at the tortuous river, thrusting its silvery bends ever toward the open sea, at the favorite paths over the gorse-clad shores, leading on the one hand to the Chateau du Henan and on the other to the Menhirs and the hamlet of Rosbras. Those riverside walks abounded in beauty spots. He had painted them all, in many lights and in most seasons. They held a perennial charm. He could have sketched each secluded dell from memory with almost photographic accuracy, and hardly made an error in the type of the surrounding foliage, whether of lordly and treacherous elms, or close-knit firs, or blossom-covered apple trees.

"It is hard!" he said at last, almost unconsciously.

Yvonne heard, and her eyes grew dim. "It is more than hard," she murmured. "It is thoughtless."

A fierce joy surged into her father's heart, yet he only said softly, "We must find another hermitage, my dear one."

"Why should we be driven out of the place we have made our home?" she cried, yielding suddenly to the overwhelming demand for a confidant. "My mother has the wide world to choose from. Why should she settle in Pont Aven? I am sorry for her, and she is very lovable and gracious; but no power on earth can part you and me, Dad. Oh, I have been so miserable during these wretched days! I have had the wildest, maddest thoughts. If only she had not made a new life so impossible! She, my mother, another man's wife!"

The sheer necessity of calming the girl's hysterical outburst imposed a restraint on Ingersoll he was far from feeling. "We need not contemplate heroic measures today, at any rate," he soothed her. "Mrs. Carmac's present mood supplies no warranty of her actions next week or next month. Though she may seem to have recovered from the strain of the wreck, probably she is still very shaken and low-spirited. That phase will pass. She has many interests elsewhere--and few here. Moreover, you know me too well to believe that I would forbid you ever to hear from or see her again. That would be foolish, criminal. You are a grown woman now, Yvonne. Life has revealed some of its riddles, bared some of its brutal crudities. I can never forget, strive as I might, that you have met your mother. Let us bide a wee, Sweetheart. Let us wait till you and your mother have discussed an awkward situation openly. I gathered from your letters that she is saddened and disillusioned, and I shall be slow to believe that she really contemplates a permanent residence in Pont Aven. She and I cannot dwell in the same small village. If she stays, I go. Why, then, should she wish to bury herself alive here?"

Yvonne dried her eyes. "I'm so glad I brought you back, Dad," she said more cheerfully. "It is such a relief to hear you tackling a problem that has nearly driven me crazy. You see, I had no one to talk to. I couldn't confide in Lorry;

though I imagine he guesses the truth----"

"Why do you think that?" broke in Ingersoll quickly.

"It seems that some days ago he overheard a conversation between Captain Popple and Mr. Raymond, Mr. Carmac's secretary, the man whose arm was injured. He was writing in the old dining room at Julia's, and heard voices outside. At first he paid no heed; but some reference to an attempt at salvage on the wreck appeared to upset Mr. Raymond very considerably. Then, when Mr. Raymond became calmer, he led the talk round to us--to our history, I mean. Some lady had given Captain Popple certain details picked up from village gossips. The captain--quite innocently, Lorry thought--corrected a silly story which Mr. Raymond had got from Peridot, and Mr. Raymond grew quite excited. Lorry has seen Peridot, and finds that Mr. Raymond actually went to his cottage and questioned him--about us. Peridot told him some outrageous fibs----"

"He would," said Ingersoll, with a grim smile.

"Well, Lorry is such a loyal soul that he didn't hesitate to warn Mr. Raymond very plainly that he must mind his own business."

"Exactly what one might expect from Lorry too."

"I don't attach much weight to Mr. Raymond's prying, nor does Mrs. Carmac. I told her. Was that right?"

"Quite right."

"But I couldn't help seeing that Lorry must have formed some theory of his own, or he would never have interfered."

"If Lorry were our only bugbear, our troubles would be light. Have you met this Raymond?"

"Oh, yes. Often. He comes to Mrs. Carmac daily for orders; though she or I have to write letters and telegrams, as he can only print laboriously with his left hand."

"Have you seen a good deal of Rupert Fosdyke?"

Now Yvonne had not mentioned Fosdyke's name in her letters. She did not like him. Indeed, she mistrusted him from the moment of their first meeting, when the gallant Rupert favored her with a glance of surprised admiration; which, however, faded into a covert scrutiny on hearing that she was Mrs. Carmac's niece.

Her sentiments toward this new-found "cousin" had developed speedily from passive indifference into active resentment of his ways. Of course there was nothing in Pont Aven to interest an ultra "man about town"; so Fosdyke took to escorting Yvonne from the hotel to Mere Pitou's cottage. At first she yielded out of politeness. When the short promenade became an established custom, and Fosdyke even called for her at the hours she might be expected to visit her mother, she was at a loss to know how to get rid of him. She thought first of Tollemache; but instinct told her that he and Fosdyke would mingle as amicably as fire and oil, and with similar results. Then she sought the assistance of Madeleine Demoret, and thereby added a new burden to an already heavy load; for the village girl became straightway infatuated about the handsome stranger, and Fosdyke, who spoke French fluently, took malicious pleasure in annoying the pretty prude, as he classed Yvonne, by flirting with Madeleine.

No wonder, therefore, that the girl should have longed for her father's company and protection; though she looked at him now with an air of bewilderment.

"You know something of him, then?" she said, searching the worn face with anxious eyes.

"I know his name. I attended his mother's wedding. Indeed, why trouble to conceal the fact that it was then I first saw your mother? She was a brides-maid, a girl of fourteen, and already notable as a musical prodigy. I did not meet her again for six years, when her voice had given way, and she began to dabble in art. Mr. and Mrs. Fosdyke brought their little son to our wedding. He was an extraordinarily pretty child, and almost attracted more attention than the bride."

Ingersoll spoke in the tone of one who was recalling the past without pain; but his glance followed the last stragglers of the procession to Nizon,--Nizon, with its finely carved Calvary, and its high-perched stone cross bearing the tortured body of the Christ.

"Father dear," cried Yvonne impulsively, "I have made up my mind. You are powerless; but I can act. I will not have you harrowed and wounded at every turn. You and I, together with Lorry and Peridot, saved my mother's life. She must repay us by the only means she possesses,--by conferring the freedom of our own small Paradise."

"Yvonne," he sighed, "some day soon you will be marrying."

Whereat the girl almost laughed. "No matter what happens, that is the last thing I should dream of doing," she said.

"But why? It is the one thing that a girl of your age should have mainly in mind. Even in this small community, you might find a most excellent and chivalric husband----"

"Meaning Lorry," said Yvonne, without hesitation.

"Well--yes."

"But--I don't care for Lorry--in that way."

"Has he ever asked you?"

"No. Once or twice, perhaps, he has hinted that Barkis was willing. The last time was no later than the day of the wreck."

"And what did you say?"

"I was nearly angry with him."

"You would prefer him, I suppose, to a man of the Rupert Fosdyke type?"

"I loathe the sight of Rupert Fosdyke!"

"How has he offended you?"

"In no way that I can put into words. He is very courteous, and quite a clever talker, and he tries to make every woman he meets believe that she is the one creature on earth he adores."

"Then poor Lorry, with his chummy slang and abounding good conceit with himself and all the world,—excepting this Mr. Raymond, I take it,—compares but indifferently with the smooth-spoken Rupert?"

"Lorry! He's a man! He's worth a million Fosdykes!"

Ingersoll, well pleased, adopted the sound policy of leaving well enough alone. "Still, you have given me no specific reason for your dislike of Fosdyke," he persisted.

"You read my mind too plainly, Dad," she protested, smiling vexedly. "I didn't mean to tell you, hoping matters would adjust themselves; as, indeed, they may do now, if these invaders withdraw. But Madeleine has quite lost her head over him."

"Madeleine Demoret!" Ingersoll was evidently amazed, as well he might be, seeing that Breton maids are less approachable by strangers than the girls of almost any other nationality.

"Yes, and the worst thing is that I am to blame."

"But how can that be possible?"

"Mr. Fosdyke arrived here last Saturday, and of course I was introduced to him as Mrs. Carmac's niece. The necessity for any such pretense is rather hateful, and he did not render it more acceptable by claiming me as a cousin. Really, Dad, with the slightest encouragement on my part, he would have kissed me!"

"Shocking!" said Ingersoll.

"Father dear, don't make fun of me. His cousinly kiss would have burnt my cheek."

"I can't profess fierce indignation because a young man tried to seize a good opportunity to kiss a pretty young woman."

"Well, he didn't dare make the attempt," declared Yvonne spiritedly. "He realized at once that I would have slapped his face soundly for his pains."

"But are you serious about Madeleine? I mean, rather, do you think she is really enamored of him, or merely showing off for Peridot's benefit?"

"So serious that I am profoundly thankful the settled weather has kept Peridot at sea."

"Do they meet frequently?"

"I hate suspecting people, Dad; so I can only say that I don't know. Let us get away from all this worry for a day. Send Barbe for Lorry, and ask him to *dejeuner*. Then the three of us will walk by the Belon road to Moelan, and have tea at the inn. It will do us a heap of good."

Mrs. Carmac, after a burst of hysterical sobbing which her nephew tried to stop by a few conventional words of sympathy, subsided into even more exasperating silence as the carriage rolled back from Nizon. Fosdyke, being an egotist, did not exert himself to console her; he was, indeed, profoundly relieved when the wretched journey came to an end. He helped his aunt to alight, but did not attempt to escort her into the annex. Instead he waited until the second carriage drove up, and Bennett appeared.

"Am I wanted for any formalities?" he inquired offhandedly.

"Not at present, Mr. Fosdyke," was the quiet answer.

"Isn't it customary that the will should be read after the funeral?"

"Yes, if it is available."

"Surely my uncle did not die intestate?" The question was shot out with a fiery eagerness that showed how joyfully any indication of the absence of a will would have been received.

"No," said Bennett, after a pause. "Mr. Carmac's will, in duplicate, is lodged in my office and at his bank. I did not bring my copy, as I had no reason to believe that events would shape themselves as they have done. But a confidential clerk is on the way with the document. He telegraphed from St. Malo this morning that he had caught a train that should reach Pont Aven about half past four this afternoon. At five o'clock, if convenient to you, I suggest that we meet in Mrs. Carmac's rooms."

Then Fosdyke knew that the gray-haired lawyer had been playing with him; but he only said airily, "Such distractions as seem to flourish in Pont Aven will probably leave me at liberty about the time you name, Mr. Bennett."

The lawyer nodded, kept a stiff upper lip, and followed Mrs. Carmac.

"The old fox!" growled Fosdyke savagely, careless who heard him. "I'll bet good money he has feathered his own nest all right!"

The mayor, the doctor, and the notary, who had descended close at hand, wondered what had put this elegant young

gentleman into a temper. Raymond and Popple understood well enough, but said nothing.

"I suppose you ought to invite these local gentlemen to take a glass of wine?" suggested the secretary.

"I'll see them boiled first!" was the amiable answer.

Then Raymond, in his slow French, gave the invitation on his own behalf; but the Pont Aven men were not slow-witted, and courteously excused their further attendance.

"I've a notion that a gargle of some sort wouldn't come amiss," observed Popple thoughtfully.

"I can't drink now," fumed Fosdyke. "Raymond, a word with you!"

Raymond, however, had been furtively engaged in taking stock of Rupert Fosdyke during the last few days.

"Sorry," he said, "but our chat must be postponed. Mrs. Carmac would be exceedingly annoyed if she heard that we were inhospitable. You ought not to have spoken the way you did before those French gentlemen. It was distinctly bad form."

If a timid hare coursed by a greyhound were suddenly to turn and admonish its pursuer, the dog would hardly be more surprised than Fosdyke when this queer-looking little secretary dared to chide him. He was so completely taken aback that he laughed.

"I guess you're right," he said. "Order a bottle of champagne. I'll ask those fellows to dinner, and do them well. Then they'll forgive me. Lead on, Macduff! And cursed be he who first cries 'Hold! Enough!'"

Fosdyke's changed mood was distinctly more agreeable. Popple, for one, deemed him a rather peppery young gentleman, but none the worse because he spoke out freely.

"Life's a rum thing, anyhow," said the skipper, when the three were seated in the dining room of the hotel, which was otherwise empty. "About this very hour this day week the Stella was makin' bad weather of it off some little islands north of the Aven. I wanted to put in here; but Mrs. Carmac wouldn't hear of it. I must push on for Lorient, she said--an' the pore gentleman we've just planted on top of the hill there was chaffin' her about bein' afraid o' spooks. Sink me! Who's the spook now?"

"I don't see what ghosts had to do with Pont Aven," said Fosdyke sharply.

"Neither do I, Sir," said Popple. "It was a funny remark, look at it any way you like."

"Both of you seem to forget Mrs. Carmac's niece," put in Raymond suavely. The conversation had suddenly taken a dangerous turn, and it must be headed deftly into a safer channel.

"What of her?" demanded Fosdyke.

"Well, she represents the family disagreement which estranged Mrs. Carmac and the late Mrs. Ingersoll. You see, Mr. Fosdyke, your aunt was aware that her sister lived here, but evidently did not know she was dead. That fact would account for her disinclination to visit Pont Aven. In a word, Fate drove us on to that wretched reef, which you, Captain, will see more of if this fine weather lasts. How goes the salvage scheme?"

"I've got a diver, an' the right sort of craft to stand by. Has its own steam, an' a derrick, an' it'll be alongside Les Verres at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. I'm sorry I can't find that chap Peridot. They tell me he's away with the fishin' fleet; but some of the boats may come in by tonight's tide."

"What is there to salvage?" said Fosdyke.

"Banknotes, an' jew'lry, an' dockyments," said Popple.

"Rather a wild-goose chase, isn't it?"

"That is a point on which our worthy friend and I differ," put in the secretary. "I bow to his superior judgment, of course; but I shall be vastly surprised if he brings ashore anything worth having."

"It's a bit of a handicap not havin' Peridot," grumbled the sailor.

"Who is Peridot?" demanded Fosdyke.

"A Breton, whom Mr. Ingersoll employs occasionally on his cutter," explained Raymond. "He, and an American named Tollemache, together with Mr. Ingersoll and his daughter, were concerned in the rescue."

"Mighty lucky thing for the rest of you that they were at sea that day," commented Fosdyke, with a certain viciousness born of a thought that had darted through his mind. "It was a close call, I'm told. Two minutes after the last man was taken off the Stella smashed up."

Raymond smiled. He knew exactly what this dutiful nephew was thinking. Had the Stella been lost with all on board, there would have been some chance of the Carmac estate passing to nephew and nieces, notwithstanding the will. Mrs. Carmac might have been legally presumed to have died first, or, failing that, her relatives might have remained unknown.

"Mrs. Carmac means to present Peridot with a sardine boat of his own," he said, waiting until Fosdyke was surfeited with the gall of his own evil notion. "Then," he went on, gazing contemplatively at a cart laden with casks of cider lumbering across the square, "then, I am given to understand, Peridot will marry a girl named Madeleine Demoret, and settle down in prosperity and content."

There was a pause. Captain Popple, who really had no reason to complain of any deficiency of vision, either literal or figurative, poured out another glass of champagne, and watched the wine creaming.

"This fortunate person, Peridot, owns a queer name," said Fosdyke, surveying the secretary with a steady scrutiny. "Isn't a *peridot* a precious stone of sorts?"

"Yes; but his real name is Larraidou. The other is only a nickname, arising from the curious color of his eyes. He's by way of being a humorist too; though I fancy he could reveal a very ugly disposition if roused."

"Humor of any variety is surely out of place in Pont Aven," said Fosdyke. "Here's to Peridot remaining several more days with the fishing fleet--and damn his eyes!" He rose and went out.

"Affable kind o' young gent, that," commented Popple. "A trifle quick on the trigger, though. I was glad to hear you touchin' him up a bit, Sir. You did it neatly--twice, an' all."

"Twice?" Raymond affected astonishment.

But Popple was a wary bird too. "No business of mine, anyhow," he said shortly, and, finishing his wine with a gulp, betook himself upstairs, where the injured steward was still confined to his bedroom.

The sprained ankle had proved awkward; practically it amounted to a dislocation, and Dr. Garnier would not yet allow the patient to put the injured foot on the ground. A cheerful little Cockney, the steward had interested Yvonne at once by his happy-go-lucky demeanor when brought on board the *Hirondelle*. Each day she had visited him for a few minutes. Tollemache seldom passed without exchanging a few lively words with him, and he was a positive godsend to Popple.

"Well, Harry my boy, how goes it?" was the skipper's greeting.

The invalid was sitting up in an easy chair, placed in front of a low window. Thus he could gaze into the square beneath, and see its whole extent. In summer the dense foliage of the sycamores would have blocked the view; but in mid-December their bare branches hid nothing.

"Fine, Cap'n," he answered. "Mr. Tollemache tole me the doctor said I might hop downstairs tomorrow. This d'y week I'll be leggin' it back to England, 'ome, an' work."

"Mebbe, an' mebbe not," said Popple, settling his bulk into another chair, and beginning to fill a pipe.

"Strewth, Cap'n, you're the larst man I'd tike for a Job's comforter," said the steward.

"W'at's the rush?"

"No rush; but I'm goin' along all right, an' 'er Lydyship won't want to keep a chap like me 'angin' abart."

"S'pose you get a job here?"

"Now, I arsk you, Cap'n, w'at can I do in a plice where they tork neither French nor English? I'd be a byby among 'em--a silly byby."

"This salvage business may last a bit. If you like, I'll ax Mrs. Carmac to put your name on the books."

"Cap'n, d'y mean it? Well, you are a brick! It'll help a lot if I earn a quid or two while I'm crocked. I've been thinkin' abart this salvage idee. W'at's behind it?"

"Just pickin' up any odds an' ends we come across. But that's a funny question. Got something in your noddle?"

"Nothink, Cap'n. On'y it struck me that w'at between sea an' rock the *Stella* must be pretty well dished by this time."

"Everybody says that," growled Popple. "An' that's just why I've a fixed notion we'll find more'n anyone bargains for."

He was busy with his pipe, which refused to draw freely, so failed to perceive that the steward was gazing out into the square with a curiously brooding stare. Harry Jackson had been taught by a hard world not to blurt out everything he knew.

"Harry," said Popple suddenly, "would ye like a tonic?"

"Would a duck swim, Cap'n?" said Harry instantly.

"There was a glass or two left in a bottle of the boy downstairs. 'Arf a mo! I'll ax Marie if it's still on tap."

Harry stared again out of the window. This time his glance followed Harvey Raymond, who was strolling toward the bridge. He watched the secretary's thin figure, its ungainliness being somewhat enhanced by the stiffly bandaged arm, until Popple returned in triumph with nearly a pint of champagne and a wine-glass.

"There you are, Son!" he cried joyously. "Put that where the cat can't get it. You're drinkin' Mr. Raymond's health."

"Am I?" said Harry. "Then, 'ere's to him, the swab!"

"Hullo! Don't you like him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"'E ain't my sort, Cap'n. Monkey-fice, we chaps forrard used to call 'im."

"Sink me! You didn't see much of him."

"Didn't need to. 'E's the kind o' jumped-up snotty who torks to men beneath 'im as if they was dawgs. When a real toff calls me 'Jackson' I s'y 'Yes, Sir'; but when that blighter did the sime thing I wanted to bung 'im one in the jawr."

"Well, I'm dashed!" breathed Popple, surveying his friend with manifest approval. "Now, who'd ha thought he'd stirred you up in that way? Between you an' me, Harry, I'm not too fond of him meself. I suspcioned that Mrs. Carmac meant to fire him last week; but I was mistaken. Anyhow, 'Live an' let live' is my policy. So long as he doesn't interfere

with me, I'll leave him alone."

"Sime 'ere," agreed Jackson.

Mrs. Carmac passed a restless afternoon. Twice she summoned her maid, Celeste, who had come from Paris on receipt of a telegram, meaning to send that discreet tirewoman for Yvonne, yet twice changed her mind.

As the hour fixed by Bennett drew near, she felt more reconciled to Yvonne's prolonged absence. She was beginning to realize the perplexities and embarrassments to which her daughter was being subjected daily.

The lawyer was first to arrive. "I am glad of the opportunity of having a word with you in private," he said. "Of course you are acquainted with the disposition your husband made of his estate; but Rupert Fosdyke may be disagreeably surprised. If he protests, do not be drawn into argument. Please leave matters in my hands."

"Am I to say nothing at all?" she demanded.

"Nothing controversial. If he blusters, and asks questions, refer him to me."

"He knows already that Walter viewed his--what shall I call them?--social entanglements with disfavor."

"Yes. For all that, he may be hoping for more than he will get."

"Wouldn't it be wise to soften the blow by an act of voluntary generosity?"

Bennett shook his head. "It would be construed rather as weakness than as strength," he said. "Fosdyke is not poor. On ten thousand dollars a year a man can live very comfortably, even in society. An extra couple of thousand will keep his hunters or run a car. No, Mrs. Carmac. Your husband's intentions are set forth very clearly, and I advise you not to depart from them in the slightest particular."

Five o'clock came and passed; but Fosdyke did not put in an appearance. They waited ten minutes, and the lawyer was about to suggest that the will should be read without more delay when a hasty step on the stairs and an imperative knock on the door announced the errand one's advent.

He apologized gracefully enough. "I went for a stroll," he said, "and missed my way in the dark. I hope I have not kept you waiting?"

"It did not matter, Rupert," said Mrs. Carmac.

"Well, now that we have come together, suppose we get to business," said the lawyer, unfastening a brief bag and extracting from its depths a bulky parchment. He began reading at once. Mrs. Carmac sat very still, a listener whose thoughts hardly kept pace with the loud-sounding legal jargon. Fosdyke, however, followed every word attentively. First in order was a long list of bequests to various institutions, and legacies or annuities to servants. Annuities of five thousand dollars a year to each of Carmac's two nieces succeeded. Then came a personal reference:

"To my nephew, Rupert Fosdyke, I give and bequeath the sum of two thousand five hundred dollars per annum during his life. This sum is to be increased to ten thousand dollars per annum on his marriage, provided that such marriage takes place within two years after my death, unless a postponement is rendered necessary by unavoidable circumstances which the trustees of this my will shall deem sufficient cause for an extension of the said period of two years, and provided also that the said trustees shall approve of the person he marries. Such approval should not be withheld unreasonably; but nothing in this testament shall be regarded as interfering with or controlling the absolute discretion of the said trustees."

There was no hint of tremor or emphasis in Bennett's tone as he recited that onerous clause. He treated Fosdyke's legacy with the same sangfroid he had displayed in detailing a bequest of fifty-two pounds per annum to an aged gardener attached to the Surrey mansion.

But the despoiled heir bubbled into instant frenzy. He could hardly believe his ears when the amount was disclosed. The generous treatment of his sisters prepared him for at least five times the sum they would receive, and his sallow face grew livid when he knew that the dead man's hand still retained its grip.

He gasped something; but the lawyer promptly raised his voice, with the air of a man who was not to be stayed in an important undertaking because of an incensed legatee. Thereafter Fosdyke paid little heed. He understood, it is true, that the whole of the residue of the real and personal estate was left unconditionally to "my dear wife, Stella Carmac," and that the said Stella Carmac, John Carruthers Bennett, and the public trustee were named as trustees, with the ordinary provisions as to the appointment of successors.

But these things reached his senses through a haze of fury and disappointed greed. He was almost beside himself with rage. Two thousand five hundred dollars a year! This slight woman in black, sitting there downcast and melancholy, would have at command an income of quarter of a million! Bitter as were his thoughts toward his uncle's widow, he was even more enraged with the smug lawyer. If murder would have served his purpose, Fosdyke was in a mood to choke the life out of the gray-haired man whose voice had droned out that sentence of almost complete excommunication.

"Can I have a copy of that precious scree?" he said, and if each word had been a poison-tipped arrow Bennett would have died a sudden and painful death.

"A copy of any will of which probate is granted in England can be obtained by application at Somerset House," said the lawyer calmly; "but in this instance, as you are interested, I see no reason why, with Mrs. Carmac's consent, an uncertified copy should not be supplied from my office."

"I am not thinking of contesting it," went on Fosdyke bitterly. "I have no doubt that the robbery has been carried out in accordance with the law."

"You have been aware of your uncle's views during the last four years, Mr. Fosdyke--why do you now resent their clear and final enunciation?" came the cold, unemotional comment.

Fosdyke rose. He would have gone had not Mrs. Carmac stayed him. She too stood up, and came nearer. She was deathly pale, her lips trembled, and she spoke at first with difficulty.

"Whatever the consequences, I cannot let you leave me with anger in your heart," she said. "Still less can I endure that your uncle's memory should be made hateful by what you regard as unjust treatment. It was not his intention, it can never be mine, that you should be punished for past errors.... Mr. Bennett, I beg you not to interfere. There are moments in life when a higher law operates than is writ in the text-books.... If I were to let you go now, Rupert, harboring evil thoughts against me and the man who is dead, I should hold myself responsible in some degree through all the future years. Your uncle only asks that you shall marry some woman worthy in herself and fitted to carry on the traditions of your family. Do that, and you will never regret it, either in its influence on your own career or in the material benefits it will bring without stint or delay. I can say no more. But I do ask you to believe that I am speaking from my very heart."

She ceased. For a few seconds there was profound silence in the plainly furnished room, which, by its very simplicity, gave a curious indefiniteness to a conversation in which money, money in millions, minted wealth that would have overflowed through windows and door if piled on the floor, figured as a vital element.

But Fosdyke closed his ears to the woman's plea; though his alert wits warned him that a declaration of war would be nothing short of rank lunacy at the moment. So he bowed with the easy grace that was natural to him.

"I appreciate what you have said, Aunt," he murmured, choking back the humiliated wrath that stormed for utterance. "I don't imagine you expect me to discuss matters now. With your permission, I shall leave Pont Aven as soon as possible. On your return to London I shall ask permission to visit you."

Mrs. Carmac would have answered, but he quitted the room abruptly.

"Rupert Fosdyke is a thorough bad lot," said Bennett, fastening the lock of a brief bag with an angry click. "If that young man pulls himself straight, I'll--well, I'll grow potatoes instead of preparing deeds!"

Mrs. Carmac smiled wistfully. She knew, none better, that the pendulum of life can swing from one extreme to the other. Yet even she might have lost faith had she been with Yvonne when the girl hurried from home after supper.

At that hour, about half-past eight, though the night was pitch dark, one so accustomed to unhindered movement in any part of the village did not hesitate to take the short cut that led across the Aven by a footbridge and debouched by an alley on the main street not far from the Place. She was on the bridge, and a faint luminosity from the swirling waters beneath showed posts and rails with sufficient clarity. At that point she ran into two people, a man and a veiled woman, who emerged from the black shadow of a mill. The man was Rupert Fosdyke; but the woman was a stranger. Who could it be?

Suddenly some trick of carriage and bearing suggested Madeleine Demoret. Madeleine masquerading in modern attire! Madeleine without coif or collar! And Yvonne knew how a Breton maid shrinks from revealing herself to masculine gaze without her coif, which is the symbol of all that is pure.

In her dismay she nearly cried aloud to her friend. But the two had hurried on, vanishing in the direction of the Bois d'Amour. Sick at heart, she hastened to Madeleine's cottage, where the girl lived with an aunt.

"*Tiens!*" cried the woman who looked up from the hearth when Yvonne entered. "Why isn't Madeleine with you? She went to Mere Pitou's half an hour ago."

"We've been to Moelan," faltered Yvonne. "I must have missed her. *Au revoir*, Madame Brissac."

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" cried Yvonne in an agony of shame when she was alone again in the darkness. "My mother! And now my friend! What shall I do? Is there none to help? How can I tell my father--or Lorry? Dear, lion-hearted Lorry! Surely I can trust him, and he will take that man in his strong hands and crush him!"

CHAPTER IX

SHOWING HOW HARVEY RAYMOND BEGAN THE ATTACK

Raymond had too many irons in the fire that day to permit of the relaxation of mental and bodily energies that his condition demanded.

It was essential to the success of a scheme now taking definite shape in his mind that he should seem to avoid Rupert Fosdyke's prying while maintaining a close surveillance on his movements. Thus, owing to the chance that he occupied a bedroom overlooking the Place, he knew when Fosdyke went out after changing the garments of ceremony worn that morning, and guessed quite accurately that an afternoon stroll would lead the younger man past Madeleine's cottage. He watched for the arrival of the solicitor's clerk from London, and witnessed Fosdyke's return soon after five o'clock. Then, realizing that the first of many formalities with regard to Carmac's will was in progress, he quitted his post, meaning to sit on the terrace until Fosdyke reappeared.

The weather, however, had turned cold, and he found an overcoat necessary. With the help of a servant he buttoned the coat in such wise that the empty right sleeve dangled as though he had lost a limb. As a consequence he was not instantly recognizable. Harry Jackson, seated patiently at the window behind the sycamores, failed to make out the identity of that small, ungainly figure until it had paced to and fro several times across the top of the small square.

A remarkable feature of a day rich in events fated to exercise a malefic influence on the lives of four people was provided by the fact that two men so opposite in characteristics as Harvey Raymond and Harry Jackson should have spent some hours in staring out from their respective apartments at the normal if picturesque panorama presented by the main thoroughfare of the village. Each was unaware of the other's vigil, each wholly unconscious of the part he was destined to play in a drama of love and death.

The secretary, of course, was nursing a project that could hardly fail to raise his fortunes to a height hitherto undreamed of; whereas the cheery-hearted steward, though his puzzled thoughts at times would have bothered Raymond far more than an occasional twinge of a broken arm did he but know their nature, was actually concerned about little else than his own future and the welfare of a mother dependent on his earnings. Still, it was odd that the sight of Raymond seldom failed to bring a perplexed frown to Jackson's face. The two had never met until the Stella sailed from Southampton Water. They had not exchanged a word beyond the commonplaces of existence on board a yacht. Yet Jackson disliked Raymond, and, if minds were mirrors, the quasi-gentleman would have seen in the civil-spoken steward a mortal enemy; though none would be more surprised by the fact than the sturdy little Cockney himself.

Jackson felt rather lonely just then. Pople was occupied with an English-speaking representative of the Brest marine salvors, from whom he had hired a diver and a tug. Tollemache had vanished, being miles away at Moelan with Yvonne and her father, and the changeful show beneath had lost some of its novelty in the eyes of the lively Londoner. He resented enforced inactivity. He wanted to be up and doing, bustling about like Pople; but that wretched ankle of his anchored him securely in bed or easy chair.

Thus there was nothing to distract his attention from Raymond's slow promenade beneath; and he speculated idly as to whom the secretary was awaiting--evidently someone from the annex, judging by the frequent glances cast that way.

At last Jackson's harmless curiosity was gratified. Rupert Fosdyke, walking rapidly, hove in sight. The main door of the annex was not visible from the onlooker's window; but Raymond's unflagging patrol told him where the expected one would come from, and a close family likeness between uncle and nephew--notably in the dark, lustrous eyes, raven black hair, and pink and white skin--served as an effectual label. No cumbrous Brittany cart happened to be creaking noisily over the rough cobbles of the square. The gale had subsided. The window was open. Jackson could hear every word that passed. These were brief, and much to the point.

"Ah, Mr. Fosdyke!" said Raymond, affecting a pleased interest because of their chance meeting. "I'm glad I've run across you. What did you wish to say when we came back from Nizon?"

Fosdyke, staring with uncomprehending eyes at first, seemed to awake suddenly to the fact that his late uncle's secretary barred the way. "I've forgotten," he said slowly. "At present I want only to tell you to go to the devil!"

"Indeed!" Raymond jerked his head backward, as if he had been flicked with a whip on the cheek.

"Yes, truly."

"But what grounds for quarrel exist between us?"

"Quarrel? I'm not quarreling. I simply curse you."

"But why?"

"I feel like that, and you are a suitable object."

"Yet no man breathing could be better disposed toward you personally than myself."

"To blazes with you and your disposition!" was the amiable comment, and Fosdyke strode off into the gloom.

Raymond remained stock still until the tall, alert figure vanished round the bend where the houses surrounding the Place converge near the bridge. Then, with chin sunk into the collar of his coat, he went in the same direction.

Jackson was distinctly amused, even edified. "Well, I'm jiggered!" he chuckled. "If that ain't a nice, friendly w'y o' pawsing the time o' d'y--not 'arf! Real pire o' blighters, both of 'em!"

It was of course much later in the evening when Yvonne, a prey to deep tribulation of spirit, entered her mother's suite. Mother and daughter invariably kissed now at meeting and parting. On this occasion each was nervous and distraught; Yvonne because of foreboding on Madeleine's account, and Mrs. Carmac by force of that vague and obscure subconsciousness which lurks ever behind the operations of the everyday mind,--that dim ghost as inseparable from the acknowledged senses as the shadow from the material body, yet impalpable as a shadow, and not to be defined in terms of human speech.

All day long had this specter peered over her shoulder. Its influence was affrighting and oppressive. The woman who had regarded her conscience as dumb and deaf and blind during nearly twenty years had suddenly discovered that the gagged and bound prisoner had become a most imperious master. Was it conscience, she wondered, that caused this disease? But conscience is a monitor that recalls past transgressions and threatens punishment, while her inward vision was aware rather of gloomy portents akin to that state of being fay, which is the unenviable attribute of the Celt. A Breton would understand, and dread; but, as Tollemache put it, the fumes of petrol seem to have banished such wraiths from that outer world in which Mrs. Carmac moved and had her being.

Even Yvonne's presence did not banish the phantom. Singularly enough, she and her mother, each weighed down by premonition of evil, looked more alike than ever, and each interpreted the other's distress by the light of her own disturbed thoughts. Yvonne, accustomed all her life to unfettered frankness, took it that her mother was saddened by her prolonged absence.

"I'm sorry, Dear, I could not reach you earlier," she explained. "My father came back from Concarneau this morning, and he looked so overtaxed and worried that I resolved to take him for a long walk. He and I and Lorry--Mr. Tollemache, you know--went miles and miles. That is our cure for the blues,--an infallible recipe. We arrived home rather late, but feeling ever so much better."

"Your face shows it, Yvonne," was the answer; though the quiet cynicism was softened by a wistful smile.

"Honestly we were lively as crickets during the second half of our tramp. But, where I am concerned, something that occurred during the last few minutes undid all the good. Tell me, Dear, what sort of man is Mr. Fosdyke?"

In the conditions few questions could have been more surprising. Her nephew's name was the last Mrs. Carmac expected to hear on Yvonne's lips, since the girl seldom alluded to him, and had shown by her manner that the handsome Rupert made slight appeal, if any.

"Why do you ask?" she said.

"You have heard me speak of Madeleine Demoret, a village girl, one of my greatest friends?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Fosdyke has made her acquaintance,--through me, as it happens,--and now he is meeting her constantly. They are together at this moment."

"Isn't that what one rather expects in village girls?" Mrs. Carmac, borne down by her own ills, could spare scant sympathy for any flighty maiden who had fallen victim to the fascinations of her good-looking relative.

"It may be so elsewhere, but not in Brittany," persisted Yvonne, who was keen-witted enough to understand how differently she and a woman of her mother's world might view Madeleine's folly. "Here such behavior is unforgivable. A girl may not walk out with the man to whom she is engaged, far less with a stranger. I--I hardly know how to act. You cannot imagine how completely her friends and neighbors will condemn poor Madeleine if it is spread abroad that she was seen in Mr. Fosdyke's company. As for Peridot, if he knew, he would kill him!"

"Kill Rupert?"

"Yes."

"Peridot may find consolation elsewhere."

Yvonne winced; but she had a purpose in mind, and persevered bravely. "Oh, please don't say such things!" she said. "I want you, Dear, to try and look at this affair through my eyes. I know my Bretons, and Madeleine must be saved, in spite of herself. Can you persuade Mr. Fosdyke to leave Pont Aven tomorrow?"

"He is going: not tomorrow, perhaps, but soon."

"Are you sure--quite sure?"

"He told me so himself today."

"If I could be certain he would go, I shouldn't speak to Lorry."

"How does it affect Mr. Tollemache? Is he too an admirer of Madeleine's?"

Then, despite her perplexities, Yvonne laughed. "No, of course not," she cried. "Didn't I imply that Peridot means to marry her?"

"In that event why appeal to Mr. Tollemache?"

"Oh, I see your difficulty now. When aroused Lorry is a very convincing person indeed. He would tell Mr. Fosdyke to 'quit,'--that is exactly what he would say,--and if Mr. Fosdyke didn't quit he'd jolly well make him--which is also what Lorry would say."

Mrs. Carmac seemed to consider the point for a few seconds. "My difficulties, as you put it, cover a larger area," she said, with a bitterness that had its pathetic side. "Don't forget, Yvonne, that I am debarred from sharing your confidence. Dare I ask, for instance, if at some future date you will probably become Mrs. Laurence Tollemache?"

The girl flushed under this wholly unexpected thrust. First her father, now her mother, had voiced such a far-fetched notion! "I don't know," she said simply.

"The events of the last week have taught me the un-wisdom of thinking that we can forecast the future; but I can say now, with the utmost candor, that I will never leave my father."

At the moment she had no other thought than a disavowal of her prospective marriage with Tollemache, or any other man; but her mother cowered as though flinching from a blow, and Yvonne was instantly aware that the words had conveyed a meaning far beyond their intent.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed. "How easily one can be misunderstood! Now it is stupid that you and I should be at cross purposes in a matter of this sort. Will it help if I tell you what my father said this morning? He asked me why you had decided that Mr. Carmac should be buried here, and I gave it as my opinion that you meant to remain in Pont Aven a considerable time. Was I mistaken?"

The older woman's face became a shade whiter; but she replied steadily enough, "Something of the sort had certainly occurred to me."

"But you must abandon it, Dear," said the girl earnestly, dropping at her mother's feet, and taking one thin hand in both hers. "If you do that, everything will go wrong. Dad and you cannot possibly live in a small place like this, where everybody knows everybody else, where the history of each family or individual is common property, and where gossip would soon find flaws in the pretense that you and I are aunt and niece. If you continue to reside here, it means that Dad and I must go. No, you sha'n't weep, or be allowed to fret yourself into some misleading notion as to what I really mean. Once and for all, the possibility of that kind of lamentable thing happening must disappear.

"Dad is a fair-minded man,--I don't think his enemies, if he had any, would deny that,--and he admits that it would be cruel to keep you and me apart, now that we have been brought together in such an extraordinary way. He will let me come and visit you often, I am sure. But, Dearest, if you drive him away from a spot he had made his own, if he is shut out of the one tiny bit of earth he has learned to love, I shall go with him, and I'll feel so deeply that you have treated him harshly that I will never see you again.

"Now isn't it better that we should examine the present position of affairs clearly and honestly? A great many years ago you left my father of your own accord. He suffered terribly,--how much I have learned only during the last week,--but he gave himself up to art, to a few friends, and to me. He has taught himself to be happy in a quiet way. You, taking part in that social whirl I have read about in books, and dimly imagined from paragraphs in newspapers, can have no idea of the pleasant monotony of life in Pont Aven. Why, an excursion to Le Faouet is an event to be talked of a whole month before and after the great day itself, and a sold picture supplies a week's excitement! Existence on those lines cannot possibly appeal to you.

"Mother dear, you cannot undo the past; but you can and will leave my father undisturbed in his work and his few joys. You must go away from Pont Aven, and never come here again. Write to me as often as you like, and I for my part will try to recite our small histories so as to interest and amuse you. Arrange that I may stay with you sometimes, and I'll come. I promise you that Dad will never prove unreasonable if you feel lonely and want me. But it would be unjust both to you and to him if I did not say now that I shall always put him first. I am not reproaching you. Why should I? You have never caused me any unhappiness, because it would be monstrous to charge you with responsibility for the series of misfortunes that began with the wreck. I mean to look on you as a mother, and indeed, indeed, my love and respect will never waver unless they are brought into conflict with the greater love and duty I owe my father!"

Yvonne's voice broke on those concluding words. During the long walk by the shore of the Belon she had planned the arguments she would use in urging her mother to adopt the only course that would restore serenity to her father's declining years. She had plenty of opportunity for leisured thought. The Belon rivulet gives its name to an estuary far wider than that of the Aven, and the violet light of a December evening had led Ingersoll into a discussion with Tollemache on the nature and limits of realism in art. But all her carefully conned phrases had fled when she looked into her mother's sorrow-laden eyes, and that pathetic appeal had welled forth tumultuously from her heart.

Mrs. Carmac was visibly shaken. Yvonne's straightforward plea had swept into ruin the structure built of vain longings and fantastic dreams. Yet what else could she expect? She had known her own mind on that never-to-be-forgotten night in Paris when she deserted her husband and child, and fled to secure "freedom." Her action was deliberate; she had not felt a tremor of remorse when she wrote that cruel letter to her husband. What reason had she

now to hope that the closed door might reopen?

She bent her graceful head over Yvonne's, and made the first real sacrifice that life had demanded from an essentially strong if inordinately vain temperament.

"Dear," she murmured, "why should we torture each other more? I agree to your terms. Tell your father that when I go from Pont Aven it shall be forever."

For a little while neither could speak. Mrs. Carmac was the first to recover some semblance of composure.

"Don't let us endeavor tonight to peer any more deeply into the coming years," she said, smiling wanly. "When I reach London my affairs will demand a great deal of attention. I shall write to you every week, Dear. Sometime in the spring, when England is at its best, you shall come to me, and I'll strive to render your visit enjoyable, because you have so much to see, and there is so much worth seeing. Your presence will make me young again.

"Now I must explain why it is absolutely necessary that I should remain here until it is ascertained whether or not anything can be recovered from the wreck. I care little about the jewels and money that went down with the yacht. Of course, if they are found, so much the better. But the really important thing is a despatch box full of documents that was in one of Mr. Carmac's cabin trunks. It contains papers that I would not wish others to see. Will you, then, tell your father that I shall leave here the day after that case is put into my hands, or, if the sea refuses to disgorge, when I am assured that further effort at salvage is useless? The local notary, as well as the people at Brest, agrees with Captain Poppel that if the remains of the Stella are lodged on the reef a close search is possible, and may yield results; but if the two parts of the hull have been washed into the tideway, we may as well abandon the project altogether. In a word, if the weather remains fine, the matter will be settled within a week, or even less. To show my gratitude to your father for the concession he has made with reference to you, I am willing that he and you should go away tomorrow, should he think it advisable. You can give me your address, and I shall let you know the date of my departure. Of course I shall be sorry----"

"No, Dearest, you are not to cry any more," and the strong young arms were flung impulsively round the grieving mother's neck. "You will only make yourself ill again. I am sure everything will work out all right in the end. Scheme and contrive as we will, it is God who decides. All that we can do is but strive to act right, to atone for mistakes, to help one another. For the rest, the future is in God's hands."

"Ah, my dear one," came the tremulous words, "a kindly Providence has given you wisdom beyond your years! It was well for you that you were reared by a man like John Ingersoll. Some day, when present bitterness is dead, and he realizes that at least I am repentant, you must tell him that in restoring to me a daughter such as you he has only shown me the depth of my folly. I little dreamed that I should ever be taught such a lesson. Yvonne, when you marry, marry for love. May Heaven pardon me, I did not! I married your father because I thought I should have what we thoughtlessly call 'a good time.' I left him, not for love of another man, but in the hope that I might secure a wealthier husband. I have never known what it means to love anyone but myself. Perhaps I shall learn now--too late!"

When Yvonne went out she found Raymond awaiting her at the doorway beneath.

"Miss Ingersoll," he said deferentially, "if you are going home, may I walk with you as far as the bridge? I would not inflict my company on you if I had not something of importance to say."

"Your company will be no infliction, at any rate, Mr. Raymond," she answered readily; though she would have vastly preferred to be alone, if only during the few minutes' interval that separated a very trying interview with her mother from the calm and smoke-laden atmosphere of the studio, where her father and Tollemache would surely be expecting her appearance at any moment.

"But it must be rather a bore that you should have to accommodate your lively pace to my slow march," said Raymond. "You see, I dare not step out quickly over these rough stones. I----"

"Please walk as slowly as you like," she cried, with a quick sympathy which the man had counted on as establishing a species of comradeship between them. He too, like Yvonne herself a few hours earlier, had rehearsed every syllable of a conversation to which he attached the utmost importance; but, unlike her, he was following his "lines" with the glib perfection of a skilled actor.

"I hope you will pardon me also if I reach the heart of my subject without preamble, as the lawyers say," he went on. "You have met Mr. Rupert Fosdyke several times of late, and I think I am not mistaken if I assume that you are neither greatly impressed by him nor inclined to view with indifference the ridiculous flirtation he has been carrying on with Madeleine Demoret. Am I right?"

Yvonne was momentarily tongue-tied with surprise. The last thing she expected was any interference by this plausible-spoken little man in the affairs of the two people he had named. She knew that her mother disliked him--that fear was now added to her dislike--but she could not guess that Raymond was actually counting on her knowledge as a successful factor in the campaign he opened that night during the short stroll between the Hotel Julia and the bridge.

"Pray believe that I have intervened in this matter with the best of motives," he added hurriedly. "It is often the fate of meddlers to be misunderstood--I have been an innocent victim in that respect once already in this very place. But I felt it was due to you that I should explain the action I have taken today. You may be angry with me. I cannot help that.

My own sense of right and wrong tells me that I am justified; so I may only put the circumstances before you, and leave you to decide whether you approve or condemn. In a sentence, then, I have ventured to remonstrate most openly and emphatically with Mr. Fosdyke. You may not be aware of it, but he is tempting your friend Madeleine to meet him secretly. Of course she is your friend because of the simple conditions of life which obtain in Pont Aven. In America or England you and she would fall naturally into widely different social strata. But here--in Arcady, if I may so express myself--close intimacy between you and a peasant girl is permissible, even advantageous. The case of Rupert Fosdyke is wholly outside this small local circle. His association with Madeleine must inevitably lead to a grave scandal. I have tried to put a stop to it: not without success. He assures me that he has seen her tonight for the last time. Now, Miss Ingersoll, I want you to tell me candidly, first if I have done right, and in the second place if you commend my action."

"Mr. Raymond," cried Yvonne impulsively, "I thank you from my heart. I cannot find words to express my relief at your news. You have accomplished something wonderful. Really, I am more than grateful."

"That is good to know," he said, stopping in the roadway, and bowing as humbly as his tightly strapped arm would permit. "You have said all I wished to hear, and more."

"But won't you come with me to our cottage?" she said, aware only of deep joy because of Madeleine's salvation, since it was nothing less than this queer-mannered stranger had brought about. "I have not dared to speak of this matter to my father and Mr. Tollemache. I can tell them now, and make light of it, while giving you some of the credit that is your due. Do come!"

"Not tonight, if you will excuse me. I am yet far from strong, and today's experiences have been somewhat exhausting. If you will ask me to meet Mr. Ingersoll tomorrow, or next day, I shall feel honored."

For a rascal--which he undoubtedly was--Harvey Raymond exhibited a restraint that marked a rare capacity for intrigue. He had not anticipated such a long stride in advance as an invitation by Yvonne to make her father's acquaintance then and there. But a lightning flash of clear judgment had shown that he would gain immensely by a display of modest reticence. The story would not suffer in its telling because he was not present to receive congratulations from the artist and what would be tantamount to an apology from Tollemache.

So he bowed again, with a murmured "Goodnight!" and, involuntarily as it were, stretched out his left hand, which Yvonne seized and wrung warmly. Then, apparently shocked by his own boldness, he turned abruptly, and hurried back to the annex.

During a few seconds Yvonne stared after him.

"Well," she breathed, "I have never before been so deceived in anyone--never!"

Which shows that even the brightest and most intelligent girl of nineteen may have a lot to learn of human nature before she can form reliable estimates of its true inwardness, because the time was not far distant when she would as soon have thought of crediting one of the horde of vipers then hibernating among the rocks of Brittany with any lofty conception of duty or service to mankind as Harvey Raymond with similarly benevolent intentions toward his fellow creatures.

CHAPTER X

MADELEINE'S FLIGHT

Rupert Fosdyke departed by the earliest train next day. He did not see Mrs. Carmac again, and it was assumed by those who gave any thought to the matter that he would make for London. Bennett's clerk, however, traveling to England by the same train, did not set eyes on him again after the local tramway had delivered its passengers at Quimperle. Fosdyke might or might not have gone home *via* Paris. What was quite certain was that he did not cross the Channel between St. Malo and Southampton that night, because the clerk ascertained from the purser that no one of the name was on board the steamer, and telegraphed to that effect to his employer, who wished to be kept posted as to Fosdyke's movements.

Meanwhile Raymond was so concerned about Mrs. Carmac's health that he suggested the hiring of a hotel automobile, and a run to Lorient for luncheon. Yvonne and Bennett agreed readily to accompany her, and the secretary was commissioned to order a car to be in readiness at ten-thirty A.M. Now, there were three automobiles in the garage,-a small runabout, a limousine to hold three and a chauffeur, and a huge touring car, which would accommodate six easily. He chose this last.

"As the day is bright, and there is no wind, I have selected an open car," he said on returning. "I hope you approve. Plenty of fresh air should be the best of tonics."

Yes, his mistress was pleased, if only because Yvonne must be decked out in some of the magnificent furs that the thoughtful Celeste had brought from Paris. Very charming the girl looked in a long sealskin coat with sable collar and cuffs, and a sable toque. Her mother's appraising glance spoke volumes as to plans for the future, when Yvonne came to England, and would need dressing in accordance with the new scheme of things. But Mrs. Carmac was genuinely surprised when she saw the size of the car.

"Couldn't the hotel provide a smaller one?" she asked.

"Only a closed car," explained Raymond.

"Well, since there is so much room to spare, hadn't you better come with us--that is, if your arm permits?"

"I am more than inclined to risk it," and Raymond smiled ruefully, as though tempted by this unexpected invitation. "Yes, please, I'll come. I'll only delay you a minute while I get a coat and an extra rug."

Tollemache happened to stroll out of the hotel the moment the secretary's back was turned. He shook hands with Mrs. Carmac and the lawyer, and nodded to Yvonne, on whom he permitted his eyes to dwell in an admiring if somewhat critical survey.

"Where are you off to?" he inquired.

"Lorient," said Yvonne.

"Why Lorient?" and his eyebrows rounded.

"I really don't know." She turned to Mrs. Carmac. "You tell," she said.

"Mr. Raymond has arranged everything," said Mrs. Carmac. "But why not Lorient?"

"Because it's an uninteresting place, notable only as containing the most inartistic statue in France."

"Very well. Come with us, and be our guide. We don't care where we go."

"Is Mr. Raymond joining you?"

"Yes."

"Then be a good Samaritan, and take that poor fellow, Jackson. He hasn't been out of his room since he was brought ashore, and his game leg will keep Mr. Raymond's crooked arm company."

"Bring him, by all means."

"Take him," I said, Mrs. Carmac.

"No, he must be your guest. Even then we have a spare seat."

"Done!" cried Tollemache.

Thus, when Raymond appeared, the party was larger than he had bargained for. He was all smiles, however, even when he found himself placed by the side of the lame steward, and behind the chauffeur. Tollemache sat in front; while Mrs. Carmac, Yvonne, and Bennett occupied the spacious back seat. Tollemache promptly varied the program by striking into the broad Route Nationale leading to Quimperle. They reached the quaint old town about eleven o'clock, and luncheon was ordered at that famous posting house, the Hotel du Lion d'Or. While the meal was being prepared they went on to the beautiful Chapelle Saint Fiacre, with its remarkable rood screen of carved and painted wood and rare sixteenth century stained glass.

Tollemache insisted, too, that they should return before sunset, or the evening chill might prove dangerous. The excursion was voted delightful. The only person who felt that his projects had been completely frustrated--for that day, at any rate--was Harvey Raymond. He had hardly exchanged a word with Yvonne throughout the journey, and was hard put to it to maintain an agreeable conversation with Jackson during a five hours' run.

The steward, however, was not neglected. His manner of speech was an unfailing source of amusement to Yvonne, whose acquaintance with the Cockney dialect had hitherto been derived solely from books. He was by way of being a humorist too. When he hobbled into the Chapelle Saint Fiacre, and gazed at the history of Adam and Eve as depicted on the screen, he raised a laugh by a caustic comment.

"That ain't exactly my idee of the Gawden o' Paradise, Miss," he said, when Yvonne told him what the carvings symbolized. "You wouldn't expect Eve to be chewin' a crabapple--now, would yer, Miss?"

"But what makes you think Eve is eating a crabapple?" she cried.

"Why, Miss, look at 'er face!" he said. "Tork abart lemons! One bite has given 'er a pine!"

In the hotel at Quimperle, too, he created a good deal of merriment on discovering the English name of a dish which looked and tasted like chicken but figured in the menu as *grenouilles a la financiere*.

"W'at!" he cried, some natural embarrassment because of his surroundings yielding to horrified surprise. "Me eat a frog? Well, live an' learn! But I tell you strite, I'd as soon 'ave eaten a snike!"

"What is a 'snike'?" inquired Raymond.

"It's a squirmin' reptyle w'at eats frogs," said Jackson instantly, and, as the secretary had partaken freely of that particular course, the retort did not lack point.

But Raymond laughed with the others. He would have guffawed cheerfully if someone had bumped into his injured arm by way of a joke.

Bennett, being a lawyer, was not dull of perception. He claimed the front seat for the return journey; so Tollemache sat between Yvonne and her mother.

In some respects, therefore, Raymond regarded the day as spoiled. But it was far from being a failure in a general sense. He had established a precedent. During the remainder of her stay in Pont Aven, Mrs. Carmac, weather permitting, would surely hire the car every day, and, as she was hardly likely to revert to a smaller and much inferior vehicle, he in all probability would be invited to join her; while Yvonne's presence was assured.

As for other additions to the party, he must take such fortune as the gods gave. The chief and vital consideration was that he would almost infallibly be thrown into Yvonne's company during many hours daily. If he contrived also to establish himself on a friendly footing with her father, he had taken the first long stride toward the goal now clearly visible to his mind's eye.

With Rupert Fosdyke disinherited and discredited, why should not Harvey Raymond consolidate all warring interests by marrying Yvonne? Truly a brilliant notion! It followed the lines of high finance. Better than running counter to your enemy, absorb him! Though he believed he held Mrs. Carmac's millions in the hollow of his hand, were it not for Yvonne, he could act only through Fosdyke, who had flouted him openly, and would assuredly be disdainful, no matter how greatly beholden he might be to an informant. But the fact that Yvonne existed changed all that. Money talks, indeed! Money would shriek in ecstasy if the despised secretary married Mrs. Carmac's daughter.

There were obstacles in the way, of course; first, Tollemache? Raymond had weighed this possible rival's claims carefully, and did not find them overwhelming. Yvonne was the young artist's close friend of five years; but that did not necessarily mean that they were lovers. If anything, such intimacy was favorable to the newcomer. The girl herself? Well, Raymond knew he was no Adonis; but keen-eyed students of human nature had established the axiom that exceedingly pretty women often mated with the plainest of men. Here again the difficulty was not insuperable.

There remained Mrs. Carmac. Willy nilly, she must range herself determinedly on his side! Very gently, very unwillingly, letting the facts be dragged out of him with the utmost reluctance, as it were, he must make her understand that he held the power to crush her financially. During the last few days he had left no stone unturned to secure proof of an astounding romance which depended for credence otherwise on the unsupported testimony of a woman's raving. He had neither blundered nor spared expense.

That very morning, and not before, he *knew*. The knowledge had sustained him throughout a trying day. Each time he thought of the irresistible weapon now safe in his possession he chortled. No wonder he laughed, even when that impudent steward likened him to a snake! There was truth in the jibe. One person, at least, seated at that luncheon table would feel his fangs. Mrs. Carmac, if left in undisputed possession of her wealth, would be *his* puppet! She must choose between comparative pauperism and Harvey Raymond as a son-in-law! So, where she was concerned, the money that Fate had showered on her would prove a most potent factor in his behalf.

Once again, then, would money talk. If necessary, it might even sing the song of the sirens in Yvonne's ears. Why, her experiences that day, the very wearing of those costly furs, and the swift whirling over the Breton roads in a luxurious car, were not negligible quantities in the arithmetical calculations that bemused the man's subtle intellect. There was no discernible flaw in them. British law would pronounce the American divorce invalid. It followed that an estate held almost exclusively in Britain would go to the next of kin. And he alone held the key that would unlock this treasury!

Snatches of talk came to him from the three in the back seat. He could make little of it, because all three were

speaking French; but when he listened occasionally he gleaned that Yvonne and Tollemache were telling Mrs. Carmac the legends of wayside chapels,—how this saint protected the crops, and that the horses and cattle, how Sainte Barbe arranged love affairs and Saint Urlou cured the gout. Each ill, each blessing, had its patron, who exorcised demons or dispensed favors at will.

Nearing Pont Aven, Yvonne startled him by leaning forward and touching his shoulder. "Why in such a brown study, Mr. Raymond?" she inquired pleasantly, thinking that perhaps the queer little man might feel he had been somewhat ignored. In her thoughts he figured invariably as a "queer little man." Her woman's intuition had suspected that queerness as something underhanded and evil; but his action with reference to Madeleine Demoret had obliterated an unfavorable first impression. Now she regarded him as an eccentric who did good by stealth.

The slight pressure of the girl's fingers thrilled him. "I was hoping there might be a healer of broken limbs in Brittany. Now I know that there *is* one," he answered readily enough.

"Dr. Gamier is really quite skilful," she said, and Raymond had the wit to remain silent.

It was dusk when they reached the hotel. Popple was standing there with two strangers.

"Any news?" inquired Mrs. Carmac as she alighted.

"Yes, Ma'am, an' not the best," said Popple. "The wreck is all broken up. The diver has been over the south side of the reef, and saw nothin' but scrap iron."

Neither Raymond nor Jackson had quitted his seat as yet, and the steward heard his companion laugh softly.

"Then we must abandon the search?" came Mrs. Carmac's clear, well-bred accents.

"There's just one more chanst, Ma'am," said Popple. "We can try a trawl."

"But isn't that a thing meant to catch fish?"

"It's surprisin' w'at you can ketch in a trawl sometimes, Ma'am."

"Captain Popple was telling me the other day that he has known it catch a man," put in Raymond, evidently regarding the sailor's suggestion as an excellent joke.

"I've seen a shawk in one meself," said the irrepressible Jackson.

Popple waved aside these flippant interruptions. "Mossoo Gueho here, from Brest," with an indicatory thumb toward one of his companions, "tells me there's a big trawler in Concarneau today, an' Peridot's boat will be there too. If you like, Ma'am, he'll go to Concarneau this evenin', an' bring both of 'em here tomorrow."

"Peridot? Why Peridot?" inquired Mrs. Carmac.

"He knows the set o' the tides so well, Ma'am. He'd help a lot."

"Well, I want to see him soon; so secure his services by all means. As for the trawler, or any appliance you think necessary, I wish Monsieur Gueho to understand that every effort should be made to recover the boxes I spoke of."

Monsieur Gueho, who spoke English, assured Madame that his firm's resources were entirely at her command.

Then Yvonne hurried to her mother's suite to divest herself of furs and toque. For the time she had abandoned the Breton dress, and wore her tweed costume. She met Mrs. Carmac, Bennett, and Raymond on the steps. Tollemache was assisting Jackson to his room.

"I really must run home," she explained. "Dad will be wondering what has become of me; though I sent a message by one of Julia's maids to tell him that Lorry and I were being whisked off to Lorient in an automobile."

"Yet you have been nowhere near Lorient," said her mother.

"A pleasure deferred, Mrs. Carmac," said Raymond. "You ought to take a spin in that car every day while in Pont Aven. It will do you a world of good. Don't you agree, Mr. Bennett?"

"Most certainly," said the lawyer; "that is, if Mrs. Carmac doesn't return to England with me tomorrow."

Bennett spoke as though he were giving indirect advice; but Yvonne gathered that her mother explained her decision to remain a few days longer because of anxiety with regard to the salvage work. Lorry reappeared on the terrace, and the girl hailed him.

"Come to supper," she cried. "Call in at Madeleine's on the way, and tell her to come too."

"Right-o!" he said.

But Madeleine failed to join the supper party at Madame Pitou's that night. She excused herself to Tollemache on account of a headache.

"She looked rather ill," said Lorry pityingly. "Her aunt was boiling some decoction of herbs. Madeleine is to be dosed."

"If I was her aunt, I'd set her to scrub the stairs," commented Mere Pitou emphatically. "Work is the only tonic Madeleine needs. When the hands are busy the wits don't stray."

"Is she up in the air about Peridot?" inquired Tollemache. "Before he went away he told me she wouldn't speak to him; but he shouldn't have taken it so seriously."

Madame shook her head and kept tight lips,—an ominous sign. Yvonne strove at once to change this ticklish topic.

"Didn't Captain Popple say something about bringing Peridot here tomorrow?" she said. "If he comes, he and

Madeleine will soon bury the hatchet, especially when they know that Mrs. Carmac means to present Peridot with a fully equipped *vague* [sardine boat]."

"Good!" cried Tollemache. "Mere Pitou and I will foot it together at the wedding. I'm stuck on Breton weddings. There's no nonsense about them. Everybody enjoys life to the limit."

He had answered in English; but Madame evidently gathered the drift of his words, because she laughed dryly, and herself turned the talk to the day's outing. Yvonne, finding her father's eye on her, was just able to repress a sigh. Mere Pitou knew of her friend's folly, and, if she knew, there must have been gossip in the village. There was a chance, the barest chance, that Peridot's arrival might still scandalous tongues, if only Madeleine could be persuaded to receive him graciously and fix an early date for their marriage. The girl had already ruined any prospects she might have possessed of being elected Queen for the next Feast of the Gorse Flowers. The Pont Aven maid who aspires to this must display not only a pretty face but a spotless escutcheon. It might be that Madeleine would see this for herself. If not, she must be told.

Next morning, then, Yvonne called at Madeleine's cottage in order to make a later appointment. Madame Brissac, who admitted her, was in tears.

"Madeleine is gone!" she explained. "She went to Quimperle by the early train. Nothing I could say would prevail on her. I've never seen her so determined about anything."

Yvonne, sick with apprehension at first, found a crumb of solace in the aunt's statement, which apparently limited the girl's flight to a town not far removed from Pont Aven.

"But why has she gone to Quimperle?" she faltered.

"That grinning fool Peridot left her too much to herself. She has been moping about the house during the last week, saying that her lover had deserted her. This morning she was out of bed before dawn. Her box was packed when I rose at six. Then she told me she had decided to accept her cousin's offer of a place in his shop, and meant to give it a fair trial. As she might be of some use during the few days before Christmas, she was going at once. I argued and stormed; but it was useless. Off she went!"

Yvonne knew indeed that a Quimperle draper in a small way of business had often tried to induce Madeleine to take charge of his retail trade so that he might travel in the rural districts; but the girl had always scoffed at the notion. Perhaps, dreading the weight of public opinion in Pont Aven, or finding life in the village insupportable, she had sought refuge in Quimperle for a while, and would return when present clouds were blown over.

"You are sure she means to join Monsieur Bontot?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course. There is no one else. Marie Bontot will welcome her, because Madeleine's help will enable Jacques to double his turnover; but I'll miss her dreadfully, and I can't imagine why she should want to scurry away in such a whirl. I haven't recovered from the shock yet."

Yvonne could only endeavor to console the old woman with a prediction of the truant's early return. She herself was greatly distressed by Madeleine's action in leaving the village without giving the least hint of her intention, or uttering a word of farewell. Moreover, it was more than unkind to put the blame on Peridot. The fact that Madeleine should have stooped to positive deception in that respect brought a suspicion, an ill-defined uneasiness, which was better suppressed at the moment.

But when she learned that Mrs. Carmac intended to take another run in the car she asked as a favor that they should proceed direct to Quimperle in the first instance, as she wished to pay a call there. Moreover, if Mrs. Carmac didn't particularly want the big car, it would be more convenient if they used a smaller vehicle that day. Her mother was only too glad to agree; so a servant was sent off post haste with orders to hire the limousine.

Raymond was annoyed, but dared not show it. He heard the girl's request, and marked her agitated air, and searched for some explanation of an arrangement that he interpreted as aimed against himself. Puzzled and irritated, he seized an opportunity to put a daring question.

"Miss Ingersoll," he said, "I hope you have not forgotten your promise to introduce me to your father?"

"No. How could I forget?" she cried. "Will you come to Mere Pitou's this evening about five o'clock? Mrs. Carmac and I will be home long before that hour. I--I'm afraid, Mr. Raymond, I may have cost you an agreeable outing today; but I want to find Madeleine Demoret, and have a long talk with her. It might be rather awkward if there were men in the party. She would not discuss matters freely."

Raymond was so profoundly relieved that he nearly blurted out, "Oh, is *that* it?" He contrived, however, to murmur something about his complete agreement with any course suggested by Miss Ingersoll, when Mrs. Carmac intervened.

"Madeleine Demoret?" she said. "Isn't she the girl you spoke of the other evening?"

"Yes. She is definitely engaged to Peridot, and now, the very day he is expected back in Pont Aven, she has flown off to Quimperle, vowing that she means to stay there with a married cousin. I want to see her, and coax her into meeting Peridot soon, either here or in Quimperle."

"You seem to be very much concerned about this young lady's love affairs," smiled the older woman.

"Madeleine has been my playmate ever since I was able to walk," said Yvonne simply, quite unaware of the pang that this seemingly innocuous remark caused her mother, "and I do wish to see her happily married to Peridot, who is an excellent fellow, and thoroughly devoted to her. It would be too bad if they should separate now because of some absurd tiff. In any case," she added, "I want to know the truth."

"As to why she has gone?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Carmac was perplexed. She too, like Raymond, felt that there was more in Yvonne's anxiety than met the eye; but it was inadvisable to probe deeper into the problem until she and her daughter were alone.

"Ah, well," she said lightly. "Within the hour, I have no doubt, we shall be listening to a tearful denunciation of Peridot. The *Perfidy of Peridot*--it sounds like the alliterative title of a magazine story. Is that our car? Tell Celeste you'll wear the furs you had yesterday. They suit you admirably."

Monsieur and Madame Bontot were the most surprised people in Quimperle when two elegant ladies alighted from an automobile outside their tiny shop, and inquired for Madeleine Demoret. They were almost astounded when they recognized Yvonne, whom they had never before seen in such guise.

"But why do you seek Madeleine here, Mademoiselle?" cried Madame Bontot, recovering her breath and her wits simultaneously. "I've not even heard from her or her aunt since Jacques was in Pont Aven two months ago. Isn't that so, Jacques?"

"*Parfaitement*," agreed Jacques, a rotund little man, coatless, and decorated with a tape measure slung round his neck.

Yvonne paled, but was, in a sense, sufficiently forewarned that she did not make matters worse for her unhappy friend by blurting out the true cause of her visit.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It is my fault. I have not seen Madeleine for some days, and I had a sort of idea that she meant coming to you about this time. It was discussed, I believe?"

"Yes, yes!" admitted Madame Bontot instantly. "We should be glad to have her in the shop. Then I could look after the dressmaking, and Jacques could run all over the country for orders. Isn't that so, Jacques?"

"*Parfaitement*," said the stout man, breathing heavily. In imagination he was running already.

"Well, I'll look her up when I return home, and tell her of my mistake. Then I'll see that she writes to you, at least," said Yvonne.

"Take us to the station," she said to the chauffeur, controlling voice and features with difficulty until safe in the seclusion of the closed car. Then she broke down, and sobbed bitterly; for she feared the worst.

Mrs. Carmac, unable to share this distress on account of some village girl's escapade, felt nevertheless that some minor tragedy was about to be added to the already heavy burden which life had imposed since the Stella was shattered against the inhospitable rocks of Brittany.

"Are you afraid she has run away--that she is making for Paris, or London?" she whispered.

Yvonne nodded. She could not speak. For the first time in her life she understood what hysteria meant.

"To join Rupert Fosdyke?" persisted her mother.

"Oh, I don't know! I am afraid--terribly afraid!" was the broken answer.

"But--it is inconceivable. A rustic of her type can have no attractions for a man like him. She would weary him in a day."

Yvonne did not reply; and in her heart Mrs. Carmac knew why. Rupert Fosdyke might share her half-veiled contempt for one of the "lower orders"; but he would have no scruples in using poor Madeleine's infatuation as a whip to scourge certain folk in Pont Aven.

Inquiry at the station was almost fruitless. Yvonne dared not appeal to the conductor of the tramway service, because any hue and cry raised for the missing girl must reach Pont Aven in the course of a few hours. She ascertained that no young woman in Breton costume had bought a ticket to Paris or St. Malo that day. This signified little. The very fact that the coif identifies the Bretonne would induce Madeleine to travel in an empty first-class carriage and change her outer garments.

"Was any ticket issued for a long journey to a girl of twenty after the arrival of the first train from Pont Aven?" said Yvonne as a last resource.

The booking clerk was inclined to be helpful. Not often did young American ladies speak French with such an accent. Usually they misunderstood him, or blandly assumed that he spoke English.

"*Tiens!*" he said, tickling his scalp with a pen-holder. "Such a one booked to Nantes. I remember thinking that she had a lot of money, because she picked a hundred-franc note out of a fair-sized packet."

"Was she a Bretonne?"

"Yes, Madame. Wait one moment." He called a porter. "Pierre," he cried, "you had charge of a lady's baggage by the nine o'clock train to Nantes. Did she come from Pont Aven?"

Pierre thought she did, but could not be sure. If so, the local conductor had brought her box across to the departure platform. At any rate, she was not a known resident in Quimperle. And she possessed one trunk, a black one, iron-clamped, and studded with brass nails. Madeleine owned a similar box: but so did half the inhabitants of Brittany.

With that Yvonne had to be satisfied. Madeleine might or might not have gone to Nantes; whence, if so minded, she could travel on to Paris in the same train. It was difficult to account for her possession of the amount of money spoken of by the observer behind the wicket; but Mrs. Carmac solved the riddle at once.

"Until I am convinced to the contrary," she declared, "I shall believe that your friend is on her way to meet Rupert Fosdyke somewhere. Of course he would provide her with ample means. Gold is the most potent of all lures."

Yvonne shuddered. Her mother was least lovable when she became cynical. The girl felt unutterably sad and depressed.

It was a relief, in a sense, when the car sped down the hill into Pont Aven, and she could make some excuse to hurry home. Her father and Lorry, thinking she would be absent till a much later hour, had gone out, tempted by the continued fine weather.

But she was given no respite from her misery. Madame Brissac had posted an urchin to watch for the return of the motorists. She came now to gather tidings of her wayward niece, and Yvonne was obliged to confess that Madeleine was not at her cousin's house.

Then the storm broke. Madame Brissac had probably been made aware in the meantime that Madeleine had outraged local conventions by "walking out" with a stranger, and she poured her wrath on Yvonne.

"This is your doing!" she screamed, her black eyes flashing fire, and her swarthy skin bleaching yellow with fury. "You turned her head with your fine friends and their fairy tales. What could I expect but that my girl would be led astray? But her character is not the only one at stake. When we know the truth we'll hear more about that precious aunt of yours. Aunt, indeed! Who ever heard of an aunt screaming for her daughter and meaning her niece?"

Mere Pitou bustled out, breathing the flame of battle. "Marie Brissac," she cried, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Isn't this a case of what's bred in the bone coming out in the flesh? Have you forgotten why Jean Brissac married you? Because, if your memory is failing, mine isn't. I can tell you now that Madeleine simply flung herself at that young Englishman's head, and, if that's news to you, it's the talk of everybody else in Pont Aven. Don't you dare come here insulting my friends, or you'll get more than you bargain for!"

"Oh, please, please, don't quarrel with Madame Brissac on my account," wailed Yvonne, daring all, even a blow, and putting her arms round the half-demented woman's shoulders. "You poor dear," she went on in a voice choked with sobbing, "blame me if you wish, but don't condemn Madeleine unheard. It may not be true. Let us pray the good God that it is not true! I love Madeleine as my sister, and I shall never believe that she has fled with any man until I hear it from her own lips."

Anger melted in tears. Madame Brissac suffered Yvonne to lead her back to the deserted cottage. There the two talked for a long time, and the girl got the old woman to agree that, in Madeleine's interests, the fiction of transference to the drapery establishment in Quimperle should be maintained until something really definite became known. Not that any such, pretense could avail to shield the lost one. The village was already agog with the sensation of Madeleine's flight, and not a soul credited Madame Brissac's story of the Quimperle cousins. The shy, rabbit-eyed glances of every village girl met in the street told Yvonne that Madeleine could never again raise her head in her native place. The maid of honor was dishonored--the Gorse Flower crushed into the mire!

And all this wretched hotchpotch of suffering and contumely was directly attributable to the presence of *her* mother in the community! Truly, Yvonne was sorrow-laden and oppressed when she reached the cottage again, and found Harvey Raymond awaiting her.

CHAPTER XI

MUTTERINGS OF STORM

Unfortunately neither Ingersoll nor Tollemache had returned. Yvonne was on the point of asking Raymond to pardon her if she deferred receiving him until the next day, when his adroit brain anticipated some such setback to his plans, and he strove instantly to prevent it.

"I fear you made an unpleasant discovery at Quimperle today," he said, striking boldly into the one subject that he guessed was occupying her thoughts. "Is Mr. Ingersoll at home? If so, I ought to tell you briefly what I purpose doing to help, as you may not care to discuss the matter in your father's presence."

It was cheering even to hear the man speaking of "help," and he had already given solid proof of honest intent in his stern rebuke of Fosdyke; though, alas! it had come too late to be of any real service. Yvonne's mind belonged to that somewhat rare order that magnifies good and minimizes evil. She was grateful to her mother's secretary for that which he had tried to do, though failing, and abandoned her first design forthwith.

"Come into the studio," she said, leading the way. "My father and Mr. Tollemache will be here soon. Meanwhile I'll ask Mere Pitou to bring some tea. We won't wait. Of course I must tell Dad everything about Madeleine now. We can depend on him for sound advice. He doesn't lose his head in an emergency, and I shall be guided entirely by what he says."

"Naturally," agreed Raymond, throwing the utmost deference into voice and manner. "It is delightful to meet a father and daughter who are on terms of genuine confidence and comradeship. I only meant to suggest, Miss Yvonne, that I should communicate with a friend in Paris who is acquainted with Rupert Fosdyke, and ascertain by that means whether or not Mademoiselle Demoret is in his company. I have taken action already in a small way. Thinking it advisable to keep an eye on him, I telegraphed to my friend this morning, asking him to let me hear if Fosdyke was in Paris, and his address. Here is the reply."

Even in the chaos of the hour Yvonne was conscious of a certain surprise at Raymond's singular foresight; but she took the proffered telegram, and read:

"Yes. Arrived in Paris early yesterday. Residing Hotel Chatham.

"DUQUESNE."

"Ah, how thoughtful and clever of you!" she cried. "Can anything be done now? Suppose Madeleine is in the train, would Monsieur Duquesne meet her and urge her to return at once?"

"How would he recognize her?"

"Oh, dear! I had not thought of that. But it might be possible to telegraph a general description, and there will not be so many young women traveling alone in a train reaching Paris in the small hours of the morning that he should have no chance of picking out one in particular. I know it is asking a great favor of your friend; but he may act with decision if you hint at a matter of life or death. And it is all that. Poor Madame Brissac will never survive the shame of a public scandal. If Madeleine would only come back, I should meet her on the way, and persuade her to go straight to her cousins in Quimperle. Don't you see, Mr. Raymond, she would be saved, *saved*? You have accomplished wonders already. Please don't hesitate, but send a telegram at once. I sha'n't know how to thank you if you succeed in this. But I forget. You cannot write. Let me write for you. Now what is Monsieur Duquesne's address?"

Yvonne, flushed with new hope, was seated already at a small writing table, pen in hand. For once Raymond was caught off his guard. He had not expected this development, and would vastly have preferred a friendly and sympathetic chat; but he dared not refuse the girl's excited demand. Moreover, he would be earning her gratitude and repaying some of Rupert Fosdyke's insults in the same breath. So he blurted out the information:

"Duquesne, 410 Avenue Kleber, Paris."

Yvonne wrote rapidly. "Will this do?" she asked:

"Person mentioned in earlier message is probably decoying to Paris a Breton girl of twenty, Madeleine Demoret, from her home in Pont Aven. She is believed to be in train due Saint Lazare 2 A.M., is good-looking, slim, of medium height, and quietly dressed. You are besought to discover her, and use all possible means to convince her that she ought to return. Her friend Yvonne will meet her at Quimperle on receipt of message, and promises that everything will be arranged satisfactorily. Her aunt, Madame Brissac, is grief-stricken and prostrate. Madeleine should come home if only for her sake."

"There, Mr. Raymond--can I add anything to make it stronger, more emphatic? Should I say that all expenses will be paid?"

"No," he said, bending over her, and resting his left hand on her shoulder. "That is quite clear and understandable. Any man of experience should read between the lines that the undertaking is vital and imperative to the last degree. If I were in trouble, Miss Yvonne, I wish I dared think that you would display such heartfelt interest in my affairs."

"You!" she cried, rising hurriedly. "You are one of the best of men! You hardly realize yet what good you are achieving. Mrs. Carmac, I am sure, will appreciate your kind action just as greatly as I do. Shall I take the telegram to the

postoffice?"

"One moment. We have plenty of time. Should a message of that direct nature be despatched locally?"

Some of the light died out of the girl's eyes. The officials in the Pont Aven postoffice were discreet as any in France, and courteous beyond the average; but they all knew Madeleine! Still, Yvonne might be trusted to fight to the last ditch in her friend's behalf.

"There is a train to Quimperle within half an hour," she said. "Someone must go. If necessary, I'll go myself. You are not fit to travel, Mr. Raymond. If only Lorry would come----"

"You may leave the mission in my hands, Miss Yvonne," said Raymond suavely. "Indeed, rather than risk the journey over that bumping tramway, I'll hire an automobile, and reach Quimperle more quickly."

Barbe came in with a laden tray, and Raymond swallowed a cup of tea and ate some of Mere Pitou's famous cakes.

He was bidding his hostess an impressive farewell when Ingersoll and Tollemache appeared. Yvonne's father, observing men and events with a certain detachment in these days, was not drawn to the ungainly secretary. He was puzzled, at finding the man there, and even bewildered by the warmth of Yvonne's introduction. But Raymond was master of himself now. He withdrew promptly, trusting to Yvonne's enthusiasm to make smooth the way for his next visit. And indeed his back was hardly turned before she plunged into a recital of the day's doings.

Her father listened quietly, passing no comment other than to express a brief but complete agreement with every step she had taken.

Then she hurried out, being restless until assured that her messenger had really started for Quimperle.

Ingersoll sighed deeply, rose to reach a tobacco jar from the mantel, and threw a question sidewise, as it were, at his companion, who was smoking meditatively, and apparently in a somewhat subdued mood.

"Lorry," he said, "what do you make of this chap Raymond?"

"I've no use for him, Socrates, and that's a fact."

"He seems to be acting in perfect good faith in this affair."

"Yes; but why?"

"That is what is bothering me. There are two points about his behavior that may have escaped you. In the first place, if Madeleine has gone to Paris by arrangement with that scamp Fosdyke, he of course will meet her at Saint Lazare, so what chance will Raymond's 'friend' have of intercepting her? Again, who is this Duquesne? I have a good memory, and I happen to recollect a notorious case reported in the newspapers about a month ago, a case in which a private inquiry agent of the name figured, and his address was in the Avenue Kleber. I don't profess to recall the number; but when name and street coincide it is safe to assume that Raymond's Duquesne and the other Duquesne are one and the same individual. Now the momentous question that presents itself is, Why should Raymond be in prior communication with a private inquiry agent in Paris?"

"I can't guess."

Ingersoll stooped, and tapped his pipe on one of the heavy iron dogs guarding the hearth. Straightening himself, he drew a labored breath, like one who braces his nerves to face a dreaded but unavoidable ordeal.

"Then I'll tell you," he said. "Mrs. Carmac is Yvonne's mother. She left me soon after Yvonne was born--went off to her people in the States. There, after some delay, she secured a divorce. Later I heard that she had married Carmac, who was immensely rich, while I could barely afford to maintain a small flat in Montmartre. Carmac was not a bad sort of fellow in his way. He was, I believe, devoted to Stella, my wife. She too was better suited to him than to me.

"But Carmac, though of Southern birth, had become a naturalized Englishman, having, I understand, some ambition toward a political career on this side. Now I doubt very much whether the divorce proceedings were valid according to British law, and a wife takes her husband's nationality. Had I been wise and dispassionate, I should have given Stella her full freedom. But I did not--may Heaven forgive me! I was so utterly crushed after leaving Paris and seeking sanctuary in Pont Aven that I disregarded her entirely. None of my associates knew where I had gone. Every sort of effort was put forth to find me, but without success. Eighteen years ago, Lorry, Pont Aven was a long way from Paris. There was no railway, and communication with the outside world was mainly by sea.

"At last, despairing of any assistance from me, Stella and Carmac risked everything on the American decree. They were married openly. The wedding was announced in all the society newspapers. Even I, buried alive here, read of it. But, if the question were raised, it might be held in England that Stella is still my wife in the eyes of British law."

Ingersoll made this astounding statement in a voice so calm and free from emotion that Tollemache stared at him in blank amazement. Of course events had given the younger man some inkling of the truth; but he had never imagined anything so disastrously far-reaching.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "That is terrible--that means all sorts of beastly complications!"

Ingersoll threw out a hand in a gesture of sheer hopelessness. "It means this,--if Raymond suspects that the marriage was invalid, and Carmac left his money to his 'wife,' the will can be upset, Mrs. Carmac will be stripped of every penny except her personal belongings, and Rupert Fosdyke and his sisters will inherit the estate. Naturally I know nothing of the exact position of affairs beyond the hints I pick up from Yvonne.

"She, poor girl, hasn't the remotest notion of the tragedy that I see looming darkly above the horizon--because it is the very essence of tragedy that a woman who sold her happiness for gold should be despoiled in the hour when the bribe might be regarded as most surely within her grasp. Lorry, I pity her! She is well aware that she is clinging to the edge of a precipice.

"Raymond's inquiries concerning Yvonne and myself, which you overheard, and which were confirmed by Peridot, warned me of her danger. When you carried that maimed scoundrel into the cabin of the *Hirondelle* he retained his senses sufficiently to understand the tremendous significance of Mrs. Carmac's ravings. To the ordinary ear they would sound like the gabble of dementia; to Raymond, already disliked by his mistress, and retained only as a useful slave by his master, they conveyed immense potentialities. But at first he must have felt like a traveler in the desert tantalized by a mirage. Investigation in Pont Aven might strengthen his suspicions; but he could never obtain proof. He dared not appeal to me. Rogues of his class have a tolerably clear notion of the sort of man they must not meddle with: probably he summed up the father through the daughter. Now, perhaps, you see where this Parisian inquiry agent comes in?"

"No, I'm dashed if I do!"

"There isn't much guile in your composition, Lorry," and Ingersoll smiled forlornly. "I gather from Yvonne's story that during the talk on board the cutter her mother spoke of having deserted her in Paris. Unhappily she thereby supplied Raymond with the most important clue. The very next day he had the impudence to remind Mrs. Carmac that she had claimed her 'niece' as a daughter. He drew in his horns when checked; but set about unveiling her early life without delay. Paris is a city of records. It was a simple matter for anyone to discover the date of my marriage, which took place nearly four years before the American ceremony between Carmac and my wife.

"Good God, Man! that poor woman is in a damnable position. Not only can she be robbed of the wealth given her by Carmac, but in England she is likely to be prosecuted on a charge of bigamy! And I shall be responsible! My pride and futile anger deprived her of the only means whereby she could have married Carmac without fear of consequences. I left her no alternative. Oh, Lorry, Lorry, if only I could have foreseen something, howsoever shadowy, of the evils that were impending when we brought those people on board! Had I even known the name of the yacht, I might have been vouchsafed some glimpse of the peril. One glance at Stella herself, or at Carmac, would have revealed an abyss from which I should have recoiled with horror. I might have contrived some subterfuge, some wild scheme, to keep Yvonne and her mother apart. But it is too late! The mischief is done. I am bound hand and foot,--a man delivered over to the torturers!"

Ingersoll's voice trailed off into silence. He sank into a chair, threw aside the pipe which he had filled automatically but not lighted, and buried his face in his hands.

But Tollemache sat bolt upright, his shoulders squared, his strong features frowning in thought. Thus had he looked when swinging precariously above the precipice at Le Faouet, and thus when the *Hirondelle* was backing into the hell's broth of the reef.

"Tell you what, old sport, we must act, and quickly at that," he said at last, springing to his feet as though some valiant deed was called for straight away.

"But what can I do?" came the despairing answer, and Ingersoll, the leader, the master, the kindly cynic, lifted weebegone eyes to the lithe and stalwart figure towering above him.

"Lots!" cried Tollemache. "First, let's get down to bedrock--then we can talk plainly. I've never said a word to you, Ingersoll, and mighty little to your daughter; but I love Yvonne, and if she will marry me, our wedding day will be the proudest day of my life. I'm not a poor man. I've a heap more money than ever I've owned up to, because I like the life here, and I like you, and I worship the ground Yvonne walks on, and I was afraid that if you knew I was fairly well fixed in a financial sense you'd regard me as a *poseur*, and cut me out. Why, I've saved nearly ten thousand dollars a year since I came to Pont Aven! I can lay my hands tomorrow on a hundred thousand, and still have enough left to keep Yvonne in pretty good shape.

"Now I'm not making any bargain with you. That isn't our way. But if I am given a free hand with Raymond, I'll settle his hash in double quick time. Swine of his variety are always blackmailers. Very well! I'll pay his price. He must clear out, bag and baggage, giving me the promise of his silence, over and above an acknowledgment that he obtained the money by threatening to expose Mrs. Carmac. Don't imagine he won't go! I'll make him! It's rather rotten even to talk of using violence to a fellow with a broken arm; but he must be got rid of, and I'll frighten him into a deal--see if I don't!"

Ingersoll rose, and caught the younger man's hand in an impulsive grip. "Lorry," he said, "if it pleases Providence to ordain that Yvonne shall marry you, I'll offer thanks on my knees. You are honest as the sun, and transparent as the Aven beneath the trees of the Bois d'Amour in summer. I have known your story for years. I had hardly learned your name before a man told me of the quarrel with your father because you refused to fall in with some marriage brokerage arranged between him and the father of a girl whose business interests marched with his. I knew too that you bought ten of my pictures during the first six months of our acquaintance. I didn't interfere with your well meaning subterfuge. You have lost nothing on that speculation, at any rate, because you acquired my work at its best period, and your

investment would yield two hundred per cent. if you sold now.

"But let that pass. Do you believe I would ever have encouraged you to waste your time in pursuing the fickle goddess of art but for the knowledge that you were happy, and content, and far removed from the temptations that beset youngsters of means but of no occupation? No, you know well that I should have driven you forth with hard words. Yet I have never deceived you. How often have I said that Art is a cruel mistress, a wanton who refuses her favors to some most ardent wooers, yet flings them with prodigal hands at others who, though worthy of her utmost passion, despise it? But you have a quality that ranks you far above the painter who, while fitted to see divine things, wallows in the mud of mediocrity. You are a loyal friend and good comrade, a man of clean soul and single thought.

"Would to Heaven I might leave you now to deal with this prying hound, Raymond! But the plan you suggest is useless. He would laugh at you, disregard your threats, and taunt you with personal designs on Mrs. Carmac's millions. You have forgotten, Lorry, that Yvonne is her daughter. I know my wife's nature to the depths. She has drunk to nausea of the nectar of wealth. What has it given her? Happiness? Good health? A contented mind? No; she is scourged with scorpions, torn by a thousand regrets. She would give all her money now if some magician would wipe out from her life the record of the last eighteen years. Very gladly, very humbly, would she dwell in this cottage, provided that no cloud existed between her and Yvonne. But that cannot be. As offering a middle way, I have agreed that Yvonne shall visit her at intervals, and even that small concession has delighted her beyond measure. And what will be the outcome? No matter what I may say, she will try to capture my girl's heart with a shower of gold.

"No; I don't believe for one moment that she will ever estrange Yvonne from me. I do not even commit the injustice of attributing any such design to her. But that Yvonne will inherit Carmac's millions if they are left undisturbed in her mother's possession is almost as certain as death,—the one certainty life holds for us poor mortals. And, above all, don't hug the delusion that the man who has discovered my wife's pitiful secret is not alive to this phase of a problem which is in my mind night and day to the exclusion of all else. He will exact a price which you cannot pay. Each hour his ambitions mount higher. That unhappy woman is as powerless as a fawn caught in the coils of a python."

"One can free the fawn by dislocating the python's vertebrae. Is there any harm in my trying?"

"You may not kill the man. If you tackle him openly, you admit the very contention that he may never be able to establish in a court of law; because, although he may have ferreted out the prior marriage, he cannot yet be sure that there the divorce may not hold good. Even I myself am doubtful in that respect. It is a difficult legal point. Obviously Stella fears something. The fact that she has retained Raymond when she meant to dismiss him seems to indicate a weak spot in her armor. No, Lorry. I've looked at this thing from every point of view, and I see no loophole of escape. She is trapped, and Raymond alone can set her free. We must await his pleasure, act when he acts, and strive to assist her when the crisis arrives. Meanwhile, for her sake, we must endeavor to tolerate him."

Tollemache sat down again. "I feel like my namesake, Saint Lawrence the Martyr," he said gloomily. "You remember that when he was put on a gridiron, and done to a crisp golden brown on one side, he suggested that by way of a change his executioners should grill him a little on the other. Gee whizz! That reminds me, Socrates—if Sainte Barbe can't arrange matters better for pilgrims to her shrine, she ought to go out of the business. Here are Madeleine, Yvonne, you, and myself mixed up in fifty-seven varieties of trouble! And I suppose Mere Pitou and little Barbe will receive attention in turn. If ever I meet Sainte Barbe in Kingdom Come, I'll tell her her real name. It strikes me that whoever invented the pin-dropping scheme knew what he was doing."

Ingersoll needed no explanation of his friend's outburst against the gentle lady whose love story has descended through the centuries. It was a confession of sheer impotence. He was forcing himself to admit that he could no more stay the course of events than stem the next tide rushing in from the Atlantic.

Feeling that he wanted to bite something, Tollemache lit his pipe and clenched the stem viciously between his strong teeth. Aroused by the striking of the match, Ingersoll began to smoke too. The attitude of the two bespoke their sense of utter helplessness. Thus might men imprisoned on some volcanic island sit and await in dumb misery the next upheaval of the trembling earth.

At last Tollemache, whose lively and strenuous temperament rebelled against indecision, even in circumstances such as these, where one false move might precipitate the very crisis he wished to avoid, put a question which Ingersoll had been expecting, and fearing, since their talk began.

"I take it you haven't told Yvonne what you have told me?" he said. "I can't recall your exact words, but you implied that she is ignorant of the true nature of the dilemma her mother is in?"

"Yes, that's the worst of it," muttered Ingersoll. "It comes hard, Lorry, to parade the wretchedness of forgotten years before one's own daughter,—a girl like Yvonne, whose mind is an unblemished mirror. Before this blight fell on our lives I don't believe she really understood why sin and wrongdoing should exist. We dwelt apart. We moved and breathed in a gracious world of our own contriving. She read of evil in books and newspapers; but it passed her by, leaving her unruffled as our earth when astronomers report some clash of suns in the outer universe. Now, although her mother's callousness is patent to her, and this mad escapade of Madeleine's has stabbed her as with a dagger, she is wholly unaware of the chief offense, my neglect to facilitate the divorce proceedings."

"For the first time in our acquaintance, Socrates, I've got to say that you're talking nonsense," blurted out Tollemache excitedly. "It's bad enough that Mrs. Carmac--I suppose I'd better stick to that name for her--should be in such a hole, and we be unable at present to pull her out. But it's absolute rot that you should blame yourself for her mismanagement of her own affairs. Dash it all! Where is the man or woman who can act tomorrow in face of such an experience as yours as they might, twenty years hence, wish they had acted? That's no way to look at things. Tell Yvonne, I say. Tell her tonight. Then she can discuss the situation fairly and squarely with her mother. Don't you see, heaps of things may have occurred which, if you knew of them, might modify your judgment? This American divorce may be bad law in England, but good law in France. That lawyer fellow, Mr. Bennett, struck me as a wise old codger. He, or someone like him, might put Mrs. Carmac up to all sorts of dodges to do Raymond in the eye. And, in any event, don't start accusing yourself to Yvonne. If you do, d'ye know what the upshot will be? She'll take your side against her mother, and where will Mrs. Carmac be then?"

"Probably you are right, Lorry. I have learned to distrust my own thoughts. Yes, I'll tell Yvonne the whole truth."

Ingersoll spoke in the accents of stoic despair; but Tollemache was in fighting mood, and eager to close with the enemy.

"It's sound policy to defend by attacking," he went on, with an air of profundity that, at any other time, the older man would have found intensely amusing. "That's what we were taught in college football, and it's true of every other kind of rough and tumble. Why shouldn't Mrs. Carmac blow Raymond and his blackmailing schemes sky high by making a deal with Fosdyke and the other relatives? The cake is big enough, you say, that each should get a good slice and be satisfied. As for legal proceedings in England, who's going to prosecute? Not you. And who else can act? The more I look at this affair the more I'm convinced it's a boggy that will fall to bits at the first straight punch."

Certainly the enthusiastic advocate of strong measures seemed to have hit on a project that, though difficult, was not wholly impracticable. If Fosdyke had only kept clear of that stupid intrigue with Madeleine Demoret, a settlement by consent might come well within the bounds of reason.

For the first time in many days Ingersoll saw a gleam of light in a choking fog. He brightened perceptibly, and talked with some of his wonted animation.

Neither man noticed how the time was slipping by until Mere Pitou summoned them to supper. Yvonne had not arrived; so they assumed that she had remained with Mrs. Carmac. About ten o'clock Ingersoll--probably in a state of subdued nervousness as to the outcome of the projected disclosure--asked Tollemache to convey a message to Yvonne that she was wanted at home.

Lorry obeyed cheerfully. He believed he had blundered on a means of discomfiting the rascally secretary, and, that laudable object once attained, the path was clear for his own love making. Though his aims and hopes differed from Harvey Raymond's as the open sea from a slime-covered morass, he too made the mistake of imagining that money could level all obstacles; which, if regarded as an infallible maxim, is misleading alike to the just and the unjust.

Usually, when returning to the hotel from the cottage, he took the short cut by the footbridge on which Yvonne had encountered Madeleine and Fosdyke. He was aware, however, that the girl habitually used the slightly longer but more open highway. So he turned into the Concarneau road, and was approaching the main bridge (the famous old pont that gives the village its name) when he saw two people sauntering slowly toward the harbor, and apparently engaged in close converse. They were some distance away, and partly hidden in the deep shadow of a fifteenth century mill with curious carvings beneath the roof of a lion and a man; but he could not be mistaken as to Yvonne and Raymond, for no other girl in Pont Aven carried herself with Yvonne's grace, and the misshapen little secretary was in a class apart.

Evidently Raymond had offered his escort to Yvonne, and they were extending a somewhat late promenade to enable the former to convey such news as he had to give of the journey to Quimperle. Possibly he had received an answer from that mysterious "friend" Duquesne. Nevertheless Tollemache was aware of a sudden lessening of his exaltation. It was as though when overheated by exertion he had entered a cold and clammy vault. He could give no valid reason why he should not quicken his pace and overtake Yvonne with her father's message. Yet he hung back, conscious of a sense of intrusion, yet furious with himself on account of this inexplicable hesitancy.

Finally he compromised. Yvonne would surely not take a prolonged stroll after ten o'clock at night. He would walk a little way up the old Concarneau road (so called because, after the fashion of ancient tracks, it climbs a steep hill boldly, while its modern supplanter follows a longer and easier sweep) and keep in the gloom of the ancient houses clustered there until he saw her making for the cottage. With growing impatience, and a prey to not a little misgiving, he waited fully half an hour.

At last she appeared, walking swiftly and alone. And now his anxiety yielded to astonishment. Coming quietly down the hill, and crossing the Place au Beurre, he was just in time to see her vanish into the obscurity of the Rue Mathias. At any rate, then, she was heading for Mere Pitou's. Glancing toward the harbor, he fancied he could make out Raymond at the end of the short, narrow street.

He did not think it necessary to lurk in the background until Raymond passed, but went to the hotel and stood on

the terrace under the sycamores, but well in view of anyone approaching the annex.

Soon Raymond came, picking his steps with careful slowness, and keeping to the well lighted center of the square. His chin was sunk in the upturned collar of an overcoat, and he had the aspect of one lost in thought. Yet he seemed to know of Tollemache's presence, and raised his eyes in a steady stare when the two were within a few yards of each other.

He did not speak, but his pallid face creased into a malevolent grin. Whether or not this was intended as a polite recognition, Tollemache neither knew nor cared. He returned Raymond's stare with the impassivity of a Red Indian, and, though puzzled and distressed, resolved to look in on Harry Jackson before retiring for the night.

In after life Tollemache never forgot that moment. It was big with fate. Perhaps, if left to their own course, events might have followed the same channel next day or some succeeding day. But there could be no questioning the tremendous significance of that particular hour when its outcome was recalled in the after light of accomplished facts.

Thenceforth there was no damming the torrent that swept away men and women in its fury. Some were lost for evermore, some were thrown, bruised and maimed, on far distant strands; but all were caught in an irresistible flood, and, if Tollemache were a visionary, he might have heard the rush of mighty waters as he turned to enter the hotel.

CHAPTER XII

WHEREIN BOTH THE REEF AND MR. RAYMOND

YIELD INFORMATION

Yvonne was looking forward to Raymond's return from Quimperle with an ill concealed restlessness that drew a sympathetic inquiry from her mother.

"Are you still fretting about Madeleine?" she said.

This solicitude was not feigned; but it centered wholly in Yvonne. The folly, or stupidity, of some pert village maid whom she had never either seen or cared to see did not interest Mrs. Carmac in the least. Had she voiced her real feeling in the matter she would have condemned her daughter's lack of proportion. During half a lifetime she had dwelt among the elect. To her it was quite immaterial whether or not Madeleine's career was ruined. Nor was this a mere pose on her part. She had trained herself to think that way. Yet, so sharply may deeds clash with personal inclination, both she and Walter Carmac were noted for their philanthropy. She strove to do good, but not by stealth. She could lecture Rupert Fosdyke with genuine zeal; but, while seeking to reform the victimizer, she had little pity for the victim. From her point of view, Madeleine was one of a fixed percentage of girls who rebelled against the social law. Of course one tried to reduce their number; but it was almost bad form to wear one's heart out because the expected had happened.

Yvonne, though she would not have cared to put her impressions into words, was aware of this attitude on her mother's part, and it saddened her inexpressibly. At such moments a seemingly impassable gulf yawned between them. Madeleine had been her trusted associate since they were babies together, toddling up the hill in convoy of some older girl to the kindergarten class in the convent. She knew that her friend was pure-minded and warm-hearted. Nothing could have shocked her so greatly as the discovery that a man like Rupert Fosdyke should have succeeded in so brief a time in undermining the moral structure that Brittany builds so solidly in its women folk.

"I shall never cease fretting about her," she answered. "If by some cruel chance Mr. Raymond's friend fails me, I am minded to ask my father to come with me to Paris tomorrow. Madeleine will not resist me if once we are brought face to face."

"Your father has far too much sense," said Mrs. Carmac composedly.

"Oh, please don't talk in that strain. I cannot bear it!" pleaded the girl.

"It hurts, of course; but isn't it better to look at the facts squarely? I am surprised that Mr. Raymond, who has more experience of life, should have flown on a wild-goose chase to Quimperle. It is nothing else. If Madeleine is actually on her way to Paris, the journey is a matter of obvious arrangement. Rupert will unquestionably meet her at the Gare St. Lazare, and what opportunity will your deputy have then of making any appeal to the girl herself? Rupert would simply take him by the collar and swing him aside. You see, Yvonne, I am forty-two, and you are twenty. We survey life from different angles."

"From different levels, at any rate," said Yvonne, closing her ears to the cold accuracy of her mother's reasoning. "You gaze down on us simple Pont Avenois from the altitude of New York and London, while I cannot peer above the eaves of our little mills. I am looking now through the low door of a desolate cottage, and I can discern a broken-hearted woman crooning her sorrow by the embers of a dying fire. Oh, Mother, Mother, if ever you would have me love you as a daughter, you must try and realize that my very heartstrings are twined round my Breton friends, that I rejoice with them and grieve with them, that I love them for their many virtues and condone their few faults! I have never knowingly wished evil to anyone, but if God in His mercy should preserve my dear Madeleine from that horrid man I would not care what means His wisdom adopted. Even though Fosdyke marries her, Madeleine will not be happy, and I cannot think that if he meant to behave honorably he would have tempted her to plunge her people into such distress by leaving home clandestinely."

Mrs. Carmac could have rocked with laughter at the notion of Rupert Fosdyke marrying Madeleine Demoret; but she curbed the impulse. Despite her primitive simplicity, Yvonne was in an excitable mood that night, and this affair must be allowed to settle itself without disturbing their good relations.

"Well," she sighed, affecting an accord she did not feel, "we can only hope now that your telegram will prove effective. Who is the person whose aid Mr. Raymond is securing?"

"A Monsieur Duquesne."

Mrs. Carmac wrinkled her smooth forehead. "I have not heard the name," she said, after a pause. "But there is nothing unusual in that. Raymond is curiously secretive. Any other man, living in a household on the footing he occupied in the Chase and in Charles Street, would have spoken at times of his relatives. He, for all I knew of his earlier history, might have been born in--Saturn. I was going to say Mars; but Mr. Raymond does not meet one's ideal of a Martian."

At that Yvonne was constrained to smile. Neither she nor the woman who dismissed Raymond and Duquesne so flippantly could guess what sinister influences lurked behind the association of those two men. An astrologer would

have found something ominous in that haphazard reference to the planetary harbingers of disaster, Saturn and Mars, and, oddly enough, a half-thought of the sort did flit through Yvonne's mind, because she often found amusement and interest, during the mild and clear winters of Brittany, in reading the firmament from a stellar atlas, and there was hardly a constellation in the northern heavens she could not name at sight.

At that moment, however, relief from a rather forced conversation came in the shape of Captain Pople's burly form.

"Beg pardon, Ma'am, for intrudin' at this time," he said, when admitted, "but I thought you'd like to hear the result of today's operations on the reef. Atween Peridot an' a trawl, we've been doin' things."

"Is Peridot here--in Pont Aven?" interrupted Yvonne, blanching in quick alarm.

"Yes, Miss. He kem from Concarneau this mornin', an' I've brought him up the river on tonight's tide."

"Where is he now?"

"I'm not quite sure, Miss. He left me a couple o' minutes since. While I was havin' a word with Jackson, Peridot went up the hill."

"Was he tired?"

Pople was undoubtedly perplexed by this sudden concern as to Peridot's physical condition; but he answered readily enough, "Well, Miss, if he isn't, he ought to be. We've been hard at it, high water an' low, for fourteen hours."

Yvonne was so visibly relieved that Pople's bewilderment increased. Of course he had heard no word of Madeleine's flight, and he could not understand that if Peridot had gone home and to bed there was a chance that the fisherman might leave the village again early in the morning without being told the disastrous news, since Madame Larraidou was a cautious old body, who would not vex her son with idle gossip.

Pople hesitated. If further details of Peridot's well-being were needed, he was ready to vouch for the Breton's apparent good health and complete sobriety.

Mrs. Carmac fathomed his difficulty at once.

"Go on, Captain," she smiled. "Miss Ingersoll only wanted to be assured that Peridot was safe in his cottage. His mother was anxious about him--that is all."

"No need, Ma'am, I assure you," said Pople earnestly. "He's one of the best, is Peridot. For a Frenchman, I've never met his equal. I had a sort of notion he'd bring good luck, an' he did too. We've got your boxes!"

Mrs. Carmac stood up. Her pale cheeks flushed with gratification. "I am more than pleased," she cried. "Where are they? Can they be brought here tonight?"

"No, Ma'am; not both, that is. Like meself, I reckon, you're forgettin' the ways of a French custom house. I've got yours, because it was open; but the other one, which is locked, had to be left in a shed down below there until the key is produced. I tried to tell some chap in a blue coat and cheese-cutter cap that if poor Mr. Carmac had any cigars or cigarettes in his cabin trunk they wouldn't be of much account after soakin' in salt water for a matter o' ten days or thereabouts; but, bless your heart, he wouldn't listen. Mossoo Gueho, the gentleman from Brest, tole me I'd have to bring the key in the mornin', or, more likely, force it open; so I left it at that."

Mrs. Carmac was puzzled, and showed it. "You say my box is open. Do you mean, that it has been smashed to pieces?" she inquired.

"It's hardly been scratched, Ma'am. You see, it was this way: When the yacht broke in two the fore part was carried clean away by the sea. The trawl picked up fittin's an' bits o' machinery two hundred yards from the reef. But the after part must ha held together longer, an' the heavy seas didn't get at it quite so fierce like. Anyhow, Peridot sort o' nosed out where them boxes might be lyin', an' we sent the diver down--an' sure enough there they were."

"Could the box have been wrenched open while being lifted to the surface?"

Pople scratched his head dubiously, not because of any doubt suggested by Mrs. Carmac's question, but on account of a problem that had bothered him ever since the salvage was effected.

"No, Ma'am," he said, evidently weighing his words. "It received no rough usage. It wasn't locked."

"But it was!" insisted the lady, rather emphatically. "I locked it myself before coming on deck after we left Brest. I remember doing so most distinctly."

"Then it's a myst'ry, Ma'am--a real myst'ry, seein' as the lock has been turned. The wards are full o' sand, of course; but that has nothin' to do with their position."

"Where is the box now?"

"Outside on a handcart, Ma'am. Jackson's on guard. That's been his job all day--just sittin' on that box. You see, Ma'am, you tole me you was particular about it an' the other one; so I've taken care that each of'em reaches you just as we found it."

"Will you kindly ask the hotel porters to carry the one box here now?"

"Cert'nly, Ma'am. There's on'y one thing. The contents are in a sad mess. The sight of'em may upset you."

"No, no. The loss of the clothing is immaterial. Please have the box brought in."

Popple lost no time. Mrs. Carmac was explaining to Yvonne that the solitary article of jewelry she valued, a necklace of graded pearls, had been left in a locked case, itself inclosed in a locked box, when a porter entered and dumped a rust-covered steel trunk on the floor. Popple untied the knots of a rope that kept the lid in position. Unquestionably, if Mrs. Carmac had turned the key in the lock on leaving her cabin, it had been opened later, either by accident or design.

The owner dropped to her knees instantly. After an alarmed glance at an arrangement of straps beneath the lid, she piled a number of sodden and salt-stained articles on the floor. Soon she was gazing disconsolately at an empty box. The jewelcase was not there. But she was more than disturbed, she was exceedingly annoyed.

"I have been robbed!" she cried. "Someone on board the Stella possessed a key that would open a Yale lock, a thing that called for careful planning. I have lost twenty thousand pounds' worth of pearls and diamonds!"

"Mr. Raymond tole me the necklace alone was worth ten thousand, Ma'am," breathed Popple thickly.

"Mr. Raymond! How came you and he to be discussing the value of my jewels?" She was on her feet now, glowering in anger, a woman despoiled of her prized possessions, and ready to suspect anyone.

Popple was apologetic. He felt as if he were personally in default. "We was talkin' one day about the salvage, Ma'am. If you remember, you mentioned a lot o' money in notes, which ought to turn up in the trunk at the customs shed, and it seemed sort o' nateral that Mr. Raymond an' I should talk things over."

"Yes, yes. Of course he knew all about the notes and the rest. Don't look at me in that stupid fashion. I am not accusing you or Mr. Raymond of stealing my belongings. But how can one account for this wretched business? Who could have dared to go to my cabin, when the robbery must be discovered before we reached port that night? I locked both case and box. Here are the keys. Celeste found them in a special pocket inside the skirt I wore that day. My husband's keys were in his pocket too. They were brought to me by the mayor on behalf of the police."

She was talking excitedly, almost at random, and had snatched at a porte-monnaie to display the keys, as though the fact that they existed and were in her keeping supplied proof positive that she could not be mistaken.

"It's an awkward business, an' that's the solemn truth, Ma'am," wheezed Popple. "It 'ud please me an' Jackson if you'd send for the police an' have 'em search us an' our rooms. Not that we've got much beyond a few bits o' linen----"

"You and Jackson--the steward!" repeated Mrs. Carmac shrilly. "Did you know already that my jewels were gone?"

"We guessed it, Ma'am. We didn't like the look o' that there box, an' that's a fact."

She stamped a foot angrily on the floor of polished wood. "It does not concern you or Jackson," she cried. "I would as soon think of blaming Mr. Raymond, who was with me in the deck saloon during all those miserable hours----"

"Blaming me for what, Mrs. Carmac?" came in the secretary's harsh voice. The door had been left open when the box was brought in, and Raymond himself was standing there now. He had just returned from Quimperle, and had the semblance of a man pierced with cold, as the night had suddenly grown chilly. His small eyes roved from Mrs. Carmac's irritated face to Yvonne, who was still seated, and had not interfered in the conversation. Then they dwelt on the empty trunk and the disheveled heap of its contents.

"You've recovered some of your baggage, I see," he went on quietly. "Is that the box containing your jewelcase?"

"It is the box that did contain it at one time," came the vexed rejoinder.

"Do you mean that the case is not there?"

"Yes. Someone has stolen it. I care nothing about the diamonds; but the pearls were given me by Mr. Carmac, and cannot be replaced."

"But--forgive the question--why did you say you do not blame me?"

"I blame no one, you least of any, as you are the one man who was never near my cabin since I quitted it."

Raymond advanced farther into the room. After one sharp glance at the flustered sailor, he gazed again at the limp collection of garments on the floor, from which a light haze of steam was curling lazily, as the temperature of the apartment was many degrees higher than that of the wet and closely packed lingerie and dresses.

"This is a very serious matter," he said slowly. "Unfortunately most of the Stella's crew have left Pont Aven."

"My men were not thieves, Mr.----" broke in Popple fiercely.

"I am not even hinting that they were," said Raymond. "I only mention the chief obstacle in the way, of a search for the missing gems--granted the almost incredible thing that any man on board the Stella stole them in the belief that he could win clear with his loot before Mrs. Carmac discovered her loss. Do you mean to send for the police?" he continued, addressing Mrs. Carmac. "And--that reminds me--what of the money Mr. Carmac carried in one of his trunks? Is that gone also?"

Mrs. Carmac snapped that she did not mean to trouble the police. The sooner she was out of Pont Aven and free of its oppressive atmosphere the better she would be pleased. Then, apparently ashamed of her petulance, she explained the mystery of the open lock.

Raymond tried to be helpful. He frowned judicially. "Where did you actually place the jewelcase?" he asked.

"In those straps," she said, pointing to the slings attached to the inside of the lid.

"Then isn't it at least possible that you did not actually lock the box, though believing you had done so? In this event the case, being heavy, may have fallen out, and be now somewhere in the locality where the box was found."

"No," said Poppel. "The diver had his orders. He searched peritic'lar." His tone was gruff, even hostile. He would be hard to convince that the secretary's reference to the departed members of the yacht's company was not meant as a slur on their character.

Raymond ignored Poppel's curtness. "Still, as you yourself said, Captain, the sea acts in a curiously uncertain way at times," he replied blandly. "There will be no harm in making a fresh search tomorrow. Weather permitting, I shall accompany you, if for no other reason than a wish to see once again a place where some of us--not all, unhappily--were so providentially rescued."

Mrs. Carmac rang for Celeste. "Take these articles, and give them to Mademoiselle Julia for distribution among the poor women of the village," she said. Her attitude was eloquent. The pearls were lost irretrievably. She dismissed the subject.

"*Mais, Madame,*" cried the dismayed Celeste, "much of the linen is veritably new, and only requires washing."

"Do as I bid you. I shall never wear any of those garments again. Captain Poppel, here is the key you want. I leave you to deal with the customs people. Will you help Celeste to remove the box? Thank you. Well, Mr. Raymond, you have just returned from Quimperle, I suppose? Did you have a cold journey?"

Raymond took the cue, and said nothing more of the theft. When Poppel and the maid had gone he explained that during the run to Quimperle he decided that it would be more discreet to telephone Duquesne than send Yvonne's telegram. He was lucky in reaching his friend without delay, and was thus able to give him detailed instructions, including a full description of Madeleine's appearance. Duquesne had promised to meet the train at the Gare St. Lazare. In fact, he was so eager to serve that, failing Madeleine's arrival at the expected hour, he would meet the next train, and the next. In any case he would telegraph the result early in the morning.

In a word, Raymond had acquitted himself admirably. He had forgotten nothing, left no stone unturned. Yvonne was more than ever grateful.

Mrs. Carmac was tired, almost peevish; so the girl did not remain much longer.

She agreed readily when Raymond asked to be allowed to see her home, and did not demur on reaching the bridge at an unexpected request that she should walk with him a little way down the road to the harbor.

"The hour is not so late," he said deferentially, "and I wish to lay before you a very serious matter. I may surprise you greatly. I may even distress you. But I do want you to believe, Miss Yvonne, that in baring my heart to you I am not swayed by unworthy motives."

The girl was certainly astonished by this portentous opening; but the secretary's action with regard to Madeleine had completely dissipated a sense of restraint and dislike that she was usually aware of when in his company. Thinking he had some news from Paris that he did not wish to reveal in Mrs. Carmac's presence, she hastened to assure him that he might speak with the utmost candor.

"That is good and kind of you," he said; "but it is only what I expected to hear from your lips. But I am sure you will forgive me if I tread warily. I have that to tell which may find you unprepared, and I think you will thank me afterward--no matter what view you take of what I may call an astounding revelation--if I do not blurt out what I have to say like some frightened child. My nature is a cautious one, and I shrink from even the semblance of inflicting pain. Such characteristics may be commendable in their way; but they have their drawbacks in a case like this, when a man who would willingly undergo any suffering for your sake is forced, against the grain, to utter unpleasant truths."

Yvonne was more and more bewildered. She realized intuitively now that he meant to discuss her mother's affairs, since Madeleine could not possibly have reached Paris yet, and any tidings he might have obtained with regard to Rupert Fosdyke's schemes hardly warranted such an alarming preamble. So she strove to make him comprehend that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"If you are referring, even indirectly, to Mrs. Carmac," she said frankly, "I must warn you instantly that I cannot listen to anything concerning her. Until she came to Pont Aven I was not even aware that such a relative as an aunt existed. When she leaves this place--though I shall see her often, I hope, in the future--the relations between us will be rather those of good friends than of aunt and niece. You ought to understand, then, Mr. Raymond, that if your confidences deal with her I refuse to hear them."

Raymond sighed heavily. He seemed to be at a loss for words. In reality Yvonne had said exactly what he anticipated, and he counted on a well judged delay as calculated to increase her agitation and weaken her defenses.

"Please don't render an ungracious task harder," he said, as though nerving himself to a supreme effort, when Yvonne, after walking a few paces in silence, was about to tell him that she would go no farther. "I meant to prepare you by some vague comments that would clear the air. But your highly strung and generous temperament will not permit any display of what I have described as my methods of caution. Well, then, if it must be so, let us get to the crux of the matter at once. Mrs. Carmac is not your aunt, Miss Yvonne. She is your mother! She was your father's lawful wife! She deserted him and you, got an American divorce, and was married to Walter Carmac in England. I believe that the second marriage was not a valid one. It is terrible to have to say these things; but they are true, and it rests with you to

save her from exposure and ignominy. I beseech you to credit my good faith in this matter. To whom can I appeal if not to you, her daughter? It is manifestly impossible that I should go to your father. He could not help her if he would. Her future happiness, her very means of existence, are in your hands. Can you then reproach me if I ask you to bear with me while I endeavor to show a way out of a situation bristling with difficulties for all of us, alive with real danger for your own mother?"

In the first shock of this disclosure Yvonne was minded to rend the man with a few quiet words of scorn and disdain, and then leave him. Twice she essayed to break in on his measured utterances, and twice she held back. She could not know that Raymond had forged his thunderbolt with no slight skill. He could not hope to achieve the final effect he aimed at by merely revealing a secret that was no secret. Close observation had shown that the girl was well aware of the relationship she bore to Mrs. Carmac, and, although she might be a prey to terror and dismay at finding the knowledge in possession of a comparative stranger, she would hardly do other than resent his interference, resent it too with a good deal of spirit and hot indignation.

He contrived therefore to combine innuendo with fact. He had counted the cost. He was playing a desperate game. During the next five minutes he must have in Yvonne either a determined opponent or a subservient if unwilling ally. There could be no half measures. If his suit was spurned, he must attach himself forthwith to Rupert Fosdyke's fortunes. If Yvonne wavered, or was cowed, he would strike a telling blow through her mother. No matter how the issue tended, he was secure of a thumping reward.

Once again the hazard of the hour seemed to be with him. Yvonne, almost tongue-tied and wholly bewildered, could only falter brokenly, "Having said so much, you cannot stop now. What do you mean when you say that Mrs. Carmac is in danger?"

He almost chuckled. Things were going well, exceedingly well. She was ready to listen. But he managed to throw an emotional vibration into his voice. For the moment the man was a consummate actor; though indeed he had so much at stake that no extraordinary effort was called for.

"Thank you," he said, apparently groping in a fog of doubt, and forcing an unwilling parade of unpalatable and distressing facts. "It is something gained to feel that you have suspended judgment. You may or may not know already that Mrs. Carmac is your mother. I ask you to admit nothing: only to hear and weigh my statements dispassionately. Eighteen years ago your mother deserted you and your father in Paris. For some reason Mrs. Ingersoll married Carmac in her maiden name two years later. None of her associates ever guessed that the beautiful and distinguished Stella Fordyce had been the wife of an unknown artist. Her secret was safe with your father. It would have gone to the grave with her but for the wreck of the yacht on a Breton reef, and the really phenomenal chance that brought her first husband and her child to her rescue. Even then nothing might have been revealed had not Carmac lost his life. Really, if one were superstitious, one would see the action of Providence in----"

"Please spare me any references of that sort," broke in Yvonne. She could endure much; but she was not compelled to suffer this hypocritical scoundrel's blasphemy.

Raymond started. There was a new quality in her voice. She was regaining her self control, and at all costs he must prevent that. If he would win, he must adopt tactics of the whirlwind order.

"Forgive me," he said. "The thought has been so constantly in my mind of late that it came unbidden. But you leave me no choice. I must speak plainly, almost brutally. Let Rupert Fosdyke obtain the faintest shadow of the unquestionable facts, and he will not only drive your mother forth a pauper, but put such a complexion on the facts that she will be disgraced forever among her equals."

"Disgraced! Why? People are not disgraced because they obtain a divorce according to the laws of their own country."

"No; but they are punished severely if they offend against the social code. Mrs. Carmac's offense is against British law. She cannot deny it. The first person who lodges an information can upset her husband's will. Deprived of his money and its influence, what becomes of her?"

Yvonne stood in the road as though she had been turned to stone, and perforce Raymond halted and faced her. There was not a strong light in that place. Some fifty yards away shone a lamp that marked a footbridge across the top of the harbor. Just beneath the Aven took its last plunge as a mountain stream and mingled its sweet waters with the tides. On the rocks, high above the river, a Calvary was silhouetted against the cold, clear blue of a starlit sky, and it needed no highly imaginative mind to picture the stark figure of the Christ gazing down compassionately on one of His creatures who was disobeying His ordinances.

Not far distant was the cheerful cafe frequented by artists and writers on summer evenings, where Madame Marechale, Julia Guillou's sister, dispensed cups of black coffee, and tiny glasses of liqueur cider, and epigrams--each excellent in their way. In a flash the notion presented itself to Yvonne's overburdened mind that the pleasant intimacy of those mild revels was being banned by some malign influence which had its living agent in the diminutive creature now confronting her. The empty right sleeve of Raymond's overcoat added to his lop-sided appearance. The black

figure, sharply outlined against the white road and the luminous mist rising from the river, was almost ghoulish in its ungainliness. She could see the Calvary. Raymond had turned his back on it. Instantly she found in him the personification of the impenitent thief.

But she had her wits about her now. Life was becoming too complex in its issues that a girl should handle them alone. No matter what the outcome, her father must take control; but before going to him she must probe this miscreant's full intent.

"Do you imply that you are the person who may lodge an information?" she said, with a calmness of tone that sounded bizarre in her own ears.

"No, no. That is the last thing I would think of," protested Raymond heatedly.

"Or that you feel compelled to acquaint Rupert Fosdyke with his rights as his uncle's heir?"

"He has no rights. His uncle has cast him off deliberately. He is an unscrupulous rascal--witness his heartless philandering with your friend Madeleine!"

"In that event, why have you made revelations to me, which, if true, cannot fail to be hurtful?"

"I want to become your loyal ally in shielding your mother from the consequences of her past mistakes."

"I am almost powerless, Mr. Raymond. Mrs. Carmac will go from Pont Aven soon. I remain with my father. What sort of alliance can you and I form that will protect or benefit her?"

Raymond's small eyes blazed with sudden fire. She had actually helped him to surmount the stiffest barrier. "The best and most enduring of all," he said thickly. "Marry me! Why not? You are free. I shall be a devoted husband. Your slightest wish will be my law. You will not be separated from your parents, with either of whom you can dwell for such periods as you think fit. Marry me, and every ill now threatening your mother will dissolve into thin air!"

At that crisis the image of Laurence Tollemache obliterated that of the little man with the grating voice, and Yvonne could have laughed aloud. But she kept her head. The naive habit of thought induced by close communion with her Breton friends stood her in good stead then, when a false move might precipitate she knew not what ills.

"Is that the price of your silence?" she said, and the clear, precise enunciation recalled her mother in every syllable.

"That is not a fair way to put it," was the hoarse answer; for the strain was beginning to tell, even on Raymond's nerves of steel.

"Let me hear how you put it," she went on mercilessly.

"We would be making a compact to our mutual advantage," he said. "I would gain a beautiful and accomplished wife; you would inherit your mother's millions. We would unite in protecting her and punishing Rupert Fosdyke."

"I see," she said, with an air of careful consideration. "You do not want an answer tonight, I suppose?"

"Time is pressing--horribly pressing."

"In that respect time must stand still until tomorrow. We shall meet then."

She went off without any attempt at bidding him farewell. Raymond glared after her fixedly. He was annoyed, almost discomfited, but not disheartened. He had taken the step that counts. She knew now what lay at the back of his projects, and that was a long stride toward the goal. He was so deeply absorbed in reckoning the pros and cons of every word Yvonne had spoken that he failed to see Tollemache standing outside Julia's until close on him. Even then he could not find his tongue; so he merely grinned. Thus might a fiend gloat over a soul in peril. Was there none to help? Raymond, at any rate, saw a clear road. He was most affable to the porter who was waiting to assist him in undressing. For a man with a broken arm he had struck a shrewd blow in Pont Aven that night.

CHAPTER XIII

SHOWING HOW TOLLEMACHE TOOK CHARGE

Yvonne found her father hunched up in his accustomed chair. He was smoking, and brooding, his gaze centered in the pine logs crackling on the hearth. Thus had she found him each night since his return from Concarneau. He, seldom without a book after daylight failed unless some crony called in for a chat, had not opened a book during many days. He had the aspect of a man crushed by misery. It was borne in on his daughter that he was slowly yielding under an intolerable strain; yet it had become her bitter portion to add materially to a load carried so uncomplainingly.

He looked up as she entered, and essayed a welcoming smile which conveyed a ghostly reminiscence of a joyous past now utterly remote. It cut her to the quick; but she strove to emulate his seeming nonchalance.

"I thought my message would have brought you sooner," he said. "But perhaps you were helping your mother to overhaul her boxes. Mere Pitou gave me the news of the salvage, which has surprised our local experts. This is the first time in the memory of man that Les Verres have disgorged their prey."

"What message, Dad?"

Yvonne removed her hat and coat, and seated herself on a sheepskin rug by her father's side. She had that to say which would be hard for both, and she did not wish to see the agony in his face.

"Haven't you seen Lorry, then?" he inquired.

"No, Dear."

"But that is strange. Lorry left here quite half an hour ago, meaning to ask you to come home. I didn't think Pont Aven could hide you from Lorry if he was bent on the chase."

"Sorry, Dad. Nothing--no one--would have kept me had I known. But I understand what happened. I quitted Julia's about half an hour since. Mr. Raymond was anxious for a brief talk, and we walked to the top of the quay. Lorry would go to Julia's by the mills. That is how he missed me."

She felt her father's body quiver, as a mettlesome horse might flinch under the touch of a spur, and knew that the mere mention of Raymond's name had affected him. It was her habit, when seated at his knee, to catch his hand and draw it over her shoulder, holding it in both of hers, and using it as a sort of stay. She had done this insensibly, and her downcast eyes dwelt on the thin, nervous fingers--they seemed to have shrunk during that time of suffering. The discovery affected her strangely. She could not, she dared not, unburden her soul then. No matter what the cost to herself and others, he must be spared--at any rate till another day of wretchedness was upon them. She realized just in time that a hot tear stealing down her cheek would drop on that dear hand, and bring about an instant demand for an explanation.

With a jerk she averted her head, and the tear fell scalding on her own wrist. Her father misinterpreted the movement.

"Don't stir, Girly," he said. "I have something to say, a confession to make. Remain where you are. I shall cause you pain, and if I find my own anguish mirrored in your eyes, I may falter in my duty."

So father and daughter were animated by the same thought. Each desired only to lighten the shock for the other. Yvonne nestled closer. More than ever was she resolved to keep her woes to herself for the hour. With an effort that cost a cruel biting of her under lip, she contrived to murmur without a catch in her voice:

"You're tired, Darling. Don't tell me you're not. You ought to be in bed and asleep. Let us wait till the morning, and have a nice long chat after *petit dejeuner*."

"No," said Ingersoll firmly. "I promised Lorry I would speak tonight. He--expects it of me."

"Lorry!" she gasped, in a sudden fright born of the knowledge that had come to her in the gloom down there by the whispering river, when a cold-blooded trafficker in her mother's difficulties had offered to sell his secret at the price of all she held dear. "Lorry! How is Lorry concerned in our present troubles?"

"Your troubles are his, Sweetheart. Lorry loves you. True knight-errant that he is, he wants to slay the dragon that would devour you."

"But, father dear, how could he know? How could anyone know?"

In her quick alarm the cry slipped out unaware. Happily, as it transpired,--for there is no telling what John Ingersoll might have done in his anger if Raymond's infamous suggestion had reached him in the present state of tension,--he misunderstood a second time.

"Lorry didn't know, he only guessed," he said gently. "He is a good fellow, and I ached for the sympathy of some man to whom I could talk freely. So, to remove the cloud between us, of which each has been sensible since we came ashore on that Thursday night, I told him the truth, and the whole truth. He urged that you should be told too. He is right. Oddly enough, despite my vaunted repute for wisdom, he saw into the muddle more clearly than I. Yvonne, I did not divorce your mother. I--I regret my action now, when regret comes too late. According to English law she never could have been Walter Carmac's wedded wife while I lived. Girly, forgive me! I have wronged both her and you

grievously."

Yvonne whirled round and flung her arms about the stricken man's neck. There was no pretense now at hiding her tears; but her eyes shone with another light than that of grief.

"Dad," she cried fiercely, "I sha'n't have you torn and harried in this way! I refuse, do you hear? It is my turn to bear some of the suffering, some of the sacrifice. I am young and strong, and you have trained me well for the battle. My mother's story must not become known. We must save her, you and I. Isn't it by such means that our worth is tested? Do you think I'll shirk the ordeal? No, a thousand times no! We can't talk reasonably tonight. We would rend each other's hearts. But tomorrow, when we are calmer, we must look at things fearlessly, and take the road that leads to honor, no matter what the cost!"

Her father stroked her hair to still her frenzy, just as he had often done in the stress of some childish tantrum; for Yvonne had never been a demure little saint, but owned in full measure the defects of a frank and impulsive temperament.

"Don't let us give way to hysteria," he said, smiling wanly. "Of course it was my fault. I cracked up first; but I sha'n't offend again. Perhaps, as you say, we may take a more level-headed view of our difficulties in cold daylight. But, to prepare you, so to speak, I must warn you that your mother's chief enemy is that churl Raymond."

"Raymond!" Again was Yvonne almost choked with apprehension. How could her father suspect the devilish scheme the secretary had hatched? Had Lorry probed the depths of the man's evil mind? Her brain swam; but she compelled her faculties to remain alert.

"Yes--Raymond," her father was saying. "I have no absolute proof; but I am convinced that he overheard your mother's frantic words of self reproach when the Hironnelle was coming up the river. The very agent he is employing in Paris, ostensibly in aid of your quest for poor Madeleine, is really engaged in a search into the early records of our lives, your mother's and mine. The inquiry is a simple thing. If Raymond has not secured the necessary evidence already, it is only a matter of hours before it is in his hands. Then, unless a miracle happens, he can dictate his own terms. Worst of all, your mother will be in his power as long as she lives, and an unscrupulous scoundrel, such as I believe Raymond to be, could cause untold mischief after her death."

Yvonne rose to her feet, and straightened her lithe, slim body. With a determined gesture she brushed away a mist from before her eyes. "I want to ask a few questions," she said. "You will be quite open and candid with me, I know, because it is necessary that we should meet the trials of the next few days with the clearest knowledge of each other's aims. Do you think it possible to make any arrangement with Raymond that would be binding?"

"The blackmailer's appetite only grows by feeding. Pay him a very large sum today, and he will demand four or five times the amount within a month or a year. There is no finality. The wolf may eat to repletion; but it will continue to slay in mere lust of killing.

"Is there no way of defeating him?"

"Lorry, as I hinted, hit on a notion. I have no means of knowing exactly what legal steps Carmac and Stella took to make their marriage valid. Carmac might have been advised to establish, or secure, American citizenship. Moreover, French law may adapt itself readily to American standards. Those are points for lawyers; but I want you to go into the matter thoroughly with your mother, and ascertain whether or not there exists any sort of legal barrier that may serve to keep this jackal from devouring her. That is one reason why I have opened my heart to you tonight."

Yvonne had Mrs. Carmac's trick of wrinkling her brows when in deep thought. Many a time had her father chaffed her on the habit, and pretended to wait in breathless suspense till the oracle announced its weighty decision. But the creasing of the smooth forehead passed unnoticed now. They were no longer light-hearted playmates, but a man and a woman pondering one of life's most harrowing problems.

"Raymond can get nothing at all unless he acts through Rupert Fosdyke," she said collectedly. "Why shouldn't an arrangement be made with him--Fosdyke, I mean? It's all a question of this wretched money. Why shouldn't Mother give it to him and his sisters? Surely they would leave her sufficient to live on?"

Youth is sanguine. Yvonne had reached the same conclusion as Tollemache; that, if money were really the root of all evil, the noxious growth that had sprung into such vigorous existence in Pont Aven since the feast of Saint Barbara might be torn out bodily.

But Ingersoll thought the discussion had gone far enough for the time. Certainly a settlement on reasonable lines might be effected; but it was impracticable to form anything in the nature of a fixed opinion until Yvonne and her mother had talked matters over in the light of full understanding. Something was gained in the fact that the last obstacle in the way of complete confidence between Yvonne and himself had been thrown down. His manner showed how beneficial this belief on his part might prove. He sprang up with a certain alertness of movement that was eloquent of new-born hope.

"No more talk tonight, Mignonne," he cried cheerfully. "Now that we know the worst, we can fight in the open side by side. Hitherto I have felt that I was treating you unfairly in withholding from your ken the most damaging item in your mother's catalogue of worries. Tell her what I have said. I want you to speak without reservation. Then, if she is equally candid, we shall know just where we stand, and whence the main attack may come."

Unhappily Yvonne was aware, when kissing her father goodnight, that the enemy was attacking already; but she

held steadfast to the resolve not to disclose Raymond's brazen scheme at present. The day had produced sufficient wretchedness of spirit already.

So the two parted, and Yvonne, when safe in the solitude of her room, knelt and prayed that some ray of sunshine should pierce the gathering clouds. Then, in more tranquil mood, she forced her thoughts into a new channel by reading some pages of a biography of John Ruskin. By curious chance she came across a passage dealing with Ruskin's ill-fated love for Rosie La Touche, and containing a poignant passage in a letter he wrote to a friend:

"I wanted my Rosie *here*. In heaven I mean to go and talk with Pythagoras and Socrates and Valerius Publicola. I sha'n't care a bit for Rosie there; she needn't think it. What will grey eyes and red cheeks be good for *there*?"

Yvonne closed the book with a snap. That shaft from the bow so deftly wielded by a master archer had pierced her very heart. She loved Tollemache. She wanted her Lorry *here*. If any maleficent influence drove him from her, all the brightness and color would depart out of her life, a pleasant world grow cold and gray for evermore.

Then, being weary yet eminently healthy, she went to bed and slept dreamlessly, and was up betimes in the morning. It was pleasant to see the sun rising into a clear sky above the stunted trees crowning the Toullifot hill. The frosty weather, coming unusually early that year, had lasted far beyond the prescribed brief period of such cold snaps in December. There was little or no wind. It was an ideal day for a walk. Meaning to excuse herself from motoring, and wheedle her father into a long tramp after luncheon,--with Lorry, perchance, to disprove the infallibility of the adage that two is company and three is none,--she warned Mere Pitou that she would return for the midday meal.

"Ah, *tcha!*" said Madame testily. "What between one thing and another, I'm thinking of taking a holiday. Little Barbe could have done all the cooking needed in this house during the past week. Look at your father! Anyone would say I starved him. As for you, flying about and eating scraps and hashes in strange hotels, I'm surprised at you!"

Yvonne assured her irate landlady that the best ragout in Brittany would not lack appreciation that day, and went to visit her mother in more cheerful mood than she would have deemed possible overnight. It was market day, and the Place au Beurre, beside whose old houses the parish church of Saint Guenole reared its modest spire, was alive already with country carts, smart coifs, and velvet jackets. In the larger square across the bridge traders from neighboring towns were erecting stalls for the display of their merchandise, mostly wearing apparel and articles of household use.

Yvonne knew everybody, and everybody knew her. She had a smile and a nod for the Widow Limbour, whose confectionery and sweets had won her heart years ago, for Marrec the barber, Daoudal the baker, Madame Le Naour, purveyor of a strange blend in hats and liqueurs, and Madame Le Garrec, seller of newspapers and picture postcards. Monsieur le Courronc, whose little gallery had held many of her father's pictures, had spared a moment from his artistic wood carving, and was looking out at the crowded marketplace. The Morvans, *Monsieur et Madame*, whose Breton costumes and laces excite the desire and empty the purses of fair visitors in the summer, were in Pont Aven that day, and Canivet the coach builder was standing at the entrance to the yard that houses his industry. Each and all greeted Yvonne. For a few happy minutes she forgot her worries, until a girl met her, and asked shyly:

"Is there any news of Madeleine?"

That took some of the blue out of the sky. Yvonne had to confess that nothing was known of Madeleine except that she had gone to Quimperle the previous day. Her questioner simpered, and passed on. Madeleine's story was already discredited. Much water would flow under the bridge before she was reinstated in the good opinion of Pont Aven.

Yvonne caught sight of Tollemache, standing, with a pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, outside Julia's. (And, by the way, there is no disrespect in this curt allusion to the name of the chief hotel in the village. It is never spoken of locally otherwise than as "Julia's" in English and "Chez Julia" in French. The excellent lady who to a large extent built, and in every other way owns, the property would think her popularity was fading if any more ceremonious description was used.)

Near Lorry were Captain Popple and Jackson, the latter now promoted to a stick and a slow limp. Yvonne would have passed with a smiling "Goodmorning," but Tollemache pocketed his pipe and hailed her. She realized instantly that he was excited about something quite out of the common run, though his air was studiously composed.

"You're going to Mrs. Carmac, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, coloring slightly under the intensity of his gaze, for Lorry had fine eyes, and now they seemed to be looking into her heart; which was so absurd a notion that her cheeks grew redder and redder.

"You won't be there long before Raymond comes in," he went on earnestly. "When he turns up I want you to look out through the window, and touch your chin with your right hand. That's all."

She laughed quite merrily, for sheer relief at the discovery that he was thinking of anything but the fantasy that had caused that riot in her veins.

"Dear me!" she cried. "What does that signify in the code? Is he to be garroted straight off?"

Tollemache laughed too. "Don't ask any questions, little girl, and you won't be told any fibs," he said. "Captain Popple and Jackson and I have some business on hand, and we want Mrs. Carmac and you to be present when we

drive a bargain with the wily Raymond. Now, I sha'n't tell you any more; so you needn't pout."

"I'm not pouting."

"Oh, by the way, if there's any news of Madeleine, get it while the deputation is approaching."

She courtesied, with a demure "*Oui, M'sieur*." Somehow, that morning, despite the unpleasing tidings that might have arrived from Paris, she felt oddly light-hearted.

But the smile froze on her lips when she met Raymond on the steps of the annex, where he had evidently stationed himself in order to waylay her. His slight figure was tightly buttoned up in a heavy overcoat, and he carried another coat over his left arm; so he raised his hat more awkwardly even than usual. Then she remembered that he was going down the river with the salvors, and summoned all her woman's guile to the task of bringing him back to her mother's apartments, in case he had been there already and taken leave. She could hardly have explained her motive. It sufficed that Lorry had made a point of Raymond's attendance under given conditions, and she was determined that his wish should be obeyed.

"I've received a telegram from Duquesne," he said, plunging at once into a topic on which they could converse freely without the inevitable constraint of a first meeting after the extraordinary disclosure of the preceding night. "It's satisfactory, in a sense. He was unable to approach Madeleine, because Fosdyke met her on arrival at the Gare St. Lazare. But he followed them. Fosdyke took Madeleine to a small hotel, and left her there. Duquesne will endeavor to see her this morning."

"Has he obtained her address?" inquired the girl eagerly, sinking her loathing of the man in the importance of his statement.

"No. I'll show you the message, if you'll hold this coat for a second or two."

"Come to Mrs. Carmac's room."

"Sorry, I've just seen Mrs. Carmac, and am making for the quay."

"I insist," she said, with a very creditable effort at a coquettish glance. "We can't stand talking here. Come. I'll not keep you more than a minute."

Raymond, veritably astounded by her manner, as well he might be, followed her without demur. He was elated, almost excited. A new and entrancing vista opened before his mind's eye. Were the difficulties that yet loomed so large about to vanish into thin air? If Yvonne proved gracious, what else was there to bother him? Each upward step on the creaking stairs seemed to be another rung in the ladder of fortune. He did not know it, but he had reached the highest point of the climb when he stood in Mrs. Carmac's room on the first floor.

Yvonne had hurried on ahead, and put a warning finger on her lips when she cried aloud, ostensibly to her mother but actually for the secretary's benefit, "Mr. Raymond is coming in. He has news of Madeleine, and I didn't want to wait outside lest Peridot should pass. I mean to avoid Peridot until, by one method or another, I get in touch with Madeleine."

The explanation was not only plausible but strictly accurate. When she crossed to the window and made the agreed signal to Tollemache she might well have been looking out to learn if Peridot was coming down the Toulifot.

Lorry and his companions were already on the way. They had seen the meeting in the doorway, and assumed that Yvonne had drawn Raymond in her wake. Nevertheless her stanch friend and devout lover was watching the window. He grinned broadly, and waved a hand. Why, she knew not; but her pulses throbbed. Some remarkable thing was going to happen. She felt it in the air.

Then she focused her thoughts on what Raymond was saying. He had produced the telegram, the text of which ran exactly as he had given it.

"As I may be absent all day," he added, "I took the liberty to tell Duquesne to wire the result of his interview with Mademoiselle Demoret to Mrs. Carmac. You have his address, and can communicate with him without waiting for me."

Mrs. Carmac nodded. She knew of the arrangement already, and meant to inform Yvonne of it herself. She was quick-witted, and her daughter's manner carried a vague consciousness of the imminence of some matter more important even than the tangle in which Madeleine Demoret was involved.

"That sounds practicable," said Yvonne, rather for the sake of detaining Raymond than by way of agreement, since her father's revelation had destroyed every shred of confidence in the man himself and his Parisian helper. "Monsieur Duquesne can at least let us know where Madeleine is staying. Then I'll risk all in a personal appeal."

"I would advise you strongly to act only through Duquesne," said Raymond. "He has wide experience, and is thoroughly trustworthy. You can depend on his discretion. He----"

There was a knock at the door. Tollemache entered. After him came Popple, red-faced and serious, and Jackson, with a bulldog expression on his Cockney features.

"I want you to give me five minutes, Mrs. Carmac," said Lorry gravely. "Certain facts have reached me----"

"I'm sure you'll forgive me," broke in Raymond, with glib assurance, "but I am accompanying the salvage party, and I'll walk slowly on to the quay."

"No, you'll remain here!" said Tollemache. "What I have to say concerns you more than any other person breathing. Just listen! I'll come to the point quickly. Mrs. Carmac, I have good reason to believe that this man Raymond stole your jewels. I believe he has them in his possession at this moment. Of course I'm fully alive to the risk I run in bringing such a charge if it is not substantiated. Now, Raymond, if you're in a hurry, hand over those pearls and diamonds. By staging the *piece de conviction* you'll save a lot of bother. Then the court, which is now assembled, can pronounce sentence, and you'll know exactly where you are, which should be a relief."

Tollemache paid no heed to the half-repressed cry of amazement that burst simultaneously from the lips of both women. He was gazing sternly and fixedly at Raymond, whose sallow face had suddenly grown livid. During a few trying seconds it really seemed as though the rascal thus roundly accused of a dastardly crime would collapse in a faint. But he rallied, and blurted out a protest in a voice choked with fury.

"How dare you?" he cried. "You hound, to attack a defenseless man! Mrs. Carmac, I appeal to you! Do you allow me to be so grossly insulted in your presence?"

"*Defenseless* strikes me as the right word," said Tollemache, ignoring Mrs. Carmac's involuntary attempt at interference. "Of course you intend it as a plea on account of your injury; but unless I am mistaken--in which case I stand to be shot at in any way you choose--you got your arm broken when rifling Mrs. Carmac's trunk. However, I'll explain the whole business to your complete satisfaction. Give me those pearls and the other things. I mean to have them now! Don't think you can escape by bluff, you miserable whelp! Hand them over, or I'll take them, and use as much force as may be necessary!"

Tollemache strode forward, and grasped the lapel of Raymond's coat. Then indeed it was more than probable that the secretary would drop where he stood. He trembled like one in a palsy, and his lips twitched convulsively, but could only mouth incoherent sounds.

Tollemache did not hesitate. Unbuttoning the overcoat, and endeavoring to avoid touching the bandaged arm, he thrust a hand into the inner right-hand pocket of Raymond's jacket. At that the accused man uttered a queer squeal of mingled rage and despair, and struck wildly at his adversary with his left fist. Tollemache merely moved his head, and the blow passed harmlessly over his shoulder. In the same instant he withdrew something from Raymond's pocket, and stepped back.

"What's this?" he said coolly, exhibiting a small square case, covered with Morocco leather.

Mrs. Carmac, who had watched this trying scene with manifest distress, looked at the object that Tollemache held in full view. Her eyes dilated in sheer terror; but recognition dawned in them, and she cried excitedly:

"That is the case which contained my pearls!"

Tollemache pressed a spring, and a lid flew open. There, coiled within, reposed a string of pearls. Mrs. Carmac gave them one glance; then she turned on the man who had been so dramatically compelled to relinquish his booty.

"Oh, how could you do such a thing?" she wailed brokenly. "You knew how I prized them--the one gift of my husband's which I valued."

"Your husband's!" snarled Raymond. "Which husband? Carmac?"

She flinched as if he had dealt her the blow intended for Tollemache; but her champion was in no mind to permit a discomfited rogue to vent his spleen on a woman.

"Unless you're a bigger fool than you are unquestionably a knave, you'll hold your tongue," he said, speaking with a vehemence that silenced Raymond for the moment. "Now let us have no more humbug. I don't want to hurt you. Where are the other articles? Either give them up yourself or tell me where to find them."

Though quivering with passion, the detected thief apparently realized that he had nothing to gain by further pretense. From the left-hand outer pocket of his jacket he took two cases similar in size and material to that which held the pearls, though the color of the leather differed in each instance. He ignored Tollemache, and gave them to Mrs. Carmac. Even in that supreme instant his brazen nerve did not fail him.

"This dispute really affects you and me," he said. "I suggest that you discuss it with me privately."

"At present, Raymond, I would call your attention to the fact that you are discussing things with me," said Tollemache firmly. "Mrs. Carmac," he went on, "kindly glance through your belongings, and tell me if there is anything missing."

She obeyed, though in a pitiable state of nervousness. In the cold, clear light of a December day, diamonds and rubies, sapphires and emeralds, winked at her evilly as her trembling fingers turned over the contents of the cases, which had evidently been extracted from a larger receptacle so that they might be disposed of in Raymond's clothing without attracting attention by their bulk.

"Yes," she faltered, "I believe that every article is here."

"Now," said Tollemache, turning again to the ashen-faced Raymond, "I've proved my charge in the presence of witnesses. The stolen goods have been found in your possession. I admit that it is sheer good luck alone that swung the investigation my way. Had you been searched tonight, we might have whistled for the actual proof, because Mrs.

Carmac's property would have been lying beneath the sea on the reef, unless it happened to be picked up by the diver. The facts are simple. You were with Mrs. Carmac in the deck saloon of the Stella during the gale. When Mr. Carmac shouted to his wife that the yacht had broken down, and would be dashed ashore within ten minutes, Mrs. Carmac fainted. Neither you nor anyone on board realized that the vessel would strike on Les Verres and not on the coast.

"Being a thief in heart, you remembered that a small fortune was lying in those two boxes, and you thought you had plenty of time to open them, secure both the money and the jewels, and trust to luck for escape when the yacht was wrecked. If either of your employers was saved, and inquiry seemed possible, you had the plausible excuse that you were safeguarding the most valuable part of their property. You might have found some difficulty in explaining how you came to be in possession of duplicate keys; but you took the chance. I must say that for a man at the very gates of death you displayed a cool nerve which might command admiration if applied to a worthy object.

"As it happened, there was one man who kept an eye on you. Jackson here was below at the time, preparing tea. The sudden racing of the engines, the stoppage of the screw, and the fact that the yacht was drifting told him what had occurred. Then he heard the cry, 'All hands on deck!' and was himself running along the gangway when he saw you rush down the main companion and dart into the cabin occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Carmac. Thinking you might need his help, he followed you.

"By the time he reached the door you had Mrs. Carmac's box open, and had snatched the jewelcase, which, being locked, you stuffed into a breast pocket. Then you turned to Mr. Carmac's trunk, and were about to insert a key, when the yacht struck, and fell on her beam ends. The heavy trunk rolled on top of you, and broke your arm. Jackson thought you were killed; but in the same instant he was flung across the lower saloon, and had his ankle dislocated. When he was lying there you managed to crawl in and join him, and each of you was carried out by the crew later. Is that the correct story, Jackson?"

"True as the Gospel, every word, s'elp me!" said Jackson.

"So you see, Raymond, this poor fellow didn't know what to think during the last few days. He couldn't swear that you actually took the case, because you were kneeling beside the box, and your back was toward him. But you took something, and until the search was made and the robbery discovered he could not be certain what it was. He had his suspicions, but wisely kept a still tongue; though, had he left Pont Aven earlier, he meant to tell me what he had seen. Last night he and Captain Pople and I reviewed the facts carefully. In the first instance, we believed that you meant to drop the jewels overboard today, and then cause a careful search to be made in that exact place. I know why you were willing to relinquish your loot. I'll deal with that side of a nasty business in a minute or two. Secondly, I called on Dr. Garnier early this morning, and both he and the nurse assured me that, notwithstanding the physical agony you were suffering when brought ashore, you insisted on removing your coat yourself, placed it on a chair, and stipulated that your clothes should not be touched by anyone. Of course I had to do a bit of guessing; but I guessed right."

Yvonne, now that the shock of an extraordinary and painful scene was yielding to a sense of its paramount importance in view of Raymond's previous attitude, was gazing at Tollemache with new wonder in her eyes. The light-hearted, happy-go-lucky dabbler in art had conducted this remarkable investigation into a crime with the easy assurance of a skilled lawyer. He had marshaled his facts lucidly. He had decided on the one method that would insure complete success, and had adopted it without hesitation. Each trenchant sentence had a sledge-hammer effect on the culprit, who saw his inmost thoughts laid bare mercilessly, yet in a manner wholly devoid of heat or bluster. She could not find it in her heart to pity Raymond; but she was aware, for the first time in her life, of a species of awe with regard to Tollemache.

The man who was judge and jury and prosecuting counsel in this new and thrilling form of criminal procedure had not, however, reached the end of his brief. He nodded to Pople and Jackson.

"Thanks," he said quietly. "We've carried that job almost to a finish without a hitch. I'll join you on the terrace when Mrs. Carmac has settled matters with this chap."

Raymond made one last effort to assert himself. "I have not interfered with your stage effect," he sneered. "It was not necessary. I shall explain to Mrs. Carmac, and to none other, why her jewels came to be in my care."

"Don't think it!" said Lorry, smiling pleasantly into the vengeful face raised to his. "I'm not through with you yet. You're dealing with a man now, not with a terrified woman. So long, you two! I'll soon make an end of our unworthy secretary!"

The two men saluted silently and went out.

When the door had closed on them Tollemache drew some sheets of manuscript from a pocket.

"You've heard the evidence and verdict, Raymond," he said, piercing the defeated schemer with unwavering eyes. "Now I shall proceed to pass sentence. I have jotted down here a full confession. In return for my clemency you will undertake never to interfere in any way with regard to Mrs. Carmac's second marriage. You understand exactly what I mean. You and I both know why you were giving up to the vagaries of the sea thousands of pounds' worth of pearls and diamonds.

"This bargain is between you and me. Mrs. Carmac herself is not a party to it. I return her jewels, and she asks no questions. So long as you hold your tongue, and leave her in peace, she will ignore the facts I have made known this morning. Breathe one syllable affecting her private affairs, whether today, or next year, or in twenty years, and your signed confession of the theft is handed over to the proper authorities. You need not hope to extricate yourself by appeals or threats. Your fate doesn't rest with Mrs. Carmac, but with me, and if the occasion arises I'll crush you as I would a scorpion. Sit down, if you're tired, or feel faint. But keep your wits active.

"It's now or never for you! You either agree or go to jail, and if you choose the latter course, you'll find French law devilish unpleasant to any scoundrel who tries to bolster up his offense by trading on a woman's bygone history."

CHAPTER XIV

A BRETON RECKONING

Raymond squirmed, but signed the confession. Tollemache forced the belief that he was in deadly earnest. The blackmailer had either to accept the proffered terms or concoct schemes of reprisal in a cell. At the last moment Mrs. Carmac intervened.

"I know what it means to be tempted, and to yield," she said sadly, realizing now that her own somewhat checkered record was not hidden from anyone in that room. "You, Mr. Raymond, have only yourself to blame for your misfortunes. Even your physical injury is the direct outcome of an attempt to steal the few trinkets I prize. But I would never forgive myself if I turned you out into the world penniless and suffering. Please tell me the truth. Have you any money?"

"V'ery little," came the sullen answer. "I have spent a good deal during the last few days."

"But how?" she cried, genuinely surprised. "You are under no expense here."

"Since candor is in the air, I may as well acquaint you with the facts," said Raymond bitterly. "You blurted out your own secret, and I thought I saw a way of improving my position. I should have won too if it were not for a piece of cursed ill luck in the finding of those boxes. I employed Duquesne to ferret out your early history in Paris. If I disappear, you had better pay him well, or he may take it into his head to go to Rupert Fosdyke with the story. Of course I don't expect you to place much credence in anything I say; but mere commonsense should show you that the only safe course is to send me to Paris with sufficient means to secure Duquesne's silence. That is a fair offer. Take it or leave it, as you will. Let me point out, however, that the Madeleine Demoret affair supplies a reasonable excuse for my journey, and, if you are as generous as you can afford to be, I promise to devote myself wholly to the task of diverting any suspicions Duquesne may have formed as to the motive behind my previous instructions."

Tollemache, with a wisdom beyond his years, seemed to know when to strike and when to hold his hand. Raymond's suggestion was eminently reasonable. The evil spirit that had raised all this commotion could best allay it.

"Come, Yvonne," he said. "Let us leave Mrs. Carmac to determine this matter as she thinks fit. I offer no opinion. Mrs. Carmac has not compounded a felony,—that responsibility rests with me,—and, if she chooses to employ Raymond in a personal undertaking, I cannot interfere. He knows the penalty if she is troubled by any future act of his. I'll hunt him round the globe!"

Yvonne never knew what terms her mother made with Raymond. That they did not err on the side of parsimony may be taken for granted. Long after the tornado that swept through Pont Aven that Christmastide was forgotten by all save a few, the ex-secretary was able to buy a share in an automobile agency.

Lorry was hugely amused as the two descended the stairs. "Socrates believes there isn't any guile in my composition," he grinned. "I wonder what he'll say when he reads the screed to which that beauty has just put his left-handed signature?"

"Dad will agree with me that you carried a very difficult matter through with great skill, Lorry," said Yvonne.

"But the joke is that if Raymond stuck to his guns I was done for. Who cares tuppence whether a skunk like him goes to prison or not? Not a soul! But the whole press of Europe would stand up on its hind legs and roar if the Carmac millions were thrown into the melting pot of the law courts. Don't you see, Yvonne, I had to rush Raymond off his feet. I've broken about twenty statutes made and provided. If he had shown one quarter the nerve in that room which he displayed when the Stella was drifting on to the reef, he could have laughed at me."

"For all that, Lorry, you were very clever, and I think you're a dear," said Yvonne quietly.

Neither her father nor her lover should ever be told now of the sordid compact that Raymond had put before her during that memorable walk by the side of the Aven. She would simply erase the hateful record from her mind; but she could not close her eyes to the certain fact that Raymond's daring project had shriveled into nothingness because he saw that, no matter what the consequences, Mrs. Carmac's daughter would never marry a common thief. That phase had passed like the stupor of a nightmare. The vital problem presented by her mother's future remained insoluble as ever.

In the crowded Place they met Peridot. There was no chance of avoiding him: he had seen them leaving the annex. Before they could join Popple and Jackson beneath the sycamores the fisherman barred the way, cap in hand.

"Pardon, Ma'mselle," he said, speaking with a civility that hardly masked a note of defiance, "have you any news of Madeleine?"

"Nothing definite, nothing reliable," she answered, striving valiantly to convey the impression that the mystery of Madeleine's whereabouts would soon be cleared up satisfactorily.

"Nothing that you would care to tell, Ma'mselle—is that it?"

"No, Peridot. Madeleine said she was going to Quimperle; but I have heard that she is in Paris. That is all I know--probably all that anyone in Pont Aven knows."

She had flushed under the fisherman's penetrating, scornful gaze not because of the effort to conceal a scanty budget concerning her wilful friend's flight, but out of sheer sympathy with the man, whom she knew to be consumed with wrath and shame.

"Then I shall be justified in killing any man who calls her a strumpet?" went on Peridot icily. He had used a Breton word which Tollemache did not understand, but Yvonne's gasp of horror was eloquent, and Lorry came to the rescue.

"You must have taken leave of your senses, Peridot, to address Mademoiselle Yvonne in that manner," he said.

The fisherman spat, an unprecedented thing. "*Gars!*" he growled. "Taken leave of my senses, have I? I'd like to see you if your girl had bolted with the first well dressed dandy who made eyes at her. Scratch a Russian and you find a Tatar, they say. Scratch Monsieur Tollemache and you might find--Peridot!"

With that he left them, swaggering off among the throng of peasants as though he had not a care in the world. Yvonne's troubled glance followed him. Here was a new Peridot, a man out of whose life was fled the light-hearted gaiety and spirit of good-fellowship that had made him so popular in the village. No sooner, it would seem, was one cloud dispelled than another gathered. Yvonne shuddered with foreboding; for in those gray-green eyes she had seen the lurid light of a volcano.

During some days peace reigned in that small circle of a small community with which this chronicle has dealt so intimately. Mrs. Carmac did not hurry her departure. She promised Yvonne that on arriving in London she would consult Bennett as to her exact position. She neither affirmed nor denied that Walter Carmac had renewed his American citizenship. Ingersoll, when the girl brought a faithful record of the discussion between her mother and herself, drew the only reasonable inference,--that no steps had been taken in that direction. The knowledge was disheartening. Not without cause did he say to Tollemache that he had fathomed his wife's nature to the depths. Were it possible for her to end her days in real communion with the husband and child she had forsaken deliberately, she would gladly have renounced wealth and social position. As it was, she meant to cling fiercely to the bulk of her possessions, thinking that thereby she would have a stronger hold on Yvonne, since she hoped to draw the girl nearer by the lure that money alone could spread so enticingly.

Undoubtedly she had it in mind to provide ample revenues for the Fosdyke family, with guarantees of large interests in the estate at her death, and thus close the only source that threatened discredit and loss. But this was the half-measure that so often spells disaster. Its outcome lay in the lap of the gods, and the gods were frowning on her.

Meanwhile she lingered on in Pont Aven. The equable climate suited her health, she said. She dreaded the formalities with regard to the succession, and wanted to leave all such disagreeable details to the lawyers. Until Madeleine Demoret's affair was settled she wished to remain within call of Paris. These were excuses. They deceived none, Yvonne least of any. The girl's affection never wavered for an instant when the interests of father and mother were at war. Her father could not be at ease until the woman who had broken his life was far from the village, and the daughter was on pins and needles of anxiety that the mother should depart.

Raymond--suddenly reverted, to type, become once more the discreet, unobtrusive secretary--reported that Madeleine and Fosdyke seemed to have quarreled. He had visited the girl, and found her uncommunicative and rebellious. Fosdyke had gone to England. He supplied Madeleine's address, and Yvonne wrote, in friendly and sympathetic strain, asking for news of her welfare. By this time Ingersoll had advised the cessation of any effort to persuade her to return. It was not in human nature to expect the girl to endure the slights that would inevitably attend her reappearance. To her Pont Aven must henceforth be a sealed Paradise. If ever she saw the place again, she would tread its familiar ways a stranger and unregarded.

At last came a letter from Madeleine herself. Its tone was honest, and very much to the point. She had imagined that Rupert Fosdyke meant marriage. When she was disillusioned she spurned him, and had obtained a situation as a nurse, her country speech and Breton costume being passports to ready employment. It was better so. Paris takes a more lenient view of certain aspects of life than Pont Aven.

Singularly enough, during those days no word of love was spoken between Tollemache and Yvonne. The mine was laid, and the smallest spark would fire it; but the spark was not forthcoming, and for the excellent reason that Lorry wished Mrs. Carmac and her millions far away before he asked Yvonne to marry him. If, in some distant time, the girl's mother insisted on enriching her, it would be difficult to defeat her intent. But it was Yvonne he wanted, not Mrs. Carmac's money. He was more attached to Ingersoll than to his own father, a narrow-minded Philistine who had cut himself adrift from a son because the ingrate preferred art to money spinning.

If once he and Yvonne were wed, Mrs. Carmac's ambitious schemes in behalf of her beautiful "niece" would go by the board. Circumstances had made it impossible that father and mother should meet, even at their daughter's wedding-

-and where could such a marriage take place but in Pont Aven, and who should spread the wedding feast but Mere Pitou?

So Lorry bided his time; though Yvonne read him like a book, and the knowledge that her mother's continued residence in the village alone prevented Lorry from taking her in a bearlike grip and telling her that she was the one woman he had ever loved, or ever would love, gave active reinforcement to her anxiety concerning her father, whose well-being, she was convinced, depended on the prompt and complete restoration of life to its normal plane.

Thus, when preparations were being made by Mere Pitou for the Reveillon--that cheerful feast which enlivens the midnight of Christmas--Yvonne did not hesitate to tell her mother that on that occasion at least they would see little of each other, and perhaps less in the immediate future, as she was going with her father to Concarneau.

Mrs. Carmac took the hint gracefully. As a preliminary she sent Captain Popple and Jackson to England; the one to become a sort of factotum in her Surrey house, the other to join the staff in her Charles Street residence.

"Ask your father, as a last concession, to allow you to travel with me as far as St. Malo when I leave on the twenty-sixth," she said. "It will be a long and weary journey otherwise. Have you a friend who can accompany you? You would need to stay one night in St. Malo and return here next day."

Ingersoll did not demur. It was arranged that Barbe should go with Yvonne; so one heart, at least, rejoiced, since the mere prospect of such an outing brought untold joy to a little maid who regarded St. Malo as a place so unutterably remote that it figured in her mind only as a geographical expression somewhat akin to Timbuku and the North Cape of Lapland.

Yvonne left her mother about four o'clock on Christmas Eve. Tollemache was waiting for her, and together they strolled to the cottage. There was much to be done, because Mere Pitou expected a large party. Peridot, though specially invited, had refused to come. Indeed, his manner was so gruff that Barbe, who acted as messenger, was moved to tears while relating the reception accorded her.

"*Tcha!*" snorted her mother. "That's a man's way, all over. When a woman gives him the slip he'll sulk and paw the ground like an angry bull for a week or so. Then he'll drown his sorrows in cognac, and at the next *Pardon* you'll see him squaring up to some pretty girl as if the other one had never existed. What about that sardine boat which the American lady promised him? That should widen his mouth when it reaches the quay."

Mere Pitou never alluded to Mrs. Carmac by name. To a Frenchwoman the word presented no difficulty; but, owing to some whim, Yvonne's "aunt" was "the American lady," and was never promoted to greater intimacy of description in the old woman's speech.

"The vessel is ordered in Concarneau," said Yvonne. "With complete equipment it is to cost five thousand francs. Mrs. Carmac has also given another five thousand francs to the notary to be invested for Peridot; who is well aware of both gifts, but has neither called nor written to express his thanks."

"The worm!" cried Madame. "*Peridot*, indeed! He ought to be christened *Asticot!*"

As an *asticot* is a maggot, it was well that none but Yvonne had overheard Mere Pitou's biting comment, or the fisherman's new nickname might have stuck, its point being specially appreciable in a fishing community.

The weather that night was peculiarly calm and mild, even for Southern Brittany. Shortly after midnight Ingersoll, who had been watching Yvonne and Tollemache dancing the gavotte, in which the girl was an adept, and her lover a sufficiently skilful partner to show off her graceful steps to the utmost advantage, suddenly decided to smoke a cigar in the open air.

He quitted the studio by a French window, and strolled into the garden, which stretched some little way up the steep slope of the hill, and through a narrow strip toward the road on one side of the cottage. Owing to the feast, Pont Aven was by no means asleep; but the streets were empty, as the people were either entertaining or being entertained. In a house near the church a girl was singing the "*Adeste fideles*" in a high, pure treble. Those in her company, men, women, and children, burst into the harmonious chorus, "*Venite, adoremus; venite adoremus in Bethlehem.*" As the appeal swelled and then died away, and the girl's voice took up the solo, Ingersoll remembered the verse, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God," and his eyes grew dim with unshed tears.

The hymn ceased. From some more distant gathering came the strumming of a banjo in the latest Boulevard refrain. Ingersoll smiled at that. Not often might any man hear twenty centuries summed up so concisely. He was about to reenter the cottage when a woman, hatless, but with head and face veiled in a shawl of black lace, appeared indistinctly in the roadway. He knew instantly that it was his wife. Only two women in Pont Aven walked with such ease and elegance, and they were Yvonne and her mother.

A second later he heard the familiar creak of the garden gate. So she was coming in! He was utterly at a loss to account for this amazing intrusion. He had counted implicitly on his wife's sense of good breeding and fairness restraining her from any frenzied effort to undo the havoc of the past, and a spasm of anger shook him now because of this threatened invasion of his small domain. At any rate she should not have the hysterical satisfaction of placing him

in a false position before Mere Pitou and her guests, to say nothing of Yvonne and Tollemache.

He retreated into the deep shadow of a lofty retaining wall, whence he could see without being seen. If, as he expected, there was a commotion among the dancers when the unexpected visitor was announced, he would escape by way of the open hillside, and remain away during some hours. Then, in the morning, Yvonne and he would end an intolerable state of things by leaving Pont Aven for some unknown refuge until Lorry told them that the coast was clear.

Thus do some men plan when beset by some unforeseen difficulty. Be they wise or foolish, they seldom learn that in those crucial moments of life when events of real importance take place they are as straws caught in a whirlpool, and no more capable than straws of predetermined governance of their deeds and movements.

Ingersoll was barely hidden before he received a fresh surprise. His wife had not gone to the door. She was in the garden, and coming round to the back evidently meaning to look in on the revelers and remain unseen. She halted but a few paces short of the place where Ingersoll was standing, and soon he knew that she was crying in a heartbroken way. Her very attitude, the care she took to restrain the sounds of her grief, and not become visible to any eye that chanced to look out through the open window, showed that she was in the depths of despair. By a rapid revulsion of feeling the man's heart ached for her. Strive as he might, and strong as were the dictates of the social laws that closed and bolted the door of reconciliation, he was tempted, or it may be divinely inspired, to make known his presence, and utter words of healing and forgiveness.

But the opportunity, no less than the impulse, passed as quickly as it had risen.

The dancing had stopped. Evidently in response to some question of Yvonne's, Tollemache came to the window, and peered out.

"Ingersoll!" he cried.

There was no answer. The artist could not be detected in any event, and the change from a well lighted room to the external darkness temporarily blinded Lorry's sharp eyes, or he might have noted the slight, shrinking figure beneath one of the apple trees.

"He's not there," he said, speaking over his shoulder to Yvonne.

The girl came nearer. "I saw him go out," she persisted.

"Yes, of course. I saw him too. He stopped to light a cigar. Bet you he's gone for a stroll. You remember last year at this time he went to Julia's for half an hour."

That was an unfortunate recollection on Lorry's part. He was aware of it instantly; but Yvonne helped to slur it over by saying that she had no doubt "Dad" would soon return. Then the two rejoined their Breton friends.

Mrs. Carmac clearly meant to take no further risk of discovery. She hurried away. After a momentary indecision Ingersoll followed. His action was inexplicable, even to himself. It arose, perhaps, from a desire to make certain that his wife reached the hotel. Such a motive was at least comprehensible. It came within the bounds of that intelligence which regulates ordinary human affairs. But there is another subtler spirit essence which sends out through space its impalpable, invisible, yet compelling influences. Sometimes the storm-tossed soul makes silent appeal for help, and finds response in some other heart whence aid is unsought and unsuspected.

Howsoever that may be, John Ingersoll followed his wife, and Pont Aven was soon in an uproar, when the news spread that while Monsieur Ingersoll was rescuing *l'Americaine*, Madame Carmac, from the waters of the harbor, Peridot, easygoing, devil-may-care Peridot, was battering Rupert Fosdyke into a hardly recognizable corpse on the open road near the hotel.

In a village rumor of that sort seldom lies. Both these sensational statements were true; though the one became widely known far more speedily than the other. In fact, Peridot's crime had witnesses. A party of villagers, coming down the Toulifot, heard voices raised in altercation. Then there were sounds of a scuffle, and a tall man was seen to fall, while a shorter man stooped over the prostrate body and struck blow after blow with an iron belaying pin.

The women screamed; the men ran forward to seize the would-be murderer. He offered no resistance, but said calmly: "When one meets a viper one batters its head. It is the only safe thing to do, eh?"

He seemed to find comfort in the thought. He repeated it many times, in one form or another. When the police came, and a sergeant who happened to be a great friend of his had the miserable task of arresting him and charging him with murder,--for Rupert Fosdyke was dead; would have died under any one of those half-dozen fiercely vindictive blows,-- Peridot was quite cheerful.

"*Cre nom!*" he cried. "It is not often one finds a snake hereabouts at Christmastime. This one made a mistake. It shouldn't have come to Pont Aven, where we wear stout sabots!"

Then he broke gaily into one of Albert Larrieu's Breton songs:

*"Toc! toc! toc! toc!
C'est a Concarneau
Qu'on voit de belles filles,
Prestes et gentilles,
Dans leur petits sabots!"*

"Shut up, Peridot, for the sake of the good God!" muttered his friend. "Come, Man! There's your mother looking out. She heard your voice!"

"Is that you, Jean Jacques?" came a shrill cry from a bent figure etched in the lighted rectangle of an open door in a cottage higher up the hill. "Time you were home and in bed!"

"Don't worry, Mother, I'm in good company," he shouted. "Here is the law on one side of me, and a dead viper on the other! I'll go straight tonight, never fear!"

Mere Larraidou saw her son walk off down the hill with his friend the sergeant. In pity the men who were lifting a corpse desisted from their gruesome labor till the door was closed again.

When Ingersoll carried the body of an insensible and half-drowned woman into Mere Pitou's there was a rare stir.

By chance the lesser tragedy which took place in the river beneath the line of dwarfed oaks had passed unnoticed by the villagers. Greatly wondering, and wholly at a loss to account for his wife's behavior, the artist had followed her into the main road, and kept her under close observation when she failed to cross the bridge and hurried along the narrow street leading to the harbor.

Once clear of the last mill, he could watch her from a greater distance, because the valley widens with the stream, and the hills are neither so high nor so precipitous. On and on she went, past Madame Marechale's café, past the triangular grass plot where roundabouts and swings and canvas theaters stand in the summer, past the jolly little Hotel Terminus, and along the picturesque Chemin du Hallage; which is not a carriage road, but a pleasant footpath, bordered on the one hand by pretty villas and on the other by the tidal stream, with here and there beneath the stunted trees a rustic seat overlooking the water.

At such an hour, long after midnight, the last pollard oak marks the Ultima Thule of Pont Aven. The nearest house in front is nearly a mile away, and reached only by a narrow track through the gorse.

Some vague terror caused Ingersoll to quicken his pace, and a few seconds later to break into a run. Perhaps his wife heard him, and, fearing interference, made up her mind to delay the great adventure not a moment longer. Uttering a wailing cry, she threw herself into the water. The tide was falling, and as the main stream travels close to the right bank at that point she was swept away as though some giant hand were waiting to clutch her.

Commending his soul to Heaven, Ingersoll raced ahead to a rocky plateau which, although submerged now, drove a broad and fairly level causeway far into the center of the river. He was just in time. He saw a white face, a hand, whirling in the current. Plunging in, he grasped desperately at the place where he judged the body might be. Then began a fight, a life and death struggle against a relentless, overwhelming force. Yet somehow he conquered, and found himself with a limp body in his arms, wading knee deep in a tract of mud and slime.

Though slightly built and frail looking, and, owing to the worry and confinement of his recent life, rather out of condition, once he had regained his breath he made light of carrying his wife to the cottage.

He could not tell why he brought her there, rather than to the hotel. He remembered afterward giving the matter some thought; but he was either deterred by the sight of so many people in the Place,—brought thither by the affrighting news of murder,—or by the notion that a further scandal might be averted if the unhappy woman were tended by those whom he and she could trust. None of Mere Pitou's guests knew that Mrs. Carmac had been rescued from the estuary. They thought she had mistaken some byway, and fallen into the Aven, a quite possible accident to a stranger on a dark night.

So a second time Yvonne stripped her mother's slender form of its water-soaked garments, while Mere Pitou loudly invoked the aid and commiseration of various saints—but did not forget to fill hot-water bottles and wrap them in flannel before applying them to the unconscious woman's benumbed body and feet. Dr. Garnier came, and shook his head, muttering of "shock," and "derangement of the nervous system," and in the midst of all this turmoil and furtive fear of the worst consequences arrived Celeste, searching for her mistress, and almost incoherent with her story of Rupert Fosdyke's fate. He had arrived in the village by the half-past four train that afternoon, and after a long talk with Madame had dined alone. She was told that he went out shortly before midnight, and met Peridot, and was straightway beaten to death.

After some hours of horrible uncertainty Mrs. Carmac recovered sufficiently to speak.

"Where am I?" she muttered, staring about wildly.

"At home, Dear, with me," whispered Yvonne.

The dazed eyes slowly gathered consciousness of Yvonne's presence. "Who took me out of the river?" she went on. "The man who has loved you all his life, Dear," said the girl softly. She had the fixed belief now that her mother would surely die, and was resolved that her last hours should be made happy by knowledge of her husband's devotion.

"What! John saved me! Was it he who followed me?"

"Yes, Dear. He risked his life for your sake, and carried you here unaided."

"A good man," came the low murmur. "I was not worthy of him."

"Mother, you are to try and sleep now. The doctor's orders must be obeyed. Otherwise you will be very, very ill."

"I am sick unto death already, dear one. But I shall do as you bid--to please you--and John. One word! Tell him--tell him--that I am poorer than when I left him. Rupert is here. He gloated over my downfall. He knows everything, and would hear of no terms. No, it is not Raymond's doing. I asked that. He met some man, who knew us in the old days, and who had read the account of the wreck. I am a pauper of sorts, Yvonne. Please ask your father not to turn me out."

"Mother!" wailed the girl in a voice strangled with grief. "You must not talk like that! You'll break my heart!"

"Ah, *tout passe*, Yvonne, even broken hearts! You will be far happier in your cottage than ever I was in a mansion. Yes, I'll sleep--if only to please you--and John. Tell him I said that, will you?"

Next morning Ingersoll, who, thanks to the exertion demanded after the plunge into the river, was not one whit the worse for the wetting, sent the following telegram to Bennett:

"Rupert Fosdyke met his death here last night, and Mrs. Carmac was nearly drowned. Both events closely bound up with succession to Carmac estate. Probably you will understand. Can you come at once?--INGERSOLL."

That afternoon came the reply:

"Profoundly distressed. Crossing tonight. Wire reports concerning Mrs. Carmac's health Southampton and St. Malo.

"BENNETT."

Yvonne wept with sheer gratitude when her father said that, with Dr. Garnier's permission, he would visit her mother. She had not dared to suggest it; but Ingersoll knew that his action had added one more link to the chain of love that bound his daughter and himself. Dr. Garnier, of course, was aware of no reason why the woman should not meet her rescuer; though he might have been startled had he seen the look of terror that darkened her eyes when she found her husband bending over her.

"Don't be afraid, Stella," said he. "I am not here to reproach you. Be content, and live! We want you to live, Yvonne and I."

"John, forgive!" she murmured.

"I do forgive, Stella, as I hope to be forgiven!"

"John, how could I have left you?"

"That is all passed now--merged in the mists of long years. You will be made happy here. I mean what I say. You are in Yvonne's care, and in mine, and always in God's. Believe that, and you will soon be restored to health and to such happiness as life can bring."

She sobbed convulsively, and he called Yvonne in haste, thinking that perhaps he had done more harm than good. However, the invalid rallied after he had gone, and seemed to gain strength, though slowly. Next day she was wracked by the first symptoms of pneumonia.

When Bennett arrived she was conscious and free from pain. He had not been seated by the bedside many minutes before he put a curious question.

"Do you feel able to sign a will?" he said.

She smiled wistfully. "Have you not been told?" she said. "I shall lose everything. My second marriage can be proved illegal."

"I am not quite sure of that. I only want you to pull through this present illness. But it is well to prepare against all eventualities. Would you wish to constitute your daughter your sole heiress?"

She was beyond the reach of surprise, and contented herself with a fervent yes.

"I have prepared the necessary documents. Listen now, while I read," and the woman's weary, puzzled eyes dwelt on the lawyer's grave face as he recited the testamentary clauses by which "Stella Ingersoll, otherwise known as Stella Carmac," left all her real and personal estate to "her daughter, Yvonne Ingersoll."

"Now we'll get witnesses, and remember that you sign your name Stella Ingersoll," said the lawyer, with a cheerful and businesslike air. "Mr. Tollemache will be one witness, my clerk another, and little Barbe Pitou a third; so you need not worry at all because of the change of signature."

Forthwith, in the presence of Lorry and Bennett's clerk, and the scared Barbe, Mrs. Carmac signed her name in a way that was strangely familiar, though she had not seen it written that way during two decades. A precisely similar will was executed in the name of "Stella Carmac."

Bennett had not erred in his judgment. The pneumonia developed a high temperature that night, and Yvonne's mother died without recovering consciousness. She was buried at Nizon. To silence gossip, and by her husband's emphatic wish, she was described on the monument erected to her memory and to that of Walter Carmac as "Stella, wife of the above-named Walter Carmac, and formerly known as Stella Ingersoll."

The lawyer's extraordinary haste and anxiety with regard to the two wills was explained after the funeral.

"I have always had reason to believe that the validity of the marriage might be questioned," he said, when he had drawn Ingersoll, Yvonne, and Tollemache into the privacy of the studio. "When Mr. Carmac executed the will which may now, under advice, be set aside, he caused two copies to be made with blank spaces for names and dates. A few days later he lodged a sealed envelope with me and another with his bankers, and each bore the superscription:

"This document is to be kept always in its present condition, and never opened unless my wife's succession to my estate shall be disputed. In that event the document must be produced and acted on."

"I broke the seal yesterday, soon after Mr. Ingersoll's telegram came to hand, and was not surprised to find a will, properly filled in, signed, and attested, leaving Carmac's estate to 'Stella Ingersoll, formerly wife of John Ingersoll, artist, at one time resident in the Rue Blanche, Paris,' and dated subsequently to that already in existence. So, you see, all these tragic happenings might have been averted. Rupert Fosdyke could never have touched a penny of his uncle's money beyond the provision made for him in both wills."

But a white-faced girl looked at her father, and their eyes met, and each knew that a Power not to be controlled by any human agency had brought about the horrors that had agitated their beloved village during that memorable month.

And, when the clouds disappeared, and the sun shone on a Brittany pink with apple blossom, Yvonne herself had to ask that absurd fellow Lorry whether or not he really wanted to marry her, because he was hanging back shamefacedly, for no better reason apparently than the ridiculous one that he had no right to woo and wed a girl so rich as she. At least if she didn't exactly say "Will you marry me?" she did the next thing to it by telling him that she and her father had decided to regard themselves merely as trustees of the Carmac millions for the benefit of their fellows. They would touch little, if any, of the money for personal needs. The notion was thoroughly distasteful to both, and they would help each other to find the best and wisest means of getting rid of the incubus.

"So, you see, Lorry, with the exception of some of my mother's jewelry, which I know she would wish me to keep and wear, I shall be quite poor," said Yvonne demurely.

That settled matters completely. They were in a secluded part of the Bois d'Amour. How could locality be better named? The wedding took place before the summer, and they roamed through Switzerland in June.

Madeleine? Madeleine is a certificated nurse in a big Paris hospital, very smart in her nice uniform, and thoroughly devoted to her profession.

Peridot? What French jury would convict Peridot of murder when his story was told? His advocate almost moved the judge to righteous indignation against the iniquitous Fosdyke, and Peridot was let off with a light sentence. He came back to Pont Aven, was received with open arms by the village, and sailed away in his own *vague* to pursue the elusive sardine. Last year he married little Barbe. So Mere Pitou's views anent fishermen as husbands must have been modified by Peridot's ownership of a fine boat and good money invested in French rentes.

Pont Aven, save for the riotous month of August, is still unchanged. A new house springs up here and there, and rumor has it that sometime soon, maybe when the gorse is in flower next summer, a new launch will replace the old one which has to be coaxed daily to Port Manech and back during the season.

But that is all--nothing to make a song about. Mademoiselle Julia, ever busy, growing younger each year, still cracks jokes and encourages art; though, to be sure, her opinion of cubism and futurist pictures is distinctly unfavorable to both forms of excess. She is always ready with a smile and the right word. If, for instance, anyone asks her if she knew Yvonne, and Ingersoll, and Lorry, and where Mere Pitou's cottage stands, you should see the way she jerks her head on one side, and hear her rattle out, with a merry twinkle in her eyes:

"*Qu'est-ce que tu veux que je te dise, moi?*"