Tregarthen's Wife

A Cornish Story

by Fred Merrick White, 1859-1935

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Illustrations

Chapter I

A Garden of Sleep.

THERE are no poppies in the garden of sleep, though, if you come there in the season of the year, there are many flowers. And these flowers are born when you and I talk of yesterday’s snowstorm, and the children’s twelfthcake is still a fleeting, unstable joy. Then Tregarthen Island is gay with flowers, great beds of them. There are daffodils and narcissus knee deep, and violets fragrant and richly purple under the cactus hedges. And they nod and droop and flourish to the booming plunge of the Atlantic surges.

Where is it? What matters it? Not so many leagues from Tintagel, for they tell tales of King Arthur, and there is a deep apple orchard in the heart of the island where Lancelot slew the dragon whose teeth were flaming swords. And the gladioli flourish there in scarlet profusion.

The island of Tregarthen is a long, green, luscious slice from the mainland, some eight miles long by five in width. It is sheltered from the east and north by granite walls rising sheer and grim for a thousand feet and its music is the Atlantic thunder and the scream of innumerable sea-fowl. There are gardens in the sea-pools, there are wide stretches of sands golden as Aphrodite’s hair, and the sky is fused into a blue so clear and ambient that the eye turns from it with an

ecstasy of pure delight. You shall see presently what manner of place this kingdom by the sea is.

"Miriam," the princess said, "Miriam, this is paradise."

Miriam hoped that no harm had come to the small, black box. The remark was inconsequent, as the princess pointed out in her clear high voice. What did it matter if the Trevose fisherman who had brought them across was a little clumsy? Had Miriam noticed what a splendid torso he had, and what a picture he made with his blue eyes and brown skin, seared and tanned, and his white beard?

The princess stood watching the landing of her boxes. She could not have been anything else but a princess, of course, she was dressed so beautifully. Nobody in these parts had ever seen such dresses before, not even the travelled ones who had known great cities like Plymouth and Exeter.

She was tall and fair, with eyes as blue as the bounding sea, and hair as golden as the sands she trod. She carried herself imperiously as the daughter of a conquering race, and there were diamonds on her fingers and in the coral of her ears. A woman learned in the mysteries of the toilette would have told you that that heather-mixture coat and skirt, engirt by a silver buckled belt, could only have come from Paris. The same wise woman would have added that the princess was American and very rich. In which the wise woman would have been absolutely correct. To mortals she was known as Mary Blenkiron, only daughter of the late Cyrus K. Blenkiron of Pittsburg, Pa., who, as all the world knows, died two years ago—in 1885—after a heartbreaking financial duel with Zeus Z. Duncknew, in which he lost four million dollars, dying a comparative pauper with a mere ten million dollars or so. Thus do some men make failures of their lives.

Mary was something more than an heiress and an exceedingly beautiful girl. She was good, she was clever, headstrong of course, and fond of her own way. Other girls besides heiresses have been known to show the same weakness. And what manner of girl Mary Blenkiron was, you will see for yourself presently.

Between the girl and her companion there was contrast enough. Miriam Murch owned to fifty, to save the trouble of explaining that she was ten years less; and though she was thin and gaunt and brown, her skin was unwrinkled and healthy. There was a suspicion of down on her upper lip; her mouth was wide and humorous; and it was only when you came to look into those wonderful brown eyes of hers that you forgot to feel that here was a woman who ought to have been born a man.

Here was a girl who had started twenty years ago, with one of the first typewriters, to carve her way to fortune. At forty she was the absolute owner of three flourishing daily papers, all of which she had built up for herself. A busy, happy, shrewd, kindly, hard-working woman whose only grievance was that she could not enter Congress, and run for the Presidency. But this calumny might have been, and probably was, a libel of Mary Blenkiron's.

Michael Hawkes, the boatman, was staring in blank astonishment at a crisp piece of paper Mary had placed in the desert of his huge brown palm.

"I'm no scholar," he said defiantly. "What's a man want with book learning so long as he can count the cod and mackerel?"

"It's a five pound note for your trouble," Mary explained sweetly. "The only literature I know that meets with no adverse criticism."

Hawkes regarded the paper suspiciously with his head on one side. He had heard of banks and kindred institutions. James Trefarthen up to Tretire had lost all his money in one.

"You couldn't make it half a crown?" he asked, tentatively.

Mary laughed, and Hawkes so far forgot himself as to smile. Your Cornish fisherman, joking with difficulty even more than a Scotchman, is not given to levity of this kind, but the man who could hear Mary Blenkiron laugh unmoved, would have been mentally or morally deficient.

"You are corrupting the native, my dear," Miss Murch said. "Give him talents of silver and let him depart in peace."

Hawkes went off with three half-crowns, having scornfully refused half a sovereign, as savouring of lustfulness, and departed with the suggestion that he would come and take the ladies off again presently, Mary's insinuation that they intended to remain being received with scorn.

"Tregarthen won't let you stay," he said. "No visitors are allowed on the island. Seeing you would come, you had to come—being a woman."

With this Parthian shot, Hawkes climbed into his boat, and slowly pulled for the mainland. Nobody ever did anything in a hurry there. Energy would have been resented as an outrage on the feelings of the community, except at such times as the sea rose in its wrath and the trail of the rockets smote the reeling sky over beyond Tregenna Sand.

Miss Murch sat down on the little black box, which had been carried from the boat by Hawkes, and looked calmly around her. It was a February afternoon, and yet it was possible to sit in the sun without the smallest personal discomfort. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers, outside, the sea was getting up, a long ground-swell was rolling in from the Atlantic. When this ground-swell ran for days together, even in the finest weather, it was impossible for boats to land on Tregarthen. Hawkes had mentioned this, but Mary had regarded it more as an advantage than otherwise. Even Tregarthen could not control the elements.

"I think, my dear," Miss Murch said, in her clear, incisive tones, "I think it is time that you and I came to an understanding. As a hard business woman I am entitled to an understanding. To please you I have come four thousand miles. To please a girl who takes advantage of my weakness—"

"And the love you have for me," Mary said parenthetically.

Miss Murch put on her pince-nez—this when she was going to be terrible. Strong men, even unscrupulous financiers, had trembled before the flash of those glasses. Mary laughed.

"I don't care," she said—"I really don't care. I came here because the founder of our family was originally a wanderer from Tregarthen. He was persecuted for his religion, and he fled to New England. He was one of the original Pilgrims who came over in the MAYFLOWER."

"According to statistics," Miss Murch observed, "there are at the present time no less than 250,000 American families claiming direct descent from the original Pilgrim Fathers. I met one in New York the week before we sailed. He had a nose like a scimitar, which nose he used largely for the purpose of articulation. His name was Vansleydon."

“An impostor,” Mary said calmly. “But you know that what I say is true, because you have seen my ancestress Marcia Blenkiron’s diary. And that diary was actually written on this very island. All those delightfully quaint phrases were actually penned here. Think of it, my dear, think of the delight of exploring the island! I want to see the place where Amyas Blenkiron saved the life of his rival, and where Marcia found the dying Spaniard after the Spanish galleon, SANTA MARIA, was wrecked here. And I believe you are as interested as I am.”

Miss Murch candidly admitted the weakness. As a matter of fact, Marcia Blenkiron’s precious diary was in the little black box with the rest of Mary’s diamonds, and hence the anxiety.

“I’m an American, and proud of the fact,” Miriam said. “But I wish my country was a trifle older. I wish we had a history, a past, as the people have here. That is why I can enter into your longing to see the place. But shall we be allowed to see it? The island belongs to Tregarthen—not Mr., or Sir, or Lord anything, but simply Tregarthen. It sounds delightfully feudal. The island belongs to Tregarthen, who makes all the laws, pays neither taxes nor excise, and you have heard them say what a peculiar man he is. The people here are a form of Christian Commonwealth, a self-supporting community, who pay no rent or dues of any kind and who hold communication with nobody. Tourists who have heard of the place and tried to get a footing here have been rigidly excluded. And I don’t fancy that Mary Blenkiron, beauty and heiress, will care to be shot off the island like a common trespasser.”

Mary was bending over a sea-pool, clear as the ambient air and filled with the most brilliant pictures in many hues. The reflection of her exquisite face was smiling back at her.

“Miriam, where is your boasted friendship? Did you ever know a man who could refuse me anything? You will see what you will see. Let me once smile on that man and he is lost. Then you shall fix your glasses and glare at him, and we will walk over his prostrate body.”

She waved her wet jewelled hands lightly towards a floating grey gull.

“I am not going to be expelled from the land of my ancestors,” she said. Then she lay back, filled with the pure delight of being.

And surely all the joys of life were bound up in that one slim young person with the diamonds on her fingers, and the diamonds, too, in her sparkling eyes. Health, wealth, beauty, and a volume of fresh sensations—new, and with the leaves uncut—before her; what more could the heart wish for?

She grew grave in the contemplation of the perfect things about her. Though it was but February, the sun was full of grateful warmth, and the breeze, blowing in from the wide Atlantic fields, was crisp and clear. Behind lay the island, with the flowers and orchards and green meadows, while against the granite cliffs of the mainland the long ground-swell was thundering. Each long-crested wave broke with a booming plunge, millions of yards of creamy white lace seemed to be creeping ribbon fashion along the cliffs. Almost at Mary’s feet an old dog-seal gravely disclosed his grizzled moustache and wide speculative eyes ere he sank like a stone again.

“This is going to be absolutely delightful,” the girl cried. “Miriam, we will stay here till we get tired of it.”

Miss Murch murmured something relevant to the policy of her papers, and the shortcomings of a certain managing editor of hers. Nevertheless the charms of the place were not lost upon her.

It would be good to stay here, pleasant to explore all the scenes disclosed in that quaint old diary. What would Tregarthen say when Mary stood confessed as a relative of his? For Marcia Blenkiron of the diary had once been Marcia Tregarthen in the days of old.

"I fear we shall have trouble with him," she said, *à propos* of nothing.

"With Tregarthen, you mean?" Mary replied. "Not at all, my dear. We shall manage him entirely by kindness. And if he discloses Napoleonic leanings we must bring up our Guards and spring the Great Secret upon him. There may perhaps be no occasion to use the Great Secret at all. But if the worst comes to the worst we hold the key to the position."

"True," Miriam murmured. "I had forgotten that. Still, it is time we made a move of some kind. Here comes a native."

A man lurched down to the beach. He was dressed like a sailor, with a red stocking-cap on the back of his splendid head. A young man, lean-flanked, broad-chested, full of life and vigour. Burnt to a deep mahogany was his clear grained skin, his dark gipsy eyes met Mary's blue ones fearlessly. There was curiosity and frank admiration in his glance.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

A fisherman beyond question, a fine type of a young Cornish fisherman, fearless, frank, meeting every man—and woman—on terms of absolute equality. Your fisherman has been lord of himself for many generations, and knows nothing of the slimy by-paths to wealth, and calls no man master. The gaoler of dubious millions was no greater autocrat than these Phoenician-descended fisher-folk.

But Mary was slightly annoyed. She came on one side of her family from a humble stock, therefore she was disposed to take her present exalted station seriously. Miriam smiled. She would have loved Mary less but for her little weaknesses.

"That magnificent creature has not properly appraised you," she said. "He is in darkness as to your millions. Your diamonds convey nothing to his eye. Tell him what you are worth, tell him about those Chicago tramway shares. Your beauty he evidently appreciates."

Mary laughed; her displeasure was as elusive as breath on a mirror.

"Will you tell us where we can find Mr.—I mean Tregarthen?" she asked.

"Tregarthen has sent me for you," the man replied. "I am Gervase Tretire. Who are you, and what is that woman's name?"

Mary explained faintly. For the first time in her life she wanted an ally. She glanced at Miriam, who was silently enjoying the situation. To see Mary getting the worst of an encounter with a mere man was delightful.

"It is kind of Tregarthen, very kind," Mary said, with a thin sarcasm utterly lost on one listener. "And when Tregarthen gets us, what do you suppose he will do with us, Mr. Tretire?"

"Eh?" Tretire demanded. "What's that?"

Mary repeated the question. The man had never been addressed as Mr. in the whole course of his life, and possibly hardly recognized his patronymic from the lips of another. Slowly he comprehended.

"Send you back again," he said promptly. "Pack you off to the mainland soon as the swell runs down. We have no strangers here."

"He says 'strangers' out of politeness," Miriam murmured. "But his tone plainly denotes that he means tramps. We are suspicious characters, Mary."

"Well, sir, and meanwhile what can we do?"

"You can go to the Sanctuary," Tretire explained.

"The Sanctuary!" Mary echoed. "Delightful! Do we do penance there?"

"I don't know about penance," Tretire said dubiously; "but you clean out your own cell and cook your own food."

Mary listened entranced. There was a mediaevalism about this far beyond her most sanguine expectations. Tretire was obviously melting. No man is insensible to the flattery of an interested audience. Even as he spoke a figure came down to the beach towards the little group, a tall thin man, with a refined dreamy face and eyes like the sea. In years he could have been no more than forty, but his hair was quite white. The contrast was not displeasing; in fact, it was exceedingly fascinating.

Tretire turned to him easily, yet not without deference.

"Tregarthen," he said, "these are the women you spoke of—Miriam Murch and Mary Blenkiron. Mary Blenkiron is the pretty one."

Chapter II

Tregarthen of Tregarthen.

THE man with the refined features bowed with the grace of courts and palaces. He was a Louis, a Charles, a Bayard and troubadour at the same time. Yet he might have been—indeed, from his own point of view he was—a monarch welcoming strangers to his court. A handsome man with a dreamy intellectual face, the face of a poet, and the hard firm mouth of a soldier. A man who formed his own judgments—generally wrong ones—and who acted up to them to the detriment of himself and everybody about him. But you will know more about that presently.

"I wish I could say I was glad to see you," he said. "Did they not tell you at Trevose that under no circumstances were strangers permitted within the Dominion of Tregarthen? I am king here, I make my own laws, I can imprison my subjects without let or hindrance. I could send you to gaol, and the British House of Commons has no right of interference."

"All these things," Mary said, "did they tell us at Trevose. And, being women, that is exactly the reason why we are here."

Something like a smile trembled on Tregarthen's thin lips.

“However,” he replied, “we must make the best of it now that you are here. So long as this ground-swell runs it is impossible for a small boat to reach the mainland. After a big storm out in the western ocean the swell sometimes runs for days.”

“The longer the better,” Mary murmured.

“Perhaps you will have cause to modify your opinion,” Tregarthen suggested dryly. “Sometimes we are compelled to have people here from the mainland, as last year, for instance, when the herring failed us entirely, and half the people at Trevose were starving. But they have to conform to our regulations, and I fear I cannot make any exception in your favour. In the Sanctuary are our poor—it is a workhouse, if you like to call it so. There you will have to reside, indeed there is no other place for you. You will wear a blue woollen dress with white cuffs and collars. Nothing like this, oh no.”

He indicated Mary’s faultlessly cut tweed gown and her jewels with a fine contempt. Once more Miriam smiled. A little colour crept into Mary’s cheeks. The performance of walking over the man’s body was not working out in strict accordance with the programme.

“It might help us a little,” she said coldly, “if I were to tell you who we really are. I am an American.”

Tregarthen glanced once more at the diamonds.

“So I should have gathered,” he said pointedly.

“Of English extraction,” Mary went on rapidly. Really, this monarch was too painfully outspoken. “My name is Blenkiron, and I claim and can prove direct descent from the Amyas Blenkiron of this island.”

“Pray go on,” Tregarthen replied, “I am deeply interested.”

Mary melted in a moment. She spoke of the diary which she knew almost by heart, she touched on scenes in the history of the island which Tregarthen had deemed to be known only to himself. Beyond question the girl was all she claimed to be. Tregarthen admitted this as a monarch might who interviews a claimant to an attainted estate.

“I cannot deny what you say,” he admitted, magnanimously. “Some of these days I should like to see that diary which is more than once quoted in the archives of the Dominion.”

“I will try and get it for you,” Mary said demurely.

Thus Mary’s diplomacy. But then she had a good and pressing reason why she should not show Tregarthen the diary. Why she did not desire to show it to him, and what happened on the occasion when she did show him, will be told in due course. Her eyes were full of smiling promise.

“Are we still doomed to the Sanctuary?” she continued.

“Unfortunately, yes. Indeed, there is nowhere else you could possibly go. And if you were my own sister I could not violate one of my rules for you. In my own house I have male vassals only, so you could not come there. The cottages, I am ashamed to say, are of the humblest. We are miserably poor here, we can only fish rarely, and our flowers are a little later than those of Scilly, and therefore fetch less money at Plymouth and Bristol. Fortunately my people have no taxes to pay and no rent. We are a Christian Commonwealth and I am the Lord Protector.”

Cromwell might have said it or Wolsey. For one brief moment Mary was actually deeply impressed.

"Have you no manufactures?" Miriam asked. "No source of employment for the poor women? You know what I mean?"

Tregarthen's eyes flashed. The spring of fanaticism that Miriam had guessed at from the first was tapped. His speech gushed out like water from the living rock. Miriam watched him with all the palpitating interest the student of human nature feels for a new type.

"I would cut off my right hand first," he cried. He strode to and fro across the wet sand; he had forgotten his audience. "Rather would I see my people starving in a ditch. I say your modern commerce is a hateful and loathsome thing; that what you call business is a delusion and a lie. And now you have dragged women into it, women who should remain pure and unspotted from the world, who should remain at home and make it beautiful. Once start a manufactory here, and the purity and morality of my people are doomed. Poor they may be, but honest and upright they are, and so they shall remain while there is strength in my arm and breath in my body. Let the men stick to their flowers and their fish, let them toil in the sweet air and in God's blessed sunshine, and they will be as their fathers before them—good men, with no guile in their hearts. Do you know that there has been no crime of any kind on this island for over a century? But once you send greed and the love of gain amongst us, you destroy our purity for ever. And anything would be better than that."

"There is a great deal in what you say," Miriam replied. "And at the same time a deal of nonsense. Do you know, sir, that I have made a large fortune by my own efforts?"

"You have my profound sympathy," Tregarthen said with feeling.

Indeed, he was so obviously sincere that all the contemptuous anger died out of Miriam's heart.

"You are utterly and absolutely wrong," she said. "There is a large field waiting for women, a field that calls to her. Oh, I would not have her different from what she is for all the wealth in the world. But I have found scores of them starving with temptations such a man as you cannot dream of," Miriam said, glaring behind her spectacles. It was Mary's turn to look on and enjoy the fray. "Do you know what I would do with you if I had my way?"

"Could one hazard a guess as to the wishes of a woman?" Tregarthen asked.

"Well, I would send you out into the fierce hard wolfish world with just one solitary half-crown in your pocket to get your own living. I would starve your eyes clear and your mental vision clean. Ah, you should learn what it is to be a defenceless woman, you should learn what opportunities you are wasting here. That's what I would do with you, if I had the chance."

"A woman at work, at man's work, is an outrage before God," Tregarthen cried stubbornly. "You will never see that here."

"What if your flowers fail?" Mary asked.

"We starve, or near it," Tregarthen admitted. "But we are patient. Complaining is for the children. They are tried in the fire of affliction, and they endure it with silence."

Miriam listened quietly, but the gleam of battle was in her eyes. On woman's mission she was the greatest authority in the United States. The Employer was no god in the car, nothing more than the conduit pipe from which flowed Capital. And here was an Employer, a king of Employers, who regarded starvation as one of the first attributes of labour. That man would have to be taught things. When she had her glasses on, Miriam would have taught things to the Czar.

"Do you starve with them?" she repeated.

"Yes," Tregarthen replied simply, "I do."

"You starve deliberately in the land of plenty? Do you know that I could make your island as fine a paying property as Monte Carlo? Of course I don't mean as a gambling resort. Do you know that I have three newspapers with an average weekly circulation of five million copies? I could 'boom' your island—every good American during the European tour would come here. Huge hotels would spring up. From thirty to forty thousand pounds annually would find their way into the pockets of your subjects. There would be no more trouble, no more starvation—all would be peace and happiness."

"Don't," Mary gasped. "Please don't, Miriam."

The light of battle died out of Miriam's eyes and she laughed. At the same time she was filled with bitter contempt for Tregarthen. The man was so regal and yet so bigoted and narrow. But still he starved with the rest when the flowers failed.

"Is your flower harvest now?" she asked.

"From now till the beginning of April," said Tregarthen. "That is, during the next six weeks. When the Scilly and French crops begin to flag we step in. Of course we get nothing like the Scilly prices, because they have what the tradesmen call 'the cream of the market,'"—he pronounced the phrase with an air of supreme contempt—"and then we get snow sometimes and frosts. You will see for yourself that our flowers are more robust than those from Scilly. But even a good season barely serves us with food."

"And the pilchards?" Mary asked.

"They only come once in two or three years now. At the top of the island, at Port Gwyn, you will see fifty or sixty deserted, dismantled cottages. That was once my most thriving village. But the pilchards failed and failed, and the villagers dropped off and died one by one—of starvation."

"They couldn't have done that in America," Miriam snapped. "They would have hustled round for something to do. And if you had stepped in with your antediluvian ideas, they would have deposed you."

Tregarthen smiled in a pained manner. This newspaper woman was a terror to him; but he got to love her in time, as everybody did. For the present most of his speech and all of his eyes were for Mary. He had never looked upon so bright and glorious a creature as this before. Mrs. Guy, the Rector's wife up to St. Minver, was a handsome woman, but she had no loveliness, no dresses like Mary. He turned for relief to Mary.

"Show us your flowers," she said.

Tregarthen silently led the way beyond the long hedge of cactus and oleander bushes to the fields beyond. Here was a valley surrounded by a high foliage, palms, bamboo shoots and pampas grass, a warm and sunny valley filled from end to end with sheets of flowers.

Mary gave an involuntary cry of delight. So far as the eye could reach, there were nothing but blooms set out regularly with narrow grassy paths between. There were daffodils, big tranquil yellow and blood-red blooms, waving narcissus, jonquils, and beyond these again vivid flashes of gladioli and tulips and great waxen-headed hyacinths, stiff and splendid. There were tiny green hollows, too, filled with violets. Besides these, there were other flowers that Mary had not seen before.

The sun was shining clearly over this paradise, the air was heavy with perfume. From beyond the rampart hedges came the boom of the sea. Tregarthen surveyed the scene with an air of pride.

"This is our main garden," he said. "We have no place in the island that is so well protected as this. There are orchards and corn-fields, and on the sloping sides to the west we grow our potatoes. But this is the spot where our hopes and interests are centred."

"How large is it?" asked Miriam, the practical.

"About forty acres altogether. Most of our womenkind are here, you see."

There were women and girls harvesting the flowers, young and old, perhaps some five score altogether. They were dressed in plain blue woollen gowns short in the skirt, they had strong boots, and homespun black stockings, and on their heads were stiff frilled caps that looked like fans placed gracefully at the back of their heads. As one or another stood up, Mary noticed the freedom and grace of their carriage. One, a girl, passed with a frank bold glance, but with no vulgar curiosity in it, though the people she saw were strangers. Mary moved towards her in a friendly manner.

"Please may I speak to her?" she asked Tregarthen.

"Surely yes. You are going to stay here a few days, you are going to dress like the rest, and live like them too. Jane, come here."

The girl advanced fearlessly. "Yes," she said; "do you want me, Tregarthen?"

She was absolutely natural and self-possessed, she answered all Mary's questions in a manner that many a Society aspirant might have envied. She spoke of the harvest of the flowers, the planting of the bulbs, of the constant clamour of the dealers for more foliage, which they were unable to give without diminishing the vitality of the parent bulb. And all this time she was opening out a new world to Mary.

The skin under its olive varnish was clear as milk, her dark eyes were utterly fearless, and yet there was the reflection of a tragedy in them. But then, there were times when starvation was perilously close at hand.

"I should like to see more of that girl," Mary said, when Jane had departed, nodding over a bunch of daffodils.

"You can see them all as much as you please," Tregarthen said regally. "You shall see all the machinery of the island. Meanwhile I have had all your belongings removed to the Sanctuary. When you have had supper I shall be glad for you to assume the garments provided for you. To-morrow you may explore the island at your leisure, and will perhaps do me the honour of dining with me at one o'clock."

There was dismissal in the tones of the speech. Mary did not know whether to resent it or not. She had forgotten for the moment that this man and his ancestors had been rulers of Tregarthen for seven hundred years.

“There is one thing you have forgotten,” she said.

“Indeed,” the Protector asked, “and what is that?”

“To show us where the Sanctuary is. Do they expect us there? Are rooms prepared for us? Shall we be in the way?”

“Everything is ready for you. There is always room in the Sanctuary. You will draw your rations and sup at the common table, after which you are free to do as you please till ten o’clock, when all lights are extinguished. You will perhaps do me the honour of dining with me to-morrow. One o’clock.”

He bowed low, with a sweep of his soft felt hat, and went his way. Mary stood watching him until he was out of sight.

“A fine man, a handsome man, and a man who lives entirely for his people,” she said, not without enthusiasm. “Miriam, I feel as if I had slipped back half a dozen centuries. We are going to have a good time here.”

“Yes, and these people are going to have a good time later on,” Miriam snapped. “A splendid man if you like, but a visionary and a fool. What business has he to starve these people when they might have peace and plenty? Some of the finest crops in the kingdom might be grown here—a little enterprise might change the whole aspect of the place. Look at that splendid girl who spoke to us just now. She might have been a duchess, only she is too handsome. And yet you saw the shadow of the tragedy in her eyes. Tregarthen ought to be made to get his own living or starve. If we could only persuade him to take a voyage round the world! Shall we save these people, Mary?”

Mary’s eyes gleamed. “Yes, yes,” she cried. “The lesson shall be taught—taught kindly if possible, but taught all the same. It seems horrible to think of famine in connection with a paradise like this. That man must be brought to his knees. If not, we will invoke the aid of the Great Secret.”

Miriam nodded approval. What the Great Secret was and how it affected Tregarthen will be seen all in good time. For the present Mary pleaded a wholesome and unromantic hunger, and a desire for the Sanctuary and rest.

The Sanctuary was over beyond the flower garden, they were told, amongst the orchards where the apple trees were, and whence came the cider in due season. The two visitors climbed up and looked down into the valley. Then they turned to one another with a cry of admiration and delight.

A shelving broken valley lay below them, a green pleasance fed and watered by a stream fringed by ferns—maidenhair, kingfern, and the like. There were hundreds of trees in the orchards, apple trees just touched with tender emerald points where the buds were bursting. And back in the valley was a long low stone house covered to the quaint twisted chimneys with creepers, out of which mullioned windows peeped. A more perfect specimen of an old abbey it was impossible to imagine. All about it lay wide green lawns gay with flowers.

“It is Tennyson’s ‘haunt of ancient peace,’” Mary cried. “We only want the moan of doves, and the murmur of innumerable bees to complete the picture. Did you ever see anything so lovely? And to think that we are actually going to live in that delightful place!”

Miriam was duly enthusiastic. Perhaps she was also thinking of the frost and snow, and of the tragedy in Jane’s splendid eyes. And the man who owned this

paradise in his ignorance and folly seeing the tragedy of those eyes day by day yet doing nothing to avert it.

"I'll fight him," she thought, "fight him and beat him on his own ground. No mortal man has the right to play Providence like this."

Mary just caught the last few words. "But he starves with his own people," she said.

"Fine excuse, truly," Miriam cried. "I knew a girl, a rich girl, who would have given her opinion with considerable freedom to a less picturesque host than ours. Don't let the glamour of it overwhelm you, Mary; don't blind your eyes to that man's awful folly. I could render the place rich and prosperous in a year without so much as brushing the dew off a single illusion. It's monstrous, Mary, perfectly monstrous. Every woman here has her living in her own hands, and a good one, too. Don't you remember what the diary said about the Spanish lace?"

Mary recollected. It was all coming back to her now.

"But suppose the art is lost," she suggested. "My ancestress, Marcia, had it, and so had two other women in the island. They learnt it from the survivors of the Spanish galleon after the defeat of the Armada. It was a great art, the making of that Spanish lace. I saw some of it in Paris the other day, modern make, quite, and they asked me ten guineas a yard for it—"

"And you bought it, of course?" Miriam smiled.

"I plead guilty," Mary admitted. "It was like a lovely cobweb. And to think that once they made that kind of lace here, to think that somebody on the island may still possess the art. Do you think it possible that such can be the case, Miriam?"

Miriam shook her head and pointed towards the Sanctuary.

"Let us go and see," she said. "There is a deal of promiscuous knowledge to be gained by asking questions."

Chapter III

The Sanctuary.

A BROAD path, bordered on each side by flowers, led down to the Sanctuary, and an old sun-dial with some monkish inscription stood before the open door. It was all singularly quiet and beautiful, and yet everything was strongly eloquent of poverty, from the bare windows to the rusty lichen strewn apple trees with which the homestead was surrounded.

"A wholesale pruning of these trees would be an advantage," Miriam said critically. "All this is monkish, and mediaeval, and distinctly Romanish. And yet Tregarthen is a Protestant. What does it mean?"

"In the brave old days, Tregarthens were Catholics," Mary explained. "The only one in the family who made a noise in the world was Rupert Tregarthen, who took a prominent part in the Reformation. It is all in the diary, and accounts for this monastery here."

They passed under a noble archway into a cloistered quadrangle beyond. On the smooth green a number of rooms or cells abutted, shaded by the long delicate tracery of the cloisters. At the far end was one large lofty room once a chapel, doubtless, but now used as a refectory, or common dining-hall. In the centre of the lawn, round what had once been a fountain, a little group had gathered.

They were men and women, old, and past work. As Mary turned round she saw a second refectory, and this she judged correctly to be given over to the men. But just for the moment she was more fascinated by the group round the ruined fountain. How old and worn and faded they looked, and yet how clean!

Their life's work was finished, and they were in the autumn of their days. They seemed perfectly happy and comfortable in the sunshine. It seemed impossible to connect famine and starvation and death with these people, for they sat amongst flowers, the Atlantic surges were the music of their dreams, and the air they breathed was the breath of life itself.

They turned towards the newcomers with that frank free gaze Mary and her companion had noticed in Jane and Gervase Tretire. There was no adulation, no class difference here, not even in Tregarthen's case, though they would have done anything for him. They bowed gravely, and one, a very old white-haired palsied man, said something that sounded like a welcome. Then they fell to talking again, save for one woman, as if the strangers had not existed. Nothing could have been in better taste. They were talking of the sea, ever talking of the sea, the boats, the pilchards, the big take of mackerel 'over to Trevose.' Sometimes in bad weather they reverted fearfully to the flowers, but usually they had only one subject and that was the sea.

One of the women detached herself from the group, and crossed over to Mary and Miriam. The former smiled in pure delight. She saw a woman well stricken in years, a woman bent with seven decades of trouble and care and anxiety. Once she had been tall, and she was still beautiful, despite her plain woollen dress. The fanlike cap on her head was no whiter than her abundant hair. There were wrinkles on her faded brown face, innumerable wrinkles like the markings on the rind of a melon, yet the cheeks were red, and the dark eyes clear as those of a child. She spoke slowly and quietly, with a gentle dignity. Dressed in satins, with family gems of price on her long slender fingers, she would have passed for the *chatelaine* of some great house; and she was talking to two ladies who were absolutely assured that they were in the presence of a third.

"I am Naomi, widow of Isaac Polseath over to Garrow," she said. "He and my two sons and my son-in-law, James Pengelly, were drowned nineteen years ago in the great storm in September. That is why I am here. They told me you were coming and I prepared your cells for you. We sup at seven in the refectory yonder. Shall I show you your cells?"

"You are very kind," Mary said faintly. It was all she could say. Nothing but good breeding prevented her from staring Naomi out of countenance. Up to now she was the greatest surprise in this surprising island.

"Was your husband a fisherman?" Miriam asked.

"Yes, sure. We have all been fishermen since time out of mind, until the day when Tregarthen brought the flowers here. Many a time I have helped with the

fish, and sailed the boat, too, for my poor master who is gone. But please to come this way."

Mary followed wondering. She hoped that she had not gaped, that Naomi had not caught her with her mouth wide open. In all her experience and all her reading she had never come upon anything like this before. She had lost the power of asking questions. Even Miriam, who was a perfect interrogation point, was silent. She saw the small stone-flagged cell, lighted by a high pointed window exquisitely traced; she saw the spotless white bed, the open grate, and the cupboard containing one or two plain cooking utensils. On the bed lay a blue woollen gown. Opposite was a table with an unframed fragment of looking-glass. Mary did not know that this was a luxury pure and simple.

"To-night my niece Ruth has cooked your mackerel and potatoes," Naomi explained. "Tomorrow she will teach you how to do it for yourselves. You must not mind Ruth: rare impulsive and headstrong she is. Never was a body on Tregarthen before like Ruth. But a good girl in the main."

"I am sure of it," Mary cried. "My dear kind Naomi!"

But the elder woman had gone, had slipped away with tact and feeling. She had indicated by a glance the woollen dress lying on the bed. Mary slipped hers on and gazed at herself critically in the fragmentary looking-glass.

"An admirer of mine once remarked that I could not look bad in anything," she said sententiously. "On the whole I fancy I shall survive the uniform. On the other hand, you will look a perfect fright."

"I would rather have my brains than your beauty," said Miriam, calmly. "You are intoxicated with the place at present, but to-morrow you will not rest till you have had your needle and cotton at work and fitted that frock properly. Tregarthen may despoil you of your Redfern's and Worth's gowns, but he can't very well ask you to remove your Worth's corset. When that dress fits you you will look as beautiful as ever, Mary."

"I don't think there is any doubt about it," Mary said serenely.

A wonderful evening, a delightful evening, truly! First of all there was that magnificent old refectory dimly lighted by candles, its marvellous tracing peeping out of the Rembrandt shadows, the carvings on the walls, the wonderful windows. Then there were the long tables covered with coarse white cloths and gay with flowers. There were perhaps fifty women in the refectory altogether, the aged who lived in the cloistered sanctuary, and their younger relations who were permitted to reside with them and see to their wants when not engaged in the struggle for bread.

For meat there was fish and potatoes and bread, eaten off wooden platters. For drink there was tea in small quantities, and a thin hard repulsive cider, the vin du pays that caused Miriam to regret the want of the pruning-knife in the orchards. A white-haired woman, far older than Naomi, sat at the head of the table and said a long quaint grace, then they fell to and ate slowly and with refinement. Mary, who had seen costly feasts ravished in famous restaurants, was greatly pleased.

"They are never in a hurry," she murmured, "which is in itself a sign of good breeding. Miriam, has it occurred to you that these good fisher-folks are ladies and gentlemen?"

“They each have a clear pedigree of seven hundred years,” Miriam replied. “They don’t drink, and they don’t swear, and they have nothing to excite their cupidity. I wonder if they grow peas in the island.”

“What do you mean by that, you inconsequent creature?”

“Well, I was wondering how they would eat them. You will observe we have merely two-pronged forks. You can’t eat peas with two-pronged forks, steel or otherwise. And I am morally certain that no soul here could so far defile himself as to put his knife in his mouth. Let us stay here till the green-pea season, and solve the mystery.”

Mary laughed that clear wholesome laugh of hers, at some remark of her companion, and a girl opposite looked up. Mary immediately grew grave again, for she was critically regarding the most beautiful creature she had ever seen in her life. Mary was so fair herself, and so frankly aware of her own loveliness that she could afford to recognize beauty in others. She saw a perfectly oval brown face, a complexion as pure as running water, with the exquisite rose pink under the tan. A haughty face, a real patrician face with short upper lip, arched eyebrows, and a nose thin and arched also. She saw a pair of dark grey eyes that seemed to speak, so full of expression were they. It was a wilful face, too, the face of one who understands, and suffers, and rebels against the suffering. Here was a girl who, if you could only make a friend of her, would lay down her life for you. Lastly, it was the face of a girl who was educated.

“Did you ever see anything like her?” Mary whispered.

“Never,” Miriam replied, with perfect sincerity. “And what a figure! And what a face! Keen and strong, and educated, too. Another wonder, Mary. Where did that girl get her education from?”

“I wonder who she is?” Mary said inconsequently. “We’ll ask Naomi. Miriam, I am going to try and make a friend of that girl; something draws me towards her. And I fancy she is well inclined to us.”

Impulsively Mary nodded across the table and smiled. Instantly the suggestion of hauteur and uncertainty in the girl’s face vanished, and she smiled in reply; a frank charming smile it was.

“What a sensation she would create in Society,” said Miriam. “Here is a girl half starving on an island who would be a duchess at least in a year. And yet I dare say she is engaged to some fisher lad who has no ambition beyond a hut and a boat of his own.”

“There’s ambition enough in her,” said Mary. “When the meal is over and that dear old Mother Shipton yonder has returned thanks, we’ll go and ask Naomi.”

The meal was over at length, the candles were extinguished, and the company slowly departed. They took no notice whatever of the strangers, everything was in perfectly good taste. Mary followed Naomi along the cloisters.

“May I come in for a moment,” she asked, “or do I intrude?”

“Come in, my dear, come in,” was the reply. “I make an aim to sit down and read the Good Book for half an hour before I lay my old bones down to rest. But there’s plenty of time. Come in.”

Mary entered, followed by Miriam. Like everything else they had seen, the place was spotlessly clean. I believe the expression that you could eat your dinner off the floor is the correct one under the circumstances where the good housewife is

concerned. One or two pictures, almanac style, graced the stone walls. But they were pictures of the sea, always the sea.

"May I ask you a question?" said Mary. "There was a girl seated opposite me to-night. Any one so beautiful—"

Mary paused, conscious that somebody had entered the room. She turned round to see the very girl standing behind her.

"Mary Blenkiron and Miriam Murch," Naomi said, "this is Ruth."

The girl inclined her head somewhat haughtily. And yet there was a quiver of the lips and a luminous moisture in her eyes. Mary held out her hand.

"I am pleased to know you, Ruth," she said. "Will you call me Mary?"

The girl caught the hand almost passionately. "That I will," she cried. "Ah, if you only knew how I had longed for something like this, longed for the day when … and—and God bless you, Mary!"

Chapter IV

The Island.

MARY positively refused to go any further for the present. She was tired and happy and lazy, for it had been one of those Days of Rare Delight that come to us all at times, days that we frame in golden memories and varnish with sweet recollections. She had been up early; she had seen the sun gild the latticed windows and the quaint twisted chimney-stacks of the Sanctuary; she had seen the brown shadows chased from the cloisters and the children playing on the green. These latter treated her with a superb scorn, a shy scorn that was yet perfectly self-possessed. Mary had seen Courts, had even backed breathlessly from Royalty itself, but she had seen no self-possession like unto this.

It was the same with all of them; men, women, and children alike. They answered her with straight and fearless eyes and a consciousness of complete social equality that still irritated this petted Democrat a little. They were poor folk, they were dreadfully ignorant and conceited (twin sisters, these), but they were certainly refined and there was no trace of vulgarity about them. It seemed almost impossible to believe that these broad-chested, straight-limbed men who carried themselves like princes should be unable to read. Assuredly Tregarthen had a deal to answer for.

Mary had seen the cottages, small and clean and yet eloquent with poverty; she had conversed with men and women and had looked into their eyes. And in all the eyes was the shadow of the tragedy, the haunting fear of hunger. Even the children had it.

Now, according to the tenets of all the smug philosophers, these people should have been utterly and entirely happy. They had no rent or taxes to pay, every householder was technically owner of his lands and hereditaments. A tithe of his earnings went to Tregarthen, who handled all the money, and the rest belonged to the tiller of the soil. There were no public-houses, no newspapers, and no post-

office. There was a lovely island and a climate as perfect as any God has vouchsafed to the British Isles. Obviously, then, it was the duty of these people to be happy. They should have run races, garlanded themselves with flowers, and danced to the sackbut and hautboy.

But they did none of these things, albeit they were a hardy and well-nourished race. They had no sports, no conversation beyond the eternal sea and the prospects of narcissus and daffodil, they seldom laughed or smiled because the phantom of starvation was always before them. Mary thought of it angrily. Tregarthen could stop this by the raising of his hand. He should stop it, and she would compel him to do so. In the first place she would try argument, logic, and all the rest of it, and if that failed the great coup should be sprung. If Tregarthen only knew!

It seemed to Mary that she had seen everything. She had seen the harvest of the flowers going forward, she had seen the mile-long endless cable by which the baskets of blooms were transferred to the mainland at such time as the Atlantic ground-swell came reeling across the bay. She had seen Tregarthen's partially ruined castle on the headland where the lord of the island kept his solitary state. Time was when Tregarthen Castle had been a fortress of note, a ruin spoken of in legends and woven into fireside tales. As yet Mary had not explored its gloomy grandeur; that, she hoped, was to come. For the present she was interested in the human document with the aid of Miriam and Ruth who had been impressed into the service. Ruth had harvested her flowers before the sun was on them.

Mary was seated on the crest of the Valley of Contrasts. The spot had no official name of the kind, but it was even as Mary had described it. In front the tossed, wind-blown sandhills trended to the beach-dunes ruffled and quilled with weeds and carpeted with sea-pinks. Wild and desolate was this side with the chain of rocks, below this the firm reaches of sand stretched, and then the sea, blue as sapphire, and curling in from the Atlantic in huge long-crested waves, which broke thundering on the sands or carried up to the ramparts of the mainland, and dashed to pieces there like mile upon mile of exquisite billowy lace. The stagnant air trembled with the thunder of the breaking rollers, across the track of the sun a diaphanous haze of spray hung. Here you had all the spectacle of a great storm at sea with never a breath of wind to ruffle the head of a budding daffodil. And all this within five hours of London, so please you.

That is what lay on one side; the great crinkled face and the mighty voice of the Atlantic, the sweetest air under heaven, and just at the back of the sand dunes, where Mary was sitting, the edge of a valley which is a perfect paradise of flowers and waving foliage. It was like sitting on the edge of two climates. Practically speaking, it was a mere matter of shelter from the winds. One side of a tree might be blown sand and sea-pinks, the other a smiling oasis. Mary broke out enthusiastically.

"I should like to stay here always," she said.

Ruth laughed. There was something hopeless in the sound, a something suggestive of dark, screaming nights and the breaking up of boats in it.

"You wouldn't," she said. "I have seen Paradise turned into a howling desert by the frosty breath of one night. How redly the sun goes down! Did you ever see anything so magnificent as the crimson flush of that big sea?"

Mary was moved by it, and said so. Again Ruth laughed.

"It looks like frost," she replied. "Maybe the wind may shift a point or two south and carry it away. Frost is our nightmare at this time of the year. If it comes, not a flower yonder will be worth gathering in the morning. You see, we are too close to the mainland—if we were ten miles out to sea we should be better off. If the frost comes we are ruined. We shall have to struggle on as best we can till spring comes again. It happened two years ago… God grant you may never see such a sight as that. And the pilchards had failed, so there was little to expect from the villagers over to Trevose. Many of the children died, even strong men perished. And the pity of it is that it could have been so easily averted."

"Who by?" Miriam asked sharply.

"By Tregarthen. Tregarthen is a good man, he loves his people heart and soul, but in some things he is no more than a madman. He is king here, and we are his subjects. And we would do anything for him. But he will do nothing for us because it is a crime for women to work, and he fears the greed of gold that business would bring. Can you do nothing for us?"

Ruth's eyes were gleaming, her hands were outstretched passionately. She walked up and down the spit of sand with the sinuous grace of a tiger. In all the fair picture was nothing fairer than this.

"I can do a great deal for you, Ruth," Mary said. "I am rich, for one thing; and there are other means at my disposal. But if there are others in the island who feel as you do—"

"There are none, except perhaps my dear Naomi, and she is old and fearsome. I am the only snake in the paradise—I and Gervase Tretire. And I feel all these things because I have read and studied, and I understand."

"Oh, oh! So you have read and studied?" said Miriam. "Where?"

"It is a secret. You must not tell anybody. My Naomi taught me to read. Then the Rector of St. Minver over to Trevose took an interest in me and he lent me books. Mr. Guy is a scholar and a gentleman, and he has a fine library. I have read nearly all his books. I know Shakespeare, and Milton, and Addison, and Steele, and Tennyson, and Shelley. And I know Kant, and Adam Smith, and Mill also. If these people here knew what I know and feel, they would burn me for a witch likely. And yet it is all for them; for their sakes I could make Tregarthen blossom like a rose. You may say that it does so now; but not always, not always. You are not laughing at me?"

She paused, with a sudden suspicion in her splendid eyes. Mary was touched, and even the loose lines of Miriam's mouth were quivering.

"I am very far from laughing at you, dear Ruth," Mary said gently. "I am going to try and do something for Tregarthen, and you shall be my ally. Yet it would be a thousand pities to see anything like trade or commerce here. Come, I see you have thought out a way to physical salvation."

Ruth sat down, and her eyes ceased to dilate.

"I have prayed for something like this," she murmured. The dying saffron of the day was on her face and glorified it. "You are rich, and you have told me you have Tregarthen blood in your veins. Don't leave us here to starve again. Fight Tregarthen; bring him to his senses. Make him understand that woman has a mission in life that is not all crystallized in the bearing and care of children."

“That is not original, Ruth,” Miriam said demurely.

“I fancy it is Spencer,” Ruth admitted. “But you know what I mean. The men here could grow the flowers and catch the fish, but we want something to fall back upon when the flowers fail and the pilchards are shy. We want summer, and spring, and autumn visitors; in fact, visitors all the year round. Rector Guy up to St. Minver came here to die of consumption three years ago. You will see for yourself what a testimonial to our air he is when he comes over to conduct service on Sunday afternoons. But what we want is some other staple industry.”

Mary smiled. She couldn’t help it. It seemed so strange to hear this glorious untamed daughter of the sea and sand discoursing learnedly of staple industries, and supply and demand, and the like. But Ruth saw nothing of this.

“Give us that and I will ask for nothing more,” she said. “For the rest we are the model of a Christian commonwealth. We have no rents or taxes, we give a tithe to Tregarthen. The bad years he suffers, the good years he benefits. All we want is something we can work at all the year round.”

Mary nodded thoughtfully. She looked from the climbing spume thundering on the cliffs away behind to the valley where the harvest of the flowers was going on. She felt the salt breath of the sea on her face. High overhead the gulls were calling. The boats of Trevose were drifting with the tide in the harbour.

“It must be something ideal,” she said. “Something refined and dreamy. A Chicago man would recommend pigs. Fancy pigs in Tregarthen!”

“Don’t,” Miriam said. “Don’t, Mary.”

“Very well, I won’t. It all comes of having a father who never talked anything but dollars, except when he varied his discourse with shares. Certainly we don’t want any dollars or shares here. Painting or carving—perhaps children’s toys. There is a good deal of latent poetry in Dutch dolls if you properly appreciate the subject. Then there is spinning; Tregarthen tweed, for instance, with the smell of the thyme in it. I could get Worth to make me a few gowns. What do you say to Tregarthen homespuns?”

Ruth looked up eagerly. The poor child had a wide and promiscuous education, but she was not of the world, and she had not learnt to laugh at things. The tragedy of the empty cupboard is a long way removed from persiflage that often covers an aching heart.

“Where are you going to get your sheep?” asked Miriam the practical. “I have a far better suggestion than that. Lace-making is the occupation for Tregarthen. Ruth, is the art lost in the island?”

Ruth looked up with scared eyes.

“Who told you about that?” she whispered.

“It is all in the diary I told you about this morning,” Mary explained. “The art has been lost in Spain, but it was known here some century or two ago. Ruth, don’t tell me the art is lost here also.”

Ruth looked around her, fearful lest the birds of the air had carried the story. She bent to her companion eagerly.

“The art is alive,” she said. “Tregarthen found it out four years ago, and all the pillows and bobbins were destroyed except mine. It was Naomi who gave me the lace of her own making, and I took it to Exeter and sold it for twelve pounds. That money kept Tregarthen for six weeks. But Tregarthen was furious, and Naomi

destroyed almost everything. I didn't—I *couldn't* do it. Give us that industry, and Tregarthen knows sorrow and hunger no more."

"And you can do it?" Mary asked.

"I can do it," Ruth replied proudly; "but Naomi can do it better. And it's lovely. Shall I show you some of it to-night?"

"*Vive la revolution!*" Mary cried. "You shall, my dear, you shall."

And so the red flag of rebellion was raised.

Chapter V

The Lace and its Story.

THE four conspirators sat in Naomi's room. Ruth was uneasy, yet defiant, Naomi partly afraid, and with a look of shame that seemed strangely out of place on her frank, beautiful face. Mary and Miriam were calm. The door of the room was open to the cloister, for the night was warm, and the oil lamp cast lances of light upon the carved pillars, worn pavement, and smooth grass beyond. From the outer air, like the boom of a Titanic hive of bees, came the roar of the ground-swell. No light shone from any other cell, and it seemed as if they had the world to themselves. It was the eve of the revolution, and great events were to spring therefrom.

"My dear life," said Naomi. "I don't know when I felt so ashamed of myself."

"You are a darling," said Mary, incontinently and impulsively. "What wrong can you do by telling me the story of the lace?"

Naomi murmured that it was not loyal to Tregarthen. He had interdicted the thing, and she had promised to spin her fairy cobwebs no longer; indeed, the Protector was under the impression that the bobbins and stays, and the quaint old cushions, had been destroyed. He had nearly broken Naomi's heart at the same time; but it was a small matter. Flowers were all very well, but lace meant commerce and competition and the consequent moral degradation of all good and true Islanders.

That Naomi was an artist Tregarthen did not know. He was not aware that her whole heart and soul thrilled and glowed in those slender fingers and expanded in the poetry of her weaving. She had bowed her head uncomplainingly, but something had gone out of her life at the same time. Suppose you took away from Mascagni his music, from Poynter or Alma Tadema their brushes and pigments, and bade them paint no more, you would not harm them less than the autocrat of Tregarthen harmed poor old Naomi. She cared nothing for the lucrative side of her art—it was Ruth who had insisted upon that—she only loved the beauty of it, for this aged woman—ignorant and uneducated—was a Cellini in thread, an Angelo in silk and flax, and Miriam read her like an open book.

"It was a great deprivation to you," Miriam said quietly.

Naomi took the speaker's hand in hers and pressed it convulsively. A deep light was shining in her eyes. Over the bridge of years these two women came together and understood one another, and Mary divined what was passing in their minds.

"Ah, if you only knew!" Naomi murmured. "I loved it. My mother, who taught me the art, said I should make a better worker than herself, and maybe she was right. I began as a child; my fingers itched for the warp and the woof before I could speak plainly. Then I learnt to work without patterns; they came to me as I went along. I never thought about selling the lace, no such idea ever came into my mind. Sometimes one piece would take me as long as three years to complete. Let me show you."

Naomi was speaking fast and excitedly now. There was no fear of Tregarthen before her eyes. Here was an artist who for seventy years had lived neglected, and had at last found a critical and appreciative audience. She did not know that this was the happiest moment of her life, but it was. She did not know that she was going to show these strangers something beyond price, something that money could not buy.

She crossed the flagged floor, and opened an oaken cupboard in the corner. From this she produced a cashmere shawl (there had been wreckers on Tregarthen in the dark ages), and from its folds a small handful of black tangle. Then the tangle was thrown over the table, and covered it with a wonderfully fine silken mesh showing a pattern that might have come from the dainty pencil of Inigo Jones, or Pugin, or some of the great Italian designers. The pattern wandered over the cobweb apparently without beginning or end, and yet the design was perfect with a masterful, definite, dainty purpose.

Mary cried aloud in her delight. She had never seen anything so exquisite before. She poured out on Naomi a thousand extravagant but sincere compliments, she touched the diaphanous fabric as if fearful that it would shrivel up like butterfly down under her fingers.

"You wonderful creature," she said; "you did that yourself?"

"Without a pattern," Naomi replied. Her cheeks were glowing with honest pride, her eyes had grown marvellously young and bright again. "Five years it took me to do that. And Ruth doubts that it would fetch less'n a hundred golden sovereigns at Horton's to Exeter."

Mary caught the square and draped it round her shoulders. It might have been four feet square, but weighed no more than a thistle-down.

"You ridiculous old creature!" she exclaimed. "My dear creator, my very great artist, my original genius, you could not buy this in Paris for two thousand guineas! The art of the lace is lost, even the more antique stuff has no such texture and pattern as this! Naomi, you are an artist! With proper advantages your name would have been a household word in two hemispheres. Good Americans would make pilgrimages to see you. Noble painters, great connoisseurs, crowned heads would delight to do you honour. Your name would have lived in after years, as Benvenuto Cellini's has done. Ask Miriam, ask anybody who knows anything about it."

Naomi laughed, with the tears in her voice. The praise was music to her, as praise from the critic of understanding ever is to the artist. Matthew Arnold might

have conveyed what Mary conveyed more subtly, but the homage of the ordinary to the great achievement Naomi properly understood.

"I am glad you like it," she said. "Keep the shawl, my dear, and welcome."

Mary sank speechless into a chair. She had to finger the lace about her shoulders to feel that the whole thing was not some delirious delicious kind of dream. And what could you do with a dear, absurd old creature like this? Mary's eyes were full of tears, that hung like crystals on her purple ashes. There had been the pain and joy and delight of conception and delivery—the mingled anguish and pleasure that goes with the production of good things—and she was only too pleased to see it pass into the hands of beauty and appreciation. She turned to Miriam doubtfully.

"What shall I do?" she asked.

"Keep it," said Miriam. "Some of these dark nights an American heiress will be missing from the deck of an Atlantic liner, and subsequently the delightfully personal young men on the New York press will be chronicling the fact in cold print that 'Miriam Murch is home again looking yellower and plainer than ever, and wearing a lace shawl that will make Fifth Avenue dudines sit up and purr.' Naomi, you have given our Mary a priceless gift."

"She looks like a picture in it," Naomi pleaded, with the air of one who asks a favour. "Let her keep it. I—I can make another."

"I dare say," Miriam said. "But when you are gone, who can do as well?"

Ruth looked up swiftly, defiantly. She had been honestly admiring Mary's soft fair beauty. Her own dark loveliness flashed gloriously by the side of it. Not till then had Miriam noticed her long slender fingers.

"I can," the girl cried. "Don't make any mistake about that. I'm not so cunning at it as Naomi, but I shall be in time. Let me show you."

From the old oaken cupboard she produced the pillow and bobbins and everything necessary for lace-making. A half-finished design was on the pillow. Directly the fascinated spectators saw those long fingers flashing and tossing amongst the bobbins they knew that the wandering art was safe here. The pillow was a large affair, a ponderous wooden block, but Ruth lifted it with ease.

"How strong you are!" Mary murmured.

"All the women are strong here," Ruth said indifferently. "That is because of the life we lead. But see here, Mary Blenkiron. This pattern came from one of the Spanish galleons wrecked here after the defeat of the Armada. Two were saved—the wife and daughter of Captain Don Jose del Amanda. It was they who taught Tregarthen how to make this lace, and the daughter grew up and married one Ambrose Pengelly, who was an ancestor of mine. That is why I am dark, and that is also why I am rebellious and quarrelsome, and lacking in proper respect, Tregarthen says. But Tregarthen cannot rob me of my art, and cannot prevent my helping the island next time trouble comes, and I will tell him so."

She stood up there Cassandra-like, defiant. She might have been the good genius of the island fighting for light and freedom. She made a wonderful picture as she stood there in the gleam of the lamplight.

"Not so loud," Naomi said fearfully. "If Tregarthen should hear you!"

A shadow fell athwart the open door and cut off the lances of light that played upon the brown stone cloister. Outside the booming of the sea seemed to rise higher.

"He has heard you," Tregarthen's voice said.

He stepped into the room, big, strong, majestic, with anger burning in his eye. He looked so regal, so masterful. And yet Miriam, who could read men, saw that the mouth was as the mouth of a dreamer often is—a little weak and irresolute. Most women would have been pleased to call this man master. With a little cry Naomi laid her white hands on the pillow as a mother might protect a child from danger.

"Don't be angry with me," she cried. "Don't be angry, Tregarthen."

Mary came forward swiftly. Her head was thrown back, her eyes were shining. This spoilt child of fortune had no mind to be treated like a schoolboy caught in an apple raid. Who was Tregarthen that he should lord it like this?

"Be not afraid, good people," she said, in her clear high-pitched tones. "There is nothing in the least to be afraid of. Naomi and Ruth have been showing me a specimen of their lacework, and instructing me how it is to be made. The piece I am wearing now is worth two thousand pounds. If you were not so blind and headstrong you would cultivate the gifts of your people and set them beyond the reach of want for ever."

Tregarthen started angrily. This was not at all the way to address a monarch on his own soil, and in face of his own people. But Mary was angry, and the right of free speech is the most cherished of American institutions. Tregarthen would have been loth to own it, but he never admired a woman more than he admired Mary at this moment.

"I have heard those stock arguments over and over again. I could sell my island and retire in comfort any time. With your western contempt for things established, it would be hopeless to make you understand. Be good enough to hand that lace to me. The rest will be destroyed to-morrow."

Mary paused in the reply that was intended to overwhelm Tregarthen once and for all time. The Great Secret trembled on her lips, but she remembered it in time, and all the passion died out of her heart. She would give this man his chance—she would give him every opportunity of coming to reason. She would spare him now, much for the same reason that Father Mackworth spared Charles Ravenshoe.

"You will do nothing of the kind," she said, with dignity. "I have a claim on these things, for I have purchased them. And if you destroy them by force I will bring an action against you in the English Law Courts. I shall prove that you have deprived me of a valuable discovery, and I shall sue you for £10,000. It will cost you double that sum from first to last, and where will your precious island be then? You will have to sell it, and your people will fight you in their new prosperity. Do you understand, Tregarthen?"

A shaft of common sense had touched him, for he smiled uneasily. There was a good deal of force in what Mary said, and a just monarch should ever be an upholder of the sacred rights of property. As he moved back Ruth came forward and threw herself at his feet. She caught his right hand to her lips, she burst out into wild and passionate speech.

“Give it back to us, Tregarthen,” she cried. “Give it back to us, because we love it, and because it puts the bread into our mouths. Don’t be hard, Tregarthen. Remember what happened two years ago. And the red light was on Tintagel as the sun went down; so help me Heaven.”

Illustration:
„Give it back to us, Tregarthen,“ she cried

Nothing could have been finer, or more intense and dramatic. Ruth had utterly abandoned herself to the feelings of the moment. She was a queen pleading on her knees for the lives of her people. Under the bronze of Tregarthen’s face a red flush was creeping. Gently, yet masterfully, he raised Ruth.

“You must not kneel to me,” he said. “You are forgetting. And if the red light was on Tintagel, the Lord’s will be done.”

He bent his head as if an unheard prayer had passed from his heart to the gate of his lips, then the mingled look of obstinacy and fanaticism that Mary had noticed before came over his face. He looked big and strong enough to ward off any disaster, and yet Mary felt that strength to be illusory. In an odd way she contrasted him in her mind with a fine piece of china, a handsome painted vase as yet unfused and hardened in the fire. Once through the furnace, there was the making of a *man* here.

Ruth turned away hopelessly. Her passion had spent its force as a wave beats itself out against the rocks. The promised land was in sight, the pilot aboard, and yet the captain deliberately swung his prow from the haven. Tregarthen turned to go, but Mary followed him. She came up to him, Miriam behind her, just as he passed beyond the shadow of the Sanctuary.

“You are bent upon this mad thing?” she asked.

“You are bent also on keeping the lace and the patterns?”

“Of course. Why destroy that which is priceless? Some day you will listen to reason—oh yes, you will, though you shake your head. What is the meaning of this red light on Tintagel?”

“The sign of a frost, sometimes severe, sometimes slight. If it comes badly all the flowers will be destroyed. In any case the flowers on the uplands must go.”

“That is where the Lees’ and the Hawkens’ and the Braunds’ cottages are. If their flowers are destroyed, what becomes of them?”

“They will retire for a time into the Sanctuary, of course.”

“And yet you can prevent this? You have only to hold out your hand, and the tragedy will depart from the island for ever. You are the most wicked and selfish man I ever met in my life.”

“I will not argue with you,” Tregarthen retorted. “And I will not have any more of that lace manufactured in the island. You are not to return it to Naomi.”

“I will not return those patterns till you ask me to do so.”

“And that will be never.”

Mary looked towards the sheaves of stars piled high in the bending dome, and she smiled. But Tregarthen could not see that.

“I will not return them,” she repeated demurely, “till you ask me to do so.”

She turned away as Tregarthen strode homeward, with a feeling that he had got the better of the argument.

"I shall have to conquer that girl," he told himself.

Meanwhile the others made their way back to the cells. Miriam was smiling demurely.

"There is a man who will have to be conquered," she said. "He imagines in his blind conceit and ignorance that he has got the best of our Mary. That exalted monarch does not know our Mary and the power she wields. It will be a pleasant surprise for him when it comes."

Mary smiled in reply, but dreamily.

"Do you know," she admitted, "I like Tregarthen. I fancy that I could become very fond of that man."

Chapter VI

The Rector.

WITH the morning the great ground-swell died away, the grey swinging battalions no longer smote upon the cliffs, the boats were dancing upon the wrinkled blue bay. Out of a perfect sky the sun was shining, moreover the threatened frost had not come, for Mary had been upon the uplands before breakfast to see.

A kindly-looking man with grey hair and keen features stood talking to Miriam as Mary came up. His eyes were at once the eyes of a fighter and a scholar. His clean shaven lips were keen and humorous. His dress was a compromise between that of a parson and a sportsman, item, tweed trousers tucked into sea boots and correct clerical waistcoat and tie, item, a worn Norfolk jacket and a battered cap of sorts. A tall wiry man, keen as a hawk and kindly as a dove, a disappointed man who had been driven from the front rank by a physical disorder and forced back to pure air and quiet—for there are some who cannot live in towns. His disappointment had given a certain pungency to this man's speech. For the rest he who had once been in the running for a bishopric was perforce curate-in-charge of St. Minver 'up to Trevose,' where every man was a Dissenter and where the church congregation could be counted on the fingers. Thus the Reverend Reginald Guy, prince of gentlemen and best of good fellows.

"This is Mr. Guy, Rector of St. Minver," Miriam explained.

"Who has come begging, Miss Blenkiron," Guy explained. "Possibly the fact may not astonish you. A friend of mine says that the sturdiest beggars of all are to be found in the Establishment. But my alms are a favour. Lady Greytown, who is by way of being related to my wife, writes that you are down here for a time. We should take it as a great favour if you will come and stay with us for a day or two. We see so few people from the towns here excepting in the summer when Trevose has its complement of visitors. Will you come?"

Guy's tone was almost pleading. Mary understood the loneliness of these good, refined, educated people amidst the beauty and ignorance of the place. She looked at Miriam and nodded.

"We will come with pleasure," she said. "I was once on the Pacific coast for six months, after an illness, and I can quite understand your feelings."

They pushed off in the boat presently, having changed their dresses in defiance of Tregarthen. They were good women and original ones, but they had not the sheer audacity to present themselves to Mrs. Guy in blue woollen frocks, the waists of which were under their arms. Then they landed on the long razor-backed piece of sand that constituted Trevose harbour, where the fishermen were lounging with the boats pulled beyond high water. The fishers stared coolly yet not insolently, but never a one lent a hand to parson's boat though they accepted his speech with benign toleration. On the whole Mary gathered the impression that they were sorry for him.

"Are they intolerably rude or intolerably lazy?" Mary asked. "Is there some blistering sin for a Dissenter to help a Churchman?"

"Not a cardinal sin," Guy smiled. "I dare say they would look for forgiveness in time. The men condescend to speak to me, they come to my reading-room and use my bagatelle board and smoke my tobacco. But it is tacitly understood that I am in no way to tamper with their spiritual welfare, or lead them towards Romish practices. The parson has his uses all the same. He is expected to approach Lord Greytown when they want anything, he has to get up subscriptions when there is a boat lost or the nets have to be abandoned. In the summer all the people let their houses, and every prospective tenant is referred to me. I write something like five hundred letters every summer."

"And yet they won't touch your boat," Mary said.

"Well, they are a queer people. Till I came down here I had but a hazy idea what independence of character means. And they are proud. It is their constant boast that they are Cornishmen. Now, I can understand a man being proud to call himself a Briton, or else a Scot or Irishman. But why this conceit because one happens to see the light on the peninsula called Cornwall?"

"Pretty, but poor," Miriam said. "A county tied up with bits of string. But you didn't tell us why they refused to handle your boat."

"That is an old story," Guy explained. "These men live on their fishing. They have one of the finest fishing grounds round our coast—The Golden Ground it is called. And yet they go on hook and lining as they have done for generations, catching cod and mackerel, selling them to the hucksters for so much or so little, generally so little, per hundred. But there are choice ground fish here by the score. So, by way of an object lesson, I bought an otter trawl, and the first day I went out I got a catch of soles that I sold on the beach for thirty-two shillings. Of course the money was expended in charity, but since then not one of them will touch my boat."

They passed up the steep causeway from the village with the whitewashed cottages clustering on either side. From end to end of Trevose no house stood alone. In the good old times, when the wrecking and smuggling was a madder and better paying game than fishing, this had been an advantage, for one house opened into another, and when the preventive officers came hotfoot on the trail

they came only to be baffled by the rabbit warren called Trevose. All this Guy explained in his chatty, cheery way.

Illustration:
„Here we are,“ he said. „This is my house“

“And here we are,” he said. “This is my house.”

A pleasant white cottage it was, standing in the hollow and girt by trees. On each side a wing had been built out and was already covered with creepers; to the right lay the garden, and the lawn itself was in the shadow of the grey square-towered church, the church that had been empty since John Wesley blazed across the Tamar, and set all Cornwall afire to the new creed. For they are stern men and tempestuous in Cornwall, under a placid exterior, and the tranquil doctrines of the Church are not to their liking.

Mrs. Guy came out to meet them, a tall handsome woman, with lovely blue eyes, and the charm of manner that comes with breeding and contact with gentlefolks. Only Reginald Guy himself guessed what his wife had given up when she came down from the world and high places for his sake.

“To say that I am glad to see you is a mere figure of speech,” she said, with a charming smile. “Let me show you to your rooms, and then we will have luncheon, which really is dinner, at one o’clock.”

Everything was sweet and fresh and wholesome there, everything good and in the best of taste. There were flowers everywhere, the whole house was fragrant with them. The meal was simple and unpretentious, but a duchess might have sat down to it. And the rector’s conversation was refreshing as a well-mixed salad.

“You see, there are three sorts of pie on the table,” he said. “Pies and pastry exhaust our gastronomic imagination. Do you know why the devil never came to Cornwall, Miss Murch?”

“I give it up,” Miriam smiled.

“Because he was afraid they would put him in a pie. We immure everything that way. Some little time ago I had a hare sent me. You must know that a hare is a great rarity in these parts. The very day that hare arrived, the cook made a pie of it. It was a great grief to me.”

Mary sat listening. The shadow of the church was on her face, she could see the grey pinnacles glistening in the sun. She felt too languid and sleepy and restful for conversational effort.

“Do I understand that you are not really the rector?” she asked.

“That is the fact,” Guy explained. “I do the work and draw the stipend, but the rector is Mr. Tregarth of Tregarth Court. You see, he went into the Church for family reasons, and when his elder brother died, five years ago, and he came into the property, he gave up regular spiritual work. He is at home now, and you will have the privilege of hearing him preach to-morrow. A clever man who had a serious love disappointment in early life, he is a little eccentric. Nobody takes any notice. Would you like to look at the church? It is over seven hundred years old, and we have some really fine glass here.”

Mary rose promptly. “I am a good American,” she laughed, “and you can always catch me with a bait of old architecture. If you could move your church bodily to Chicago I know a man who would give two million dollars for it.”

“And we can’t half fill it,” Guy said sadly. “How hard I tried when I came here. My congregation and my choir do not total half a hundred. I fear that past apathy had much to answer for. At one time I had only myself and the organist—and my wife is the organist.”

“I have been many things in my time,” Mrs. Guy laughed. “We don’t mind it so much now, but it was an awful disappointment at first. Here is the parish church where scarcely anybody ever comes, whilst down in the village of nine hundred souls they have three chapels—Wesleyan, Baptist, and Bible Christian. And yet all the Trevose people who die are buried here, and Reggie reads the service.”

“And the bodies are carried up a hill seven hundred feet from the village,” Guy explained. “There is absolutely no hearse in the village. But there is something very simple and very touching and pathetic in a fisherman’s funeral.”

They wandered out of the house at length, across the lawn and into the grey brown shadows of the old church. Here were many monuments and mural tablets to dead and gone Tregarths who seemed to have been great people in these parts years agone. And on the Sunday morning the visitors had the pleasure of seeing the head of the family conducting the entire service. Out of respect to the keen-visaged, white-haired old man, many people had come to church who usually abstained. There might have been a hundred of them altogether, retired ‘captains’—you could not throw a stone down Trevose street without hitting a ‘captain’—a sprinkling of lean, sunbaked farmers, with the bent shaking pensioners in the free seats, and the Tregarth Court servants behind them.

Then a strange thing happened, so strange a thing that I should hesitate to record it but for the fact that there are good men and true who can testify to the truth of it. Moreover, it had happened so often that none took heed of it at Trevose. The aged rector had given out the public notices in his loud strident voice, had published the banns of marriage between Rebecca May and Roland Tregavenny, both of this parish—and both present smiling, not unmindful of their large bulk in the public eye—and then the rector proceeded thus—

“And this is to give notice that a month from to-morrow, Job Hawken, an idle fellow and a most incompetent groom, quits my service. As also does Jane Bishop, who broke three Dresden china dishes last Thursday.”

Mary pinched herself to make quite sure that she was awake. She glanced fearfully round the church expecting some outburst of feeling. But nobody seemed to have heard anything unusual. The recalcitrant Job, and the equally recreant Jane, grinned uncomfortably, and there was an end of the matter. After the service was over Mr. Tregarth joined Guy and his party in the churchyard. Mary was too fascinated to do more than respectfully gaze at him.

He looked like a gentleman with his commanding face, yet he wore a woollen shirt, and a most amazingly rusty black suit, a suit that old inhabitants could recall any time the last fifty years. No self-respecting ploughman or labourer would have been seen in such garments on the sabbath day. In no case would the village have permitted such a thing.

“These ladies are from America,” Guy explained.

“Indeed, indeed,” Mr. Tregarth muttered. “What do they come for? Young lady, what do you come here for?”

“I came to see Tregarthen,” Mary said pleasantly. “He is a distant connection of mine. My ancestors came from here.”

Over a pair of large silver-rimmed glasses Mr. Tregarth looked keenly.

“What do you think of the man Tregarthen?” he demanded.

Mary was of opinion that he was a little wrong-headed.

The keen eyes gleamed. Tregarth bounced his ebony cane on the pavement.

“A visionary, a dreamer, a fool,” he cried. “Actually had the impudence to tell me no honest man ever went into business. Says every business man is bound to be a knave. You are an American and you are rich. Oh, I can see your frock is made in Paris, though I wear a coat that isn’t worth sixpence. Marry Tregarthen, force him to fall in love with you, and then take him to see the world. Get to the bottom of him, and he is a good fellow. At present he is a deplorable ass. Good day.”

Tregarth raised his hat and kissed his fingers with a fine gallant air, ridiculously out of keeping with his rusty coat, and hobbled out of the churchyard.

“A gentleman and a good man,” said Guy, “though he loves to be taken for a tramp. Once a new servant threw him off the premises, and he was delighted.”

“Show me some more types,” said Mary. “If you only knew how I am enjoying this! Can’t you bring me in contact with the fisher-folk?”

“If you can stand the tobacco smoke,” said Guy. “I am taking the chair at a meeting in the village to-night where all are invited. This being the Jubilee year, we are seriously contemplating a memorial to celebrate the event. We meet to open a fund and make suggestions. You will have a good opportunity of seeing the fisherman at his best.”

“Delightful!” Mary cried.

“I would not miss it for worlds,” Miriam murmured. “Mr. Guy, I am glad that I came down here, I am glad to find so sweet a place. And it is good of you to take all this trouble for us.”

“That is nonsense,” Eleanor Guy said cheerfully. “It is pure selfishness on our part. We shall be sorry when you have to go, for our own sakes. You have only seen the bright and best side up to now.”

And with this dark speech Mrs. Guy led the way in to dinner.

Chapter VII

Villagers in Council.

THE boats had come in from the sea, the cod and ling and halibut and skate had been counted and sold at starvation rates to the Wadebridge hucksters, the Tres and Pols and Pens had gone home to clean up and don their Sunday suits of serge for the meeting. There was no talk of the sea to-night, no slow dissertation on the merits of Jim’s new boat or James’s new sails. They were all going to the meeting, though as yet they had not made up their minds as to what form the

Jubilee offering would take. Old Jim Challen had one scheme and Mr. John Hawkes had another. They were old and ponderous rivals, these, opposed on the great question of Bait, opposed in religion, and as extreme as the poles in politics. If there were two social parties in Trevose they were the Challen and Hawkes parties. For the present opinion was pretty equally divided as to which party would carry the meeting. Like other great leaders, Challen and Hawkes had no mind to take their followers too far into their confidence. It was understood that they both had weighty schemes to propose, philanthropic works, large social improvements, and the like.

Pressed by trusted lieutenants to divulge the nature of their scheme, the leaders shook their heads solemnly, and merely requested those under them to wait. Then they would look out to sea in respectful silence, doubtless revolving mighty matters in a brain that staggered before the stupendous task.

An old tithe barn hard by the Coastguard had been despoiled of its herring nets, and swept and garnished for the occasion. There were forms borrowed from the schoolroom, a platform on tar barrels, and sundry odd oil-lamps that rendered the brown faces sombre, Rembrandtesque. Flanked by a few 'captains' and such gentry, the rector took the chair.

Those toilers of the sea were slow, slack to catch a point, but terribly in earnest. They followed the rector's neat opening address with a flattering attention. From where she was seated, Mary noted the swarth, mahogany faces with interest, for she recognized the great force behind the gathering. This was a little of the grim earnestness, a pinch of the mighty block of it that has made the British Empire what it is. She could imagine a ship come headlong into the bay before the snarling teeth of the gale, and every man there thrashing out his life to save her.

The rector concluded his opening address with an invitation for suggestions. Throats were cleared here, and a scuffling of feet marked a lapse in the state of tension. As to the rector, he had quite an open mind on the matter. They were a poor community, and they could not expect to get much money together, certainly not more than fifty pounds. It was for them to lay this sum out to the best advantage.

For a long time nobody spoke or moved. Challen turned a lamp up and then down again. Hawkes scraped his pipe noisily, filled it and puffed huge clouds. Then the two leaders smiled at each other darkly.

"John Hawkes," Challen said huskily, "d'ye hear me?"

"Could hear ye above a gale a'most, James," Hawkes said, not ungraciously.

There was a growl of laughter, for this was repartee of a high order, a little personal, perhaps; but what would you have better than the model of the Commons?

"What I was going to say—" Challen floundered. He had got his speech now, and was struggling to get in his depth. "What I was going to say is this. May happen you've gotten some sort of idea, and may happen you've not. But down to the quayhead a fortnight come Saturday I heard as how so to speak you had. If you have, why not speak it? You're older than me, John."

"Less 'un a year," John Hawkes said, with great modesty. "Less 'un a year, James. And I've never been far as Exeter, like some folk."

Challen generously waved the implied compliment to his superior travel aside. In sooth, both were eager to begin, and both too bashful to start. When the matter was discussed later in quay debate lasting the best part of a week, public opinion gave Challen a point over his age argument.

"What I says is—let the older man begin," Challen maintained stoutly.

Applause followed. It seemed to lift John Hawkes unwillingly to his feet. He was a man of bulk, and the action of his skin was proceeding finely. The big red face glistened in the dim light.

"I've been thinking," he said, with a sigh for that painful operation. "And I've worked it all out. What do we live for here? what keeps us? Why, fish. And if there was no fish we should just starve. It's hard work getting the fish, and it's hard work getting a price for it afterwards. If so be as we could send our catch to Wadebridge, why, there'd be more money for us. But we can't; and why? Because we haven't got any proper con—conveyance to take ut."

Like more favoured orators, Hawkes paused here, and the expected applause followed. The speaker wiped his big face and drew inspiration from tobacco. Every man present instantly pulled at his pipe till the chairman dissolved into a blue mist and was seen no more for the present.

"Then, I says, let us have a fish-cart," Hawkes spoke from the haze. The fragrant curtain seemed to give him courage. "Let us have a Jubilee fish-cart; let us celebrate the fiftieth reign of Her Majesty with a Jubilee fish-cart, so as to save us carrying the catch up the hill, and so as to get a better price for the catch in Wadebridge. Stick a brass plate with an inscription on it, if you like; but the fish-cart, say I."

Suspicious sounds might have been heard to proceed from the direction where the chairman was mercifully concealed. Perhaps the tobacco was too much for him, old smoker as he was; perhaps he had gone off into a reverie, and was recalling some boyish escapade.

"I would give five dollars for a good look at the rector's face," Miriam whispered, under cover of the wild applause that burst with suspicious spontaneity from the Hawkes faction. "Don't laugh, Mary, or they may turn us out, and if we lost the conclusion of this I should never be happy again. A Jubilee fish-cart!"

"I know, I know," Mary said faintly. "If you have a large rusty pin concealed about your person, oblige me by giving me a vicious jab. Miriam, I am afraid I am going to laugh and spoil everything."

Fortunately the disaster was averted. A newcomer opened the door, and the fresh, sweet, sea-laden breeze carried the canopy of smoke away. At the amazing earnestness painted on every face there Mary grew grave. Positively there were only three people present who saw the exquisite humour of the suggestion, and its absurdity. But there was more to come. The applause had died away, and Challen was anxiously counting his forces. He was fearful lest Hawkes' brilliant suggestion might have influenced the wobblers. Already the assurance of victory was on Hawkes' shining face.

"Hast done, John?" he asked. "Hast anything else to say?"

Hawkes admitted that he had finished. He intimated that his oratorial effort might have lacked the polished grace of more practised speakers, but he was still

under the impression that for real usefulness it could not be approached. He turned benignly to his rival.

"Happen *you* might have some sort of idea, James," he remarked suavely.

James Challen rose ponderously. Clad in his sea-boots and shaggy guernsey, he was the heaviest and biggest man in the village. Yet his voice was small, and he had the air of one who is detected in something childishly wrong. The gravity of the occasion seemed to weigh him down. But the eyes of his faction were upon him, and he smiled feebly. They were all so terribly in earnest. Not a villager amongst them had the faintest idea of the humour of the situation. The smell of the nets and the tar and the sea was in their nostrils, and the need of a fish-cart was a dire and pressing thing. It might have been held by some that Her Most Gracious Majesty had been spared to reign for fifty years specially for the benefit of Trevose and the staple industry.

"There's things worser wanted," Challen shot out. The words came from him with the force of a catapult, and his faction applauded. As a matter of fact Hawkes' suggestion was real genius from the local point of view, and even the faction secretly admitted it. But it was just possible that Challen had something better to suggest.

"That man," Mary whispered, "hasn't a notion what to say."

"It is coming," Miriam replied. "I can see the great light of inspiration coming into his eye. He beams and his face shines."

"So would yours if you were his size," Mary retorted.

A vast pleased smile was stealing over Challen's face. His supporters caught the expression, and their hearts were uplifted. Jim Challen was going to surpass himself; and he did.

"There's a power of sense in what John Hawkes said," he observed ponderously. "But those who travel sees things"—he had once been as far as Plymouth—"and ideas come to folks at times. I'm not denying the need of a fish-cart, I'm not denying its uses. I dare say if I'd ha' thought of it fust, I should ha' proposed the fish-cart 'stead of John Hawkes."

At this ingenious confession and implied compliment Hawkes applauded, as also did both factions. The mirth was timely, for it enabled Mary to laugh. It was an opportunity that she needed badly.

"But there's something better," Challen resumed solemnly. "What is it we want mor'n a fish-cart, mor'n anything Trevose asks for? What the papers call a crying need. It's a long step from here to St. Minver churchyard, and there's seven hundred foot of hill to climb. And we've all got to climb it some of these days, lads. When one of us dies the rest carries him up the hill on their shoulders. It ain't right, and we ought to have a proper hearse. Therefore I propose that we don't have no truck with fish-carts, but that we have a Jubilee hearse instead."

Challen had made his effort at last. He stood with the proud consciousness of one who has made a great new discovery. His faction applauded, whilst the faction led by Hawkes protested. There was a deal of noise and confusion, which was a merciful thing for three people present. Mary bent over her handkerchief and laughed without restraint; Miriam smiled broadly. She was one of those lucky people who can laugh inside. One sharp clear laugh had come from the rector's lips ere he recollected himself. It was a great effort, but he managed it. In after

days he told proudly how he had fought down the flesh in face of so fierce and clinging a temptation.

His eyes were grave now, but his lips were twitching. He rose to impose silence upon the gravely excited audience. They were arguing in little knots, but there was no sign of temper anywhere. In all his experience of these men, he had never once seen one of them in a rage. Intensely eager and intensely in earnest they are, but passion is not of their blood. Nor, unfortunately, is humour either, or they could not have been blind to the lighter vein of the situation. Jubilee hearse or Jubilee fish-cart—that was the question that cleft Trevose in twain to-night. Guy sought to throw oil on the ruffled sea.

"Had we not better put it to the vote?" he suggested gravely. He had the air of importance that prevails at parish meetings and such-like notable gatherings; he seemed to assume that the glittering eye of hemispheres was on Trevose to-night. "Gentlemen, this is a great and solemn occasion. It should not be marred by unseemly strife. We will put the question to the vote, and the majority will decide. I am certain that my friends John Hawkes and James Challen will be guided by the wishes of the majority."

"Big lump, big lot," Challen said gracefully.

"Bigger crew, bigger share," Hawkes responded, with an apt touch of local colour.

"Very well," Guy resumed. "Those in favour of John Hawkes' proposal hold up their hands. There! Now let me count."

A forest of brown hairy hands shot up in the musty air, and Guy proceeded to count them carefully, naming the owner of each hand. In a way he was conferring immortality upon them, and they seemed to appreciate the fact. And then it so fell out that for the two proposals there was exactly the same number of votes, namely, forty-seven for each. The rector explained the deadlock, and placed himself in the hands of the meeting.

"Ain't there no such thing as a casting vote?" a plaintive voice asked.

Guy shook his head solemnly. On a less momentous occasion he might have been tempted to exercise the prerogative of the chair, but he dared not accept his responsibility. As a matter of fact, he knew that dire results would follow. He would be pretty sure to mortally offend forty-seven worthy but somewhat bigoted individuals. The victorious leader would be regarded darkly by his fellows, he would be watched carefully and all his actions noted. Dark suggestions of bribery and corruption would be in the air. The hint that this or that, as the case might be, had been seen in confabulation with the rector outside his gate would be construed into part of a Machiavellian conspiracy. It might have been no more than a mere friendly discussion as to the best way of growing carrots; but what of that? And, moreover, the rector had his own views as to the suitability of fish-carts and hearses as a fit and proper memorial of a remarkable and beneficent reign.

There was a deadlock. Eye looked into eye, seeking inspiration. For a long time nothing was heard beyond the shuffling of feet and the sound of hard breathing. And then Robert Treagle slowly rose.

They watched him with petrified astonishment. Treagle was the silent member of the community. They were all given to long pause and frequent lapses into

rumination, but in Robert they had taciturnity reduced to a fine art. Never in the history of the village had Treagle ever hazarded or originated a remark of his own.

"There don't seem to be much sense here," he said impatiently, and in a voice that seemed to come from his boots. "What Jim says is good, and what James says is good; but neither ain't going to give way, and there's an end on it. What I says is this—give us something that will do for a hearse and do for a fish-cart. When it ain't wanted for one thing it can be used for another. Now then! And if you fancy as I'm going to stand maundering here all night, why, you're mistaken."

The speaker turned resolutely away, his big boots clanking on the beaten floor of the barn. He banged the door behind him as he passed into the night. But nobody laughed—the meeting remained as stolid and earnest as ever.

"The best thing we can do," the rector said, in a small stifled voice, "is to adjourn the meeting for a fortnight, so that you may come to some understanding. You may adopt one scheme or you may adopt the other—possibly you may like to take up the brilliant and original suggestion made by Robert Treagle."

The audience began to file out slowly. Nobody proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman, nobody had any further use for him. There were more weighty things to be discussed than mere rectors. He, good man, was only too grateful for his merciful release. All up the hillside he was laughing gently whilst the tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"What will happen at the next meeting?" Mary asked.

"There will not be another meeting," Guy replied. "They will wrangle decorously over this thing for fully twelve months, it will be a fruitful topic of discussion next winter. At intervals it will crop up for years. The hero of the occasion will be Treagle. But there will be no more meetings."

Mary laughed freely. She laughed at intervals all the way up the steep rocky road as some fresh humorous point occurred to her. She could not call to mind anything that had amused her so much.

They grew quieter at length as they approached the rectory. Mary drew her jacket a little closer around her. She looked up at the clear sky and the powdered glory of the stars, and a chill breath smote her cheek.

"It is surely very cold," she said.

"Ay," the rector murmured. "There will be frost to-night."

And Mary said nothing, thinking of the flowers on Tregarthen.

Chapter VIII

The Blighting of the Blossoms.

MRS. GUY had taken farewell of her guests almost tearfully, and after having exacted solemn promises that they would return before long. The rector had gone off early to see a sick parishioner, so that the two friends had perforce to go down to the village alone and charter Hawkes' boat once more.

The sea lay before them very still and intensely blue, there was a crisp invigorating touch in the air, in the sun it was warm and grateful. Yet Mary's beautiful face was very serious as she walked along, for in the hedgerows along the herbage and dead leaves of yester-year was a line of white rime where the jewels of last night's frost still glistened.

"Do you think it has reached the island?" Mary asked.

"It is impossible to say," Miriam replied. "This has come along the mainland with the east wind, and there was a suggestion of breeze last night. As Tregarthen is an island, the frost may have been tempered by passing over the sea. Let us hope for the best, Mary."

And Mary was inclined to take a more cheerful view of the situation. They found Hawkes getting his boat ready for the afternoon tide. He stared with unaffected astonishment at the suggestion that he should earn a trifle by conveying those adventurous women back to the island.

"I guessed Tregarthen had turned you out," he said.

"That is impossible," Mary said serenely. "And as proof of the fact, you are going to take us back again. Of course, if you are afraid to go, we shall have to get somebody else."

Hawkes pointedly admitted his readiness to accommodate passengers. Asked if he thought that the frost had done any damage over yonder, he shrugged his shoulders. This man, like all his kind, was a philosopher in his way. If the flowers had to go, why, they had to go, and there was an end to it. Some seasons the fishing off Trevose was bitterly bad, and then the village starved. They knew what it was to be without bread as well as Tregarthen's people. If the fish wouldn't take bait, why, what was a man to do?

"I know what I should like to do," Mary said between her teeth. "I should like to take that rugged, handsome, honest, picturesque head of yours and hammer some common sense into it. Don't you know that if you were to adopt the Otter trawls the rector suggested that you would never want again? Haven't you got mind enough for that?"

Hawkes looked up placidly from his rowing.

"New-fangled ideas," he said pitifully, "new notions. We fish same as our fathers and their fathers before them did. And what was good enough for them is good enough for us. I don't hold with no trawls, not I."

Mary gave up the case as hopeless, for what can you do with a man like that? Both here and on the Island was the same stern crass conservatism. They would not learn, they did not want to learn. Rather would they starve in the midst of plenty. There was a station being built at Port Gavern Road some three miles away, a station that would bring big dealers here and treble the price of Trevose cod and herring and mackerel. And yet, had the men of Trevose been less God-fearing and law-abiding, they would have marched over to Port Gavern and pulled that station about the ears of the contractors. And why? Because the women who slaved to fill the Gavern slate barges at starvation wages would cease to find employment. That they would not need employment at the enlarged price of the fish was a detail. Small wonder that Mary felt sad and downcast.

She saw the women now, as the boat threshed out for Tregarthen. A ketch heeled over on the sand at Port Gavern, and a knot of women were filling her with

slates from the quarries. There were women young and middle-aged bending their backs and streaming under that cruel burden. And all this because the fish fetched next to nothing and the winters were long and treacherous.

"Do you call that a pretty sight?" Mary asked.

Michael replied doggedly that he saw nothing inharmonious about it.

Thus does the eye become educated to the proportion of disgraceful things. The new railway would stop all that, Mary explained; it would even obviate the necessity of a fish-cart. The dealers would come freely, there would be healthy competition, and the weary burden would fall from the backs of the women.

"Nowt of the sort," said Michael. "The slates will be carried by rail, and many a wife will be missing her silver before long. The day that railway opens, Trevose will be in mourning. There'll be black flags on the houses. You stay and see if there won't."

And in the fulness of time events fell out as Michael darkly prophesied. The slates were carried by rail, there was no more white slavery in Port Gavern, and behold the fish-dealers came with bursting pockets, and mackerel fetched a price never before heard of in those parts. And the Sunday hats and bonnets of the women became as the glories of Solomon, and the black flags were hidden in the byres. But nobody was grateful, and nobody had the grace to be ashamed of himself, which is a state of things not altogether peculiar to fishing villages and the like.

Mary stepped on the island with Miriam, anxious to learn the fate of the flowers. As she strode over the ridge past the sea pinks and the sand dunes, where the reeds rustled and looked into the valley beyond, she gave a sigh of thankfulness. The flowers were nodding and blooming in the sunshine, and the air was sweet with the fragrance of violets. Ruth rose, warm and flushed, from a bed of jonquils, and gave them friendly greeting.

"How glad I am that you have escaped the frost," Mary cried.

"We have and we haven't," Ruth explained. "Down here, where all our hopes and interests lie, the frost has done no damage. But they say that towards Port Gwynn, where the Bishops and those live, the frost has been cruelly hard. Gervase Tretire has gone up there to see."

"And such a lovely day as it is," Miriam said sadly.

Ruth turned upon her fiercely. Her eyes were flashing.

"A hateful day!" she cried. "Lovely enough in a way, like a beautiful girl dying of consumption. But the frost is in the air; I can feel it in my blood. A day that most folks would be glad to be alive in, but a bad hour for us. I want to see the wind change, to see the scud flying over Tintagel, and feel the sting of the rain upon my cheeks. If you care for us and our ways, if you would save Tregarthen, pray for that, Miriam Murch."

Gervase Tretire came slowly down into the valley. His eyes were grave, and he even walked as a messenger of evil tidings. Things were very bad up to Port Gwynn, he explained. On the exposed hillsides the frost had cut the smiling crops off like a scythe. It was a pitiable sight to see Bishop's lot. And Mary Bishop had locked up her cottage and betaken herself, weeping, to the Sanctuary.

"Is it so hopeless?" Mary asked.

“Ay, ay,” Tretire replied. “Not one blossom more will be cut in Port Gwynn this year. Absolute ruin, it is. All swept away in a night. Go and see for yourself, Mary Blenkiron. We are getting used to it.”

“And all Tregarthen’s fault,” Mary cried impulsively.

“All his fault,” said Gervase. “We all know it here, though the Islanders would cry shame to hear me say so. I saved that man’s life twice; I risked my own to do it. If he had gone down off Lantern Rock he would have perished as the last of his race, a more far-seeing man would have ruled us, and to-day would have smiled back to God’s blessed sunshine and not been afraid. Oh, why didn’t I let him go; why didn’t I let him drown?”

Illustration:
Ruth laid a trembling hand on his arm

He spoke more with the intensity of a long and bitter despair than from revengeful impulse. Ruth laid a trembling hand on his arm.

“I cannot bear to hear you speak of Tregarthen like that,” she said gently.

All the fire died out of Tretire’s eyes. His glance met that of Ruth fondly and yet without pathos. Her lips were quivering, and the lovelight was in her eyes. She might have been saying farewell to a lover.

“I forgot,” said Gervase, “that you were bespoke to him.”

“Bespoke!” Mary cried. “Engaged to Tregarthen! You?”

“Yes, yes.” Ruth’s glance was clear, but there was no proud look in her eyes. “I thought you knew, I thought everybody knew. It will be no love-match, Tregarthen’s and mine. He is the last of his race. By the charter he is bound to marry. There are four First Families here, and from them the head of the island has to choose a wife. In those four First Families I am the only girl. It is nothing strange. European rulers are influenced by similar political reasons.”

There was just a touch of satire in Ruth’s tones. Mary was about to ask another question, then she paused. She saw the glance of Ruth and Gervase meet, and she understood everything. These two loved one another. Any woman of ordinary intelligence would have divined the fact by sheer instinct.

“And here,” thought Mary, “are all the makings of a tragedy.” But you shall hear it all in good time.

“Has Tregarthen none of his own blood to choose from?” Mary asked.

“They are all extinct,” Ruth replied indifferently. “If any remained, he would not go to the Four Families. And, if one remained, she could claim to be the bride of Tregarthen with the same right that he could claim her for his wife. It is all in the Charter, as you may see for yourself.”

Mary looked up swiftly, and her eyes met Miriam’s. The latter read her friend like an open book, and for the first time in her life she was afraid of Mary. For she was going to do a mad thing, a wild, unreasonable thing, and Miriam knew that nothing would turn her from her purpose. You can do things with a man; you can blackguard him, or, what is worse, ridicule him. You can knock him down if the extreme is called for; but nobody on earth can influence or check a pretty, spirited young woman, who is a great heiress to boot.

“Come up to Port Gwynn with me,” Miriam said sharply.

The two moved off together, leaving Ruth and Gervase knee-deep in the jonquils. The sun was on Gervase's face, that strong handsome face that was as gentle as a child's in Ruth's presence.

"Don't be cross with me, dear," said Mary. "And look at those two—they are positively made for one another. If Tregarthen marries Ruth he will be guilty of an unpardonable crime. He must not do it."

"And you are going to prevent him?"

"I am going to try, dear," Mary said demurely. "Now, honestly, wouldn't you marry Tregarthen if you had the chance?"

All Miriam's anger vanished at once. It was impossible for any one to be angry for long with Mary. And even newspaper proprietors have their weak spots.

"I might if I had the time," she said placidly. "Tregarthen's education would be such a long and exhausting process. His conceit is monumental, he is the absolute incarnation of the Fixed Principle. Mary, *could* you marry that man?"

"I really fancy I could, dear," Mary said academically. "In the first place, I should be a kind of queen. American girls have married dukes and princes—of ice-cream extraction most of these latter. But I can't recollect any greasy Chicago dollars going to the support of the purple. Then Tregarthen is young and very handsome. He has a deliciously dreamy poetic nature—"

"And a vein of singularly tough obstinacy, not to say pig—"

"Fixety of purpose," Mary said reprovingly. "My dear, monarchs are never pig—Besides, the word is so dreadfully reminiscent of Chicago. And Tregarthen could be tamed; he could be made to take a proper view of his position."

"Meaning *your* position, of course."

"Really, Miriam, it is just the same thing. On the whole it would save a deal of bother if I married Tregarthen. I'm going to put the island right, and don't you forget it."

"But if the Charter says that, failing kin, the Four Families—"

"*A bas* the Four Families. Recollect what Ruth said. Besides, there has been no failure of kin. Am I not directly descended from Tregarthen's own family—can I not prove it?"

Miriam groaned. This was worse than she had anticipated.

"My dear," she gasped, "I—I thought you were only going to make Tregarthen care for you; I had no idea that you intended to compel him to marry you."

"I guess," Mary said nasally, "I guess, marm, that's about the size of it."

Chapter IX

A Limited Horizon.

IT was even as Ruth had said up at Port Gwynn. The flowers had failed there, and those who relied upon them for their daily bread had been forced to fall back upon the Sanctuary. Most of them had not gone as yet, neither would they so long as food and firing remained in the cottages.

It was a beautiful spot, a wild, rugged valley, with the sea cutting into its green heart like a glittering silver lance. Here the tide creamed and poured over the crisp sands; from the beach there rose terrace upon terrace of rocks all honeycombed by the ceaseless fret of the everlasting surges, and over the terraces hung the gardens and trees that crowned the hillside. Here and there on the flat ledges white cottages stood, smothered to the roof with fuchsia trees, and behind these again were the gardens where lately jonquil and narcissus and daffodil had flourished. There were many more cottages falling into decay, their great cellars filled with dank vegetation. These had been deserted for a generation or more—ever since the pilchards had failed, in fact. The cellars for packing the fish were no longer needed, the hearthstones were cold, and the birds built in the eaves. It was very wild and beautiful, very romantic, and very sad. But there were sadder things to come.

The sun shone bravely, the waves danced over the golden sands; down below some children were playing noisily. But before the cottages women sat with despair in their eyes. Mary and Miriam came up to one of them. They had made her acquaintance through Ruth a day or two before. She looked up dully as they accosted her.

"Is it very bad?" Mary asked.

"Ay," was the quiet reply. "You mind the garden we had here a day or two ago? Well, go and look at it for yourselves."

They skirted by the side of the cottage to the half-sheltered stretch behind. On the slope the soil was more or less exposed, and there were brown regular patches of limp and drooping vegetation, with here and there a yellow or white spike uplifted. The man who has seen a fair and smiling expanse of apple orchards before and after a wet May frost will understand what I mean. So it was with the garden that fringed along the headlands of Port Gwynn.

"It is very, very sad," said Miriam, "and yet it ought not to matter in the least. Of course all the gardens here are the same. Let us go and discuss the matter with poor Jenifer Bishop."

Jenifer Bishop was a little bitter, but then she had thought of it all before, and she knew exactly what it meant. Also she was not grateful, though there was no suspicion of charity at all. She was a young wife, with two little children, and she preferred a home of her own to the shelter of the Sanctuary. It would not, however, have occurred to her to blame Tregarthen.

"I suppose you have all suffered the same here?" Mary asked.

"All lost everything, yes. My dear heart, nothing is left."

She rocked herself to and fro after the manner of her kind. Miriam regarded her with deep sympathy.

"There are eleven families here," she said. "Suppose that you do not go to the Sanctuary, how much per week would keep you as you are in the habit of living?"

Jenifer promptly replied that nine shillings would be sufficient. Altogether the clan might be rendered happy and comfortable for an outlay of five pounds per week or, say, two hundred pounds per year. It was about the amount that Mary usually gave for one of her party dresses. If she deprived herself of one new frock a year the thing could be done. If she decided to wear all her old dresses—fearfully antiquated things, almost three months designed—the whole of Tregarthen would

be beyond the reach of actual want until the next harvest of flowers. Miriam nodded as brightly as if Mary had made the suggestion orally.

"It shall be done," Mary said serenely. "You shall not go to the Sanctuary. You shall remain here with your curly-headed babies."

Jenifer nodded, but did not respond joyfully. The Sanctuary meant being half parted from her children. Down in the cruel sunshine, with just the touch of frost in it, the children were rioting on the sands. It would be good to keep them here; but she knew Tregarthen would not listen to the suggestion.

"It's cruel to put such an idea into one's head," Jenifer said.

Mary protested. Miriam's face grew hard.

"Are you slaves, that you should heed every word of Tregarthen's?" Miriam cried. "So long as his wicked pride knows no fall what does he care for you? Any other people would have risen in revolt against him long ago. He may be your ruler, but he has no right to starve you like this. I am going to see him, and compel him to listen to our proposal. Suppose the frost comes again to-night, suppose all the flowers fail—what then?"

"We should starve," Jenifer said calmly.

It was the calmness of despair, of one who has gone through it all before. Miriam was not quite sure whether to shake the woman's hand or her shoulders. She was furiously angry with everybody, and with Tregarthen most of all. What was the use of waving the red flag if nobody followed it? There was Ruth, and there was Tretire, but they hardly formed a force.

But Tregarthen was not to be seen. He had gone over to the mainland on some business connected with the island. Down in the valley the harvest of flowers was proceeding with feverish haste; flowers were cut when it would have been far better to leave them for a day, for the warning had come, and for the second time they saw the red light on Tintagel. Just before sunset, too, there had been a passing shower with a scud of hail. It did not require a very weather-wise person to prophesy a frosty night. Mary and Miriam came upon Ruth and Tretire as they were discussing the situation.

"What of the morrow?" Mary asked.

"Bad," Gervase said, with a shake of his head. "I'd have guessed at frost in any case, but the shower just now settled it. Look at the red in the sky and the reflection on Tintagel. It's the writing on the wall."

Tintagel was dreaming in the purple mists of evening, his shoulder was in the clouds. Yet the light of the setting sun caught the face of the great wall and tinged it with a sapphire and crimson glory.

"That is what we never want to see," Tretire went on. "It never lies to us. After that light the frost always comes. Sometimes it passes over, for a dry frost seldom harms us. But this will be a wet frost, for all the leaves and blooms are dripping. By this time to-morrow it will be all over."

Mary unfolded her plan. She was prepared, she said, to put down a certain sum of money. It would be a small sum, but ample to tide the islanders over till better times came. If Tregarthen did not like it, then Tregarthen's wishes must be ignored. Tretire was enthusiastic but not sanguine. Tregarthen would refuse, and so surely as he did so, so surely would the islanders refuse to touch one penny of Mary's money.

“I’ll do what I can for you,” he said. “I’ll fight Tregarthen if you like. But you will never make him yield, never.”

Mary thought of the Great Secret, and she was silent.

The saffron bars of a new day’s prison were breaking when Mary came from the land of dreams, and the consciousness that somebody was hammering at her door. Ruth was calling her, and the stern note of tragedy was in her voice.

“Come out and see,” she said. “They are all down in the valley.”

Mary dressed herself swiftly and went forth with Miriam. It was a fair and beautiful morning, with a crisp keen air and thousands of sun jewels dancing on the grass. The sea had taken on a deeper blue, the sands seemed more golden. Tregarthen might have been the Paradise of the Four Seasons, so fair it was.

And yet it was a smiling treacherous Paradise. Down in the valley all the Islanders had gathered to watch the effect of the wet frost. Over these forty acres a hideous change had come. There were no longer rows and spaces of nodding blooms, but only the pungent fragrance of the sea was on the air. As far as the eye could see was no more than a waste of broken brown leaves like a swamp after a herd of wild beasts has trampled through it. As Mary looked the whole landscape became blurred, and she could see nothing but mist for the moment. She turned to an old bent man who was standing by her side.

“This means ruin?” she asked.

“That’s it,” the other replied. “Starvation. The best part of a year’s starvation. Best go away, Mary Blenkiron, best not stay here and see what we shall have to see. ‘Twill be no place for butterflies, Tregarthen won’t, this summer.”

The man spoke roughly, more, perhaps, to hide his feelings than anything else. There was nothing but pity in Mary’s heart for him.

“Even butterflies have their uses,” she said sweetly. “No, if you would only let me help you, I should do so gladly. I have far more money to spend than I need. If you will only let me come to your—”

“We’re not beggars, Mary Blenkiron. We can’t take your money because—”

“Because you haven’t earned it. But I want you to earn it. Do you suppose I would insult a Tregarthen Islander by asking him to eat the bread of charity? There are scores of things you can do. Tregarthen ought to have provided for that. What right has he to leave you in peril of starvation, when there are so many ways? Will you be good enough to answer that question, Abel Penberthy?”

Penberthy looked a little dubious. Perhaps a faint light was beating in on his understanding. Ruth came in time to hear the last words, and a little knot had gathered round. There was a vague feeling of comfort in the presence of numbers. Ruth’s eyes were blazing. Tretire would have checked her, but he was too late.

“No right at all,” she cried. She spoke wildly and her words carried far on the still air. “If any of us die over this business, as some of us have died before, Tregarthen has our blood on his soul. Prosperity and Comfort have held out both hands to him, and Tregarthen has turned his back on them. We could have no visitors, no industries, nothing. And why? Because the flow of money in the island would have corrupted us. There was the lace making, for instance. These ladies could find us with the material and the market. They are willing to arrange it now so that starvation will never trouble us again. And Tregarthen refuses with scorn.”

“Tregarthen is coming,” a warning voice cried.

“Let him come, let him hear every word I have to say. Tregarthen, are we going to starve when the gold is waiting for us?”

“It is not waiting for us,” Tregarthen cried sullenly.

He strode into the group, his head erect, his eyes flashing. Miriam’s eyes were flashing too, behind her glasses.

“I beg your pardon,” she said. “You know perfectly well that the money is here, and that it can be honestly earned.”

“They won’t like it,” Tregarthen replied. “Ask them.”

Miriam proceeded to do so. She stood with a hundred pairs of eyes upon her as she made a speech; and though she saw anxiety and desire in them, when she called for those on her side, not a soul moved. It was only Tretire and Ruth who cried approval to the skies when she had finished.

“You?” Tregarthen cried. “You, who are going to be my wife.”

He strode forward, a picture of magnificent wrath, and made as if he would grasp Ruth by the wrists and drag her away. Thus a mediaeval baron might have felt had his spouse dared to thwart his wishes. Never had Mary admired him as she did at this moment. She stepped quickly between the angry Dictator and Tretire, whose face had grown queerly white under his tan.

“Ruth is not going to be your wife,” she said very quietly. “Tregarthen, are you quite serious in your determination not to accept my offer?”

“Nothing could induce me to change my decision.”

Mary looked round, half expecting to see the mob rush on Tregarthen and tear him in pieces. But nobody moved. There was no emotion on a single face there save the heavy despair that had fallen on one and all.

“Very well,” she said quietly. “Then I must use the power that Fate has placed in my hands. I must see you at once. I must crave audience in private with you. I believe that is the correct way for a mere individual to address a sovereign. Will your Majesty graciously deign to lead the way to your castle?”

Chapter X

Nearing the Throne.

MIRIAM glanced at her companion with anxiety. As a beauty, an heiress, an American woman, Mary was in the habit of doing things regally. If she was bent upon folly now—and Miriam had no reason to doubt it—that folly would have something imperial in it.

“Let me come along with you,” she said indifferently. “I have not seen Tregarthen’s home yet, and I am curious.”

“Curious to see how I am going to behave?” Mary replied. “When you speak in that coldblooded, indifferent way I always know that you are worrying over me. I guess this is my show. Now, sir.”

She turned haughtily to Tregarthen and waved her hand. It was Elizabeth and Burleigh up to date. Tregarthen so far forgot his dignity as to admire Mary. Ruth

was more beautiful; she was of the soil, but she had not the grace and daintiness of her more fortunate sister. Education and the air of palaces could alone have given her that.

Then the people made way for them to pass down the grassy slopes between the withered wilted flowers, already smelling rank and harsh in the sunshine. Mary snapped off the head of a narcissus, a brown broken-hearted bloom that yesterday was sweet with grace and beauty.

"Look at this," she said. "It is from the injustice of Tregarthen. Ignorance, sloth, and neglect have blighted your paradise. Do you understand me? Under happier auspices that flower would be no more than a mourning blossom upon the grave of Spring. To-day it is the tragedy of a people, slain on the tomb of Helplessness by a murderer."

"Meaning me?" Tregarthen asked grimly.

His eyes were cold and angry, and yet not without a certain grudging admiration. The girl was fair to see, she talked easily, and she was not afraid of him. And deep down in the heart of Tregarthen was the restless uneasy voice that told him how wrong he was, how right was Mary.

"Meaning you," she said. "Oh, you can play the monarch here, you can take advantage of a quaint old charter to run your little tin kingdom. But you have no right to assume the rôle of Providence, to starve four hundred souls. What will they do now?"

"They will manage. We have oats and dried grapes and a fair supply of old potatoes from last year. It will be a hard and bitter struggle, but we shall survive it. We have done so before."

"You share the food of the common people, I understand?"

"I have already told you so. I am of my people. All the crops are common, and they are divided at a certain ratio. The same with the money. I take one tenth of everything, and there is an end of the matter. Give us proper weather in due season, and we are the most perfect Commonwealth in the world. We ask for nothing from the outside."

"Do you not?" Mary said dryly. "You don't require fertilizers, or new and fashionable bulbs, or cloths, or medicines, or anything of that kind?"

Tregarthen conceded the point none too gracefully. He also admitted that if such things were required at the present moment it would be impossible to procure them. The frost had come at the onset of the flower harvest when hard coin was practically exhausted. It is not nice for a monarch to be compelled to admit these things to a mere mortal.

"Do you ever get any really severe weather here?" Mary asked.

"Sometimes," Tregarthen explained. He spoke as a man does who recalls a great disaster, a sacred grief, marshalling his words slowly and thoughtfully, so as not to display undue feeling or emotion. Yet his eyes glistened, his face grew grave and consequently handsomer for its suggestion of humanity. Mary never liked the man as much as she did at that moment.

"It was seven years ago," he said, "just after the harvest was over. Never was there such a blizzard known in Cornwall. We were cut off from the world for weeks. Anybody in the village will tell you how Gervase Tretire fought his way to Wadebridge and saved us. It was a dreadful time."

“I am very fond of Gervase Tretire,” said Mary.

“A brave man,” Tregarthen replied, “but passionate and headstrong. That comes from the Spanish blood in his veins. Sometimes I fear that he may venture to defy me. I almost dread that happening.”

“If it does happen, what then?”

“I should exercise my right, and banish him from the island.”

The Man had disappeared, and once more the King was speaking. Mary glanced into that strong face with its mobile lips, and smiled. She had seen greater rulers than this, and they were only men in disguise.

“He is going to marry Ruth,” she said.

“Oh no, Ruth is going to marry me.”

There was grandeur in the speech, magnificent condescension. King Cophetua and the beggar maid was a mere gutter romance to this.

“You have broken it gently to the poor girl?” Mary asked.

“She knows her duty,” Tregarthen replied. “You have already heard why it is her place to become my wife. There is no strong affinity between us.”

“No; the strong affinity is between Ruth and Gervase Tretire. They love one another, and it would be a sin to part them. Both are headstrong and hot-blooded. Tregarthen, if you part those two, you are inviting a tragedy.”

“I tell you Ruth knows the high position before her!”

“And fancies that she is resigned to it. She will find her mistake when too late. I shall not permit you to marry Ruth.”

“You will not permit me to marry Ruth—you will—you—”

His voice trailed away lost in bewilderment and indignation. Who was this modern who dared to come here and address him like this? A mere American beauty with the greasy trading dollars for the throne of her arrogance! Yet her eyes were smiling and serene, and she spoke as one who grasps her power with both hands.

“I shall not permit you to marry Ruth,” she said.

“And how will you prevent me?”

“Easily enough. By the charter you can only marry your own kin on the island, or, failing them, one of the Four Families. Your kin has not failed. I am of your kin, and have all the necessary documents to prove it. So, before any woman on the island claims the right to share the throne they have my claim to dispose of. You are mistaken, Tregarthen. I am your future wife—if I like to exercise my prerogative.”

Tregarthen stood still, with his hands raised above his head. His eyes were focussed upon Mary’s face. She was sweet and fair to look upon, yet she might have been some loathsome thing. That she spoke the truth Tregarthen never for one moment doubted, that she had right and the custom of the island on her side was certain. The knowledge struck Tregarthen with the force of a blow.

“Do you want to—to marry me?” he asked hoarsely.

“A terrible fate for you,” Mary replied. “Yet there have been men who would have run the horrible risk. But I said no; I said that other girls might become duchesses and the like, but that I was reserved to share a throne, and rule over a kingdom bigger than a pocket-handkerchief but not so big as a tablecloth. I argued that I was born to the purple.”

Tregarthen had no reply for the moment, he was slowly assimilating the new condition of things. If this girl liked to assert her right he had perforce to obey. The idea of breaking away from tradition never occurred to him for a moment. He would have to marry this American girl, this up-to-date, frivolous creature with her worldly ideas and her horrible suggestion of turning Tregarthen into a paying speculation. He had once stayed amongst people like this, he had actually been expected to be civil to a man who had made a fortune out of glue. Would Mary insist upon bringing a phalanx of glue merchants to the island and teaching his beloved people business!

"Do you want to marry me?" he repeated.

"Under the present circumstances, no," Mary replied. "Your own actions in the future may compel me to change my mind; but, when the time comes, I hope to marry something more like a man."

"I—I beg your pardon," Tregarthen gasped feebly.

"And yet my words were quite plain. For the present you are a visionary and a dreamer—a poor creature who is wrapped in a phantasy no stronger than a wreath of frost-bitten flowers. Oh, yours is a poetic life. The romance of a king starving with his people is precious; but a *man* would be up and doing, fighting the foe until he had it by the throat. Tregarthen, I had a great mind to make a man of you in spite of yourself."

"I am quite satisfied as I am," Tregarthen said bitterly.

"Of course you are. Never was the sappiest little dude yet who would have been content to change places with William Shakespeare without a large sum of money to his credit to make the bargain moderately even. But I'm not satisfied at all. I grant there are thousands of men in the world who corrupt all they touch and who make business a vile thing. You hate and despise commerce, but you have no right to keep the bread out of your subjects' mouths, and you have no right to compel a girl to become your wife when she has given her heart to somebody else. And, what is more, I am not going to permit it."

"You are not going to permit it? You!"

The acrid contempt in Tregarthen's voice moved Mary to a passing anger. But she was strong, and consequently she was disposed to be merciful.

"Yes, I," she said. "I can bring your little doll's house about your ears, and can cause you to wander like Ishmael, seeking your daily bread. I could open your eyes to the better side of the struggling millions whom you affect to despise. I could show you women with far less natural advantages than the women of Tregarthen who are happy and contented with remunerative daily toil. At present you are no more than a conceited boy who has everything to learn. Some day I may do this thing, some day I may fill you with shame and repentance and clothe the island in happiness and prosperity. But not yet, not yet."

"I presume that is American bluff," Tregarthen suggested.

Mary laughed. Her little gust of passion had passed away. She was sorry for this man, a man truly honourable and yet so blind in his methods. And Mary had a terrible weapon to her hand.

"Nothing of the kind," she said. "For the present I am content to warn you that you are not going to marry Ruth Pengelly. If you insist upon that I shall assert my

rights to the throne. Come, are you going to listen to reason, or is it going to be war to the knife between us?"

"A king can do no wrong," said Tregarthen. "I can pass you over for Ruth, I can expel you from the island altogether. You have not seen yet how great a hold I have on the affections of my people."

Mary admitted the point. It was a strong argument, and she was a stranger amongst the most clannish people in the world. As she looked into Tregarthen's cold eyes she saw the shadow of the coming strife there. Then she turned and saw the desolation of flower gardens in the valley and her heart grew hard.

"Will you come in?" said Tregarthen. "A cup of tea——"

"Not yet," Mary said; "not yet. I cannot partake of your hospitality and remain your sworn foe. For the present you must go your way and I will go mine. But you are not going to marry Ruth Pengelly."

She bowed and turned, leaving Tregarthen standing under the shadow of his own ancestral home, where the Tregarthens had governed for seven centuries. Under the shade of the grey walls a flippant American girl had defied him, a mere bundle of pretty femininity from a people who measured their dominion by the span of one prosaic century! Tregarthen strode across the stone-flagged hall with no place in his heart for aught but anger and contempt. He turned to see Mary tripping away in the sunshine.

"Wonderfully graceful and pretty," he said. "Under other circumstances I suppose I might have been like that myself. To-night I will see Ruth and arrange for our nuptials. My pretty American needs a lesson badly."

Chapter XI

Ruth in Rebellion.

IT is just possible that the good seed falling upon stony ground is not always wasted. Seed sown anywhere generally sprouts, even if nothing comes of it eventually; and it was thus with the ideas Mary and Miriam had attempted to inculcate in Tregarthen's mind. The seeds might parch and wither in time, but they were troubling Tregarthen now. They were as peas in his mental shoes. He would have dismissed the whole thing contemptuously, but unfortunately his conscience would not be stifled. And he was sorely troubled in his mind. To admit that Mary Blenkiron was right was out of the question, to admit that there might be something in her argument was quite another matter.

Tregarthen paced up and down his big hall uneasily. His feet echoed on the polished oak floor and resounded in the gallery overhead. A huge table ran along the whole length of the room, and, halfway down, was a great, battered, glistening salt-cellar of silver. Above this, Tregarthen dined at two o'clock in solitary state, unless he had visitors, which was rarely, and below the salt sat the men-servants just in the good old-fashioned way. No Tregarthen had ever dined in any other

fashion. There are Cornish farmers, men warm in the world's goods, who dine with the servants in the big stone kitchens to this day.

A fine old place was Tregarthen and in good repair. It stood high on a jagged pyramid of rocks close to the sea, and partly sheltered by a jutting spur. There were grounds where primroses and gorse and heather grew, but no attempt was made at elaborate floral decoration or shaven lawns, for the situation was too exposed for that. It was better thus, for no formal arrangements would have possessed half the charm that went to Nature's own perfect handiwork. And there was music there, the everlasting music of the sea, with the song of the Atlantic on its restless lips.

Here was a great stone house approached by an enormous gateway opening on either side into long suites of rooms. There were pictures on the walls and glittering suits of armour, stands and trophies of arms, quaint useless artistic furniture of all ages, oak chests, teapoys, inlaid cabinets, rows upon rows of china plates and figures. Here was a spinnet, and close by the outline of a huge bow-pot filled with dead leaves. If you had asked Tregarthen where these had come from, he would have shrugged his shoulders and replied indifferently that his ancestors had accumulated all these priceless art treasures. Which to a certain extent was true, for nine-tenths of them had come from wrecks, especially about the time Spanish Philip's ingenious little scheme came to grief and the Armada passed into history.

But Tregarthen was thinking nothing of his house and its story to-day. He could not get Mary out of his mind. He had been defied by a mere girl on his own island. These are the kind of things monarchs are not accustomed to, and the worst of it was that there was so much in what Mary had said. The people were going to starve, and he alone was to blame for this lamentable state of things.

Yes, he could have helped it—that he admitted freely. He might have transformed Tregarthen into another Treharrow which is a new but fashionable resort some few leagues nearer Penzance. There was a time when Treharrow used to starve in the same genteel patrician way after the pilchards failed, and before Sir Giles Treharrow sold the island to one Richard Thunder, a retired merchant, who promptly boomed the place with the aid of a London doctor and a judicious hospitality to the press. But what had happened? Primitive Treharrow folks had gotten civilized, and had built public-houses, so that Treharrow became a byword for fifty miles of coast-line. Prosperity had contaminated Treharrow and all the vices had bred from the spawn of gold. Perish every man on Tregarthen rather than follow an example like this.

No, Tregarthen decided, he would not bring trade here. The lace industry seemed harmless enough on the face of it, but it was only the thin edge of the wedge. Once let his subjects know the lust for money and the island was doomed. They could fight through the calamity as they had done before. They had their meal and their salt fish and the native wine they made from the vineyards over by Port Gwynn. Could there be a more model community on this earth? Only keep the frosts away, and there was nothing that they required.

And Ruth? Well, Ruth would follow the path of obedience faithfully. She might have a fancy for Tretire, who was wild and headstrong and more trouble to hold in

than all the rest of the islanders together. Tretire must be taught a lesson. And yet, if Mary exercised her prerogative—

Tregarthen came to a stop and looked out of the great mullioned windows. Across the hall fell shafts of purple and gold and pallid blue from the stained glass overhead, whereon were emblazoned the Tregarthen arms. And Mary Blenkiron was equally entitled with Tregarthen to bear these arms.

She was absolutely entitled under the Charter to insist upon Tregarthen marrying her; and if you smile and say such a thing is impossible, read the archives of certain old families and peruse certain old statutes never repealed, and you shall find things of amazing interest. Under the Charter, failing other Tregarthens, Mary was within her rights. Would the islanders permit Tregarthen to put her aside?

Well, they were pretty tenacious of their laws and customs. Not more than seventy years before they had murdered Jasper Tregarthen, grandfather of the present ruler, because he tried to impose taxes in coin in lieu of taxes in kind. But then, Mary could hardly be regarded as a Tregarthen. No Tregarthen ever wore Paris frocks and carried diamonds of price in her ears. This beautiful creature was of the world worldly, an American. And it is hard to imagine a greater gulf than that existing between Tregarthen and America. But she was beautiful. Tregarthen could imagine a man doing anything for the love of Mary.

No, he would marry Ruth. He had already put up with enough from this strange girl from over the water. He would see Ruth this evening, and arrange for the ceremony to take place without delay.

He dined moodily from fine silver plate on salt fish and oatmeal cakes, he drank from a crystal goblet beyond price, he was waited upon by men who would have laid down their lives for him. And the table service there would have sold for enough at Christie's to keep Tregarthen from want for years. Certain of the Tribes would have advanced large sums upon it. But Tregarthen knew nothing of this, he was ignorant of the bursting philanthropists who actually spend large sums of money advertising the glad tidings that they had shekels to lend to their less fortunate brethren; which was a pity, because much subsequent unpleasantness would have been saved.

Tregarthen strode down the rocks towards the valley. A brilliant moon was flung athwart the sky like a shield on oak, the powdered stars gave promise of a further frost, which mattered nothing now. In the valley a figure stood still and silent as a statue. When Tregarthen came near he saw that here was she whom he was looking for. He touched her on the shoulder and she started round. Her face was white and drawn, there were the dark purple lines from tears under her eyes; but still beautiful, always wildly beautiful and alluring.

"What are you doing here?" Tregarthen asked.

Ruth caught at her breath. Then she spoke with an effort.

"I came to look upon the ruin of our hopes," she said. "The valley fascinates me, I cannot keep away from it. Tregarthen, Tregarthen, why do you torture us all in this way—why do you do it?"

"I? All my hope, all my strength is bound up in my people."

Ruth burst out wildly. She had arguments ready that fairly carried Tregarthen off his feet. She pelted him with philosophy, she stoned him with logic culled from

Mill and Smith and the rest. And then she told, in a breathless voice, where she had gleaned her knowledge.

"If they were all like me," she said, "you would be compelled to yield."

"And this is the way you dare to talk to your lord and master?"

The words came crisp and clear from Tregarthen's lips, and it seemed to him that Ruth had come to her senses at last. She fairly cowered before him, she bent down as if a great weight were pressing on her shoulders.

"You don't mean it?" she cried.

"Indeed I do; surely you have known this for a long time. And when you come to realize the honour that I am conferring upon you—"

"The honour! Ah, I had indeed forgotten that. I am to be queen of the island, the Lady over a few stricken acres and a people gaunt with hunger. That I am to starve with them is merely a detail. And I am to be tied to the blindest, most ignorant, headstrong man in Europe. A painted puppet, a figure on a string, a marionette with straw in his hair that he imagines to be a crown! Truly I am most fortunate amongst women. Oh, I will obey; I shall know how to carry it through when the time comes. But I shall despise you none the less for that. You shall have no cause to blame, but none the less all my heart belongs to another. Does that touch your pride, Tregarthen?"

It touched his passion more than anything else. He stood there pale with anger and fighting for his self-possession until he trembled.

"You love another man?" he said slowly.

"I do—and another man loves me. It is Gervase Tretire. I shall never care for any one but Gervase, he will never care for any one but me. Tregarthen, if you have a heart at all, spare me."

She came towards him with outstretched hands, her splendid eyes full and pleading—pleading for her happiness, the happiness she wished to share with a poor islander who could give her no more than the bare necessities of life.

"Tretire knows what the arrangement is," Tregarthen said.

"Of course he does. So does everybody on the island. But none the less are you guilty of a cruel act. It may be many years—"

Tregarthen caught her wrists passionately. Any other woman would have blenched. But Ruth was conscious of no pain.

"It will not be years," Tregarthen whispered, "or months, or weeks. We are going to settle this matter here and now."

Ruth wrenched herself away. She had grown quiet and listless as if the mainspring of her passion had broken. But there was a sombre gleam in her eyes that would have given pause to a wiser man than Tregarthen.

"You mean to go through with it?" she asked.

"Ay, I do. Come, you know me, Ruth. Do you remember a Tregarthen breaking his word? I have no more to say."

"Then let it be as you like. I will name the day myself—the First of March. There shall be feasting and rejoicing; it shall be a skeleton feast, with Hunger and Want for my bridesmaids, and my gifts to the groom shall be Hatred and Contempt. It shall be a pretty wedding, Tregarthen; the children shall gather the dead frosted flowers and strew my path with them. And we will take our honeymoon at Port Gwynn, in one of the deserted cottages there."

Ruth's voice rose higher and higher until the valley rang with it. Tregarthen was watching her in fascinated astonishment as she passed to and fro over the dead flowers. He never caught the odour of dead vegetation again without recalling that scene with shame and humiliation.

"But, Ruth," he said, stepping forward, "if you will listen—"

The girl laughed mockingly; she swept a low curtsy, and, turning, fled up the valley towards the Sanctuary. Tregarthen would have followed but that some one came apparently out of the ground and barred his way. Tretire stood doggedly there, his face grim and set, his lower lip caught cruelly between his white teeth.

"You have been listening?" Tregarthen exclaimed.

"Ay," Tretire whispered, "I have."

"Then I need not explain what has happened."

"You needn't. Only you've got to listen to me. Push me like that again and I'll kill you. I've got the red blood before my eyes to-night."

A wise man would have said nothing in reply. But, like most monarchs, Tregarthen was not a wise man, for was not here a subject who was flaunting him to his face, looking at him with a contempt that was harder to bear than any spoken outburst of insolence? Truly the modern spirit was abroad, it was as if an avowed Anarchist had dropped in to afternoon tea with an Emperor. Given that Emperor a temple of his own and a depleted exchequer to boot, and the upshot is obvious. And in all Europe there was no greater an Autocrat than Tregarthen.

He was not a wise man, as you have seen. Handsome, gifted, brave as a Rupert, headstrong as a Stuart, he possessed none of the qualities that go to make up a strong ruler. And he believed in his anointed station as firmly as does the German Emperor.

This was Rebellion. For a moment the hot blood rose to his cheek, his hands clenched as he half stepped towards Tretire. He was physically powerful, but the man who had so inflamed his passion was his match anywhere.

"You are mad to speak thus to me," he said.

"Mad as you like," Tretire replied, with a queer, strangled laugh. "And yet not so mad, after all. Leave that girl alone, Tregarthen."

"I am going to marry Ruth Pengelly."

"No, no. I listened, and I heard what she said. Never a word of love has passed between us, her lips are pure of mine. And yet I have felt that she cared for me as I cared for her. And now I know. I would do anything for Ruth. Don't you push me too far."

"I can expel you from the island."

"You can. But where I go Ruth goes. Be wise in time, Tregarthen. Don't push me too far. Lord, Lord, what a fool you are!"

The words came from Tretire's lips with an expression of sincere pity. Had he dealt Tregarthen a blow he could have hurt him no more. He stood still and silent in the moonlight, a sound like the beat of hammers roaring in his ears.

"Why am I a fool?" he contrived to say.

"Because you are going against fate, because you are trying to push back the tide with a broom. Do you suppose you can keep Tregarthen like this always? No man could. Why should we starve so that you can lord it over us? Why should we

want bread when the loaves and fishes are to our hand? There's such a thing as the law of supply and demand—"

"Tretire, what pernicious literature have you been reading?"

Gervase laughed just a little awkwardly.

"I'm one of the few here who can read," he replied. "Ruth has brought books over from the Rectory—scores of 'em. And I've read them all. I know all about the serfs and vassals and how they fought their way to liberty. You may think that Tregarthen is a smiling paradise; but in spite of her beauty and her climate she is no more than a blot on civilization; you don't beat us or illtreat us, but we are your slaves all the same. And to prove this you would use your power to take to wife a woman who despises and dislikes you. A wise and upright monarch, forsooth! A libertine and a *rouê*. I don't know what that last word means, but perhaps you do."

Tregarthen stepped forward. No longer was his passion on the lead. His eyes flamed, a red light danced before them. In the mist stood Tretire, and then he seemed to be at full length upon the withered flowers and Tregarthen with bruised knuckles standing over him.

Only for an instant, and Tretire was on his feet again. There was wild blood in this man's veins, the blood of the Moor and the Spaniard, the reckless strains of old Tretire blood that ran hotly in the days of the wreckers. And he was face to face with the man who threatened to rob him of something dearer than life. A thin crimson trickled down his face.

He grappled for Tregarthen, whose willing hands met his, and then they struggled desperately and silently in the moonlight. Their feet crushed into the dank vegetation, their eyes were fixed in hate—murder on one face writ large—the gasping breath hung cloudy in the air. Gradually but surely Tregarthen was driven back until he was pinned to the ground with Tretire at his throat. He struggled still, struggled hard for the life that was assuredly forfeit; his starting eyes caught the flash of steel; in imagination he could feel the crush of the point, feel his life's blood ebbing on the grass.

"Stop, for the love of Heaven, stop!"

The words rang out loud and clear in the frosty air. Tretire's uplifted hand was arrested, he dashed his hand across his eyes like a man suddenly aroused from a dream. Ruth bent down and took the knife from his hand.

"What were you going to do?" she asked.

"I—I don't know," Tretire said, in a dazed tired way. "Tregarthen struck me, and I, yes, I know now. I was going to kill him. I should have killed him if you hadn't come up. Thank God you came."

Tregarthen had risen by this time.

Tretire stood trembling like a reed from head to foot. His eyes were full of loathing for himself.

Then he covered his face with his hands and sobbed like a child.

Tregarthen turned away. It is not a pleasant sight to see a strong man's tears.

"You struck him," Ruth said. "You struck him. Oh, Tregarthen!"

Tregarthen was silent, too ashamed to explain. How could he tell Ruth that they had quarrelled over her?

Tretire came forward. "Look here," he said. "See the marks of his hand. We were foster brothers, we shared the same breast, we were children together. And I saved

his life, not once, but twice. No man ever dared to lay hands on Gervase Tretire before. Ask him what I said that gave him the right to do this—ask him."

No explanation came. Tregarthen was redly silent, sullenly ashamed.

"I'll tell you," Tretire went on. "We quarrelled over you. I said the man who used the forms and customs of the island to force a girl to marry him was the worst type of a libertine. And then he struck me."

"You spoke no more than the truth," said Ruth, sadly. "My poor Gervase, I see how you are suffering. He struck you, and you are going to let him go."

She raised herself up and kissed Tretire tenderly on the raw wound over his eyes. Tregarthen turned his head away. It was a humiliating moment for him, the deepest self-abasement he had ever known. Never before had a Tregarthen been flouted like this. The headstrong folly, like the folly of the Stuarts, was upon him.

"It all makes no difference," he said. "Tretire, I am deeply sorry I struck you, I am ashamed of myself."

"And you forgive me?" Ruth cried.

"If I have anything to forgive," Tregarthen said coldly. "But I have pledged my word to marry you, and I shall not go back from that. Make the most of your time, and recollect that I can be a firm ruler as well as a generous one."

He turned abruptly away and strode homewards. Perhaps there was madness in the air. There were legends of mad things Tregarthens had done in the past, but nothing more insane was in the annals of the race than Tregarthen's folly to-night. He had been defied, and he meant to show his power. Ruth had flouted him to his face. This insubordination must be stamped out with a firm hand.

"He will keep his word," Tretire whispered.

"And I shall keep mine—up to a certain point. Gervase, I love you."

"God bless you for those words, sweetheart."

"You knew it all the time; oh, you—you must have known. I heard what you said to Tregarthen, so that I can speak plainly to you. I shall go through with it to a certain point. I shall go through the ceremony of being made a lady of the soil, and then I shall decline to proceed further. I will stand up at the altar and refuse to call that man my husband; I will ask Mr. Guy to protect me. Miriam Murch is rich and powerful, and she can influence all the papers in England. The thing will get into the great daily journals; it will cause a sensation. England will be interested, and public opinion will force Tregarthen to do something for his people. And I shall never rest till he has done so."

Ruth spoke as a prophet, with head thrown back, and eyes glistening. Tretire was watching her with deepest admiration. And he was heart and soul with her in the new crusade. Besides the two visitors, they were the only people on the island who understood what could and should be done.

"I am on your side," Tretire said. "I shall be there to see no harm comes to you. We will raise up the islanders, we will startle them into life. Once prove to them what slaves they are, and the rest is easy."

Ruth made no reply; she was looking up to the frosty stars flung across the sky as if seeking the secret of the future there. Then very slowly she and Tretire walked back in the direction of the Sanctuary.

* * * * *

“I don’t agree with you at all, my dear,” said Mary the Wise. She was seated on her bed discussing the latest development of affairs with Miriam. Ruth had just left, and Ruth had been outspoken as to the dramatic events of the evening. “I regard Tregarthen as a most picturesque personage. He is utterly impossible in this age, and he will have to be cut down to fit the picture. Do you know what is the best thing that could happen to Tregarthen?”

“Live on sixpence a day and earn it,” Miriam said pithily.

“Precisely. A ghastly remedy for a regal disorder, but the remedy will be applied if necessary. Personally, I am averse to invoking the aid of the Great Secret if I can do without it, but I am not going to see the people starve. And I am not going to allow Tregarthen to marry Ruth.”

Mary spoke with the calm assurance that goes with youth, wealth, and beauty. She might have been a duchess settling the affairs of a favourite maid. Miriam did not laugh—her face was quite grave.

“The islanders will not help you there,” she said.

“Of course not. They will not be asked. Under ordinary circumstances Ruth would have to marry Tregarthen. The clannishness and the slavery to custom of these people is simply marvellous. But we come here—from Chicago of all places in the world—as the god in the car to emancipate a colony from serfdom. I am Warwick the king-maker, and don’t you forget it. Guess I’m going to open the eyes of Tregarthen to a pretty considerable extent.”

“If you do,” said Miriam, “please keep them open. They are eyes too handsome for the sole purpose of seeing men as trees walking.”

“It is all settled,” Mary said, in her serene way. “Naomi has been posting me up in the customs of the island. When a Tregarthen has been compelled to fall back on one of the first Four Families for a wife he has to go through the form of dowering her with a rood of land. The land is chosen, and the ceremony takes place a week before the wedding in the little church. When this is done the future bride becomes a lady of the soil, a kind of landed heiress in her own right, and consequently a mate fitting to be a Tregarthen. Naomi says the ceremony is very quaint and impressive.”

“We shall have to see this,” said Miriam. “I am looking forward to it.”

Mary smiled in a puzzling kind of way. She took some letters from a desk and carefully stamped them. Miriam saw that for the most part they were addressed to such frivolous firms as pandered to a love of dress and fashion.

“I thought you meant to stay here for a long time,” she said. “If so, why do you want to write to your dressmaker and milliner? Surely you are not going to bring Paris to Ruth’s wedding?”

“Ruth isn’t going to be married—at least, not to Tregarthen,” Mary replied. “How do you know that I haven’t fallen in love with one of these picturesque islanders, and purchased him for a husband?”

“Purchased him! My dear Mary!”

“Well, that is what it comes to. Many American girls purchase titles with husbands attached to them, which must be a great drawback sometimes. Personally, I have no taste for dilapidated dukes and their badly repaired marquesses. And now will you do me a favour?”

“A dozen, Mary. What is it?”

"Then go to bed, and don't stand chattering there all night. Pleasant dreams, dear."

Chapter XII

The Wreck of the COMUS.

"HAVE you ever noticed," said Miriam next day, "how much more often our idols forsake us than we forsake our idols?"

"I have noticed," Mary said flippantly, "that we have grown very cynical. Miriam, please, *please* don't be flamboyant."

"I am going to give you a practical illustration," Miriam resumed. "We have the highest opinion, say, of a man or woman——"

"Say a man. It makes the lecture so much more interesting to a feminine audience."

"As a matter of fact, I had a man in my mind. You respect a man, you think highly of him, you put him on a pedestal and worship him. He may be a poet or a statesman, or a great artist——"

"Or even a mere husband, I suppose?"

"If you please, Mary. Well, there he is on his pedestal for gods to admire. If anybody suggested to you that he was a mere man, and liable to human frailties, you would scornfully refuse to believe it. But let your idol fall headlong into the gutter, and after the first shock of disappointment it seems to be very natural after all. Some day I am going to write a book on '*The Idols that Desert Us.*'"

"My dear Miriam," said Mary, "what does all this mean? I have had no idols for years. I pulled all the sawdust out of them in my doll days. What you say is so true and so trite, that I can only agree with you."

"I know. But there are others who have idols, and these people have theirs in Tregarthen. In their eyes he has been the king who can do no wrong. They would scornfully refuse to regard a Tregarthen as a mere man, and now they have had their shock, and Tregarthen has fallen—not quite in the dust, but the pedestal is decidedly lopsided."

"You are alluding to last night's incidents, Miriam. Do you mean to say the island knows all about Tregarthen's violence to Tretire?"

"I do, Mary. And the people are very much shocked and distressed about it. How the story got out is a mystery. Ruth only told us two, and I am quite sure Tretire said nothing to any one."

"I am sure of it," Mary said warmly. "Gervase Tretire is a gentleman. Are you certain of these matters, Miriam?"

"Absolutely. I was through the valley before breakfast, and they were discussing the question. Tregarthen came along as Tretire arrived on the scene, carrying a black eye like a chiefs banner. And Tregarthen was ashamed. It would not take much to raise a revolt in Tregarthen."

“And a good thing too,” Mary cried. “Anything to stop the starvation that stares Tregarthen in the face. Here is a smiling paradise turned into a howling waste because one man tries to play Providence to himself and his people. Suppose the weather keeps on like this, what will they do? Why, starve, unless a golden argosy comes up out of the west bringing the gifts of the gods to these poor people. I dreamt last night that a brave ship landed here with corn and oil and wine, and that there was sweet content everywhere. Miriam, do you see any signs of my argosy?”

They were standing under the gateway of the Sanctuary, waiting for a scud of sleet and rain and snow to pass. Between the island and the mainland was a plunging leaden sea, tumbled hissing caps of foam were sliced off and scattered as a sower scatters grain. Tintagel drooped mournfully under a clinging canopy of mist, his forefoot shod with a living tearing spume, while overhead the thin cloud wrack was skating over a pallid sun. Here and there was a glimpse of the sea, swirling, tossed, broken, blotted out instantly. Close by this apple trees were swishing, bent over to the ground, the air trembled to the shock of the heavy plunging seas. And lips were taut with the fine spray that clung to the skin with a rude harshness.

“If your argosy comes,” Ruth said, as she came out into the shadow, “she would be a total wreck before she touched the Fin Sands. Heaven help the boat that finds herself in the Bay before morning.”

“But there is Pinehaven,” said Mary. “You told me that if a ship could creep in there she would be safe.”

“I told you her crew would be saved, which is another matter. If a ship came into the bay and I was aboard her I would steer her into Pinehaven and save every soul. But the ship would pile up on the Razor Back, and never could she float again, because one half would be in the deep water and the other half on the rocks. The crew could step out on to hard high sand and be safe.”

“Couldn’t you send off to the ship as she came drifting by the Fin Head?” Mary asked.

“It is possible, just possible,” Ruth replied. “A Tretire did it nearly two centuries ago with the Royal Consort. And Gervase Tretire is the only man on the island to-day who might succeed in such an undertaking. He would swim out from Fin Head and try and board the ship. If he failed he would never be seen again. And in a hundred attempts he would fail ninety-nine times. There would be a poor chance for your golden argosy.”

Mary debated the point no further. She came out presently with her head tied up in an oilskin, a great pilot coat about her slim figure.

“I am going up to Fin Head to watch the sea,” she said. “Come along.”

The others, similarly attired, followed. They fought their way through the valley past the swishing swaying apple trees to the headland beyond. Overhead the torn cloudwrack was racing along like wreckage washed along a blue shore. Now and again Trevose would stand out sharp and clear, its little bay one seething cauldron, then the light shut down again to the wild grey sadness. It was necessary to stop now and again with backs to the wind and gasp for breath. All along the headland the coarse reeds lay to the wind and whistled dismally. To the

summit of Fin Head the white sheets of spray rose hissing, flung headlong into the faces of the watchers keen as lashes.

They stood silent for a little time impressed with the majesty of the angry waters. There are many grand and awe-inspiring sights in nature, but none grander and more uplifting than the face of the deep with the passion unslipped, and the teeth of the gale bared to the tempest.

"Is it often like this?" Mary panted.

"Sometimes for days together," Ruth replied. "At such times we can only communicate with the mainland by telephone."

"Telephone?" Mary gasped faintly. "A telephone *here?*"

"Yes, Lloyd's station on the west of Fin Head. It has been there for five years. I remember Tregarthen made a fearful fuss at the time, but even he was not strong enough to fight the British Government, and he had to give in."

Mary said no more. A telephone on Tregarthen seemed a weird uncanny thing. Her sympathies were all with Tregarthen in this matter, yet the time was near when Mary blessed the harsh jangling of that bell.

They crouched there for an hour, drenched with spray and stunned with the combat of the water. Now and then a green sea uplifted like a great sliding mountain, and half the hillside was covered with creaming foam. The whole world seemed to be rocking to the fury of the gale. Mary gazed out upon the wide tossing fields until the salt filled her eyes, and the wind got hold of her hair and dragged it like dank seaweed from the jealous pins.

* * * * *

That night she dreamt of argosies and ships at sea. She dreamt of the boom of the great crested waves, she saw the great barks slung afar by the gale, and she saw the islanders down at Pinehaven waiting for the food they needed. When she woke the cold grey dawn was picking out the shadows of the cell, and Ruth was standing over her. The girl was already dressed, oilskin and all, and her eyes were full of a certain sadness, yet stern withal.

"What is it?" Mary asked. "Is anything wrong?"

"Your argosy has come," said Ruth. "There is a ship in the bay."

Mary rose and dressed rapidly. She was trembling with excitement and a strange chill fear that she had never felt before. Outside, the gale was screaming with unabated fury. The mad charges ever and again hit the solid stone walls and made them hum like a harpstring smitten by an unfamiliar hand. The rain had been blown clear out of the sky, but the blast was bitterly cold. In the night the wind had shifted to the north-west, and there was a feeling like snow in the air. Then there was a thudding report, cut short by the wind. If you have ever heard that sound you will understand why Mary's heart burst into furious beating and a certain lump rose to her throat. Again the boom of the gun was heard, the signal of a ship in dire need and peril.

Up on Fin Head all the island had collected, save for the children and such of the women who were too old and feeble to face the gale. A raw grey morning growing gradually clearer, a morning to remember. A wild white shuddering plain lay before the eyes, a plain broken here and there by dark patches. It was impossible to face the sea for more than a few seconds at a time, and as yet the

keenest pair of eyes there had not made out the doomed ship. Over at Trevose they were making vain efforts to launch the lifeboat, but the north-west gale was dead into the mouth of the landlocked harbour, and thrice was the boat dashed back on to the sands to the imminent danger of the crew. All this could be clearly seen, and was being watched breathlessly by the grimly silent islanders.

Again was the attempt made, and again was the lifeboat seen to be flung like a cork back over the creamy sands. A great white wall of spray fell away, and there stood the lifeboat crew over a little black twisted knot on the sands, and a tall figure in riding attire bending over it.

"It's dreadful, dreadful!" Mary moaned. "What is it?"

"An accident to one of the crew, for sure," said Tretire. "Yon's Dr. Julien. They'll have to take the boat back up the cliffs and launch her from Port Gavern."

"Won't that be too late?" Miriam asked.

Tretire said nothing. The operation would take an hour, and subsequently the lifeboat would have to beat her way some four miles further, and a crueller coast for the gallant work it was impossible to imagine. The tears were running freely down Mary's face, but she was absolutely ignorant of the fact. Other women were crying too, the men alone were stern, yet sad. If they could only have done something besides stand there buffeting the gale! But there was nothing to be done, and only too well they all knew it.

Once more came the thud of the gun, this time nearer. All eyes were turned in the direction of the sound. Tretire's hands were held down over his brows. His voice rose wildly and stormily over the gale.

"There she is," he cried; "a point or two off the Dolphin. A liner! God help the poor people aboard of her. It's one of the Atlantic Star liners, the NOMAD or the COMUS, and she's heading for Fin Sands."

She came out of the mist with the swiftness and suddenness of a vision—a great grey boat lifted clean of the water, a majestic inbound liner with perhaps the better part of a thousand souls aboard. It seemed almost impossible to believe that so stout a ship, so strong, so beautifully built a vessel should be at the absolute mercy of the treacherous sea.

"Is she broken down, Tretire?" Tregarthen demanded.

He had just come up, his teeth bared by dint of running into the heart of the gale. Tretire turned to him sullenly.

"No," he said. "Machinery damaged, doubtless, but she's got steering way upon her. Ah, if they only knew what to do!"

Every man present silently echoed the wish in his heart. The spindrift passed away once more, and there, right under the lee of the head, lay the beautiful ocean greyhound, like an albatross with a broken wing, passing on to her destruction. Another half hour and she would be in fragments on the Fin Sands. In a wild frenzy Tretire roared out some instructions, but the wind beat back the words into his teeth. He might as well have shouted from Earth to Mars, for the ears of the angels to hearken. Tregarthen smote his hands passionately together.

"This is dreadful!" he cried. "Is there nothing to be done? Am I so utterly powerless as I seem to be?"

"There be times," said Tretire, "when kings be made of dirt, same as other folks."

Tregarthen allowed the gibe to pass. Tretire spoke loudly and his voice carried gustily. The glistening, oilskinned group standing round nodded approvingly. Two days before this quiet demonstration would not have happened, yet now these men seemed to have arrayed themselves under Tretire, and his black eye led them as the colours of a regiment.

"Is it possible to save them?" Tregarthen asked.

"Well, it is," said Tretire, slowly. All his sullenness and anger seemed to vanish. "You're a good swimmer, Tregarthen. You get down off the point yonder and swim off to her. If so be as you get aboard, are you man enough to steer her on to the Fin Beck?"

Tregarthen shook his head sadly. Brave he was, but his courage was not of the reckless order. He had too vivid an imagination for that. Tretire looked up into his face and smiled meaningly.

"If you can't do it, I will," he said. "Tregarthen is a great man, but I am going to show the island things he can't do."

He stood up and tore off his oilskins, kicked off his big sea-boots, and peeled off coat and vest. With a little cry Ruth darted forward.

"No, no," she said. "You shall not do it. Gervase, you know that I love you, love you better than anything on this earth. Hold him, Tregarthen; beat him to the ground—chain him to the rocks. Oh, if you are men you won't see my heart torn out of my body like this."

With one hand clinging to Tretire's wrist she turned imploringly to the men who stood about her.

Tregarthen had turned his head away, humiliation and admiration struggling for his soul. And the gale screamed and whistled and the good ship plunged on to her destruction. The rattling flap of the oilskins was as a running volley of pistol shots.

A beautiful smile was on the face of Tretire. Mary dashed the tears from her streaming eyes and regarded him with a deep admiration. He was going to do this great brave thing and no soul in Tregarthen could stop him. Before the eyes of them all he took Ruth in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

Illustration:
„My girl," he said, „I am going to do my duty. Let me go"

"My girl," he said, "I am going to do my duty. Let me go."

The look in his eyes was almost pleading. In a slow, dazed, fascinated way, Ruth released him. Some power seemed to compel her laggard obedience. There were no tears in her eyes now, no passion on her face. Only the red lips quivered in what might have been a prayer.

"To-night I am a widow," she said. "To-night I am alone."

Tretire ran down the headland and out upon a ragged spur that pierced far into the troubled heart of the white waters. They saw him stand straight and strong and tall, then he bent back as the waves swept from the foot of the platform and plunged into the racing hellbroth at his feet. For thirty breathless seconds, nothing was seen of him. Ruth had crept to Mary's feet where she lay huddled on

the cold naked floor. What mattered it? Could anything be colder than her own starved heart?

With shaking fingers Miriam unstrapped the glass she had brought. The gale tugged at her arms so that she could hardly steady the binoculars.

"He's gone," said Tregarthen. "Caught in the undertow. It was bound to happen if he didn't dive far out."

"He is there," Miriam cried. "I see his head. What a magnificent thing, what a noble thing! Tregarthen, you are not worthy to black that man's boots. And they have seen him from the ship. They are putting lines out. Ah, now I cannot see him any longer. But he will not fail."

Nobody said anything, for there are moments when evil prophecy is no better than a grievous sin. Every man there knew the dire peril of the swimmer, knew the tricks and twists of the tide and the chaffing flow of the currents where an average swimmer would have perished in fair weather. It was possible that Gervase Tretire might be seen again; but nobody dared hope for it. So they were silent for the sake of Miriam's brave words.

Silent and grim, though the gale made noise enough. A thin spray smote upon the oilskins, they flapped noisily in the wind, crackling to each movement. All eyes were turned to the drifting boat now. There was just a flash of watery sunshine and Tintagel raised his ragged head out of a mist like tears. As the glint radiated over the churning waste, Miriam pointed to a black object bobbing above the spume. It was smitten here and there, sport for the derisive winds, now down low in the trough, now high out of the water. Then a hand shot high in the air.

"Tretire, Tretire," Tregarthen cried. "It is Tretire."

There was hope now, unless the swimmer was dashed against one of the long ledges of cruel gapped teeth that fringed the coast there. Strong swimmer he might have been, yet he was at the mercy of the storm. At any moment he might be pitched high and flung on to the black forehead of a rock where he would have been crushed like eggshell. Mary felt the convulsive grip of Ruth about her knees.

"What is it, dear?" she asked tenderly.

"Tell me, can you see?" Ruth asked. Her voice was hoarse, she breathed thickly as one does who has sped far. "I dare not look. Lend me your eyes, Mary. Look for me, and let me know."

But Mary looked in vain. A ragged wrack of rain spread itself over the heaving plain like a cloud of cavalry. The stinging rush of it beat in her eyes till she could see nothing but the stern-faced group around her. The whole landscape seemed to have been wiped out with a damp sponge. How long the mist curtain hung now it would have been impossible to say, probably not more than fifteen minutes, and yet it was as a night vigil to those waiting there.

The raw battalions of the gale thrust it aside at length, once more came sea and sky mingled furiously together. Something like a spider on the end of a shining thread seemed to be swarming up the side of the steamer, a great puff of smoke—beaten and twisted and crushed flat by the wind—came from the funnels, the churn and busy thresh of the screw could be heard. Then her syren screamed out in a weird, drunken, staggering triumph. Through her glasses Miriam could see a figure on deck waving arms aloft.

Crash went the binoculars on the rocks as Miriam screamed that Tretire was safe. But she only told those grim-faced men what they had guessed already. The new way on the steamer, the swaggering blare of the syren had been enough for them. Yet nobody cheered—they were too deeply moved for that. Mary felt the arms about her knees creeping upwards. She raised Ruth from the streaming rocks and kissed her with unsteady lips.

"Look up, dear," she said. "Tretire is safe."

Ruth seemed to be feeling her way out of the darkness to the knowledge of this glorious truth. She looked like one who dreams evilly and is as yet barely conscious that she has come back to the joy of being. A flashing blaze of sunshine caught the steamer and held it as in a frame. She was pushing on steadily now, booming and humming like some gigantic insect.

Ruth's eyes lighted up and a flood of gladness poured into them.

"It is done," she cried. "The good Father has done this thing for me. Let us get down to the Fin Beck and see the ship come in."

Most of the others had already started. The wind and the rain were behind them and they streamed down the hill under full sail. Ruth ran, calling and praying as she went, her light foot outstripping the rest. The big steamer came rounding into the bay, the noise of shouting and stamping could be heard from her deck, and then Tretire's voice, curt, loud, and commanding, above the rest. Then the COMUS seemed to pitch high in the air, there was a rending splitting crash as she caught the Razor Back and hung there whilst the great waves were beating the life out of her. The stern was rocking in green water, the bows were buried in deep sand. As a wave broke and rolled back impotently a sailor jumped breast deep in the yellow spume and made his way to shore. Another and another followed till the doomed ship was absolutely deserted. Tretire had steered those lives to safety, but no power on earth could have saved the COMUS.

There were no passengers on board at all, the captain explained. Fever had broken out soon after leaving London and the full complement had been landed at Plymouth. The COMUS was proceeding under orders to Liverpool when the storm broke out and damaged her propeller shaft. There was nothing new about the story; it was the old, old tragedy of the sea, that has been and will be so long as men go down to the deep in ships.

"It's a bad job," said Captain Stannard as he poured a quart or two of salt water from his boots, "but it might have been worse. And here's a hero for you. I'm proud to shake hands with you, Mr. Tretire."

"Eh!" Gervase asked in a vague kind of way. "Do you mean me?"

Stannard indicated emphatically that he meant no other. A narrower citizen of the world would have marvelled at the placid manner with which these people received so marvellous an act of heroism. But the Atlantic seas are cold and treacherous, and acts of heroism on that coast were as daily bread. They were all heroes by birth and training and instinct. They couldn't have been anything else had they tried. Tretire looked at the skipper of the COMUS with some embarrassment.

"We will try and make you as comfortable as possible," said Tregarthen. "Unfortunately we are suffering from hard times, but we can manage to feed you. When the tide ebbs you will be able to get your kits ashore."

There were just one hundred and fifteen of the outcasts altogether, stolid, hard-bitten men who accepted the danger and the freak of fortune with magnificent indifference. They drifted away one by one to the Sanctuary or to some cottage hard by to strip off wet clothes and assume hospitably proffered dry ones. When the tide went down it would be possible to get the sea chests ashore.

"Gervase, how long will she last?" Mary asked.

"Over the next tide and perhaps one more after that," Tretire replied. "She carried so far over the Razor Back that she rests almost on the sands. But the big waves will pound her to pieces all the same. She's badly strained, too, and her back is bound to break before long."

"She is fully provisioned, they say?"

"Oh yes. Provisioned for fifteen hundred people for a week. Enough provisions and flour and biscuit and tinned things to keep us for months."

"And what becomes of these provisions?"

"Well, they're generally sold on the spot for what they'll fetch. Judging by the amount of money on Tregarthen, I should say that would be twopence ha'penny. It'll pay them to move the stuff to Bristol."

Mary said no more for the present, but there was a light of resolution in her eye. As they fought their way homewards Miriam glanced at her inquiringly. It was not until the seclusion of the Sanctuary was reached that Mary unburdened her mind as she sat rubbing the salt from the amber glory of her hair.

"Of course you've guessed it, Miriam?" she said.

"Of course," Miriam replied dryly. "It is a well-known fact that I can read other people's thoughts and occasionally my own. Still, it doesn't require a wide perspicuity to see that you are going to buy those stores for the islanders."

"I am," Mary said. "My golden argosy has come home. It has come in a way I did not expect; but if ever there was a bright and shining example of the proverb as to an ill wind, it is here. When I am clothed and in my right mind I am going to get Lloyd's man here to telephone to my agent in London to buy the provisions as they stand. Before I sleep to-night I am going to have this settled."

Thus spoke the spoilt beauty and heiress. Had a continent or the future of a people been at stake she would have approached the matter in the same regal way. There was a calm light in her lovely eyes that spoke of a triumph already assured.

"Before night!" Miriam gasped. "My dear Mary!"

"Before night," replied the magnificent one. "I have said it."

And, surely enough, before nightfall there came the message that Mr. Elias P. Bang, of Basinghall Street, on behalf of a client had purchased the stores of the COMUS for the sum of two thousand eight hundred and four pounds, fourteen shillings and threepence. And to this day Mary is puzzled and annoyed over those shillings and pence.

Chapter XIII

„Who is on my Side, Who?"

SUCH then is the magical power of gold, the gold that in good hands is so blessed and fruitful a thing. It is the magic wishing-cap, the touchstone of us poor commonplace mortals. In Mary's hands it had been a fairy wand, to abolish want and care and hunger from Tregarthen.

Before dark the following day the stores were practically landed and housed in the big dry cavern behind Trebarrock by the COMUS hands who were yet unable to reach the mainland owing to the great ground-swell that came up like the dirge of the dying storm. But as yet nobody knew to whom these things belonged. With the third morning there came sunshine and calm, and a fleet of boats out from Trevose eager for the news and for the sailors off the COMUS Plymouth bound. And there was news and gossip enough for the fish market to last a good year economically used and sparingly applied. How many a hundred times was the story of the Comus told, I wonder. I have heard it in the hostel, in the cottage, in the farmer's best parlour and away up inland where the tin miners are. In time it will become a legend with the graceful extravagance of fancy embroidered upon it and firmly believed.

The sailors were gone at last, and Tretire was greatly embarrassed by the possession of a handsome keyless gold watch, late the property of Captain Stannard and now a source of anxiety to Gervase, whose black eye was for the nonce forgotten. He would have had Mary take care of it for him, but she stoutly declined.

"Watches are made to wear," she said, "to tell the time."

"Who wants to know the time on Tregarthen?" Tretire retorted.

Mary's nimble wit was powerless before logic like this. Finally the watch was enshrined in an old glass-topped jewel-case of Mary's, and hung up in Tretire's cottage together with his Albert medal and an illuminated address that Tretire anathematized as a 'parcel of foolishness.' And if you take that man by the hand—provided that he will let you—and fuss over him and try and make him out to be a hero, he will probably turn his back on you and ignore you steadily so long as you permeate the island with your foolish presence.

"Never mind about the watch now, Gervase," said Mary. "I want you to help me. I have been going over those stores, and I find they will be ample for our requirements. I have bought them for the island, Gervase."

"Knowed it from the first," Tretire growled. "So long as you've got money, it's easy to spend it. But to get rid of that stuff is a different matter."

"Starving men are not severe critics, Gervase."

"Meaning that we shall be glad of anything before long. And so we shall. And we'll take what you offer and be grateful, only Tregarthen won't let us. You don't know that man when his obstinate spirit is afire."

"And you don't know what an angry woman is like, Tretire. Can't you imagine me a raging fury blazing up and down the island?"

"No," said Gervase, doggedly, but admiringly. "I can't, Mary Blenkiron."

"Well, neither can I. But I am not going to be thwarted in this thing. I am not going to be beaten. It seems almost as if a kind Providence had sent these things here for the benefit of these poor patient suffering islanders. And yet before they

get them, we shall have to fight folly, pride, and blindness. And I am going to fight these things of the night so long as there is breath in my body. Gervase, you are going to be on my side?"

Mary held out her hand. Gervase took it as if it were some thing of price.

"Ay," he said simply. "God bless you, Mary Blenkiron." He stood before Mary with his head thrown back, posing unconsciously as a champion. Yet his eyes were sombre, for he knew the magnitude of the task he was undertaking. A fine ally, all the same, this man with the broad chest and lean flanks, who was only a poor worker now on a more or less civilized island, yet dress him up and send him swinging down Piccadilly in the season, and he would have passed for something decidedly out of the common.

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

"I want you to help me to sort my stores," Mary explained. "They have been packed with system, so that the task will be easy. I want the aged and the suffering to have the comforts they sorely need."

The work was not difficult. There were cases of wine and brandy, tins of meat extract, boxes of Bovril, and the like, much as if Tregarthen had been chosen as the hospital base for an invading army. Before night, scores of these cases had been distributed over the island. Apparently Tregarthen was sulking in his tent like Achilles, for he heard nothing of these things till all the mischief was done.

All the same it was no easy matter to get rid of all these good things. There were those who sorely needed them, there were sick children here and there, for a diet of meal porridge and salt fish is not exactly the regimen approved by hospital authorities. And for the sake of the children mothers capitulated before Mary's advance, but they had the fear of Tregarthen before their eyes. The pale cheeks of a child dimmed their moral vision and the plaint of the suckling drowned the call of conscience. And Mary aided and abetted the social revolution.

It was not to be expected that this beatific state of affairs could last for long. On the third day trembling vassals brought the news to Tregarthen, and to this hour they speak of the language he used and the Homeric wrath that fell upon him as the story was told. He had been outwitted and tricked by a woman, he had fondly imagined that these stores would be fetched away and that in a few days there would be no more sign of them than there was of the ill-fated COMUS.

And here were the Islanders of Tregarthen actually accepting alms at the hands of the American woman. That Tretire and Ruth were aiding and abetting only added fuel to the flame.

Well, he would know how to deal with Ruth. He would make an example of her. By all the laws and traditions of the community she was bound to become his wife. Who was the girl that she should set up her will against his? She disliked him, she was ready to defy him, she was clever and rarely beautiful. And, like less favoured mortals, Tregarthen was alive to the desire for the unattainable. In spite of everything he could but admire Ruth strongly, his vanity prompted him to claim her as his own, and gradually bring her to be the loving obedient wife of the great and wise creature he felt himself to be.

You must not blame this man overmuch for his narrow creed and the limited range of his mental vision. For seven hundred years he and his forebears had governed Tregarthen. They were absolute monarchs. They had seen nothing of the

world, they had little education, and their lives were lived out according to rigid precedent. From his own limited outlook, he was ruling his people to the best of his ability and for what he deemed to be their own good. If they starved, he starved. If their years were fat, so were his days. And out in the world beyond was strife and greed and misery, amongst those who would have pitied Tregarthen.

Again, his ideas were Utopian. Great scholars, men of the world, abstruse philosophers, have preached the Utopian creed from time immemorial. That the thing is impossible so long as human nature is human nature is a mere detail. And yet this was what Tregarthen was trying to do.

He strode out from his lair in search of Mary Blenkiron, a hard dogged look on his handsome face. A year's struggle with the world, with daily bread as his only goal, would have been the making of Tregarthen. He would have learnt toleration and pity, he would have come to the knowledge that the best part in life is the conquest of self and consideration for others. He would have come to know that he was a mere figure in the great ledger of life and not the cover that binds the scheme of creation. A year in London slums would have made Tregarthen a new man, a man to know and respect, a man that any woman might be proud to call her lord, ay, and her master, too.

But Tregarthen knew no more of these things than a headstrong boy. He saw nothing of the beauty of the day, he saw not the lace-like spray passing in over the soddened fields, he had no pleasure in the sunshine, he saw only that his people were passing from him into a state of lazy luxury and golden charity brought here by that infamous American woman. He saw the greed and vice that was assuredly following in her trail. The aged and the sick and the young had done without these things in the past; they should do without them in the future. It never occurred to the man that he was criminally wrong, and that honest labour was far better and sweeter than this reclining on the shoulders of Jupiter, this leaving everything to Providence. A fool if you like, but a fool that you are going to be very sorry for before long.

A group of islanders stood aside respectfully for him to pass. But there was nothing servile in their looks, though the black dog was on his shoulders and sullen anger in his eyes. He appeared every inch a king who goes to demand the submission of some rebellious subject.

"Do you know where I shall find Mary Blenkiron?" he asked.

The American women were up to Port Gwynn, one explained. One or two of the children there were ill, and Mary Blenkiron and Miriam Murch had gone up a while back with Tretire bearing burdens on his shoulders. The big white-bearded islander who vouchsafed this information had an alluringly branded tin or two in his hand.

"What have you there, Abraham Ede?" Tregarthen demanded.

The big man hesitated. He looked uneasy, but he had made no show of concealing the package in his hand. His lips were trembling, but not with fear, and his aged, close-lined eyes had all the fire of youth.

"It's a cocoa essence," he said, "and some kind of wine. Last time Dr. Julien was over here, he said wife must have something of the sort. Might as well say she must be fed on pearls. I got this from Mary Blenkiron."

"Ah, charity. So you accept charity, eh?"

“Nothing of the kind,” Ede retorted. “I made her a net for the prawns. And a good net it was. And she gave me this ‘stead of money.”

“Throw it away!”

The words came out with a snap from Tregarthen’s lips. A quick movement took place in the little ragged group. So this was the way Mary was sapping the conscience of the people. Tregarthen repeated his edict. Ede stood before him like some rugged old grey tree and leafless, and yet defiant of the gale.

“It’s for her,” he said doggedly. “Where’s a better wife, Tregarthen? And it’s life to her. If you want this you can have it—same as Trevelyan of St. Kew gotten Rascelles Castle.”

Now, as the famed Trevelyan ‘gotten’ Rascelles by force of arms, Tregarthen rose to the assurance that a defiance and a challenge were meant. He advanced flamingly on Ede, who stood with the light of battle in his eyes.

“A fair fight, Tregarthen,” a voice said. “Forty years against seventy-three!”

Tregarthen’s arm fell to his side and a shamed flush crept to his face. Other men have tried to sweep back civilization and progress with their little brooms. Some of them have been converted, others have lost their heads in more senses than one. On this occasion Tregarthen kept his.

He strode away up the lawn in the direction of Port Gwynn. He took no shame from the brown, dank desolation where late the flowers had smiled. He took no heed of the fact that this misery and distress was all his doing. He only knew that he had been publicly defied by a vassal, and that he had come out of it with a great deal the worst of the argument. There was poor consolation in the reflection that any of these people would have died for him. But freedom was in the air, and it was coming to Tregarthen as it comes everywhere in time. Mary, the fairy princess, had kissed the sleeping villagers, and they were waking to a knowledge of better and wider things at last.

Tregarthen came presently to the clutch of huts that formed Port Gwynn. He had quite expected to see most of the cottages deserted, and their tenants safely housed in the Sanctuary. But there were children down on the beach, and Jacob Bishop there busily engaged in fashioning a new boat. A small, yellow-headed boy, with his hands on his hips, stood regarding Tregarthen steadily.

“What is your father doing?” the latter asked.

“Making a boat for Mary Blenkiron,” the child replied. “Father, and James Guy, and Martin Hawkes, and all of them’s at it. A fine yacht she’ll be, and there’ll be money to keep us for a great while.”

Tregarthen walked up to Bishop’s cottage. So this was Mary’s little scheme for keeping the village together. Down below the noise of hammering had ceased. Bishop and the rest had recognized the Dictator, and their slow minds had decided that his visit boded them little good. And there were sick children about, and up in the cottage were the flesh-pots of Egypt in alluring shape.

Illustration:

There had been no laughter like this in Tregarthen for days

Tregarthen lifted the leather latch of the cottage and walked in. There was a smile on Jenifer Bishop’s face, a crowing child was perched on her shoulder.

Miriam sat by the fire, Mary had an older child on her lap, a yellow-headed girl whom she was feeding with some clear amber jelly from a tin. There had been no light or laughter like this in Tregarthen for days.

"What is the meaning of this?" Tregarthen demanded.

Comus fled into the Rembrandt shadows. It was as if some master hand had wiped comedy from the canvas, and with a lightning stroke smote in tragedy instead. The children crouched down and whimpered, Jenifer Bishop dropped in a chair and began to rock herself to and fro. There was a wild tempest in Tregarthen's splendid eyes. He might have been Ajax, Ulysses, any of them that Homer loved. Mary smiled sweetly yet admiringly at him.

"A little more of the jelly," Mary said. "Tregarthen, I have no doubt that Jenifer will accept your apology for coming in with your hat on."

With a red face Tregarthen clutched at his hat. "What is the meaning of this?" he reiterated.

"Surely the situation speaks for itself," Mary replied. "There has been a good deal of sickness here mainly amongst the children, and mainly brought about by an absence of proper food. For that you are utterly to blame. I have consulted Dr. Julien by telephone, and with his approval I am administering jellies and the like. The Port Gwynn men are building a yacht for me, and the money will keep them going for quite a long time. You see, I purchased those stores for the benefit of the sick and suffering, and Dr. Julien advises me what to do."

"I will have no more of it," Tregarthen thundered.

The red flag was creeping into Mary's face. "You are violent," she said. "You are alarming the children. Dr. Julien has ordered these and other certain things, which orders you can revoke if you like."

"I certainly do like," Tregarthen said sullenly. "And I—I beg your pardon for speaking so loud just now."

"Oh, you are learning your lesson," Mary cried. She rose to her feet and stood before Tregarthen with flashing eyes. "Even the lion cub gets his lesson sometimes. Take all my good and nourishing things away and cast them into the sea! And if one of these little ones dies, he will die because you have deprived him of the meat that God has sent him. And if he dies, then there shall be an inquest, and Dr. Julien will give such evidence as shall make England cry shame on you. Tregarthen, this is a matter beyond your power, as it would be beyond the power of any prince in Europe. The doctor has ordered these things, and a doctor is an autocrat in these matters. He can order a pauper champagne if he chooses. Oh, you are a great man, Tregarthen, so great a man that you are utterly lost in contemplation of your own vast grandeur. But are you great enough for this, are you great enough to fly in the face of the penal laws of England? Come, here is the challenge in this little tin."

Chapter XIV

The Side of the Angels.

WITH a steady hand Mary held the small tin tube to Tregarthen. He stood hesitating before her as Portia's suitors might have done before the caskets. He would have liked to defy all creation, to fling convention to the winds and assert his authority before the eyes of gods and men.

Now, was ever a constitutional sovereign in so drab a plight before? Fancy the fate of a monarchy depending upon a can of concentrated soup, an empire resting on a carrot, a constitution kept at defiance by a stick of celery! It sounds strange enough, Rabelaisian, and yet is it not recorded somewhere that a grape seed caused severe dynastic complications ages ago in the purple East?

It was no farce to Tregarthen, however. He accepted the challenge in bitter earnest. Mary had spoken, and she had right and force behind her. A monarch he might be, but at present the fiat of Dr. Julien outweighed his decrees. He waved the offending tin aside.

"If what you tell me is correct," he said slowly, "I have no more to say. The matter is entirely in Dr. Julien's province, and anybody would be powerless under such circumstances. Do as you please with the sick."

"That was nicely spoken, Tregarthen. If it hadn't been—"

It was Bishop who spoke. The bulky form of the owner of the cottage loomed large in the doorway. He was big and strong with a red and brown face that shone amicably most times. It was quivering with passion now—passion appeased, yet still running over its banks.

"Wisely said," he went on. "That little one was dying—dying fair and sweet with the roses on its cheeks, same as two others died three years ago—died of starvation, so to speak, and the want of good things. And Mary Blenkiron's come amongst us like an angel from heaven to save the little ones. We've watched 'em die because we couldn't help it, and because we were loyal to you. But when you come to stand between the children and the things God sends 'em, then you do wrong. And if you'd taken yonder girl at her word I should ha' killed you, Tregarthen. Sure as I'm a living man, I'd ha' laid you out at my feet."

He spoke with the utmost deliberation; he made no gasp for breath, no bungle over a single word, and yet he was vividly, terribly in earnest. It was the absolute majesty of a strong man's wrath, the tense fanaticism that leads sometimes to great deeds and sometimes to sickening tragedy. Tregarthen seemed to dwarf into insignificance by the side of him.

"This is how my people get pampered," he said bitterly.

"Nothing of the kind," Mary retorted. "Bishop, go back to your work. I can hold my own without your assistance."

The big man was understood to say that he hadn't the remotest doubt of it. He clattered from the cottage humming some quaint Cornish melody as to the figure he cut when dancing the polka and disappeared, and presently the thud, thud of his hammer came up the cliffs again. Tregarthen lingered there, loth to go, leaving his guns and colours all behind him.

"Will you come outside?" he said to Mary. His voice was quieter and more humble than she had ever heard it before. "I have something to say to you."

Mary rose at once. She stepped out into the desolation of the garden. Only the sea was smiling at Port Gwynn; for the rest, the blight of the frost had blackened the face of the land.

"You are corrupting my people," Tregarthen challenged.

"You have no people," Mary replied. "Mind, I speak as a republican, and I may be wrong. The thing you call loyalty is the merest sentiment. Britain loves her queen because she is a good woman and she is the mother of her people. And yet this very Britain has beheaded one king and driven another into exile. What has happened yonder on a large scale will happen here on a small one. Tregarthen, you can't abolish human nature. Already your people are turning to me because they see I mean well by them, and because they are beginning to comprehend that this periodic starvation is partly your fault."

"If you would only go away," Tregarthen suggested, "I could—"

"I am not going away, Tregarthen. These people are my people, and I am going to save them all this misery and suffering. If you drive me off the island I shall get Dr. Julien to help me. I shall hire a yacht and hang about the coast. I am not going to be beaten."

"My people will not forget their allegiance."

"As allegiance, perhaps not. If one of them wilfully defied you, if he put up his authority against yours, they would stone him from the island. And yet I have got the best of you. Why? Because I appeal to poor human nature. When you are stronger than that you are stronger than me; but not before. Do you realize how near you were to death just now?"

Tregarthen shuddered, not because he was a coward, but because he had a poet's imagination. He admitted the fact freely enough.

"You have got behind me through the women," he said. "Perhaps I do not understand the women. That is why it is necessary I should have a wife. That is why I am going to marry Ruth Pengelly."

As he spoke a certain hardness crept into Tregarthen's voice. There, at any rate, he sat firmly on his throne. The islanders might rebel against him over these little children, but in a matter of spiritual authority they would be with him heart and soul. He had right on his side, he could compel Ruth to become his wife, and all the island would put pressure on her. If Mary were indiscreet enough to interfere in this matter, she would find how slippery her grasp had been.

He glanced into Mary's face, but he saw no displeasure there. He only saw a beautiful smiling woman, a woman whom he respected and admired more than he knew. And that smile puzzled him. Mary disapproved strongly of the whole business. She knew that Ruth cared only for Gervase Tretire, and yet she was smiling now as one does at a wayward child.

"Any one would imagine that I had said something silly," he remarked fretfully.

"So you have," Mary replied. "Do you know that once as a child I made up my mind that my mother should not go to a dance. Directly she came to my bedside and started I began to howl."

"It sounds incredible," Tregarthen said politely.

"Doesn't it? Well, I howled for an hour. Then, outside my door, I heard my nurse whisper to the butler that the carriage was to be sent for my mother at once. Then my poor little heart rejoiced, and I fell asleep; and when I woke up in the morning

my mother had just come back from her ball. Now, wasn't that a cruel trick to play upon an innocent little child?"

Tregarthen laughed. Mary's dainty ways were very winning. She had a trick of looking up into his eyes that charmed him. All the same he was puzzled; it seemed that Mary was in some way making fun of him.

"I hardly see the application of the fable," he said.

"No?" Mary replied demurely. "Well, I didn't see the application at the time, but I do now, and so will you in due course; for if there is one thing more certain than another, it is that you are not going to marry Ruth Pengelly."

With a saucy little nod of the head Mary turned away and disappeared into the cottage. It was all very puzzling and bewildering, but it merely served to harden Tregarthen's resolution. He would marry Ruth and nobody else. Already he had fixed the day for the initial ceremony—on the 1st of March, arrayed in her bridal attire, Ruth Pengelly would be made 'free of the soil,' a solemn ceremony almost equal to a marriage. The wedding would take place a week later; all this had happened in Tregarthen more than once. And Ruth should call him lord and master, and young Tregarthens in time should call her mother.

* * * * *

It was a wild night again with a touch of snow in the air, a creeping rain battered on to the windows of the Sanctuary. There was light and warmth in Mary's cell, a heap of papers lay on the table. They were copious extracts from the charter, which Mary had been making at Tregarthen Castle.

"It is all here just as the diary says," Mary was explaining. "And I have my pedigree down here in black and white. Perhaps you don't know that I have it all verified by Herald's College, Miriam?"

"That is as brilliant a way of disposing of spare capital as any other," Miriam replied. "Of all the dilapidated shabby old plants I know, commend me to a family tree."

"The older the seed the poorer the crop, Miriam. Still, it is not a bad thing to have a grandfather. Now, in your case——"

"My grandfather died suddenly in Kansas owing to a passion for horseflesh. Being a poor man, they called him a thief; had he been rich, they would have called it kleptomania. And since your pedigree is complete, what then?"

"That you will see all in good time. When you saw Mr. Guy to-day, did you ask him whether he was surrogate for the granting of marriage licenses?"

"I did, and he is. Tell me what you are going to do?"

"I am going to have a most beautiful comedy, and am going to write the piece myself. I am going to play the leading character in one of the most charming theatres in the world with a breathless audience about me. I am about to have an experience before which all the experiences of all the other American girls will pale their ineffectual fires. As to my comedy, it will be called 'The Taming of the King.' Miriam, you shall play Boswell to my Johnson. You shall set out all these things in print so that an enlightened transatlantic public shall say, 'Here is the champion journalistic perverter of the truth of all ages.'"

Mary paused and laughed. Miriam's face was expressive of grave disapproval. The door opened and Ruth came in.

Her dress was shining with beads of rain, her long hair hung damp upon her shoulders. There was pain and worse in her eyes, the whole expression was one of passionate abandonment, of exhaustion and despair. Mary crossed over and kissed her, placed her in a chair, and knotted up that glittering cascade of hair.

"You have seen Tregarthen?" she asked presently.

"Oh yes, yes," Ruth cried. "I am just from him. He is hard and cold and will not let me go. All the island is indifferent to me, nobody cares but you and Naomi. They say it is my duty, that the custom of the island orders it. So long as you save the children what matters me? I can't do it, Mary. And I don't want to die; but there is always the sea. There are deep pools under the rocks where one could lie at rest; there are—"

Her voice trailed off into an inarticulate murmur; she lay back in the chair like one who is both physically and mentally exhausted. In sooth she was, for during the past two hours she had raged passionately and impatiently up and down the island. The wild blood in her veins seemed to have run dry.

"You are not going to talk like that," said Mary. "And you are not going to marry Tregarthen. Get ready, prepare your bridal robes, show yourself up with your tiring maids on the appointed day to be made free of the soil, but you will not marry Tregarthen. Do you trust me, Ruth?"

The girl looked up with a flashing, transient smile.

"You are so clever," she murmured. "And your words give me hope. But you can't prevent Tregarthen from marrying me."

"I can, and I will; I pledge my honour, I pledge all I have in the world on it. I stand up here now and tell you that never, never shall you marry Tregarthen. Say nothing to anybody, get ready, come to the place where all Tregarthen brides come, but come with no fear in your heart. Let Tretire know what I say, but not another soul. Miriam, can I not do these things?"

"You can," Miriam said, with a sigh, "and I am afraid that you will. Ruth, I almost regret to say that Mary speaks the truth."

"And she can save me from Tregarthen! How?"

"That is my secret," Mary smiled. "Unless my courage fails—but it will not fail with those big staring eyes before me."

Ruth's head dropped upon the table. Mary's rhapsody came faint to her ears like a distant summer sea. She made no sign as Mary addressed her. Miriam bent over the still figure.

"Parson, parson," she said, "you have preached her to sleep, poor girl."

Chapter XV

The Night Before.

WHAT did it matter to Ruth? What did anything matter to her now? For the days had come and the days had gone, the rain had fallen and the prison bars of the fleeting days were broken, and, behold, tomorrow was the first of March. And

here was the most unhappy woman in the whole Duchy of Cornwall, envied by every girl in the island, who would have given things of price to stand in her stout leather shoes—if only they could have got them on!

Hope was dying in Ruth's breast. It was all very well for Mary to passionately promise certain things, but even the faith that is great falters when the key looks so insignificant compared with the lock. Ruth was even as a prisoner in the hands of a gaoler who has been promised escape at the hands of a child. How could Mary defeat Tregarthen as she had promised?

Ruth was becoming resigned to the inevitable. She stood in the great hall of the Sanctuary with her bridal robes about her—a dress of plain white satin and paste-buckled shoes—all loot from gallant ships of long ago—a bodice of quaint figured silk that even Mary gasped to see, and over all a veil so diaphanous and shadowy that some silken spider might have spun a golden thread over the dark hair of the bride. Really, if Tregarthen had had the respect for the morals of his people that he professed, these things had no business in the place at all. That veil, for instance. Princes had made war upon princes for such costly gauds before now.

Ruth stood there, the cynosure of threescore pair of feminine eyes, as if she had been a beautiful white statue. She heard not how many tongues appraised her, she had only donned her bridal trappings because custom ordained that all Tregarthen brides should do so. The click of tongues went on, and still Ruth stood there, beautiful, insensate, alone with her own sorrow. A flare of flickering candles lit up the carved rafters and wonderful tracery of the great dining-hall, fell upon the motionless figure there, and shone in Ruth's glorious eyes. She felt like a slave in the Roman market-place, as a picture painted for some wealthy patrician. The same sense of shame was upon her, and yet she had rarely looked more beautiful.

"Oh," she said wearily, "have you nearly done with me?"

Apparently they had not. Moreover, the elder women present resented the obvious desire on Ruth's part to escape, and thus despoil them of a legitimate sight, an earned entertainment. What did they know of Ruth's bursting heart? Tregarthen's mother had come down to the Sanctuary on her bridal eve and had stayed there until the big clock had struck ten. Two or three old dames were proclaiming the fact shrilly. Sensations of any kind were rare in Tregarthen, and the luxury of a wedding as white stones on a drear highway. Outside the moon was riding high and an east wind swept the dead flowers, but inside the clack of tongues held on. Ruth glanced up at the clock, with its slender jewelled hands, impatiently.

"Heaven grant that I don't fly out at them," she murmured. "Could anything be more horrible than the gloating over the passing of a poor white body to a strange man's keeping? But they mean no harm."

Indeed, they meant no harm. They were as innocent as the villagers who crowded round the church to see Dame Amaryllis wedded to Sir Lancelot, and most of them were as full of good wishes. Naomi was not there, for which Ruth was thankful. Then Mary came with Miriam of the inquiring eye. There was a queer bright red spot on Mary's cheeks.

"Poor child!" she said. "How she must be suffering! Those people cannot understand the hidden mockery of it all. Let us get her away."

“One moment,” Miriam replied. “Let me focus this picture upon my mental retina. Remember, I am merely a spectator and not a performer, and therefore I am interested. Fancy coming upon such a mine of ‘copy’ in a primitive, out-of-the-way community like this!”

“Miriam, you would make copy out of your own execution! If we don’t get Ruth away, there will be a scene.”

She pushed her way through the chattering, admiring group in the most masterful manner. Ruth welcomed her with a kind of negative gratitude. But for Mary, she and Tretire would have been secretly married at St. Minver ere this, and Tregarthen might have done his worst.

“You are tired?” Mary asked.

“To death,” Ruth replied. “You got me into this—get me out again.”

Her face had grown white and weary, there was a look half imploring, half desolate in her splendid eyes. The flickering light streamed on her bridal array, her figure was picked out clear against the stone and oak background.

“Come with me!” Mary said in her clear high tones. “My good people, Ruth is worn out with excitement. Let her pass.”

They fell back of course, but unwillingly. They had the vague irritation of an audience when some popular favourite fails to appear. With her head high in the air, Mary swept Ruth along to her cell. Once there she fell into a chair and smiled bitterly at Mary.

“Well,” she demanded, “what do you think of your work, and what value do you put on your promise, Mary Blenkiron?”

“I never dishonour my bills,” Mary said cheerfully. “You are in no greater danger than you were yesterday. Take off those things.”

“Ay. Would that I could always feel so cheerfully obedient.”

Contemptuous passion thrilled in Ruth’s voice. She rose and snatched the veil from her head. It fell like a film of shining dust on the floor. She tore off the bodice and dress, she kicked the paste-buckled shoes off her feet. But for that precious cobweb in danger on the stone flags, Mary might have admired.

“There!” Ruth cried. “I am free of that. Would that I could cast aside the chains that hold me as easily.”

“Your chains are purely imaginary ones,” Mary replied. “Ruth, I have a fancy for donning your bridal finery. Help me on with it. At any rate, let me have that veil on for once. I have seen many beautiful things of the kind, but never one like this.”

“Keep it,” Ruth said recklessly. “If I am not to be made free of the soil to-morrow I shall never need it. And a thing like that would be out of place at the wedding of humble folk like Gervase and myself.”

Mary cast the veil over her own fair head, and fastened it to her amber hair with a diamond pin. For once she had discarded her woollen garment and was dressed in white. Numerous newly arrived boxes littered the floor.

“How do I look?” Mary asked.

“Perfect!” Ruth cried. “I have a wreath of flowers in my cell. Let me crown you with them.” She tripped off lightly and smilingly, as if she had forgotten her own troubles.

As she went away Naomi came in. Her face was full of trouble, the wrinkles about her eyes seemed to have multiplied tenfold.

“It’s about Gervase,” she said helplessly. “He saw Ruth just now. And as he went out there was murder in his eyes. I called to him, but he took no notice. God grant that he and Tregarthen do not meet to-night!”

“Why should they?” Miriam asked.

“Tregarthen is in the chapel by the Castle. On the night before a maid of the First Families is made free of the soil, Tregarthen keeps vigil in the chapel till midnight. He prays before the graves of his fathers. Oh, oh! If you had only seen Tretire’s face! I am old and frightened.”

Naomi dropped into a chair, and swayed to and fro impotently. Miriam was regarding her with a certain admiration. Just as she was, and without a thought for her apparel, Mary made for the door.

“I am going to the chapel,” she said. “Nobody is to follow me. Miriam, you understand that I alone have the power to stop this thing.”

Miriam nodded, for once in her life overcome with a feeling of utter impotence. She tried feebly to comfort the lone old woman rocking herself to and fro in her chair. A sense of unreality possessed her. Never had Miriam longed to be a man more than she did at this moment.

Meanwhile Mary was flying like Atalanta across the lawn. Fear, and the knowledge of a coming tragedy, lent speed to her limbs. Tretire had looked upon Ruth in the added charm of her beauty, his jealousy had broken loose; if he could not possess the treasure, nobody else should. And if he met Tregarthen to-night, murder would be done.

Mary sped on and on. Presently the chapel stood up crisp and clear in the moonlight. Every pinnacle and buttress and crest tile was picked out in liquid silver. The girl passed under the shadow of the Norman arch into the chapel. Streams of gold and purple and pallid blue lay on the tiles from the moonlight glistening upon the stained glass. From the opalescent gloom Mary’s eye picked out Tregarthen’s tall figure, standing in the chancel. A beam of golden light was on his face. He had all the rapt air of the poet, the enthusiasm of the dreamer. Out of the shadow came another figure, creeping on Tregarthen.

“Stop,” Mary cried. “Stop, Tretire. Hold your hand. This is the house of God.”

Tregarthen turned round sharply. Something bright gleamed in the moonlight, something fell from Tretire’s hand and twinkled down the steps leading to the altar screen. Mary pounced down upon the knife. Tregarthen and Tretire were facing one another breathing heavily.

“He came to kill you,” Mary said.

Tretire nodded in dazed fashion. He wiped his eyes as one who has been sleeping far too heavily. Perhaps the red light was still dancing before them—the red light that makes men mad to do desperate things.

“I was going to kill you,” he said slowly, and as if the words were forced from him. “I saw Ruth to-night, and then I went mad for a time. Standing here, I tell you, Tregarthen, that I should not have been responsible for that deed. Mary Blenkiron, thank God that you came here to-night.”

Tretire was trembling from head to foot, there were tears in his eyes.

“I am not to be trusted,” he said. “My love for Ruth makes me mad. In a sudden frenzy I should have taken your life to-night, Tregarthen, ay, as you are bent on destroying two lives to-morrow.”

Tregarthen said nothing. His face was full of a certain grave displeasure. With a quick passion Mary grasped his arm.

"Are you a man at all?" she asked, "or are you of stone? Don't you see how this poor fellow is suffering? Can't you do *something?*"

"What is there to say?" Tregarthen retorted. "Am I to be deterred from my duty and from the line I have laid down for myself by every fanatic fool who loses his reason for the sake of a pretty face? Suppose an English princess fell in love with her dancing master? Would you plead for them, would you alter the course of the ship of State for their amours? Tretire knows that I am a good man."

"You are a good man," Tretire said, with fine generosity.

"He will be in time," said Mary, "when we have stripped off the folly and ignorance and selfishness and crass conceit that hides the soul. Tretire, you can go your way in peace and quietness. Even were Tregarthen the great man he deems himself to be he could do you and Ruth no harm. Have a little more patience, wait but one more day and all things will be revealed to you. Nothing in this world is more certain than that Tregarthen will not marry Ruth Pengelly."

Mary spoke with a calmness and assurance that startled even Tregarthen from his sublime assurance of power and invulnerability. She touched Tretire on the arm and indicated the distant door of the chapel. He looked at her in puzzled bewilderment; but he went. These two big strong men seemed as wax in the girl's hands.

"Foolish prophecy," Tregarthen sneered. "It is unwise to prophesy for the morrow, because your reign goes down with the sun."

"It is foolish to prophesy at all," Mary said calmly. "And I am doing nothing of the sort. I am merely stating what my countrymen call a cold petrified fact. You are not going to marry Ruth Pengelly—I have far better uses for you than that. I saved your life to-night."

"It would be ungenerous to deny the fact."

"And therefore that life belongs to me. Tomorrow you will see what I am going to do with it. To-morrow Tregarthen's education begins in earnest."

Chapter XVI

The First of March.

THE Wise Man hath said 'tis a poor heart that never rejoiceth. To invert and parody the proverb, which, after all, is the poorest kind of wit, it is the poor heart that always rejoiceth. The proof of this can be seen in a large town, say a popular watering-place, on a wet August Bank Holiday. It is impossible to imagine anything more conducive to melancholy, and yet there is the gaiety and the smile to resolution to make the best of things which is the highest virtue of the Briton in the hour of adversity. Perhaps these people are all the descendants of Marryat's midshipman—the one who was never so happy as when he was confoundedly miserable.

What right had the islanders of Tregarthen to be happy? Ebenezer Scrooge would have scoffed at them as he had girded at his nephew and Bob Cratchit on a memorable Christmas Eve. They were poor and they were going to be poorer still, famine stared them in the face, and yet every good and true son and daughter of the island rose on that beautiful first of March, bent upon feasting and rejoicing and gaiety. A daughter of one of the First Families was to be made free of the soil. Tregarthen was about to take unto himself a wife. It was going to be a red-letter day in the history of the island.

A fair, fresh morning it was, with a gentle breeze from the west, a breeze of health and strength and hope with the breaking surges chanting their psalm of life, a day that chases care away. When the wind blows from the west along that coast even a sleepless night has no terrors.

And there had been more than one crumpled rose-leaf in the couch on Tregarthen. Tretire had not slept at all. He had paced the sands over against Trevose from the time he fled from the chapel till the saffron armies of the day rolled up along the purple east. There he had fought himself all night and the dawn had found him spent, but victorious.

Ruth had not slept either. She was torn with hope and fear. She believed all that Mary had to say and yet common prudence pointed to the vanity of her promises. And Mary had lain restless and wide awake, and a little timorous now of the task she had set before her. When you come to hear, as you shall presently, what that task was you will not wonder.

She came early into Ruth's cell. The girl was already up and dressing, her wondrous hair in masses about her shoulders. She smiled faintly at Mary. On her bed lay all the marvellous finery she was to wear later on. Mary was dressed in white too, from head to foot—a lovely bride without the crowning veil.

"Have you come to tell me you have failed?" said Ruth. Her voice trembled, her eyes were burning like twin stars in her face.

"I did not feel quite so certain an hour ago, but I am confident now."

"Meanwhile I am arrayed for the sacrifice."

"I see it. And marvellously lovely you look, Ruth. You are going to the sacrifice, you are going to the edge of the precipice, but you are coming back. In a dramatic part like yours, the heroine is of necessity constantly on the verge. Look at me, Ruth."

Illustration:
„I am going forth to victory, but I am terribly nervous"

"You are always good to look at, Mary."

"Thank you. Do you see any signs of wavering about me?"

"You look like one who goes forth to victory."

"I am going forth to victory. I am going to do the maddest thing ever attempted by a woman since Eve's fatal curiosity; but I am terribly nervous. You are horribly nervous and frightened, too, but there is not the least occasion for it. Now, listen to me, and see you do exactly as I tell you."

Ruth sat on the edge of her bed and followed helplessly. She dimly comprehended what was Mary's scheme, but she was by no means sure as yet.

“It shall be as you desire,” she said at length. “And really, I am very foolish. There are many women who would be proud to be Tregarthen’s wife.”

“Of course there are. I know scores of American girls who would give their ears for the chance. Tregarthen of Tregarthen is an ancient, picturesque, and poetic title. His wife would be a real queen—she would reign over this lovely island and live in that perfect old castle. Again, there are possibilities about Tregarthen. In time he could be tamed if the right woman got him.”

“I am not the right woman,” Ruth said bitterly.

“Of course you are not. Neither will you fill her shoes. And, now that you know what to do, I am going to leave you.”

Breakfast was a perfunctory meal at the Sanctuary that morning. Everybody there was in gala attire, at any rate so far as they possessed anything of the kind. Even the old women wore some garment of price. There were quaint priceless shawls, heirlooms of the years, hideous head-dresses touched up with lace that would have fetched red gold in Wardour Street. There were faded gowns of silk, nondescript in colour, and yet of marvellous texture. Could they have spoken, they would have told of strange tragedies of the sea. But wrecking is a matter on which your islander is dumb.

The men were already gathering in the cloister and round the old sundial. They were clad for the most part in moleskins and reefer jackets, but nearly every one of them sported a brocaded silk waistcoat and carried a silk bandana flaunting bravely from his pocket. These waistcoats are fashionable elsewhere just now, and if you go to your tailor he will make you one for three guineas. But if you were to show him one that you had annexed from a Tregarthen man, and asked for one of similar quality, your sartorial artist would reply that there was no such quality on the market. Some of the men, too, wore gold watches, had long gold chains about their bull necks, chains curiously light in colour and of the most exquisite workmanship. Asked where these came from, the islanders do not know. Perhaps it is not wise to press the subject.

There they were, a motley group of men and women, strangely picturesque with their odds and ends and chains all of which would have made the fortune of a dealer if he could have got them, which emphatically he could not. And presently they began to move off arm in arm towards the Castle.

It was in the courtyard of the Castle that the ceremony was going to take place. There, within the walls, was a large grass courtyard in the centre of which a rood of ground had been staked out and fastened off by posts and old ship chains. In the courtyard was ample room for all Tregarthen.

They were all gathered there at length. At one end of the courtyard was a door leading to an anteroom where the bride was ready waiting for her call. From another door, at an opposite end, Tregarthen stepped out followed by his servants carrying a trowel on a silver salver. There were no robes or trappings of state, but the spectacle was none the less interesting for that. Mary and Miriam were watching it with all their eyes.

They were a little back from the rest. Miriam was in her ordinary attire, Mary draped from head to foot in a long cloak. From beneath peeped the fringe of a white dress. She wore no hat at all.

“Are you still determined?” Miriam asked.

“Absolutely,” Mary replied. “I am resolved that nothing shall turn me from the career of my humour. I do it because I want to do it, and if you can suggest a better feminine reason, pray do so. Hush, Tregarthen is speaking.”

He was. He had perhaps never looked so manly and dignified before. The sun was shining down on his bare head, the concourse of people were in the shadow of the grey walls. Tregarthen had stooped to cut a sod from the green, and this he laid on the salver presented to him by a retainer.

“We are here to give the bride of the Tregarthen the freedom of the soil,” he said. “There are some of you who have never seen this done before, there are some of you who have seen it done twice. But I will not enlarge upon the traditions and customs of my people. They are part of your life and are graven on your hearts. I ask you to comply and you do so uncomplainingly. It is my duty to take a wife from amongst you and I am going to obey. Tell Ruth Pengelly that Tregarthen is here awaiting her good will and pleasure.”

With a superb gesture Tregarthen indicated the distant closed door. Mary stood watching him in a dazed kind of way. The thing was striking and solemn, and yet so unreal, so vague, so shadowy. It was like a page plucked from one of Scott’s novels, and planted in congenial soil here. Then the thing became real and palpitating enough as Tretire pushed through the people and stood by Tregarthen’s side in the sacred enclosure. There was a loud murmur of disapproval, eyes were blazing with anger, knotted fists clenched.

“What does this outrage mean?” Tregarthen demanded.

“It is no outrage at all,” Tretire said, in a strangely gentle voice. “I have come here to make one last plea for the woman I love, ay, for the woman who loves me. That I shall find no friend here, I know full well; Tregarthen has only to hold up his hand and a score are ready to drag me away. Tregarthen, do not commit a crime.”

“A crime, man? What do you mean?”

“Why do you ask? Is it not a crime to force a woman who does not care for you to become your wife? If we together had not defied and threatened you, this vile thing would never have been done. I stand here—”

Tregarthen made a sign. Instantly a dozen resolute men cast themselves upon Tretire and he was hustled away, fighting grimly and yet with no passion. He heaped no curses on the head of Tregarthen and used no language of violence. He only fought and struggled with the courage of despair.

“You might have stopped all this, Mary,” Miriam said reproachfully.

“Of course I might,” Mary admitted a little awkwardly. “I could have postponed the ceremony indefinitely and I might have spoilt everything by so doing. It seems very cruel and very hard, Miriam, and yet it is necessary. I want to impress this upon the hearts of the people.”

At the very moment when Tretire was being borne away, the distant door opened and Ruth emerged, attended on either side by girls in white. As her eyes took in the painful scene, she comprehended, faltered and fell back. Just for an instant a passionate outburst trembled on her lips. What might have happened had she not caught Mary’s eye it is impossible to say. But the strength and encouragement of the glance, the faint suggestion of malice urged her on. Her step was firm and free again; by this time the worst of the struggle with Tretire was

dying away in the distance. A strange, weird, impressive scene, a scene to be remembered for many a day to come. Ruth advanced until she stood face to face with Tregarthen, the strip of turf between them.

"You sent for me," she said. "I am here. To say that I have come of my own free will would be to lie. According to the custom of the country you have the right to claim me as your bride and I have no right to refuse. Therefore I come because it is only right I should do so. But I come to you without a heart, without love, with nothing in my breast for you but contempt and loathing. Still, I shall be your bride—unless there is somebody here with a better claim."

A burst of astonishment followed this later speech. Nothing like this had ever happened on Tregarthen before. It seemed almost like a blasphemy at the altar. Hitherto the white brides had come creeping to the feet of their lords, overcome with the greatness thrust upon them, trembling with a sense of responsibility. And here was one who flouted a Tregarthen to his teeth. Surely the walls of the Castle would fall and crush the life out of her!

"Is there any with a better claim?" Tregarthen cried.

Mary stepped forward. She had discarded her cloak, and over her glorious hair had cast a long diaphanous veil. Almost before any one could realize what was happening, she had stepped into the sacred square, and with her bare right hand thrust Ruth contemptuously aside.

"You called for me and I am here," she cried. "Has any one a better claim—a real right to be your wife—than Ruth Pengelly? Why, she is a mere impostor, a daughter of the people. Woman, what are you doing here?"

Ruth started back with a strange strangled cry. Amazement, joy, bewilderment, a score of sensations struggled for the mastery. In the lightning flash of a second she had run up the whole gamut of human emotions. She was saved. She had only to draw back and the misery of it all was over.

But it was only for a moment. She must not let Mary do this thing, she had no right to benefit by so terrible a sacrifice. She looked up swiftly into Mary's eyes long before any one else had recovered from the stunning surprise.

"God bless you, dear," she whispered. "But I cannot let you do this for me."

"I am not doing it for you at all," said Mary. Her low sweet tones did not carry beyond Ruth's ears. "I am doing it for myself. I should have done it in any case. I *want* to do it. Don't you believe me, Ruth?"

Ruth nodded. She had no words. One glance into Mary's face proved the truth of her words. Strange? Well, there are stranger things happening every day. Mary was here of her own free will and accord, of her own shining desire. Why, Ruth did not profess to understand—that came later. All she knew was that Mary was not acting a part. She slipped away back into the shadow of the archway, leaving Mary face to face with Tregarthen.

The people had recovered their senses by this time. They stood all round the old quadrangle breathlessly watching the chief actors of the drama. Tregarthen, majestic in his wrath and outraged dignity. Mary quiet, erect, with the sun on her beautiful face and resolute eyes.

"What does it mean?" Tregarthen demanded.

"Surely you can understand for yourself," Mary replied. She was not in the least frightened now, she was not in the least oppressed by the grotesque side of the

situation. “I am here because it is my right to be here—I came to claim my rank and my privileges.”

“You would aspire to usurp Ruth Pengelly’s place?”

“Nothing of the kind. I came here because I am virtually a Tregarthen. I can prove it on the most incontestable evidence; moreover, I have carefully studied the charter. It seems to me that I can claim to stand here before Ruth Pengelly. If I assert my right to become your wife, you cannot contest that claim.”

Tregarthen started back as if something had stung him. He had never for one moment anticipated that Mary would claim the privileges of her race. And all she said was horribly, incontestably true. Under the charter a female Tregarthen, next in succession, could claim to share the throne of a Benedict ruler. She could waive that right if she chose, but she could insist upon it if she was so disposed.

“I shall not listen to you,” Tregarthen cried.

“You must,” Mary replied. “You are bound by every tie of honour to do so. Your people would insist upon it.”

Chapter XVII

The Freedom of the Soil.

A MURMUR of approval followed. The people were hidebound by precedent and custom, all of which was as part of their religion. They had got over their surprise now, for they had known for some time that Mary claimed kin with them. She was sweet and beautiful and kind, and moreover she was a Tregarthen on her mother’s side. She herself had said it—Tregarthen had tacitly acknowledged the fact. Therefore she had the right to stand in yonder quadrangle and demand to be made free of the soil. What Mary asked for now seemed to them the most natural and simple thing in the world. And as Tregarthen glanced round the ring of his vassals he read in their faces that environment and fate were fighting on the girl’s side.

“This is unworthy of you,” Tregarthen said weakly.

“Later on you will understand better,” Mary replied. “For the present you are as a child walking in the dark. Give me the sod.”

In a sudden blind impotent fury, Tregarthen turned to the retainer who still was dazedly holding up the salver. From it Tregarthen took the sod with trembling hands. In all his life before he had never been in such a rage, and that is saying a great deal. He had intended to come here to-day and impress his people as he had never impressed them before. He had studied up the ceremony until he had it by heart. Ruth and Tretire were to learn what it was to defy their ruler, and in fact, the whole thing was going to be an object lesson in the divine right of kings.

And behold the purple was rent, the nickel showed beneath the crown. A dinner-going dandy, with shirt-front splashed by a passing cab, had been no more miserable and impotent and cast down than Tregarthen. Who does not know that hideous dream of being in high places where fashion congregates with no more sartorial adornment than a night-gown or a modern suit of pyjamas? Standing in

the centre of his stolid vassals, Tregarthen had all the feeling and flavour of that awful chimera.

And he knew what the others did not know, that his reign was over. He was going to give the freedom of the soil not to wild passionate romantic Ruth, but to a fashionable, frivolous, Yankee girl, a Chicago heiress who had strong views on the currency question and a 'sound practical mind.' If the whole world had been ransacked for a bride utterly out of proportion with Tregarthen, the choice could not have fallen on a more singularly infelicitous person than Mary Blenkiron. And she was very, very beautiful.

"Here," Tregarthen cried. "Take it."

He should have made a speech, he should have been wise and gracious and benign. As a matter of fact, he was exceedingly cross and excessively rude. He knew that when the islanders' slow minds had chewed and assimilated it all they would not accord this to him for righteousness.

They were being deprived of their just rights and dues. Moreover, what did it matter who was Tregarthen's bride so long as she was a daughter of the soil? Nor were they in the least insensible to the brightness and beauty of their new mistress.

"God bless her sweet face," an old woman said aloud. "Where would the children be now, but for her? Tregarthen should go down on his knees and thank Heaven for one like her. Ah, what fools you men all be!"

Nobody contradicted this sweeping statement; even a murmur of applause followed. Mary bent low and accepted the sod. She placed it carefully on the ground, and stood on it in token that she was mistress here. It was her duty to say a few words to her new people, to accept a kiss from her lord, and then the ceremony would be over. Mary turned to the people. Her face was pale and yet resolute, and her mouth quivered; still, her words were clear and steady.

"You have taken me amongst you to-day," she said, "and I thank you. In time to come you will understand better why I have done this bold and forward thing. At least that is what most people would call it. But in your eyes it is nothing of the kind. I have done this for your sakes, I have forced my rights upon a passionate, unwilling, and headstrong man for the good of Tregarthen, and because I am ready to sacrifice myself to save the man by my side from his blind selfishness and folly. Ever since I was a child, ever since I could read, I have longed to see the land of my people, the cradle of my race. I came, I saw, I loved it instantly. That is in the blood, you may say. The wisest ruler Tregarthen ever had was a queen. Well, I am going to be your queen. I am going to change many things here, but these changes you will see in time. One thing is certain—Tregarthen is never going to starve any more."

A thrilling murmur of approval ran through the crowd. The people could understand *that*. They thought of the children and there were tears in the eyes of the woman. Nobody took the least heed of Tregarthen. He had fallen sulkily into the background. Already, by some vague mental process, the people had established Mary over his head. They would have indignantly denied the insurrection, but it was true all the same. Nobody knew it better than Tregarthen himself.

“I cannot say much more,” Mary concluded. “The situation has tried me more than I anticipated. For the present I have finished. My lord, I am ready.”

She advanced upon Tregarthen, throwing her veil back from her white forehead.

With scowling eyes, and lips white as the brows of his bride, Tregarthen kissed her. The thing was ungraciously done, yet Mary smiled. As yet she could not think what she had accomplished, the idea made her hot and cold all over. And after all, it was no new thing. How many a prince has been forced into a galling alliance for political reasons?

It was all over, and gradually the islanders were retiring. Mary walked away to the dim seclusion of the archway and thence into the room made ready for Ruth. It was a great relief not to find her there. With rare tact and feeling Ruth had disappeared. Her fine instinct told her that Mary was best alone for the present. Only Miriam followed into the gloomy, oak-panelled chamber. A ray of light falling through a stained window touched Mary’s pallid face.

“Well, you’ve done it!” Miriam said.

Her dry tones forced the smile to Mary’s lips. Anything like gush or tenderness would have tapped the wellspring of tears, as Miriam knew perfectly well.

“Did I behave well?” Mary asked.

“Splendidly. I never saw such magnificent lunacy in my life. You compelled my admiration. You see I had time to admire because all along I felt that you were going to commit this crowning act of folly. Just for the moment I felt like whipping you—later on I shall be ready for any madness you propose. I suppose you are going to have the thing played out to the finish?”

“If you mean that I am going to marry Tregarthen, yes.”

“My dear Mary, you will be utterly miserable.”

“Indeed I shall not. The misery will be all on Tregarthen’s side. After a time he will be the happiest man in the world, Miriam!”

“Well, cry, my dear. Don’t keep it up before me. You are heartily ashamed of yourself, and I’m exceedingly glad to see it.”

Then she said no more, for Mary was crying her heart out on that friendly breast.

“It isn’t that I’m forward or unmaidenly,” she said, in sobbing parenthesis. “The place has got into my blood; there is a voice telling me that I am to stay here and look after these people. They are my own flesh and blood, Miriam. And Tregarthen under the crust is really a splendid fellow. I have thought this all out for many many months, and my duty seemed to be plainly before me.... I am making a sacrifice of myself for these people. About my money I care nothing. I am going to open Tregarthen’s eyes, I am going to see the island blossom like a rose. I might have had a title and a splendid position elsewhere had I chosen. But I chose to come here to my own people. Try to think well of me, Miriam.”

“My dear,” Miriam said unsteadily, “I never thought so well of you as I do at this moment. Now, come along.”

They passed into the open air, and by way of the valley to the Sanctuary. At the door of her cell Naomi stood awaiting them with Ruth behind. Naomi was crying softly. An old woman’s tears are always becoming as tears can be.

“My dear,” she said, “will you let me kiss you?”

Ruth said nothing, she could only cling to Mary, with her great dark eyes gleaming with happiness and gratitude.

"You have not done this for my sake?" she contrived to say presently.

"Emphatically not," Mary explained. "Ruth, I have come to love this island as a mother loves her new child. As she looks forward to its advent, so I have looked forward to seeing Tregarthen. I want to rule here and be queen over the hearts of the people."

"And live in that fine old castle," said Miriam. "Mary loves old castles; indeed, all properly constituted Americans do. She is doing a good work and a good thing, but there is a deal of vanity behind it all."

"Vanity is the solvent of many vices," Mary replied. "I am going to devote myself to the island, I am going to make Tregarthen see with my eyes."

"'Twill be a hard task, dearie," said Naomi.

"You shall see Tregarthen happy and prosperous," Mary smiled. "No more famines, no more dogged indifference to Fate, no more watching of hope cut down like the flowers. Naomi shall teach us to make that precious lace of hers, visitors shall come to the island, Miriam shall write about it in her papers, and good Americans shall water the soil with their dollars. And—and I forget what more I was going to say because I am very tired, and this business has been a little too much for me."

She went off smiling, and with eyes half closed. When Miriam entered her cell she was fast asleep on her bed, with a smile on her parted lips. Miriam regarded her with a queer mist before her eyes.

"God grant it may be well," she murmured. "But it must be—it must be. Surely a sacrifice like this cannot be in vain."

And so said the robin outside, piping of the joy of the young spring morning.

Chapter XVIII

A New Ally.

THERE was a March brook-trout for breakfast, so that the rector read with feelings of tranquillity in his Western Morning News that Docker of Balliol had been promoted to the vacant see of Axborough. Under more favourable circumstances the appointment would have been Guy's. Still, the trout was pink and creamy and none the less exquisite in flavour because there was a strong suspicion that it had been poached.

"Well," said the rector, with enthusiasm, "I never tasted a better trout. Where did you manage to get it from?"

"You had better ask no questions, dear," the wise woman replied.

"One of the Penrose's trout for a thousand. What a wax he would be in if he only knew! They've given Docker Axborough… Really, a ripping trout."

Mrs. Guy called her husband a poor old fellow very softly. She said this none the less sweetly because she was very angry with the rector, and he was going to

catch it presently. Only she knew how the wound of inaction still rankled, and how surely Guy would have had Axborough but for that wretched breakdown in his health years before. She tried to detect anguish in the way in which he asked for cayenne pepper, but failed.

"Health is the greatest blessing of all," he said sententiously.

"Of course it is, dear old boy. Put that paper down."

Guy did so resignedly. He glanced up innocently into the superb blue eyes opposite him. À propos of nothing, Mrs. Guy demanded to know whether or not he felt very much ashamed of himself.

"Hardened sinner," the rector murmured. "What is it?"

"Why, Mary Blenkiron, of course. You have been on the island four times during the past week, and never a word have you said to me as to what was going on there. And I only found it out this morning when buying your trout from Jackson—"

"I *knew* it was poached," Guy said.

"Reggie, you are incorrigible. Are you going to let Mary ruin herself for the sake of a poor creature like Tregarthen? The girl has brains, and beauty, and ideas. She will be utterly miserable."

"I am not sure of that, Nell. I believe Tregarthen to be a man. Do you recollect that hideous packing-case you tripped over at Wadebridge Station last week?"

"Well, where is the analogy? You are talking to gain time, sir. You are trying to draw me from the point."

"Nothing of the kind, woman. Inside that ugly packing-case was a precious Velasquez. Take the repulsive black envelope off a beautiful butterfly, for instance. Who could guess how fair a thing was inside? And who would take off that coat without utterly destroying the marvel of colouring and loveliness within? Tregarthen is the chrysalis at present, and Mary Blenkiron will develop him. Nobody else could do it—I go so far as to believe that Providence is using her for the purpose."

"Of all the nonsense!" Mrs. Guy cried. "At first I fancied that she had merely the desire to save Ruth Pengelly. The Sultan is a mere misogynist compared to that man!"

"My dear, he has only asked for one wife. Just you look after your parish work and leave this to Providence."

Mrs. Guy replied with some heat that she should do nothing of the kind, a response accepted by the rector with resignation. He wisely concealed that he had talked over the whole business, and was in entire accord with, Mary and Miriam. That his wife, who cordially detested Tregarthen, would interfere he felt certain.

"I am going to write to Mary and ask her to come here for a few days, to stay till the wedding," Mrs. Guy said. "If I have any kind of influence, there will be no wedding at all. I shall have her all to myself."

Whereupon the rector burst out laughing.

"Will you?" he cried. "And what about Maud Barry?"

"Reggie! Do you mean to say that Maud is actually coming here?"

"Certainly I do. Penrose saw her at Exeter yesterday, and she sent a message to say that she would be with us to-day for a time. When she comes she will back up

Mary Blenkiron in this business if only because Tregarthen is a ruler. She has got herself into an awful mess in Ireland."

"What has the silly child been doing now?"

"Been on the war-path again. Fancy a Barry of Barry Town, niece of the Earl of Corrib and the loveliest girl in the three kingdoms, on a Nationalist platform! Well, there had been a big meeting somewhere, where the Government had been denounced, and the destruction of every landlord in Ireland apparently suggested, with more verbose rubbish of the kind. There was a Cockney commercial traveller there who ventured, at the imminent risk of his neck, to expostulate. The tyrant Saxon was 'invited' on to the platform by the patriots present, and he actually had the cheek to say that he was sorry for Maud, who was too young to understand and too pretty to be in the company of such blackguards. Then our Cockney kissed Maud and escaped before the petrified audience came to their senses. Since then Maud has had nothing but grinning audiences to face, and they have got on her nerves. When you ask an audience, as she did at Newry, 'What can be better than to be an Irishman?' and somebody says, 'Well, miss, a Cockney,' and that audience roars with laughter, it is time to give the business a rest. They've made a song about it in the west, and Maud doesn't dare to show her face at a meeting for twelve months to come. Penrose told me all about it when you were cooking that trout of his for me."

Mrs. Guy was pleased to hear all this, and said so frankly. A beautiful and high-bred girl like Maud Barry had no business playing at revolution. There was wild bad blood in her veins, but a gentler sweeter creature never existed. The girl was romantic, too, and steeped in the traditions of her country. But nobody likes ridicule, not even a patriot, to say nothing of a woman. And moreover, the Dowager Lady Corrib, who was a personage almost, had written to the effect to her grand-niece that there had been many foolish Barry women, but never one before who was not a lady, and Maud had taken it to heart.

All these things Mrs. Guy turned over in her mind what time Guy was proceeding, obediently, to the island to fetch Miriam and Mary. Eleanor Guy's high-bred face was grave with something more than the shades of the Norman church tower as she arranged the primroses and primulas in their old silver vases. For she had a deep affection for Maud Barry, also she had friends who cherished a deep affection too, and really Maud had been saying the most atrociously disloyal things about the queen lately, which, when you come to think of it, is wrong, for much as one may object to royalty in the abstract, no sweeter nobler woman has ever come from the hand of God than the gracious lady, who for sixty years reigned over this favoured land.

"If she would only leave these things alone!" Mrs. Guy murmured.

"Sure and I will, darlin', in future. Well, it's myself who is full of shame to-day."

Mrs. Guy turned with a glad cry of surprise. There stood before her a dark beauty, with wonderful chestnut hair and a pair of eyes soft and thoughtful and pensive, and yet capable of mischief, amusement, anger, scorn, anything within the brief space of a minute.

"That's only because the Cockney kissed you," said Mrs. Guy.

"So that story has got down here. I shall never have any more to do with politics, never."

She said this with an air of firm conviction, as one who has resigned the follies of a frivolous world and is about to step into cloistered gloom. Her beauty was fair and sad to look upon. The queen was a gracious lady, and she, Maud, was plunged in bottomless despair because one disparaging word had passed her lips. A quarter of an hour later, with sparkling eyes, she was eloquently discussing a plan for the great Irish rebellion and the subsequent incarceration of every member of the government in the Tower of London.

"It is all very well for you to laugh, Nell," she said. "I tell you the wrongs that you have put upon our people can only be wiped out with—"

Then she caught Nell's eye and went off into the sweetest laughter. I wish I could describe that laugh and that smile and those eyes. I wish I could make you understand the charm of that wild Irish beauty. Her wit was as elusive and as changeable as her own loveliness. It was impossible to tell whether she was really in earnest over her campaign or not. Only one thing was certain—she was still furiously angry with that Cockney.

"May I kiss you, Maud?" Guy asked, as he came in followed by Mary and Miriam. "You will see I've brought them, Nell. Behold the blushing bride."

"I'm very angry with you, Mary," Eleanor Guy said.

"Well, you don't look it," Mary said coolly. "And if you fancy you're going to talk me out of my scheme, why, I guess you're pretty considerable on the miscalculate, and you can gamble your ultimate dollar on that. Miriam, if the lady isn't Miss Barry, whom we heard lecture at St. Paul's, she must be her ghost."

"You are Americans, educated Americans," Maud cried. "Introduce me… Now I shall have somebody on my side to help me fight Reggie Guy. All good Americans love the Irish. Don't they, Miss Murch?"

"They pretend to," Miriam said candidly, "especially about election times. Individually the Irish are charming, but if money could do it I'd cheerfully give half a million dollars to grub them all up in the States and send them home again, for when the Celt in America takes to politics he's a terror. They dominate us over yonder, they police us and govern us and plunder us, and we sit down to it because Erin is the political spoilt child of the Americans."

"But," Maud cried, "you subscribe millions to the cause."

"Of course we do, my dear. If we could, we'd buy Home Rule for you and wish you God-speed across the Atlantic. Then we'd drain the ocean and fill it with rattlesnakes to prevent you ever coming back again. We should make it a *casus belli* for an Irishman ever to return to the States."

All this Miriam said with a face preternaturally grave. The rector was smiling at his own thoughts. Maud flashed out at him royally. He was a tyrant and the descendant of tyrants. Only a man utterly lost to all sense of shame would dare to throw Oliver Cromwell in the teeth of an Irishman. She was terribly angry, and Mary and Miriam aided and abetted her because she was so beautiful in her moods. When the tempest was at its height the door opened and Tregarthen came in. His face was as the pine trees when the tempest strides over them.

"I do not desire to intrude upon you," he said. "I came merely to ask Mary Blenkiron a question. I will not sit down, thank you, Mrs. Guy. Do I understand that you gave orders, orders for stores to be supplied at Porth?"

"That is a fact," Mary said calmly. "They are starving there."

“By what authority did you give that order?”

“On the authority that so recently has been conferred upon me. According to the charter, my powers are as great as yours on domestic matters—at least, they will be next week. Those people at Porth are not to be interfered with. If they are, I shall issue stores to the whole of the island. Do you understand?”

Mary was standing as she spoke. Just for an instant she half feared an outburst on the part of Tregarthen. The passion was very close to the surface, but in the presence of others he kept a grip on the leash.

“We will say nothing of this for the present,” he said. “As you are good enough to remind me, things will be different next week. Mrs. Guy, I ask your pardon for intruding upon you like this.”

“It is all for your starving people,” Eleanor said, with sarcasm. “You are forgiven.”

Tregarthen bowed and withdrew, Guy following him. Maud Barry had been following all with the deepest interest.

“So there are people who starve here,” she said. “And there are autocratic rulers here too. If ever I saw a tyrant, that man is one. I should be sorry for the woman he calls his wife.”

“Then I guess you can pour out all your superfluous sympathy on me,” Mary remarked cheerfully; “because this day week I am going to become the Lady of Tregarthen.”

“As for me,” Mrs. Guy murmured, “I’m sorry for both.”

Chapter XIX

The Agitator.

“MISS BLENKIRON,” Maud Barry remarked, “you are an enigma to me.”

“Call me Mary, and you will understand me much better. Come to that, you are quite as much an enigma to me.”

“Then call me Maud,” Miss Barry said demurely. “I suppose that we are a couple of exceedingly original girls.”

Mary conceded the point not without some little pride. Moreover, it was perfectly true. Here was a beautiful and brilliant American girl throwing her riches away upon a husband who did not want to marry her—a girl who might have gone duke stalking or prince driving with every possible prospect of success. And she was going to give up everything for a handful of ignorant islanders.

And, on the other hand, here was a lovely Irish girl, with haunting tender eyes, a sweet engaging young creature, kind hearted, loyal to her idols, and having some of the best blood in Ireland in her veins. The kind of girl you would prefer to abuse you rather than ignore you altogether, and yet a girl who had flouted all the political traditions on platforms, and caused her relations to wait trembling for what her next public utterance would be. There were politicians—men who had never seen Maud Barry—who declared stoutly that she ought to be in gaol, and

would have been ferociously glad to hear that she was there. Who could conceive so lovely a creature harbouring such atrocious sentiments? My own belief is that Maud Barry would have got up in the House of Commons, been sweetly, but outrageously, rude to the Speaker, and, after moving the abolition of the Constitution and the execution of the ruling House, have carried the whole Parliament with her to a man. On the whole, perhaps, she would have been safer in gaol.

"Do you believe all your own teachings?" Mary asked.

Maud laughed. They were seated in a sunny corner of the Rectory garden with a sloping bank of primroses behind; in front the grey Norman tower of the church was square cut and clear against the rain-washed blue sky.

"Not here," the Irish beauty confessed. "But when I get amongst the peasantry at bad times and see their condition, then the wild blood gets to my head and I say dreadful things. A secret in your ear, Mary. When I come to read what I have said afterwards I could cry for very shame. If I could only get the Queen there!"

"Anarchist! Have you got any bombs in your pocket?"

"Bosh! Sure, the Queen's a real darling, and if I saw her I should kiss her, certain. But I should like to show her some of my peasants. Oh, I'm a strange mixture of a girl. If I could only fall in love with some man who would master me—a man who would beat me would be best—I should be happier. Now, tell me something about yourself."

"Dollars, dollars, and more dollars," Mary laughed. "But my life is going to be *the* picturesque one. Picturesque people nearly always become personages. If you want to succeed in life, be picturesque—it is such a refreshing contrast to the dull monotony of everyday existence. Tennyson was picturesque, which added to his greatness. Do you suppose Browning would ever have been the cult he was but for his life in Venice? His *poetry* was merely prose cut into lengths; in fact, he wasn't a poet at all. I believe he was a subtle humourist. Look at Byron and Shelley and the rest. But you must not overdo it. Irving is really picturesque, but an equally admirable actor, I know; any one who imitates him looks a mountebank outside a travelling circus. Picturesqueness is an art, like painting or music."

"Your future home is picturesque enough," said Maud. "But from what I hear I do not envy you your future husband. I quite understand why you are going to marry him, but it is a terrible responsibility."

Mary plucked the saffron velvety heart out of a primrose before she replied. Her face was more thoughtful than usual, her eyes more dreamy.

"I was afraid at first," she said, "but not now. Tregarthen is the kind of man I have always wanted to marry. And he is a good man, only you have got to find the goodness. Later on you must come and see what I have made of Tregarthen. But there is a heavy task before me."

A tall, well-made man came striding down the path. He had the gait and manner of an athlete, blue steady eyes in a brown face, hair of silver grey though he was quite young. He was dressed with a neatness, not to say dandyism, quite out of place in Trevose, though he looked perfectly natural and easy. In any case it would have been impossible to take Dr. Julien for anything but a gentleman. And everybody has heard of the Cornish Juliens.

"Behold a gallant gentleman," said Maud. "Who is he?"

Mary explained. Then she introduced Maud to Julien. She saw the honest admiration on his face, the shrewd smile in those steadfast eyes.

"I have heard of you," he said. "Miss Barry, if you were my sister you would make no more of your political speeches."

"I am very headstrong," Maud said sweetly.

"Are you? So am I. But I call it fixity of purpose. I had a lunatic asylum for five years, and I know how to treat the people. If you were kin of mine you would make no more of those speeches."

Maud looked up and caught the speaker's eye. There was a half challenge in her own to which Julien instantly responded. He had not boasted. Certain statesmen have that eye, a judge or two possess it, occasionally a bishop, but it was there. Maud needed no prophet from the housetop to tell her that here was her master when and where Julien chose. Other men had said much the same thing and she had lashed them with scorn; at the present moment she was pleased to feel that Julien was telling no more than the warm and palpitating truth.

"I am hotfoot from the island," he said. "An entirely original and brilliant opportunity for making a fool of himself has just occurred to Tregarthen. I told you scurvy had broken out at Porth, and that the little colony there must have fresh food—"

"Which I ordered to be given out from my stores yesterday," Mary interrupted.

"Exactly. Tregarthen has just heard of it. Nobody knows better than himself what a cruel time those poor people have had of it since last summer. Well, he had called a lot of the islanders together to destroy those stores altogether."

Mary jumped to her feet, her eyes blazing with anger and indignation.

"This is wanton and wicked destruction of property," she cried. "Dr. Julien, will you take me over to Tregarthen at once?"

"Me, too," said Maud. "Mary, do let me come."

It was no far cry to the village. The women were at their doors watching Mary as she passed, for the news of the happenings at Tregarthen had come to the mainland. It was a silent little party that Hawkes landed at Porth. The old man pulled his boat close in to the caves where the stores lay and lighted his pipe. A sense of this great blessing fitted snugly upon him. The thing might have been got up for his own behalf and benefit. Judiciously handled, and drawn out with vast periods of potential silence, there was matter for weeks of conversation here. Tregarthen stood on the beach with a haggard, sullen crew about him. Five or six cases of stores had already been dragged from the cave when Mary fluttered into the midst of this party like some beautiful, bitterly polite fury.

One of the numerous Hawkes family dropped on a case, and wiped his brow with the back of a fist like a shoulder of exceedingly overdone mutton.

"Thank the Lord," he said piously, "as the job's shifted offen my shoulders."

"Will you kindly explain this peculiar line of conduct?" said Mary, with an ominous and slightly exaggerated courtesy. Probably she had never been so angry in the whole course of her serene existence. "What does it mean, sir?"

"I am destroying your stores," Tregarthen replied. "There is a conspiracy between Dr. Julien and yourself to pauperize the island, and Tregarthen people are weak enough to fall into the plot."

Illustration:
„I am destroying your stores,“ Tregarthen replied

“Very good,” said Mary. “Destroy it all, throw two thousand pounds’ worth of precious food and comforts into the sea. Then I will bring an action against you that will cost you four times the money. After that you will have to sell your island. And all the men who help you will be prosecuted. Come, Hawkes and Lee and the rest—why don’t you obey Tregarthen’s bidding?”

No man moved, all grinned sheepishly. Human nature is, after all, as strong a plant in Tregarthen as it is elsewhere, and it was just possible that most of the men there were secretly enjoying their chiefs discomfiture. Maud Barry was regarding the scene with flaming cheeks and lips that were twitching strangely. The scene reminded her of more than one eviction she had seen.

“The men are not going to do anything of the kind,” she cried. “They have wives and children whom they love dearly. Do not listen to him, do not allow him to influence your minds. He stands there a false-hearted traitor, a man whose hands are red with the blood of his own suffering people. Rise against him, trample him down, tear his heart from his body and cast him into the sea. Why should you, a free people, be bound by the will of a pinchbeck Caesar like yonder fellow? Ah, if I were only a strong man instead of a weak woman—”

“And an extremely noisy one,” said Julien, with gentle irony. “Be silent, please.”

He dropped one hand upon Maud’s wrist; the velvet glove was there, but she could feel the hand of steel beneath. She glanced up half defiantly to find that Julien’s eyes had changed to a flinty grey. He was not angry with her, he was merely the incarnation of absolute authority.

“You will please be silent,” he repeated.

“I was only trying to help Mary,” Maud pleaded.

“So you shall, later on,” Julien replied. “I am perfectly certain that you will be of the greatest assistance to her. You positively thrilled those men, a thing that has never happened on Tregarthen before.”

“And yet you insinuate that I am not helping Mary?”

“You certainly would convey to a disinterested spectator that you were inviting those men to murder Tregarthen,” Julien said dryly. “In any other country but this you would have been in gaol long ago. Now, wouldn’t you like to try a short Continental lecturing trip—say, to Germany, for instance?”

Maud’s eyes were laughing now. She had flamed out into one of her wild fits, and she was unpleasantly conscious that she had been behaving very foolishly. The Dowager Lady Corrib solemnly declared that Maud was never so happy as when outraging all the proprieties, and usually her astute ladyship was right. And yet Maud was sorry that Julien had been there to see.

“I have swayed big audiences before now,” she said defiantly.

“I don’t doubt it for a moment,” Julien said coldly. “You are beautiful enough to make men do anything. But there: as I told you before, I have had the advantage of five years’ experience in a lunatic asylum.”

Hawkes sat smoking in his boat, with a personal grievance with the ways of Fate generally. He had expected a scene, and had secret hopes of taking a hand in a game of personal violence. As a matter of fact, after Maud’s outburst, the thing

was tame and commonplace to a degree. Mary had brought everything down at once to a financial basis, and Tregarthen had grown cautious accordingly. He knew that Mary could hit him through his pocket, and that she would not hesitate to do so if his own folly gave her a favourable opportunity. But this constant success on her part was humiliating.

"Very well," he said, "you may go, men. As for me, I shall know what to do when the time comes."

This was very weak and meaningless; but it served for a 'tag' to get the melodramatic actor of the piece off the stage. He bowed low and mockingly to the girls and strode away along the cliffs. With a deep sigh Hawkes knocked out his pipe and expectorated on his hands.

"What do you think of him?" Mary asked a little later, as they were proceeding up the hill together. "Now, isn't he picturesque?"

"Well, not exactly that," Maud replied thoughtfully. "Absolutely a gentleman, with a quiet manner, but so masterful. Just the glance of his eye and the touch of his hand and I was silent in an instant. And I wasn't angry; I tried to be, but I couldn't."

"Why, he never spoke to you," Mary exclaimed.

"My dear girl. Dr. Julien never *spoke* to me!"

"Dr. Julien! I was speaking of Tregarthen," Mary said very demurely. "I quite admit that they are both remarkable men, and, what is more to the point, they are both bachelors—*especially Dr. Julien.*"

Chapter XX

Mary's Rubicon.

"THIS," said Mary, "is a most interesting document. Presumedly it is a paper of State. In time I have no doubt it will become a classic, to be filed in the archives of the island in memory of a critical period of Tregarthen's affairs. People will read it after they have visited the tomb of 'Rupert, fourteenth Dictator of this Isle, and Mary his wife.' It is written on rough handmade paper, and inscribed by a quill pen. The handwriting is crabbed and monastic."

"And what does all this hyperbole mean?" asked Miriam.

The two girls, with Miriam and Mrs. Guy, were having tea in the tiny cottage room, half sitting-room, half kitchen, that formed the parlour of the Rectory in the old days. The window was open, and from without came the scent of violets. The rector had gone away, summoned by an ailing parishioner.

"It is a letter from Tregarthen," Mary explained. "It is the first love-letter I have had from the man whom I am going to marry to-morrow. Some people might regard it as an ultimatum. Shall I read it?"

"If you please," Mrs. Guy murmured.

Maud was regarding Mary wistfully. Up till now she had been urging Mary to carry this thing through. She had thrown herself heart and soul into the cause of

the downtrodden islanders. That they were not in the least downtrodden and were perfectly capable of taking care of themselves mattered nothing. Maud would have discovered oppressed communities in monasteries. She had never been to school, the Dowager Lady Corrib urging that disaster would most assuredly have followed such a step. Tregarthen came as a godsend, and nobody was likely to taunt her with the Cockney traveller here.

And now the warm-hearted Irish girl was beginning to have her doubts. It was a glorious thing to be a martyr in the cause of freedom, but was it necessary that Mary should be sacrificed to the ignorance and conceit of Tregarthen? Might not the ordeal be greater than she could bear?

And was ever a girl about to cross the flood of womanhood under such strange and extraordinary circumstances? Men had married for love, for money, for passion, greed, gratitude, pity, vanity—they have even married purely as an experiment. Once I heard of a man who married for a bet. And women also have wed for most of these things, though probably never for the last.

But Mary's marriage was probably an unique affair. It was a kind of union unknown either in real life or in the pages of fiction. The girl stood up there with the letter in her hand, Maud watching her with a suggestion of tears in her sweet Irish eyes. I wish I could describe those eyes to you. You never saw anything like them. I am quite prepared to admit, my dear sir, that your wife or your sister, or that other fellow's sister, has the most glorious eyes in the world. But they are not like Maud's.

Mary read the letter. It was without preface or superscription, and ran thus:

> "You may imagine that I am not going to carry out the compact—I am. You may fail in your courage at the last moment. That I am expecting. But when the time comes you will find me waiting for you at the altar. If you are the woman you deem yourself to be, this time to-morrow you will be my wife.
>
> "*My wife*. Do you understand what that means, madam? For richer or poorer, for better or worse, till God do us part. And I am the man you are going to love, honour, and obey. *Obey!* Mark that. You can successfully defy me now, but a wife has to *obey*. Think it over before it is too late, and remember that in the future you have an exacting master to deal with."

Mary folded up the paper amidst a decorous and respectful silence. At least that is what Tregarthen would have been pleased to call it. There was a slight quivering about Miriam's mouth, a hard light in Mary's eyes. Maud burst into tears. She laid a throbbing hand upon Mary's arm.

"Don't do it," she cried. "I was vile and wicked to urge you on. You are better as you are—don't tie yourself up to that dreadful creature. Mary, you will break my heart if you marry Tregarthen. I can't bear it."

Mary kissed the tear-drenched face.

"Who have we here?" she cried. "Is this the Amazon who stood up and offered to lead the rebels to Cork over the prosecution of Biddy Malone by a ribald constabulary and a suborned Bench of magistrates, the girl who volunteered to don a uniform and despatch the chief Cadi with her own hand?"

“It wasn’t really an eviction at all,” Maud said, with an April face. “They wanted to evict Biddy, not so much because she owed twelve years’ rent for her cottage, but that she was using the banisters and floorboards for firewood. And, sure, how was I to know that at the time? I am afraid I am a dreadful girl and do silly things.”

“As you did when you got the bailiff away from Killiegrew,” said Miriam, “and gave him five pounds because his collar-bone was broken in the fray. You wouldn’t hurt a fly, my dear, and there is nothing you would like better than to go out of your way to help your bitterest enemy. But whatever your feelings may be, it is quite impossible for Mary to draw back now.”

“Guess I haven’t the slightest intention,” Mary said. “If the worst comes to the worst, I can always fall back on the Great Secret.”

“And what is that?” Maud asked innocently.

“Why, a secret, of course,” Mary said dryly. “It’s the wicked fairy godmother who will assuredly come and gobble Tregarthen up if he does not behave himself.”

“Is that really a fact, Miriam?” Maud asked.

“‘It’s as true as taxes, and there’s nothing truer than them,’” Miriam quoted. “It is a power that I should fear most horribly in any hands but those of Mary. It is a power so terrible that I have nothing but pity for Tregarthen, I pray it may never be necessary to invoke its aid. And here is Dr. Julien coming up the drive.”

Julien put up his horse and came in to tea. He might have been a lord of acres instead of a mere country practitioner, so grand an air had he, and so well did his coat and cords fit him. Tressillian of Tressillian Court, who was a great dandy in those parts, used to say that he never knew any man without a valet who could tie a bow or a scarf like Julien.

“You haven’t asked me to the wedding, Miss Blenkiron,” he said.

“I haven’t asked any one,” Mary replied. “You see, the whole thing is somewhat unconventional. There is to be no breakfast or reception, unless the breakfast will be like the one at the Welsh wedding.”

“And what was that, Mary Blenkiron?” Maud asked.

“Well, a whilom Welsh bridegroom boasted to an Irish friend that at his wedding there were forty cooks; to which his friend the Irishman responded, that was because each guest toasted his own cheese. My wedding will be like that. Everybody will be welcome to come and—toast their own cheese. But you will live to see Tregarthen Castle a home of hospitality yet.”

The sun was setting warm and red in the garden, and Tregarthen lay like a blazing ruby in the golden setting of the sea. Mrs. Guy said there was frost in the air, and that it would be bad for the early primroses. In the shadow of the porch Julien was talking quietly and earnestly to Maud. She was listening to him gravely, her eyes were shy on his face, there was a flush on her creamy cheeks.

“I like that man,” said Mary; “and he’s a gentleman.”

“He isn’t badly off, either, and Maud has £800 a year,” Mrs. Guy observed.

Mary responded that she really would not have thought it of Mrs. Guy. Anything sordid or worldly had no place under the grey shadow of St. Minver’s tower, and if those old Saxon saints heard of it they would come and pull down the Rectory. To which Mrs. Guy responded that it was all very well to talk, but she should try living there for nine months at a time with not a single congenial woman soul to

speak to. Besides, she was very fond of Maud, and shamelessly averred that if she did not make a match of it between those two it would be no fault of Eleanor Guy of St. Minver's to Trevose.

Mary wandered down to the bottom of the garden alone. As a rule she was not fond of solitude, but she wanted to be by herself just at present. A strange sense of impending disaster was upon her, a feeling of misery and unrest. She was not afraid, she did not fear the future. For many years she had dreamed of being mistress of Tregarthen, but the realization of her dreams brought no sense of triumph in its train. Not that she was in the least afraid of Tregarthen. She was a woman, and therefore not given to logical analysis, so that she deemed it not strange that, despite his faults, she rather liked Tregarthen. She was forcing the man to marry her for the sake of the islanders, which was all very well; but suppose that he gradually came round to her views, suppose that he grew kind and tractable, and that all the time his contempt and coldness for her grew no less? And suppose that she grew to love him and he did not care for her—never got to care for her?

That was where the cold feeling gripped Mary's heart and set her trembling. She saw the sun plunging down like a red dragon into the western ocean, she saw Tregarthen fade from a crimson flaming jewel set in gold to a cold opal in molten silver, to a ragged black mass with twinkling points of flame here and there. High to the west of the island a red gleam smote into the gloom. It was the turret of the Castle, and under that light Tregarthen might be sitting now. Then some one rose from hard by and called Mary softly by name.

"Ruth," she said, "is that you?"

Ruth it was, breathing quickly because she had come fast, and there was no time to waste if she was to get back to Tregarthen before the turn of the tide. The afterglow of the dying sunset was on her face, a face white and haggard and full of tears. Mary never caught the scent of violets again without thinking of that young spring night, for the air was heavy with the fragrance of them.

"Is there anything wrong, Ruth?" she asked.

"No, dear heart," Ruth said quietly. "Nothing is very wrong—only you. Mary, don't go on with it; stop before it is too late. I thought at one time that you were going to give yourself for me; I know now what is in your mind. But are we worth it? are all the people on the island worth the sacrifice?"

"I fail to see that there is any great sacrifice."

"But there is—there is. You don't know Tregarthen. There is wild blood in them all. And for two days he has not been outside the Castle. They say that he hardly speaks to any one, that he eats nothing. He sits brooding, brooding in the tower. You can see the light burning there now—it has not been out for two nights. I tell you I am frightened; I fear that there will be wild work done."

"Ruth, what you say only urges me on."

Ruth sighed sadly. She had had little hope from her mission.

"Then let me be with you," she implored. "I have talked it all over with Gervase, and we have decided not to get married yet, not till we feel safe about you. Gervase has convinced Tregarthen that he is contrite and repentant—which he never will be, because my Gervase is right—and he has been taken into the household. And I shall be most miserable unless I am taken into the household also. Let me come to

you, dear, I implore you, let me come to you. You want a maid—I will be maid and slave to you if you like. Only let me come."

She flung her arms out widely, she fell on her knees before Mary. It was impossible to resist a plea like that, and besides, Mary was touched to the soul. It was an infinite relief to know that she would have friends devoted to her in that gloomy old castle where she would be fettered to a man who despised her.

"Do not kneel to me like that," she said; and there were tears in her voice. "Ruth, I have no words to thank you. And tell Tretire—"

She broke down, utterly unable to proceed. Ruth snatched at her hand and carried it to her lips. Then she broke away and fled into the darkness, fearful lest Mary might, after all, change her mind. Far down towards the cliffs Mary could hear her singing as she went along. All the rest of the world was asleep, or so it seemed. The light from the Castle tower still flamed redly.

"Am I a fool, a madwoman, or a high-minded girl?" Mary asked herself. "Am I really making a sacrifice for these people, or am I simply gratifying my own whims and fancies? And yet I feel that I am sincere. Well, the whole thing is in God's hands, and He will guide me to the right."

The load lifted from her mind, the dull red light of the castle suddenly grew white and clear and strong. The omen raised Mary's spirits wonderfully. The others were calling her from the porch of the Rectory, she heard Julien's cheery adieu and the clack of his horse's hoofs. Then she wiped her eyes, and walked smilingly towards the light.

Chapter XXI

„Till Death Do Us Part."

A COLD grey morning wrapped in a cloak of mist and fine rain. Putting her blind aside, Mary could just see the Norman tower of the church coming towards her out of the gloom, she could hear the drip of rain from the trees, the only sound that broke a clogging silence. Then a soft, quick footstep went past the door, there was the sound of a match being scratched below, a rattle and fall of cinders. Presently there came a knock at the door and a maid in a violent pink print dress brought in the early cup of tea. That is the brew that young Benedicts account to their brides for luxurious extravagance, and take to themselves avidly before the waning of the honeymoon.

"Jane, it does not seem like a nice morning," said Mary.

"Wet and thick, with wind behind it most likely," Jane replied. "Boy left the firewood outside last night, and a fine job I had to get a blaze, bother to him."

Mary sat up in bed, sipping her tea, until the shadows folded their wings and the weary leaden day came up out of the east like the pauper that he was, a mouldy damp depressing day, with an occasional flirt and fling of the treetops to show that there was wind at the back of the watery curtain. It was assuredly a

dreary wedding-day even to the bride who loves her lord, but unutterably sad and depressing to Mary.

Presently she rose and stood contemplating herself in the glass. She was young and beautiful and rich—most men would have been proud of a wife like that. Mary was going to a man who detested and despised her. She was going to take the cup of happiness and freedom in both hands and dash it to the ground. And yet, when you come to think of it, there was something noble in the sacrifice.

"I am not going to be cast down, and I am not going to be miserable," she told her own reflection vigorously. "Now I am going to dress."

Mary had no wedding vestment such as fashion would have demanded of one of her wealth and station. The marriage rite would take place at the little chapel on the island and Reginald Guy was going to perform the ceremony. At first he had declared emphatically that he would do no such thing. His remarks on the subject had been characterized by considerable freedom and candour. The experiment was bound to be a ghastly failure. But if he refused to marry that strangely assorted couple somebody else would, and he yielded.

Mary's dress was pure white, plain and simple as that of a girl about to be confirmed. There was no frill or tucker or embroidery, no 'shimmer of satin and gloss of pearls' from head to foot, but the dress was made in Paris, as were the similar frocks of Miriam and Maud who were to be bridesmaids. Beyond the exquisite flowers ordered from Plymouth for the occasion, there were no ornaments at all.

Downstairs the rest of the party had already gathered. The rector stood between the latticed windows tapping the barometer like a slightly ruffled woodpecker. He prophesied wind, à propos of nothing, and in much the same tones as 'Mr. F.'s aunt' was wont to address humanity generally.

"Will it come soon?" Mary asked sweetly.

"Yes, it will," Guy responded grimly, "but not soon enough to blow Tregarthen into the sea before you have made a—I mean yourself irretrievably miserable. I am perfectly aware, my dear Mary, that I am speaking very rudely to you, for which I make no apology whatever. Come to breakfast."

To her surprise, Mary made a good breakfast, as did also Miriam. Maud ate sparingly, with her big melancholy eyes fixed on Mary. The look was disconcerting and tended to produce a slight feeling of hysteria on the part of the prospective bride. Altogether it was a silent meal, the least pleasant meal Mrs. Guy recollected during the time she had been at the Rectory. But this she kept rigidly to herself.

It was eleven o'clock when they started for the village. The dull, grey pall overhead had parted in a ragged wrack of cloud, the trailing vapour slid and spun over the face of a watery sun, a wind was blowing in fitful gusts. Far out to sea the white horses were racing and tumbling. A group of men on the quay looked grotesquely bulbous in their flapping oilskins. Cottage doors stood open, exuding odours of fish and oil, bare-armed women watched the party pass with steady curiosity. Two boats were waiting down in the bay with Hawkes and his son sitting in them.

"No fishing to-day," said the rector.

"No," Hawkes replied. "It's going to be a dirty afternoon with a fine sunset. Then the wind is going round to the nor'-west and blow up a gale before midnight.

Coastguard put up one of them bellows on the station; but, bless you, what do they know about it?"

Thus Hawkes oracularly, as if he carried the weather in the pocket of his expansive breeches. He did not suggest, he did not hint cautiously as he would have done on other matters. He stated boldly what the weather was going to do, and the midnight hour verified his prophesy to the letter.

They started at length: Mary and Miriam and Dr. Julien—who rode up at the last moment—in the first boat, the rector and his wife and Maud in the other vessel. Directly they were past the bluff that shoulders the quay they got the wind. Long before Tregarthen was reached they were in the thick of it. A sudden squall had come up, bringing a wall of green water on its back. A little knot of men had gathered on the shore at Tregarthen.

"Is there any danger?" Mary asked.

"Ay, there is," Hawkes replied shortly. "We might get there, and we might not. Anyway, we can't turn back. It all depends how long this bit of a squall lasts. It's all a matter of touch and go."

Mary drew her mackintosh closer, but she was not in the least afraid. At the present moment she would as lief die as carry out her part of the contract. The feeling was only a passing one, perhaps, but there it was. If you brought a man out of the condemned cell and gave him penal servitude the sentence would not trouble him much. Thus Mary. She glanced round at the other boat, and it seemed to her that they were making better weather of it, a fact she ventured to point out fearfully to Hawkes.

"It's right," he admitted. "They were lucky enough to go about before the storm struck 'em. I taught that lad of mine, and now he can beat his old father any time a'most."

The other boat was running before the wind. Mary saw her rise high and then disappear behind the white blundering wall that fringed Tregarthen Sands. A moment later and the passengers were standing on the beach.

Hawkes was in as close as he dared, then he had to make another leg of it. There were snarling rocks here, with teeth like knives, and he did not dare to run his boat close in. Meanwhile it was coming up black and dark from the west and the wind was increasing in violence. A wave curled over the stern of the boat till everything was afloat and the two women were almost knee deep in water. Then they began to bale out for their lives. It seemed hard to be within almost hailing distance of the shore and yet in such imminent peril. A figure rose from the rocks and yelled at Hawkes.

"Risk it, fool!" the voice said. "Drive her up behind Pennis Point."

The speaker was Tregarthen. He was so near that Mary could see the rain and moisture glistening on his coat. Hawkes shook his head doggedly, his teeth set. He was not the man to take advice from anybody.

"I ain't going to lose my boat after forty years," he said.

But he was. As he tried to put about with the idea of tacking up the bay to the sands, a wave caught the boat broadside and fairly flung her upon the black forehead of a hidden reef. Like a matchbox crushed under one's heel the boat parted and a white horseman snatched up Mary and carried her like a child tossed

in a swing. Hawkes had grabbed at Miriam and was fighting his way over the rocks with her.

It was all over, Mary thought; her little cobwebs had been blown away, the Great Secret would never be told now. She felt nothing but a dreamy regret, a great salt flood seemed to be pouring into her throat, a soothing calm came over her; if it was not for the noise she would have dropped peacefully to sleep. Then a rude hand was laid upon her streaming hair, she felt herself dragged forward, felt the imprint of her body on the wet sand, and after that nothing more.

She came to herself presently cold and shivering. There was only one man bending over her and that one man was Tregarthen.

"You saved my life," Mary gasped.

"I pulled you out of the sea, yes. I hadn't the remotest idea it was you at first. It seems like fate, does it not?"

Mary nodded. She struggled to her feet, surprised to find she was no worse. In the distance people were running towards her, Miriam amongst them. A babbling crowd quickly gathered round. Once the feeling of passionate gratitude to Providence, once the flash of tears had passed, Mary smiled.

"Miriam," she said, "am I such a dreadful scarecrow as yourself?"

"That is hardly possible," Miriam responded coolly. "I have more than once stated that, under any circumstances, you are bound to look nice. I am now compelled to qualify that remark. If you could see—oh, my darling, thank God for your merciful escape. What should I have done without you, what should I have done?"

She took Mary in her arms and kissed her passionately. Mary returned the warm pressure, just for a moment fighting with a wild stream of tears.

"Don't," she whispered; "at least, not yet. I don't want my gratitude to God to get me on my knees till I am alone. Recollect what I have to face."

"Mary, you are not going through that now!"

"I am, indeed. You don't know, nobody will ever know what an ordeal I have been through—I could never go through it again. And Tregarthen would have beaten me. There are Ruth and Naomi with dry clothing for us both, and Mrs. Bishop's cottage is close by. Let Tregarthen know I shall be ready in half an hour."

It was the rector who carried the message. He had done some uncongenial things in his time, but nothing so uncongenial as this. Tregarthen stared at him dully.

"Ah, yes," he said, "I understand. I had better go home and change. Pity I didn't let her pull me under in the first struggle."

"Tregarthen," Guy said solemnly, "I'd cut my right hand off to save this. That girl is an angel of goodness and noble qualities. She is acting from the highest motives. Mind you are good and kind to her, try and meet her and win her love. If you only knew the blessing you have in your grasp!"

"Meanwhile I am very wet," Tregarthen said coldly. "The fact is not conducive to the expansion of the higher emotions. Let me go and change and see the ghastly business through to the end."

Meanwhile the others had hurried Miriam and Mary up to Bishop's cottage. A warm fire was here, also some of the port wine Mary had sent for the sick child. A

glass of this set the blood running in her chilled veins again. Ruth knelt at Mary's feet and stripped the soddened clothing away.

It was a strange costume donned by the bride who was mistress of many dollars. Stout buckled shoes, worsted stockings, a short plaid skirt and a white bodice. Over this Naomi cast a white lace veil of her own making. Mary's flowers seemed to be but little the worse for the salt water. Miriam, arrayed in still more primitive garments, looked on with grim approval.

"You are all a bride, in spite of everything," she said.

There was no such thing as a looking-glass in the cottage, therefore Mary's natural feminine curiosity as to her appearance had to remain ungratified. The praises of Mrs. Bishop were outspoken and embarrassing. There was a latent vein of poesy in her nature somewhere, and Mary had the full benefit of it.

"Long to reign over us," the housewife cried. "That's what I say. And, if you only manage properly, Tregarthen will fairly fetch and carry for you. God bless the day you came to the island. See there."

She pointed to the white-haired child who laughed and ran across the flagged floor. All the life and elasticity of youth had returned. Mary stooped and kissed the child with a mist before her eyes. If she could do these things, then the sacrifice had not been in vain. The clasp of those childish arms about her neck gave her new strength and courage.

"I'll do my best," she said cheerfully. "And I'll try to bring the light to Tregarthen. Are you ready, good people? Miriam, will you see if Maud is anywhere near? I suppose that Dr. Julien will give me away. Or why not Michael Hawkes? There is an inspiration for you. I will be given away by Michael Hawkes."

Thus do some have greatness thrust upon them. I mind the time when Michael Hawkes was a man of some natural humility—at least as humble as you can hope to find a Cornish fisherman—but you should see him now. That, however, you shall hear about in due and convenient season. Hawkes just at the moment was trying to grasp the fact that he had lost his boat. Miriam came upon him outside as he was debating the matter. Some good Samaritan had clothed and dried him as one might a sleepy child. As Miriam put the question Hawkes shook his rugged old head.

"I'm in frame of mind to do anything as anybody asks me," he said. "Three years ago at Candlemas I give Jane to young Braund up to Bucks Mills, Devon. And a good man to her he's been. And now I've lost a boat as I wouldn't have taken seventy pound for."

"You shall have the best boat that money can buy, and I'll pay for it," Miriam said. "Come along."

Hawkes followed, with never a word of thanks from his lips. He would reach that stage in the course of weeks, perhaps. When his gratitude finally reached him Miriam found it embarrassing. Meanwhile he trudged alongside her in silence. He was, perhaps, a little dubious as to whether or not Miriam was in a position to carry her promise into effect.

The little chapel was reached at last, and here the most remarkable marriage of the nineteenth century was about to take place. The chief actors in the drama were all people of marked intelligence; if you asked them to-day to describe the progress to church not one of them could do so. It is all confused and vague and

visionary as a dream, the kind of dream that has a puzzling tragedy infused into it. Dr. Julien says he remembers nothing but the fitful sunlight, falling through the dusty purple and smeared yellow stained glass on Maud's face, and the deep sadness of her glorious eyes. Hawkes avers that he was debating whether his new boat was to be a centre board or not, and finally decided that he dared not risk the experiment. Miriam does not believe that she was there at all and that the whole thing must have been materialized. But even the spirits cannot materialize wedding-rings.

The fact remains that they were there in the dim light over the altar, and that Reginald Guy was reading the service in a singularly impressive manner. The bride might have been cut out of stone, the groom from granite. Not the least imposing part of the ceremony was the grand manner in which Hawkes gave the bride away. He was simple, reverent, and tender. A lone widower who sends his only and deeply loved daughter into foreign parts—Devonshire is a long way off—quite understands what the feelings of a parent should be. Maud was so touched that she had to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Chapter XXII

The First of the Bridge.

IT was all very strange and very wonderful, Maud Barry said; but then, when you have any amount of money, you can remove mountains. It may be a disadvantageous thing to be rich, but no rich man of my acquaintance ever says so. It was everything in the case of Mary, it is almost everything where personal ambition is concerned. Nor was Mary blind to the blessing of wealth. Without it she could not have fought Tregarthen a single yard, without it she would hardly have dared the experiment of marrying him.

And already she had brought about some marvellous changes at the Castle. It was still dry, bleak, and clear March weather, cold and crisp, and with a touch of snow in the air, but already Tregarthen Castle was blossoming like a rose. There was a crispness and cleanness about the place never seen before. The mouldy smell of sluggard centuries had gone, the pictures gleamed bright from their frames, there was a glitter on the armour, the polished oak glowed like a mirror, fair and translucent came the light through the now crystal windows. Scores of packing-cases had come from London at a wave of Mary's wand, e.g. cheque-book; the bedrooms had been utterly transformed. It had come as a shock—and by no means an unpleasant shock—to Tregarthen, that he was actually master of a beautiful, refined, and tasteful home.

There were other reforms besides these. There were women servants about the house in a neat livery of Mary's design. There was nothing of the modern starched parlour-maid about these girls—the Castle did not lend itself to that—but the dresses were artistic and the caps wonderfully becoming. Nor was there any difficulty in getting them from the cottages of the very poor. They came for the

warmth and food and comfort, but they came most of all because they were absolutely devoted to Mary. Even Tregarthen was fain to admit that Mary could do anything with them.

She was not without her influence on him. It was impossible for a refined artistic nature like his to be insensible to Mary's beauty and fascination. And all this time he could bring to his soul the delusion that Mary was in no way interfering with the politics of the island. It never occurred to him how wonderfully men are swayed by women, and that gradually but surely the new order of things at the Castle was being crystallized in the minds of the islanders. Did Mary guess this? Sad to say, she did.

She dined above the salt at one o'clock in the great hall, but she persisted in calling it luncheon. She had furnished the lesser hall so attractively and tastefully, and above all so cheerfully, that Tregarthen got to spending his evenings there. And, before he knew what he was about, he was dining at seven in dress clothes and learning to be nice in the fine gradations of French cookery. Mary the magician had managed all that. She wanted a French cook to give lessons in economy and cheap variety of food to the islanders. Demurely, almost humbly, she suggested the idea to Tregarthen. And the king could see no pauperizing of the people in that.

He was going down by easy stages. The furious, bitter sense of defeat had passed away. He was still ready to fight fanatically and fantastically for the old creed and the old narrow tenets of his political faith. His logic was of the crudest. 'I am right and everybody else is wrong' sufficed him. Meanwhile it was pleasing to have that beautiful woman, always so exquisitely dressed, about him. Her loveliness gladdened the eye, it fitted in so well with the picture. Take it away now, and Tregarthen would freely admit the terrible void left behind. In plain English he had fallen head over ears in love with his wife without the slightest idea of the fact. Mary, on the other hand, had admired Tregarthen from the first. She had only to let herself go and the love was mutual.

But not yet, not yet. Tregarthen's eyes were to be opened by love, but not the love that flings principle and honour to the winds as the lovers of Cleopatra and Ninon de l'Enclos and the rest threw theirs. Tregarthen must come to the light for the sake of the light and not for mere sentimental reasons. First there was a surgical operation like to be a cruel one.

All these things unfolded themselves to Mary's friends as they sat in her own boudoir over afternoon tea. The friends were Mrs. Guy, Miriam, and Maud. The rector and Tregarthen were on the mainland after rabbits. Dr. Julien was going to join them all at dinner.

"You should be a happy wife, Mary," Maud suggested. "Now that you have got everything in order, there isn't a nobler or more beautiful country house in England. You have worked absolute wonders."

"I am hardly what you call a wife," Mary said.

"Then, in the name of common sense, what are you?"

"A paying guest," Mary responded smoothly. "With the privilege of furnishing my own rooms. I have induced the head of the establishment to dine with and spend the evening with me, which is something."

“I don’t like to hear you talk like that, Mary,” Mrs. Guy said, with a slight frown for her unoffending Sèvres tea-cup. “Are you dull?”

“Not in myself, dear,” Mary said. “Our conversations are generally too much on a strictly meteorological basis.”

With that sweet discretion that lifts her above the ordinary woman, Mrs. Guy began to talk about other matters. She was not blind to the feelings that lay beyond Mary’s apparent frivolity. Miriam’s humorous mouth was quivering. She was unfeignedly glad to see that Mary was not unhappy. She loved the girl better than any one in the world and understood her every mood. It was only Maud who looked so beautifully, sweetly sad.

“I am not going to let you look like that,” Mary cried. “Is it my woes or the woes of Erin that worry you, darlin’?”

“Nothing of the kind,” said Miriam. “There’s no sugar on the table, and she always takes two lumps in her tea.”

Mrs. Guy remarked that Miriam was utterly incorrect as usual. A long course of newspaper writing had caused her to become criminally inaccurate in her statements. The truth was there was to be a great demonstration in Ireland over the dastardly removal of certain historical scarecrows on an evicted holding, and that Maud had rejoiced in so brilliant an opportunity of making herself ridiculous. She had had her bag packed to proceed to the fray when Dr. Julien had stepped in and forbidden the whole business. When the Dowager Lady Carrib and the whole Barry family would have failed ignominiously, an obscure country practitioner had achieved a brilliant success.

“He absolutely frightened her into staying,” Mrs. Guy smiled. “Didn’t he, Maud?”

“He was abominably rude,” Maud laughed, with a heightened colour. “But really I don’t feel up to the meetings at present. The scarecrow tale is all nonsense. The Ballybrigton tenants have a real grievance against the police.”

Mary did not doubt it for a moment. All the same she was glad to hear what a strong influence Julien was gaining over the wild, headstrong, tender-hearted Irish beauty. It was growing almost too dark to see Maud’s face, but there was a flush on it and a dreamy look in those exquisite eyes.

As the night fell, lights began to gleam from the Castle. There were no clanging gloomy passages now, no dusty corners where the red rats and the mice scratched behind the panels. As Tregarthen came in chill from his row from the mainland all this struck him with a new and pleasant force. His dressing-room was no longer a barrack, with a gallows bed ghastly in a corner. It was warm and bright and cheerful, a fire roared up between the great hammered iron dogs; his evening clothes lay ready to his hands. So strong natures are sapped, and stern resolutions broken by the treachery of a mere woman!

Shaded lamps shone redly in the drawing-room, fires crackled on the hearth. There was a rustle of silks, a flash of jewels, the sombre black and white of the man’s evening attire. Tregarthen paused as he pushed back the heavy curtain to contemplate the picture. It appealed to his artistic eye, and he was glad to see that no woman there looked more beautiful than Mary. He did not know that she wilfully designed to look more lovely for the sake of himself and his pride any more than he knew that Worth had charged her a hundred guineas for the white and

gold dress she was wearing. How colossally ignorant he was Tregarthen was destined to learn in the time to come.

"Are we all here, Mary?" he asked.

He had come to call her by her Christian name, but he was still distant, something like Sydney might have been, or Essex at first, in the court of Elizabeth. Mrs. Guy would have preferred to see Mary treated as her gallants treated Marie Stuart, but that was on the knees of the gods at present.

"All who dine here," Mary replied. "I am expecting Mr. Cutress who is doing those big coast defences at Treverlock presently. He and I have prepared a pleasant little surprise for you. I fancy I have hit upon a way of helping Tregarthen without pauperizing the people."

Tregarthen bowed and said nothing. Guy laughed.

"That will be when the Trevose-Tregarthen bridge is built," he said.

The rector was quoting a local proverb. A century before, after a long storm that practically starved out Tregarthen in consequence of the island being cut off from the mainland, a certain ruling Tregarthen had planned a bridge over the four hundred yards of dangerous channel. The bridge had come to nothing, but the proverb remained. At times it held the Trevose factions together. For instance, when the quarrel between Hawkes and Challen threatened danger, one would allude to the bridge and the other would shake his head solemnly and aver that the bridge would come as a blessing. It always healed strife. They might differ upon religion and bait—the two great causes of controversy in Trevose—but they were unanimous as to the bridge.

"Which will never be," Tregarthen said. "The people would like it; in fact, if they had the money, they would build it, and for two years or so Tregarthen would be a sink of blackguardism and debauchery. I'd rather see the island under the sea than have five hundred 'navvies' here."

Nobody contradicted this statement because the basis for argument was too slender. Then dinner was announced and the little party flocked into the lower hall, there to partake of the evening meal. There were shaded lights on the table, flowers and palms from Mary's conservatory, and willing hands to wait. Also there was wonderful china and crystal, and the marvellous collection of Tregarthen plate. That most of it had been callously ripped from the bowels of stricken argosies wrecked on that cruel coast made no difference. There it was, worth a king's ransom, and Miriam, forgetting her manners for once, cried aloud. A certain pride of possession was on Tregarthen, and he explained the history of that gleaming mass of beating and carving and designing graciously.

"Lovely," Maud murmured. "How can you keep your eyes off it?"

"My dear," the rector murmured, "I have seen it all before. Let me confess at once to you that I have a weakness for a good dinner. I perceive from the *menu* and from the soup that, for the first time for five years, I am going to dine. I have been satiated with rabbits, I have borne uncomplainingly cycles of boiled fowl and bacon, I have faced unflinchingly acres of Cornish pastry. On this occasion it is borne in upon me that I am entertaining a Dinner unawares. Maud, I fancy that you are fond of me."

"As Eleanor is not listening, I'm in love with you, darlin'."

“Dear girl! Then don’t chatter—leave this poor battered old cleric, this wreck of what might have been a magnificent archbishop, in peace for half an hour. Talk Irish politics with Julien—and get the worst of it. What can a child like you know of the true wonders of sweetbread *à la Martignan?*”

Julien came to the rescue gallantly.

“Let him alone, Miss Barry,” he said. “I always suspected the monastic in Guy. Do you know that eighty per cent. of English cathedrals are on salmon rivers?”

“I didn’t know it,” Maud admitted. “What is the reason?”

“That was the artfulness of the monks. No trouble about to-morrow being Friday on a salmon or trout stream. When I was in London a fortnight ago salmon was five shillings a pound. And fifty years ago there was a clause inserted in the Herefordshire indentures of apprenticeship to the effect that the lads were not to be fed with salmon more than three times a week.”

So the pleasant meal proceeded under the shaded lights and amidst all the artistic confusion that surrounds a well-served meal. Tregarthen lay back and feasted his artistic eye upon the refinement of it all. He saw the gleam of polished oak and armour, the glitter of silver and priceless crystal behind feathery ferns and flowers. On the whole he was more happy and contented than he had ever been before. The vivid contrast between this daintiness and refinement and the crude confusion of the great hall dinner struck him pleasantly. He did not as yet quite grasp the effect a good dinner perfectly cooked exercises upon poor sinful man. He only knew that the beautiful woman at the bottom of the table had brought all this about without the least treading upon those kingly and ultra-sensitive corns. Tregarthen’s topmost emotion just now was a drowsy gratitude to Mary for having married him.

They passed into the big drawing-room at length, and presently there came to them a dark lean man, with hard quick eyes and a roll of paper under his arm. He had no evening dress, and brought with him a subtle flavour of continents. You had only to look at James Cutress once to feel that he was a man of wide lands and many adventures.

Had he told you that travel and he were strangers, you would have been disappointed. But he told you nothing of the kind, he discoursed modestly of adventures, and the vast difficulties overcome by engineering science, of truculent native workmen, of deadly swamps, of comrades hearty at dawn and buried by breakfast. There are many men like Cutress, and they all have the same hard eye and brown skin. He bowed over Mary’s hand.

“I am sorry to be late,” he said. “But I have been to the quarries after hands. Thanks, I have dined.”

He had—dry bread and cold mackerel, with nameless ale and what the Cornish people call a pasty. In this respect, it might be said that there are pasties and pasties. The one is excellent, the other—

“This is Mr. Cutress,” Mary said, as she introduced the stranger. “Mr. Cutress has just finished those large coast protective works at Treverlock. He has kindly undertaken to engineer my new bridge.”

“Your new bridge!” Tregarthen gasped.

All the sunny amiability had vanished from his face. The old dark arrogance and ignorance were coming back, the childish conceit and jealousy that ever stood like a sore between himself and his manhood.

"I wish I was well out of this," the rector murmured to his wife. "Tregarthen is going to make an ass of himself. I know the signs well."

"May I beg for a little light on the subject?" Tregarthen asked frigidly.

"Certainly," Mary smiled. "I said I had a little surprise for you. The local tradition is going to become true. In future I am not going to run the risk of being drowned every time I go to see my dear friend Eleanor Guy. So I am going to build the bridge between Tregarthen and Trevose."

"It is well to be a millionaire," Tregarthen said bitterly.

"Isn't it?" Mary responded, with marked cheerfulness. "I am going to spend £30,000. Mr. Cutress, will you show our friends the plans?"

Cutress dexterously unfolded a long roll of drawing-paper. On it was an exquisite water-colour drawing showing the cliffs at Trevose and the high crags on Tregarthen opposite. Everything was in the most faithful detail, and across the four hundred yards of tossing dangerous channel spanned a bridge so light and graceful and beautiful, that with one accord they all exclaimed with delight.

"Decided improvement to the landscape," the rector declared.

Miriam thought it would be the making of the place. Julien was of opinion that in future he would be compelled to charge a smaller fee for his visits to Tregarthen; on those grounds he laughingly opposed the bridge.

"You haven't a leg to stand on," Mary cried, "considering that, however large or small your fee is, you never get paid on Tregarthen."

"Is that so?" Tregarthen demanded.

"As a mere matter of detail it is," Julien said dryly. "My dear fellow, so long as you persist in your present line of government, where on earth are the people to find the money to pay me?"

Tregarthen said no more for the present. With the best intentions in the world, Julien had dealt him a staggering blow. It was his proud boast that his people had never been pauperized, but they didn't pay their doctor, and the fact that his services went unremunerated didn't seem to trouble them in the least. And your decadent workman in reeking towns would never have stood that. The knowledge that he was wrong maddened him.

"It's a pretty scheme," he said; "but I forbid it."

"Baalim's ass was a mere poodle compared to this man," the rector murmured.

"Be quiet, Reg," Mrs. Guy said. "If you don't behave yourself I shall take you home this very minute." The rector expressed himself ready to sacrifice a whole silver sixpence provided he found himself in his study behind a pipe at this minute. He also added, with profound philosophy, that any man who made a fuss after dinner ought to be hounded beyond the pale of decent society.

"Forbid it?" Mary cried; "my dear Tregarthen!"

"That is what I said," Tregarthen muttered. The black frown was on his brows, the old childish sullen obstinacy in his eyes. "That I have not been consulted in the matter is nothing. I am told that husbands' opinions are quite superfluous nowadays. All the same, I am not going to have the bridge. I am not going to have the vices and ways of the 'navvy' class imported into the island. I am not going to

have my people spoilt by men who will fling their thirty shillings a week into the teeth of the poor islanders. From an artistic point of view, sir, your bridge is perfect. But you are not going to build it. For the rest I must refer you to my wife."

Cutress bowed ceremoniously. He did not feel in the least uncomfortable. A man who goes out to West Africa and comes back the only surviving European out of two hundred odd is not likely to be moved by a little domestic difference between husband and wife. A constrained silence followed.

"What do the Trevose people say?" Mary asked.

"They are enthusiastic," said Cutress. "I find the bridge is a proverb here. They seem to imagine that once the bridge is built a new era of prosperity will dawn for Trevose and Tregarthen."

"That is also my opinion," Mary said dryly. "I am yet sanguine that I shall bring Tregarthen round to my way of thinking."

"Never!" Tregarthen cried. "Never! I am ruler of Tregarthen, and, by Heaven, despite all the women in the world, so I will remain."

His voice rang in the roof, his eyes gleamed with the old fanatic fury, the petty tyrant was aroused. He stood there apparently heedless of everybody, he did not seem to realize that Mrs. Guy and his guests were saying good night to him. He realized nothing till he found himself alone with Mary. All these things he was going to repent of later in sackcloth and ashes and dry husks.

Mary had something akin to a madman to deal with, but she was not afraid. She had expected this, she had calculated upon it from the first. The struggle was inevitable. If he intended to fight her over a matter like this, what would he say to certain ultimate schemes she had already pigeon-holed? And she had Ruth close at hand, and the thought gave her courage.

"Why did you insult your guests to-night?" she asked.

Tregarthen replied furiously, taking no nice heed in his choice of words. He was no more than a spoilt boy ruined by a foolish mother. They were not his guests, he wanted nobody from the mainland, he was quite content with Tregarthen.

"I believe that," Mary said slowly. "You love the place, it would break your heart to leave it. Every stick and stone holds some precious association for you. This is a high virtue, Tregarthen, and I respect it. But, all the same, you have not the power to prevent the building of the bridge."

"Have not the power. I!"

He spoke magnificently. It was the Eighth Henry of pious memory addressing some presumptuous courtier, Wolsey in his decline, say. But Mary stood before him, absolutely refusing to be withered by his noble scorn.

"I repeat what I said," she replied. "You are powerless to prevent it, so long as I choose to find the money. And I am going to find the money."

Tregarthen bowed. One glance at Mary's face proved that.

"I shall find the money. And you will refuse powers to the builders. Very good. The Trevose local authorities will, if necessary, ask for Government powers, and will be backed up by Lloyds who have a station there. Also they will be backed up by the National Lifeboat Association. Against those allied bodies you will be absolutely helpless. Think it over for a moment. If you can see any way out I shall be glad to listen."

"A way out? Bah! the thing is easy."

But it wasn't; it was very difficult indeed. For a long time Tregarthen paced up and down the room, turning the thing over in his mind. But there was no way out—he was trapped, and baffled, and beaten by the woman he called his wife.

"I am master here," he said finally, "master here."

"Master here, indeed!" Mary replied sadly. "Master of everything else but—yourself."

The words went home, stinging all the more furiously because they were so bitterly true. As he turned his back towards her Mary moved to the door. Then she came back again and called Tregarthen to her side. He crossed over sullenly.

"Stoop down a moment," she said.

He stooped, his flushed sullen handsome face close to hers. With her hands light as thistle-down on his shoulders Mary kissed him on the lips.

"You are a foolish boy," she said; "but the foolish boy will grow into a wise man. And all that I am doing now I am doing for your good and benefit, as the God who looks down upon us knows. Good night."

She flitted from the room and was gone like a shadow, leaving Tregarthen trembling and with the sweetness of that kiss still warm on his lips. He called her back; but the oak door was closed, and she heard not. Had Mary returned then perhaps this story had never been finished.

Was that girl right, after all? Certainly she was right in saying that opposition was absolutely futile. And did she really care for him? was she actuated only by the best and purest motives? She might get the bridge built, but Tregarthen would take care that not a single islander turned a sod or drew a penny for labour on the work.

Up and down, up and down, far into the night Tregarthen paced the room in anxious thought. The lamps sighed and flickered and died with a pungent reek in the air, but Tregarthen saw nothing of it. The long watches of the night droned along the passages on noiseless feet, the grey of the dawn straggled through the storied panes, but Tregarthen took no heed.

Then the day came, a damp, raw day with the promise of rain. With a racking head Tregarthen passed outside. He heard the thunder of the sea, he caught the flying spume on his white face. He walked on and on till he came to the long ledge of rocks over against Trevose. Here, early as it was, a little knot of islanders had gathered. They were discussing something eagerly, and Tregarthen's curiosity was on edge.

The main speaker appeared to be Bishop from Port Gwynn. Once loose, there was a rugged vein of poetry in the man's nature and he talked well. Tregarthen could hear his voice booming above the swell of the sea, he saw the great knotted hand uplifted.

Then he crept along the rocky ledge and—well, he listened.

Chapter XXIII

The Golden Gate.

THE mist had lifted slightly, and Tintagel loomed from the lap of the morning with his head in a flaming glory. His feet were in the dark waste of waters, about his brown knees was a creamy fringe. In between the sea lay like virgin silver waiting for the burnishing hand of the sun. Overhead there came a faint rose pink, and one star glittered on the bosom of the morning. If I shut my eyes I can see the island as Tregarthen saw it that morning, and the memory of it will be to me crisp and clear so long as life remains.

But Tregarthen was taking no heed of the beauty of the dawn. He was creeping over the damp, dank weed amongst the sea-pools, shining pictures of forest and mountains and wide deserts of golden sand. There are no sea-pools in the British Isles like those on the North Cornish coast. They were flushed now with rose pink and umber and saffron, but Tregarthen took no heed for all these art galleries reeking fresh from Nature's hand. He wanted to know what these men were talking about.

Jacob Bishop was speaking. He was pointing to the mainland. Jackson and Hawkes, and the others were around him, patriarchs all, and fathers of the island. They made a strong group as they stood there in an atmosphere partly of their own creating—tar and fish and a tanned smoky flavour as if somebody had been adjacent to a box of kippered herrings. Big silent men, grey-headed, tangled-haired men, with knotted hands and mahogany faces. Where their brown throats were bare you could see a twisted knot there like so much horsehair. Strong men who, like Sarah of Marlborough, must have been born before nerves came into fashion.

They were listening more eagerly than usual, for they were stirred for once out of their philosophic calm. Had an angel come flaming from the ethereal sky, the islanders had been no more moved than they were by the news that the bridge was coming. The bridge had passed into a proverb, the building of it was, in a way, an Advent. It was supposed to mean good times, cycles of prosperity and a century of peace. Had you proposed to run a ferry across there you would have been a scorn and derision in the fish-market, ousted as an intruder, for that was innovation. The bridge was another thing; they wanted it, they were going to have it. And Tregarthen began to see that he had all his work cut out for him.

"Thirty and odd thousand pounds," Bishop said deliberately, and yet with great enthusiasm. He rolled the figures round his tongue. Had Mary been there she would have thought of Joe Gargary. "A sight of money. And the bridge finished at the end of two years."

"And a lot of money spent here," Hawkes suggested.

Bishop nodded. Old Spry pressed the tobacco in his pipe with a finger burnt and scarred and seared like iron.

"Two hundred men from Trevose and beyond," he said, "and as many men here as that James Cutress can get hold on. Told me so last night. Work for all as wants it at twenty-nine shillings a week. And my boy Jim's paving at Plymouth for less money. Tregarthen can't say anything to that."

Again grey heads were nodded and a great silence followed. According to the strict laws of the game it was Bishop's turn to speak. The others regarded him with tranquil expectation. They felt he was on the verge of new thought.

“Men,” he said presently, “I’ve got something as I’m bound to say, consequently I’m going to say’t. Tregarthen’s ruling us all wrong.”

At this stupendous suggestion every man rapped his pipe and rammed the tobacco tight. There was a dead puffing, blue silence for some ten minutes whilst half as many minds were taking this in. There was no hurry. Those fine fellows had nothing to do but to wait till the autumn and starve meanwhile. Still, they had their tobacco. Where did it come from? Tregarthen wondered. It never occurred to him to ask Mary that question.

“Jacob,” said old Spry, with great deliberation, “you’re right.”

That was all. There was no argument, no suggestion that there might have been two sides to the question. As a matter of fact these greybeards had been deliberating the matter for years without knowing it. In the long dark periods of starvation it had come to them as it comes to all of us pitted against an all-wise Providence. Not till now had the question been put openly. And, strangest of all, the unseen listener knew that Spry spoke the truth.

“I endorses what Spry do say,” Johnson said oracularly.

“Very well, then,” Bishop resumed in fine argumentative voice. “And now we’re going to have the bridge. An angel from heaven came out from over the Western Ocean, and said it should be done.”

The other nodded. Jacob’s metaphor was a little mixed, which is a failing that poets have; but they understood him.

“The angel came and rolled away the stone. Mary Tregarthen’s going to roll away our stone. No more weeping mothers on the cold hearth-stones now. Where’s Jane Long’s man? Drowned in a squall beaching his boat off Fin Rock. Where’s the fine lad as my Emily was goin’ to marry? Gone down ‘twixt here and Trevose. Where’s a good dozen fine lads, ay, and lassies too, that we can all remember? Lost in the cruel waters as you could fling a cod-line across a’most. And it ain’t going to be so any more. The angel rolled away the stone.”

The old man repeated the phrase over again. It was reminiscent of an ancient carol chanted at Easter any time the last two centuries, but the metaphor seemed to fit the situation exactly. It was the keystone of the arch of determination. It settled the question so calmly and definitely that Tregarthen burst upon the group in a flaming royal rage.

“This is flat mutiny,” he exclaimed. “Oh, you are going to have the bridge, because there are strong circumstances against me. But none of that money will come on to this island. Those creatures at Trevose can do as they please. But not one of my men here hires himself to those foreign engineers.”

Each man there looked calmly from Tregarthen’s angry face to his pipe and then to Bishop. Clearly the man who could make metaphors with such fluency must take the office of spokesman by right.

“You’re too late, Tregarthen,” he said. “We’ve all volunteered. The Lord has sent this thing to keep the bread in our mouths. But for this Tregarthen would have seen the blackest time I mind in a life of seventy years. We’ve gave in our names and we’re not going to back out of it.”

Illustration:
Then Tregarthen lost his temper

“Nohow and nowise whatever,” Spry said emphatically.

Then Tregarthen lost his temper. He said things that he lived to repent, things that caused Bishop to wince and flinch without so much as a sign escaping him. And yet no man there showed the slightest feeling, no more than the rocks in the pools below beaten by the creamy flood of the incoming tide. Tregarthen remembered that scene with bitter shame afterwards.

“You can’t fight all of us,” Johnson suggested.

“Perhaps not,” Tregarthen said grimly; “but every rood of ground here is mine, and I can deport the whole lot of you from the island. I can scatter you like chaff, I can pull you up like so many trees. And if you defy me I will do so without mercy in my heart. You don’t know me yet.”

Tregarthen had scored at last. He saw the dynamic thrill that passed through the little group, he saw faces pale under the tan. He could do this thing, he could depopulate the whole island if he chose, and the Parliament of Great Britain had no power to interfere. The keenest of all weapons lay to his hand. How cruel a knife it was Tregarthen knew perfectly well.

“Could you do this, master?” Bishop asked unsteadily.

“Ay,” Tregarthen cried, “I could and I will. I’ll have no insurrection here.”

He moved away, leaving something like mental paralysis behind. The fear of exile was the only thing that troubled these men. To leave Tregarthen! The mind staggered from the contemplation of such a terrible thing. To rise up in a body and fling Tregarthen in the sea had not yet occurred to the greybeards. And yet it was nearer than any one thought. After all, the strongest throne rests on the goodwill of the people. And twenty shillings are as good as a sovereign any day in the week. Those black thoughts, grafted on to patience and forbearance by Tregarthen, were to bear their bitter fruit later.

Meanwhile he strode homewards in a flamboyant mood, if not a happy one. He knew perfectly well that he had done wrong, therefore it was well for his peace of mind that he suddenly realized himself to be still in evening dress. Also it was borne in upon him that he was hungry. He changed his clothes and went down with a raging appetite to breakfast.

Mary was there in a cosy, cedar-panelled room leading off the great hall, and breakfast was temptingly displayed. She smiled as she lifted the cover from a dish of kidneys. There was fried ham in another silver dish, the atmosphere was deliciously fragrant with coffee. Theoretically Tregarthen should have had weak tea and porridge or a kipper, like the rest of the islanders, but Mary had declined any such fare. The islanders could do better if they had more strength of mind, she said. She had the money ready when they were ripe to throw off Tregarthen’s yoke, and meanwhile she really saw no logical reason why she should starve herself. Moreover, it would have been exceedingly rude and ungentlemanly for Tregarthen to refuse the breakfast his wife had prepared for him.

“You have been for a walk,” she said cheerfully. If she had any memory of yesternight, she did not show it in the least. “Sit down.”

“I am exceedingly hungry,” said Tregarthen. His ill-temper had vanished. It was impossible to be ill-humoured with so cheerful a scene before him. Why, the clear rippling fire alone would have banished such megrims. “And I have been giving

Bishop and the rest a piece of my mind. They have actually volunteered to assist in building that precious bridge of yours."

"They all have," Mary said calmly.

Tregarthen had feared to hear something like this. But the kidneys were delicious and the toast underneath succulent and rich. And, after all, there was one drastic way of ending this budding revolution. Mary was at the bottom of it, of course. Tregarthen wished she had been a little less handsome.

"I shall manage to get even with the rogues," he said.

"Indeed. How do you propose to do that?"

"I told Bishop and Guy all about it. I let them know that I had no intention of doing anything by force. I let them know that I was quite determined, and I am. As sure as any man puts a hand to the construction of the bridge I shall deport him from the island. And I will."

Mary's face grew grave for a moment. Tregarthen had the power to do this, as she was perfectly aware. She might plead with him and move him, in most things, for she was not unconscious of her growing influence; but here she knew that he would be adamant. The thing was so cruel, so monstrous, that, but for one thing, she would have remonstrated passionately there and then. As it was, she smiled a little sadly.

"You will not do this thing," she said. "Interfere as you please, coerce and bully your people, show them how mistaken they have been all these years, help me to show them the way to the light—as you are constantly doing despite yourself. But you are going to exile not one."

"Indeed! Who is to prevent me?"

"I am going to prevent you, Tregarthen. Great as your power is, mine is greater. I do not want to exercise it; but if you persist in this course I shall, I *must*. I am not speaking boastfully, I am stating a plain fact. Did I not say that you would never marry Ruth Pengelly?"

"You did. And you did far better for me than that."

Mary laughed sweetly. For was not this a compliment, and not a bad one either from a man who was a mere tyro in such courtly matters?

"Don't let us quarrel," she said. "Here is your coffee. Two lumps of sugar or one?"

Chapter XXIV

„The King Can Do No Wrong."

THERE is a certain apple good to look upon that grows on the outskirts of orchards in the green heart of the country. Perhaps it is fate, perhaps it is the cunning farmer who places those apples there, but most marauders—schoolboys—will recognize the species. They are red and round and mellow—three of them will comfortably fill a housecap, but they are unsatisfactory to the palate of a connoisseur. Stolen fruit is proverbially sweet, so that the first gush of juice is

highly pleasing. This is followed by a dry, dour, acrid flavour that earns for these apples the title of 'bitter-sweet!'

Well, Tregarthen's apples were all 'bitter-sweets' at present. On the one hand he had a peace and order hitherto foreign to his house, he had refinement and luxury and the presence of a beautiful woman. This was where the sweet came in. On the other hand Mary was thwarting and hindering him in every way, and day by day sapping his influence over the island. And the knowledge was bitter. The sure conviction that he must eventually fail was the sourest morsel of all. But the victory was not yet.

There was something like peace before the storm, but the rumbling of the distant thunder could be distinctly heard. Meanwhile, the sun shone, the sea ran down, and Tregarthen dreamed in a pink and golden glory. Cutress was busy on the mainland, he did not want any of the islanders yet, and Tregarthen had distinctly told them that the first man who handled a spade would be expelled from the island.

Perhaps this might have been allowed to pass but for a woman. Mrs. Bishop, 'up to Port Gwynn,' raged aloud, carrying a child in her arms like the banner of a revolting chief. The child was ill and ailing—but for Mary's kindness it had gone hard with the little one. Then she turned upon her husband as she had never done before. She was a thin-lipped woman, with a loose mouth, the kind of mouth that speaks of native oratory.

"And you call yourselves men," she said. "Men!"

"I've been one for forty odd years," Bishop said resignedly, yet not displeased with his own pawky humour. "What's the matter?"

"Matter enough, Jacob. Where would two of the children be but for the kindness of the good lady up to the Castle? Tregarthen prates about keeping temptation out of our way when all along we are without bread. And there's bread, and good bread to be had for the earning yonder. Thousands of pounds coming into the island and no trouble and want for years. Honest work crying aloud to be done, and Tregarthen says nay."

"What can we do?" Bishop asked meekly.

"Get up and do it," was the fierce reply. "Defy Tregarthen, all of you. Stand up to his face and defy him. He can't expel us all."

Bishop was not so sure about that. Whilst he agreed, like a dutiful husband, with all his wife said, he was dubious as to accepting her methods. He looked around him thoughtfully. He saw the sea coming up like a lance into the heart of the mainland, he saw the terraces where the ferns grew and the maidenhair nodded to the summer breeze, he saw the smoke-cloud over the ingle nook, the blue shining delf on the dusk walls. He had lived here all his life. No ancient family torn from an ancestral home would have felt the parting more than Jacob. It had grown to be a part of him—without the air and the environment he would have drooped and died.

"'Twould be rare hard to go," said he. His voice trembled slightly, his unsteady gaze wandered from the black oak settle to the shining pans over the open grate. "I couldn't do it, mother."

This capitulation faithfully repeated word for word was carried from one end of the island to the other before dusk. Thus is the art of conversation fostered on

Tregarthen. Mrs. Jacob Bishop had repeated it in a strident voice outside the cottage to young Mrs. Jackson across the port. And young Mrs. Jackson, foraging a whiting for supper, she being troubled with 'dyspepsy, my dear,' had carried it down to the Sanctuary and occupied in the telling nineteen minutes by the clock. Ruth and Naomi had to listen to every word, which they did with the greatest politeness. Some society chatterers I know would do well to go down to Tregarthen and learn the art of listening. Somehow Ruth got it into her head that Jacob Bishop had defied Tregarthen and had been expelled the island.

She flared out at once in her stormiest manner. She ought to have been up at the Castle, of course, but never a maid in this world had less to do than Ruth so far as Mary was concerned. Mary should know of this at once. And, as ill-luck would have it, on her way to the Castle Ruth met Gervase Tretire. He listened gravely to all she had to say.

"Tregarthen is mad," he said. "If he wants to turn the whole island against him, he is going the right way about it. The people are changed since our good lady yonder came amongst us. They want work, and they will have it, my dear. If Bishop goes, if Bishop goes—"

Gervase paused, lost in the contemplation of such an iniquity. He flashed up to the Castle and demanded to see Tregarthen. The latter was striding up and down the great hall with apparently the weight of its fretted roof on his shoulders. Then voices were raised, and the place boomed with the roar of angry men. Like a white vision, Mary stepped in among them.

"What is it all about?" she asked. "Tregarthen, what does it all mean?"

"It means," Tregarthen said, "that Jacob Bishop has chosen to defy me, and I am going to expel him from the island."

"You are going to send him away, the poor man who was born in the cottage where he lives! And all because he desires to earn a few necessary shillings by good honest labour. Tregarthen, I'll not permit it."

"So Tretire says," Tregarthen replied. His lips were working in a nasty trembling sneer, there was a wild light in his eyes. "I am nobody here since you came. Every clown who knows A from B is to dictate to me. For seven hundred years the voice of a Tregarthen has ruled, and I am not going to go back on the traditions of my race. Bishop shall go, ay, and Tretire too."

"This is madness," Mary murmured, "sheer madness. Tretire is your foster brother; you owe your life to him."

"Ay, but he shall go all the same," Tregarthen said doggedly. "It is he who is the source of all the mischief; it is he who has sowed your pernicious doctrines amongst my people. Bishop shall go, and Tretire shall go, and take Ruth Pengelly with him."

Tregarthen swung out of the hall, storming angrily as he went. Tretire looked at Mary, and the anger died out of his eyes.

"Dear mistress," he said, "this must be prevented. At any cost this must be prevented. Does he want to murder Jacob Bishop? Better kill him at once than do him this cruel wrong."

"I don't fancy you need have any anxiety," Mary said quietly. "It is very good of you, Gervase, to think of others to the exclusion of yourself. But Bishop is going to stay here at his cottage."

“You can insure this, dear lady?”

“I can indeed. This is not the time and place to say how. But I pledge you my word that Bishop shall remain in his cottage. Gervase, there is a time of sore trouble coming to me and to one I have begun to care for. The trouble is of my own making, brought about to save still more sorrow and suffering in the future. But it is none the less keen for all that. I shall want friends, I shall want every friend I can find.”

She looked eagerly towards Tretire, who took her hand and kissed it. Nothing could have been in better taste, nothing more feeling or courtly. Tretire was only a simple fisherman in the garb of the sea, yet he might have been a gallant at the court of a Capet.

“Always,” he murmured, “always, while I have strength to serve you.”

Meanwhile, Tregarthen had passed forth over the island with a load of care on his shoulders and a fine black demon of passion lurking in his eye. He had got it in his head, of course, that Bishop was going to defy him. Over the purchase of that historic whiting young Mrs. Jackson had unconsciously embroidered on the story slightly. It had come to Tregarthen in the guise of a challenge flung from the battlements with bridge drawn and portcullis bristling. He crushed the herbage and the sea-pinks under his feet like foes. Bishop was not at home, he was boatbuilding down in the little bay; but Mrs. Bishop was ready. She guessed why the man had come; she was armed for him, and the light of battle was in her eye. The mother of heroes panted for the fray.

“Come in, Tregarthen,” she said. “I want a word with you.”

“Where is Bishop?” Tregarthen asked.

“Jacob Bishop has naught to do with it. A good man is Jacob, but terrible slow. Tregarthen, take that child in your arms. Gently. What does he weigh? Two score pounds, you say. Well, he ought to weigh three. But for your good woman he would be in the little churchyard by this time. This is one of the children who would have died rather than Tregarthen’s pride should bend. Ach!”

The last word was a war-whoop, the defiance of the Apache, the scream of the tribesman as he comes yelling upon the stockade. Around firesides in the gloaming it is darkly whispered that this fearless creature snapped her fingers in Tregarthen’s face. Personally, he is not sure. He says that he was altogether too frightened and bewildered to remember. Mary avers he came back tempestuously, with marks like those of talons on his cheeks.

“I beg your pardon,” Tregarthen said faintly.

“Ah, it’s no time for that,” the irate Amazon went on. “Bishop’s turned agen you, and he’s going to keep turned agen you so long as I’ve got any voice in the matter. A pretty thing if a man can’t earn his honest living in his own way when Providence gives him a chance. Look at that, Tregarthen. Folks call it bread. A beggar would toss it into the gutter. And you’ve come to turn Jacob out because he chooses to have a mind to earn his own and put silver in his pocket. You take and leave Jacob alone.”

“I came to see him to-day, and——”

“And you shan’t see him. You shan’t get blustering over him and weakening him. If you go down to the bay I’ll follow you with a pail of dirty water and douse

you with it, so mind. This is Jacob's cottage that he's paid for in kind over and over again—it ought to be his by this time."

"You are a Radical," Tregarthen said, with a feeble smile.

"I'm a honest woman, who allows herself to be called no names by nobody," was the shrill reply. The noise of strife carried down to the bay, and Jacob, behind the shelter of his boat, trembled. "Go away, and don't come bothering us again. Take yourself off, and try and feel for others instead of wrapping yourself up in sin and selfishness. Lord, if only I had been your mother! If only I had the ordering of your life!"

She advanced upon Tregarthen fiercely, and he retreated before her. Where was all the force and dignity of the interview, where was the woman cowering and abashed before the Lord Protector of the island? As the child began to cry the woman snatched her up eagerly.

"Look at that man," she cried. "Take and look at him. He's come to turn us out of the cottage, to starve or die for all he cares. He's come—"

Tregarthen broke and fled in total disorder. He could not even be said to have retreated, there was no strategic movement to the rear about him. He fairly turned tail and ran away. And whilst he was smarting under the sense of a new humiliation, the victor with her child in her arms was rocking herself to and fro and weeping tempestuously. Jacob came ponderously up the terrace and looked in at the door.

"Mother," he asked, "what have you been doing of?"

"Ruining us all, God help me," she said. "Letting my tongue run away with the little sense I have left. I've done it, Jacob. We shall have to go. Say that you forgive me, father."

"All for the best," said Jacob; "always, it is all for the best."

Chapter XXV

The Clouds Gather.

THE rector came to himself suddenly with an incoherent testimony to the effect that he had been dreaming. He and the Archbishop of Canterbury had been fishing together, they had both simultaneously hooked the big trout below Porth Minor Bridge, and the primate had shied his mitre at the rector in a paroxysm of jealous—

"There is somebody hammering at the front door," said Mrs. Guy, with the impatient contempt we all have for a recital of other people's dreams. The rector groaned. His repeater said it was 1.15 a.m., and common sense said it was an uncommonly cold morning.

"It's Ezra James," said Guy, with a fine sense of prophecy. "Dissolution is close upon him, therefore he needs spiritual consolation. Bar accident, that man will live to be a hundred. I shall not go."

"But, my dear Reggie—"

“My dear girl, you know there’s nothing the matter with James. Why can’t he leave Jeremiah alone? The prophet gets astride of his imagination in the night and rides him into a state of nervous fever. Besides, Ezra is a Wesleyan at present.”

“No. He’s joined the Bible Christians. He told me so yesterday.”

“Three different sects in a fortnight! What is to become of the man? But I suppose I shall have to go.”

So, like the honest gentleman and sincere Christian that he was, the rector arose and went forth at the whim of the man who more than once had pelted him with derisive texts in the highways. In the old days Ezra James would have made a magnificent martyr, a fighting fanatic Christian, with his hand in the flame and white-hot words hammered into prophecies on his lips. To-day he was a turbulent, slightly bibulous blacksmith with a perfect genius for quarrelling with all denominations in turns. The rector shivered as he made his way down to the village, but a certain resentment kept him warm. Still, after all, Ezra *might* be ill.

He was nothing of the kind. A bottle (empty) stood by his side, the fierce fighting glare was in the eyes that met those of the rector. Yet there was a weak shifty look in those eyes, too: a craving for revealed religion is a terrible thing for a strong imagination when it is allied to a feeble intellect.

“I’m glad you’ve come,” he said. “If you turn to the fifth verse of the third chapter of the Book of——”

“You scoundrel!” the rector cried. “You are not ill at all.”

“An unworthy servant,” Ezra said piously. “Yet blessed at present with the health that enables me to earn my daily bread—”

Ezra was suddenly snatched from his seat and shaken till his excellent set of teeth rattled. Only a sense of the humour of the situation saved him from a more condign punishment. Then Guy passed down the village street, shaking internally, and quite restored to good humour. Suddenly out of the purple shadows like a miasma bred of the tar and fish and tan scents a figure rose and stood swaying and panting before the rector, and a voice said—

“Thank God I have found you!”

Comus fled into the shadows, and a grim reality clothed the chuckling rector as with a garment. For there was tragedy in the voice, and the figure stood like one beckoning to retribution.

“Ruth!” the rector cried. “Is that really you?”

“Nobody else, Mr. Guy. I’ve just pulled in from the island. There will be murder done there before morning unless you come at once.”

“Of course I will come. If I am in time, Ezra James is forgiven. Whilst you are rowing me across you can tell me all about it.”

There was not much to tell, but that little was to the point. For the last few weeks a subtle, psychological change had been taking place amongst the islanders. They had smelt liberty in the air, it had taken possession of their senses—in other words, Mary had opened their eyes, and they were beginning to see for themselves. So do we all fall away from our lofty ideals, the old order gives place to the new. Even novelists and eke playwrights have been known to woo the publisher and his cheque-book at the cost of the lofty ideal. Also are there cynics who aver that the world is all the better for it.

Well, the islanders were beginning to think for themselves. In their blindness they could see no harm in coining the sweat of the brow into shekels. In the prospective bridge they had a glorious opportunity of doing so, and the misguided author of the whole thing had declared that there was dignity and honour in free labour. On the other hand, Tregarthen denounced the whole scheme roundly. He arose in his majestic wrath and cursed it by all his gods. There was something Homeric in his anathema. The lord high cardinal's little effort at Rheims on an historic occasion was a mere plaint beside it. Yet the islanders listened with apathy, and as in the case of the jackdaw, nobody seemed a penny the worse. A wiser man than Tregarthen would have considered his position, especially knowing that he was utterly powerless to prevent the construction of the bridge. On the contrary, he absolutely forbade the good folk of Tregarthen to have anything to do with it.

It must be a painful thing for a monarch to be laughed at—far more painful, say, than the spectacle of the Prince of Wales chasing his silk hat along Bond Street on a windy afternoon. As a matter of fact, the ruler of that little toy kingdom took himself as seriously as the greatest fool the house of Capet or Stuart ever produced. And he had been laughed at down by the quay, which is perilously near to being jeered at. And when people jeer at a ruler the business is generally finished, as was the business of Louis of France and Charles of England. The upshot was that Rupert Tregarthen had lost his temper on the quay, had foolishly threatened his followers, and had been pelted with clods all along the way to the Castle.

The rector listened seriously. There was humour enough in the situation in all conscience, but that side would keep. There were times when Tregarthen gave himself over to headlong passion, and from experience the rector knew that this was one of them. Tregarthen had all the training and instincts of the tyrant, as a matter of fact the island had been governed for seven centuries by tyrants. And now the blessed wave of freedom was coming. Would Tregarthen take his lesson to heart and arise as a man purged and purified? Rather would he be likely to precipitate some dreadful tragedy.

"You are afraid for your mistress?" Guy asked.

"Well, she is my mistress," Ruth said. "Though I never expected to call any woman by that name, I'd die for Mary Tregarthen."

"I believe you would, Ruth."

Ruth nodded emphatically as she bent over the sculls. They were nearing Tregarthen now, and the booming thud of the surf on the Fin Beck rendered conversation difficult. Overhead blazed a crimson-hearted star, away up in the Castle a solitary lamp gleamed. Ruth shot her boat on over the crisp sand, and the rector tumbled out desperately and without dignity. Ruth's feet skimmed swiftly over the dead flowers.

"You say you are afraid for your mistress?" Guy asked again.

"I am, indeed," Ruth confessed. "I was with her when Tregarthen came in. There was dirt upon him, and his clothes were torn and stained. Mary Tregarthen sat in the great drawing-room—in white, with scarlet geraniums in her hair. I could see the diamonds on her breast tremble like fire that lives. Is there any one so beautiful in the world, I wonder?"

“Yes, Ruth. For instance, you are. But go on.”

“Then Tregarthen came in. His face was like death, his eyes as sullen coals. There was murder in his eyes as there was the night when those North Mannock trawlers came inside the limit and stole our nets. If Tregarthen had caught those men there would have been murder done. If I had not been with Mary Tregarthen to-night he would have killed her. And she loves him.”

“Ruth, how many times have I warned you against your wild imagination!”

Ruth caught the speaker by the arm in a grasp that tingled.

“I tell you she loves him,” she said fiercely. “Do I not love myself, and am I blind to the signs? In a way she has done him harm, and she is sorry for it. Out of sorrow comes repentance and the desire to atone. I tell you Mary Tregarthen has given her heart to her husband.”

“Let it pass. Did he—did he—”

“No, Tregarthen is a gentleman. He would have killed her, but he did not strike her. He flared out at her; he said she had disgraced him in the eyes of his people. He said how they had followed him home, pelting him along the way. And some of them fashioned him a crown out of the dead rotten mouldy flowers.”

“Men who rave like that are seldom dangerous.”

“I know that, rector. But then, Tregarthen is so different from other men. He is a fine man, utterly spoilt by education and environment. Only drive him hence to get his own living for a year and he would be one for any woman to honour. But he came near to killing his wife to-night. When the first paroxysm of his passion had spent itself I came to you at once. But even now, goodness knows what might have happened in my absence.”

“Nothing, I trust,” said Guy. “Mary is a woman of fine discrimination. I am sure she would do nothing to anger him.”

“She behaved splendidly. She was pale with the determination of one who knows her danger; she met his eyes unflinchingly, saying that she had put her hand to the plough and that she could not look back. But after that not a word escaped her lips. I left her over the fire, and Tregarthen pacing up and down the hall like a caged beast. Hark! you can hear him still.”

They were under the far-flung, purple shadows of the Castle now. The place seemed to be carved from one great block of silence. A silver light gleamed from the mullioned windows, a red light flickered in the hall. And from thence came the measured pulse of tramping footsteps like the wings of the darkness. Backwards and forwards they went, never ceasing, never varying, passionless now, but telling of hard, graven determination of purpose.

“I don’t like it,” the rector muttered. “I don’t like it at all. For the life of me I can’t see how I am to grapple with this fellow.”

Ruth flung open the great hall door and entered. The lantern light was blood-red on armour and oak and picture, and on the white set face of the man pacing backwards and forwards there with maddening monotony. He turned in a dull way as if unable to comprehend the intrusion of the strangers. His clothes were still in wild disorder, the clay of the rioters still clung to him like cerements.

“Ah, the rector,” he said, with loud politeness. “Fetched by Ruth, of course. Am I a child that I should be dosed by a doctor and cosseted by a priest? Am I to be juggled out of my island and made the sport of my own dull slaves—”

“Tregarthen,” said the rector, prosaically, “don’t make an ass of yourself.”

He had struck the right note. The banal, adolescent rudeness of it smote Tregarthen like a blow between the eyes. He literally staggered, and the rector, like the accomplished boxer that he was, followed up the advantage.

“Where is your wife?” he asked.

“In—in there,” Tregarthen said lamely. “She’s all right. But she’s not going to stay here. She shall not remain in the island.”

He was working himself up into a blind passion again. But the rector had learnt all he wanted to learn, and Tregarthen could pump himself dry at leisure now. His voice boomed high in the carved rafters.

“She shall not stay,” he cried. “She shall not remain here. Is a Tregarthen to sit in a woman’s lap and let her plait his hair into braids? Am I to be the stock for the whip that is to lash my fools into rebellion? I tell that woman ‘No.’ Bring the woman forth.”

A white figure stepped into the hall, a figure with pale set face and blue eyes that shone like sapphires. And as the rector looked upon her he knew that Tregarthen had met his master here. He bowed to Mary; but she did not seem to see him at all.

“There is no occasion to send,” she said quietly. “The woman is here.”

Chapter XXVI

A Blow for the Dynasty.

IT is generally admitted by historians that if certain rulers had done or had not done certain things, certain other things might or might not have happened, as the case may be. Macaulay, who derived much *kudos* and fortune from his critical analysis of other people’s failings and misfortunes, might have written tomes to prove that Tregarthen must have benefited ultimately by a strong line of action. But unfortunately the islanders were not Macaulayan students, and they resented Tregarthen’s strong line of action from the first. He ought to have persuaded himself that he really wanted the bridge, that he had advocated it from the first. But the Gladstonian method was beyond Tregarthen.

Unfortunately, again, Tregarthen had but little grip on the hearts of his people. He was proud of them, he admired them, but he wanted to suffer himself before he could really feel. Now he saw to his amazement that his people wanted this bridge, forgetting the legend connected with it, and the prosperity this legend promised to the island. A clever man has said that the history of France is written in inverted commas. He might also have added that rural England is welded together with the blood and tears that go to the concrete of our legendary lore. Pass a night in any village inn, sit in the ingle nook and hear the bent slaves of the plough and furrow talk, and try to laugh them out of their traditions if you can.

Thus it was with Tregarthen. The golden wand had touched the sleeping cliffs, and the arch of prosperity would be upon their granite shoulders. And peace and

plenty would flow like cold water in arid sand-stricken desolation. The women shouted it to one another as they stood bare-armed in the doorways. Tregarthen smiled sourly as he passed them. What did they matter? But then, Tregarthen knew nothing of Carlyle and the women of the French Revolution.

As a matter of fact, the women were at the bottom of the whole thing, as they always are, bless them. They talked about the bridge incessantly, they gave new and ingenious twists to the lines of the old prophecy, they could smell the honey, and the milk was warm-sweet in their nostrils. Johnny and Tommy and Isaac and Ezra were brought forth wan and pale, and of their sires was demanded how long they were going to stand that kind of thing. Let them look at little Jacob Bishop, who, under Mary Tregarthen's care, waxed fat and kicked. If the fathers were men it would be a land of red and smiling children.

So old Ben and Ebenezer and Jacob pulled at black pipes in the ingle, and thought as they had never thought before. They began to gather on the quay when the wild primrose in the western sky lengthened to the trend of extending days and the promise of a sapphire summer lay on the sea. They talked more and they smoked more, and when Tregarthen's name was under their tongues they spoke of him with eyes cast downwards. They did not know it, but these men were ripe for rebellion, that foul fruit that blooms and comes to maturity between the ripening and downfall of a November sun. Yet, if these men had been told beforehand that the dragon's-teeth were no longer phantoms, if they had been told what the eventful March evening was to produce, they had gone home to bed early and bade the housewife cease to clamour. When their blood flamed hot it seemed quite natural. And they were not to blame. When ignorance and education clash it is usually the fault of the latter. And Tregarthen was only half educated at the best.

The men were on the quay now, with the saffron glow of the sunset on their faces. At their feet the Atlantic came booming in, thrumming and trembling like an Æolian harp smitten by a heavy wind. Tintagel stood knee deep in a purple mist, from landward came the rank smell of the rotting flowers, mingled with tar and pine and the scaly suggestiveness that goes with boats. A score of men were lounging there and no more than eight of them were smoking. When you see a knotted brown and blue tangle of these Norsemen and a moiety of them are not smoking, you may be sure that there is something wrong. Perhaps there is mischief brewing, perhaps there is a great ground sea running and the boats out, or—greatest calamity of all—they have no tobacco.

And this latter was the evil befallen Tregarthen. It was the proud boast of Tregarthen that his people could suffer every deprivation and be strong. He was quite wrong, because they could not do without their tobacco. Never before had they been asked to do so, even in the worst of times. And they looked at the spot where the bridge was going to be with the bitter reflection that, had Tregarthen not been a blind, headstrong fool, every man would have had a fig of strong twist in his pocket at that moment.

Jacob Bishop sucked a dry pipe as he had done in silence for an hour. By his side Jackson was filling a fragrant clay. A fringe of weed fired under the shielded match, and a scent warm and grateful filled the air. Bishop's pride stumbled to its knees.

“Neighbour,” he said slowly and painfully, “I won’t deny as a pinch would be uncommon welcome. Say a thimbleful, and have done with it.”

Jackson handed his pouch over manfully. It was a lot to ask a man to do, but to his credit he did it without the quiver of a muscle.

“Not for any other man on the island,” he said huskily.

This was at once a declaration and a challenge. It stated a plain fact, and at the same time stalled off any further suggestion of largesse on the part of the audience. Let it be accounted for righteousness to every man there that he nodded in solemn approval. Jacob half filled his pipe and no more.

“It wasn’t always like this,” Jacob said sententiously.

A younger spirit looked up from the capstan whereon he was seated. Usually Jim Parson’s word carried little weight, more on account of his paucity of years than anything else, he being under fifty. But he was known as a disciple of Gervase Tretire’s, and he found an echo in every heart there.

“I’ve given in my name to James Cutress,” he said. “I start on the mainland Monday. No more cold pipes after Monday for me.”

Four men, hitherto silent, and likely to remain so under ordinary conditions, made a similar declaration. Something like applause followed from the rest of the group—a deep chesty growl accompanied by a stamping of feet. A close observer would have seen that these men were much moved. At the same moment Naomi came from the shelter of a tan-coloured sail.

“Lord forgive me;” she said, “but if I was a man I would do the same.”

They welcomed her respectfully, though there was something like a sacrilege in the invasion of the quay head by a woman. A rich pink was on the old woman’s face, a face like her own lacework, overlaid with faint crimson. Her figure was drawn up like one who essays daring things.

“You are with us, Mother?” Jackson asked.

“I am bound to be,” Naomi said. “Our gracious lady and Ruth have converted me. And I have broken a promise—a thing I never did before. I have been working at my lace again. Not for myself, O Lord, but for those I love. A lady at Trefarthen gave me twenty pound for the piece. And every penny of it I spent for those who need it on the island. See here.”

She produced a score of little blue-paper packets neatly tucked in at the ends. Eyes began to gleam and mouths to water. They were two-ounce packets of twist tobacco, enough to last every man there till Monday. Naomi distributed them as a goddess bearing gifts to the Olympians. No word of thanks passed, the impressive ceremony proceeded in a silence worthy of so vast an undertaking.

“A good woman,” Jacob said presently, “is above rubies.”

No more was said; indeed, the whole vocabulary of praise had been exhausted in that one high effort. It was felt that Jacob had achieved his masterpiece. Naomi turned away, with the grateful tears in her eyes. From her simple point of view, she had received a favour, not conferred one. Therefore the sight of Tregarthen standing before her with blazing eyes and black brows was a shock. His long fingers were snapping, sure signs that Tregarthen was beside himself.

“So you have been at your lacework again,” he cried. “Shameless, lying woman.”

Jacob Bishop stood forward. He was perfectly calm, perfectly resolved to keep his temper, but there were red rivers on his forehead where the hot blood ran.

“You’re a speaking to a woman, Tregarthen,” he said. “Speaking to a woman like that with a score of friends around, and six feet of water in the quay.”

There was no mistaking the threat and the growl of approval that followed it. Tregarthen was not absolutely devoid of sense. He shifted his point of attack.

“Purchased friendship,” he sneered. “Ninepence halfpenny each.”

“It was sweetly and kindly done,” said Jacob. “A princess could not ha’ done it nicer.”

It was true, and in his heart of hearts Tregarthen knew it. But that only urged him on to a darker, blacker madness. He was going to show his power over these men—to prove what a strong monarch can do. In reality he was going to play the tyrant on a set of strings worn perilously near to snapping point. He indicated the various blue packets scattered here and there.

“Throw them into the basin,” he commanded crisply.

No heed was taken. A score of tanned faces regarded him with calm curiosity. A less angry man would have been disconcerted by those steady glances. He might as well have ordered the booming waves back to the broad Atlantic fields. Twice was the command repeated only to be accepted in the same silence. Tregarthen snatched a pipe from one mouth and flung it with the owner’s blue package far into the basin.

Illustration:
With a sweep of his strong arm, he caught Tregarthen fairly on the side of his head and down he went, on a pile of sails

He had touched one man at last. With a roar like an angry bull, he rose and glared around him for a weapon. Had there been a sword or revolver handy, Tregarthen might have figured as the centre figure of a real tragedy, something on a level with the deaths of great monarchs, something to give him a niche in the gallery of purple-clad victims of misrule. But that was not to be. The bereft islander found nothing more handy than a huge plaice fresh and shiny from the sea, the red specks gleaming on the brown. With a sweep of his strong arm, he caught Tregarthen fairly on the side of his head and down he went, with a socking smack, on a pile of sails. He might have been a King’s Fool rather than a monarch himself.

He rose again, furious, smarting, half blind. He bubbled incoherently without reason and without sense. The younger men enjoyed it—to the elder it was no more than a painful and degrading spectacle. Tregarthen never mentions it now, except to declare sadly and sorrowfully that he was mad at that time.

How did it come about? Nobody knew, nobody can say to this day. Jacob Bishop believes that Tregarthen began a furious onslaught on them all. Certainly a few minutes later Tregarthen was flying up the cliffs pursued by a mob of men who pelted him with clods and sand the whole way. They jeered at him, they used wild language, only a Providence watching over the women restrained the children from joining in the painful demonstration. In plain fact, the island was in revolt, and Tregarthen’s sway was tottering. He did not know, nor would he have believed, that the thought of Mary only saved him from worse indignity. Yet, with all his courage and all his madness, he was glad when the doors of the Castle closed

behind him, and he could stand face to face with his wife and revile her insomuch as the foul insult had overtaken him.

But the Castle doors were closed now and the tumult had died away. The young men turned home, chewing the cud of bitter rather than sweet reflection. The appearance of Tregarthen in apologetic or consolatory mood might have changed the pages of the future, but he was pacing the great hall furiously, with his wrongs in his arms pressed to his burning bosom.

Bishop lit the pipe which was anything but the calumet of peace on this occasion, and shook his head before the faces of the elders. They were waiting for some condensed philosophy to comfort them, but it was a long time before the sage of Port Gwynn spoke.

"Friends," he said, "friends, it's my opinion as we've gone and done it."

The thing was settled. They would not go back, so they must go forward. For Jacob had been consulted, and had he not said that they had gone and done it!

Chapter XXVII

The Great Secret.

MARY stood like a carved resignation. Siddons might have looked like that; tall, white, statuesque, with something of pity in her melting blue eyes. However near to her death she might have been an hour ago, Guy could see that she was perfectly safe now. He had broken the back of Tregarthen's passion by a few commonplace words. He could see that there was no longer anything Homeric in Tregarthen's anger, he was no Curtius ready to jump into the gulf for the great cause.

Mary stood in the archway, with the panels of oak about her and the great framed picture of Rex Tregarthen, first of his race, over her head. The living fire of the diamonds on her bosom trembled never so slightly. To the rector she advanced with a smile.

"It was good of you to come," she said. "But there was no necessity."

Tregarthen had commenced his strident echoing march once more. At that moment he was lost in the gloom down the hall.

"But *was* there no necessity?" Guy asked.

"Well, yes. The Tregarthens have dominated their passions as little as their other vices. I heard you tell him—well, you know what I mean. It seemed to break him all up, didn't it?"

Guy admitted gravely that such was the fact. He derived no amusement from the scene for a long time afterwards.

"What can I do for you now?" he asked.

"Go," Mary said. "Later on I shall know how to thank you. For the present your greatest kindness is to leave me alone."

Guy nodded silently, and withdrew. Mary heard his footsteps echoing along the flagged passages; but she was no longer afraid, the feeling of hopeless desolation

had passed. Tregarthen heard nothing beyond the rushing of blood in his ears, but that was running more slowly now and like a mill race when the gates are let down. He paced up and down his cage still, but with shorter strides. Of Mary he took no notice whatever.

She sat by a quaint carved table in the centre of the hall, a three-branch candelabra on either side. A pool of light lay across the polished oak floor, Tregarthen crossing it over and over again like a shadow. A big brass-inlaid clock ticked ponderously in one corner till it seemed to smite the silence like a hammer.

Mary will not soon forget that night. The armour, the pictures, the old gleaming oak with its mirrors, glowing moons on the shield of the sky, the glint of priceless things here and there, and, above all, that dark moody figure walking to and fro. She was brave and resolute now, but she had to speak or cry.

"I shall install the electric light here," she said.

The remark was banal and pointless enough, a miracle of inconsequence that any foolish woman might have uttered. Yet it brought Tregarthen up all standing as if a Machiavelli had framed it.

"What do you mean?" he asked stupidly.

"Well, it is so gloomy here. Really, you have no idea how well the electric light suits these old homes. I saw one up in Scotland. I shall have all the fittings made of old copper. Sit down."

Tregarthen sat down, to his own astonishment. And therefore gave away the one advantage he had possessed.

"You speak as if the place was your own," he said.

Mary smiled. How singularly handsome and distinguished she looked! An artist brought up amongst the most artistic surroundings, Tregarthen had a fine eye for beauty, as his ancestors had before him. All their women had been beautiful, but never more so than the lovely anomaly who smiled into his eyes. There was a queer warm feeling at Tregarthen's heart.

"You are doing your best to make it mine," she said.

"Indeed! In what way? I am not defeated yet."

"No; but you are going to be, my dear Tregarthen. When you say 'my will is law,' you forget that you are on the very extreme of Cæsarism. You say there shall be no bridge, but you are wrong."

"I admit that much. You have forced my hand there."

"If you only knew how you encourage me to proceed! You say your people shall have no part in the undertaking, that they shall not earn the honest money they so sorely need. You are acting with the greatest cruelty towards your people. Tregarthen, this must be stopped."

Tregarthen rose again, for there was no longer a smile on Mary's lips. She spoke in tones of the firmest resolution, spoke sweetly, with the silver in her voice, yet she meant every word. There was something confident, too, in the gentle challenge, an assurance of success that shook Tregarthen. Up to now Mary had accomplished all that she had foreshadowed; had she some weapon yet to hand?

Tregarthen exploded angrily again.

"Look at me," he cried. "Look at my clothing, see the mocking dust upon it!"

"A sixpenny clothes-brush would remove that in a minute."

Tregarthen shook himself like an angry terrier. There is nothing that kills hifalutin like the thing Mary's fellow-countrymen call 'horse sense.' Like Jacob Marley's ghost, Tregarthen was apt to be flowery. Like Scrooge, Mary detested it.

"You have no sympathy with me," the injured monarch growled.

"Not the least," Mary replied. "But I am fond enough of you to try and bring you to your senses. I entered upon my present course from a sense of duty. And I am honest enough to admit that I should probably have shirked it had I not liked you, Tregarthen."

Again that queer warm feeling at his heart.

"Do you mean that you love me?" he murmured. "If you do—"

"Oh, we are not going into that yet," Mary interrupted swiftly. "I may come to play Phyllis to your Strephon some day. But not till you have made amends to your people for last night's folly."

"Oh, indeed? I am to apologize? I am to come down to dessert and to say that I am sorry for being a bad boy, and that I will never do it again? Look at me. I am covered with foulness from head to foot. I am sore from their treatment of me, me—Tregarthen. And you sit there like a beautiful white fool saying I am to make amends to my people."

"Are you sure that they are your people?"

Tregarthen looked at his wife keenly.

"You mean that they have thrown off the yoke?" he asked.

"Not yet, perhaps; but they will. The fever of freedom runs riot in their veins, the disease was bound to come at last. Why do you deny the rights of incipient revolution? There is more treason and sedition openly preached in England in a single hour than in a year elsewhere. Yet nobody cares, nobody heeds. And England is the one free country on the face of the earth. The wise ruler bows to the will of his people, and those people rejoice in their sovereign. If you can't rule through the heart, you cannot rule at all."

Tregarthen nodded, though it was doubtful whether or not he understood the true inwardness of Mary's wisdom. The time was coming when these words were excoriated upon him in letters of flame.

"No," he cried eagerly; "but I can punish them. I can make them repent in sackcloth and ashes and bitterness of the spirit. I can expel them from the island."

"What, all of them? Never! Miriam would take the matter up, she would lash you with her pen in every important paper in England. You little know the power that woman can sway. Money would pour in like water. Why, you would be crushed in a week."

Tregarthen could not see it. He was ready to defy the House of Commons and the Speaker to boot. He would scoff at the mace as Cromwell had done. Mary laughed aloud for the first time. There was something indiscreet, not to say ludicrous, in the coupling of Tregarthen and the Protector.

"Oh, you are hopeless," she cried. "You are like a spoilt boy, and you must have your lesson. Don't blame me for the thing you have brought about yourself. And believe that I am actuated by the highest motives. Once for all, are you going to give your people the reforms that they demand?"

Mary had risen now, her face pale and grave. Blind as he was, Tregarthen could see that some crisis was at hand.

“No,” he said, “they shall be banished, they shall be beaten to their knees. Till that comes I have no mercy on them. I have spoken my final word, so there is an end of it.”

He thought that he had conquered, for Mary had covered her face with her hands and her whole frame was shaking. When she looked up again her face was grave and steady. She grasped one of the candles in her hand and stepped across the hall to the picture of Rex Tregarthen.

“See him,” she said. “Read the pedigree of the race inscribed on the gilt panel at the foot of the frame. Read it aloud.”

Tregarthen proceeded to do so. The inscription was a long one, telling of the dead and gone Dictators from grim old Rex to headstrong, foolish Rupert. The recital was finished at length.

“Is there not a break somewhere?” Mary asked.

“Surely. Jasper Tregarthen who fled the island in 1659. He died in America, childless, in 1697.”

“If he had issue, and that issue could be proved, then his descendants would be rulers of Tregarthen. According to the charter there is no fixity of tenure in the title. If I could prove that I was the lineal last of Jasper’s family, you would have to abdicate your position and hand it over to me despite yourself. You would be no more than one of the First Families and I should be queen here!”

“Assuredly. A parallel case happened in 1410 in the case of Mathilda Tregarthen, but so long a time had not elapsed since. But what has that to do with the matter?”

Mary turned and faced him.

“It has everything to do with it,” she said. “Tregarthen, as I am a Christian woman I am Jasper Tregarthen’s only living descendant. I have proofs that have passed every test. I stand here mistress of these people and you stand there as powerless for good or evil as a mere child.”

Each single simple word seemed to be beaten into Tregarthen’s brain as silver is beaten, or brass, into the scrolls of some exquisite design. Not for one instant did it occur to him to flout the truth of the statement; indeed, it was impossible to look at Mary and doubt. And she had proofs, too, proofs that nobody could have successfully contested.

“I am nobody,” Tregarthen said presently. “Why did you not tell me this before?”

“Tregarthen, I did not design to tell you it at all. Why should I come here and do you this terrible injury? But you forced me to speak, to tell the rude truth for the salvation of these poor islanders. If it is not too late yet, there is no reason even now that they should know. Give them their freedom, let them do as they like, let prosperity have its chance. If you will only do as I ask you!”

“What, sell myself and all my ideals for an empty place, for a crown of tin, a throne with the bottom out of it! Oh, I shall get used to this presently, I shall come to understand! For the present I am stunned and dazed. But, thank God, you cannot destroy my independence, you cannot take away from me the manhood and the—”

“Stop. I can do worse things than that.”

“Indeed! What can you do?”

“I can banish you from the island as a stone in the path of progress. I can send you forth without a penny to get your own living, shiftless as you are. I can do all this.”

“Mary, you would never, never commit such—such——”

“Yes,” said Mary, slowly. “That is exactly what I *am* going to do.”

Chapter XXVIII

Le Roi Est Mort.

IN subsequent admissions Mary confessed to fear but three times in her life. The first occasion referred to the prehistoric period of juvenile dentistry, the second to her first proposal, the third and greatest to the declaration of banishment so far as Tregarthen was concerned. There was both fear and sorrow here, regret and remorse, stiffened and steeled by the knowledge that she was acting up to crystal purpose. But the fear was a living, palpitating thing.

Mary need not have been in the least afraid. She had shot at her tiger, and she had pierced him clean through the heart. He recognized her power, and bowed to it. Then the dread significance of it all came upon him like a flash. Just try and realize what banishment meant to this man.

It meant the absolute loss of everything that he held most dear. The expatriation of a MacGregor or a Cameron was a mere summer holiday compared to it. Tregarthen was the soil, and the soil was Tregarthen. He had more than once declared that he could not breathe any other air. The boom of the ground-swell and the rock of the surges made the only music to which his ear was attuned. And Mary was going to deprive him of all this. He never questioned her power to do so, he never asked for proofs. For, you see, the man was a gentleman, and a lie to him was a mere intangible form. The new head of Tregarthen had formulated a stern decree, and it was his only to obey. He felt strangely like a little child confessing to a mother.

“Why do you do this thing?” he asked gently.

“If I tell you you will not understand,” said Mary, “at least, not yet. That will all come in time—when you have suffered and learnt things for yourself. And you are going to suffer, my poor Tregarthen. What a fortunate thing it is that you are a man of simple tastes and habits!”

“Go on. If you pity me I shall do you a mischief. Go on.”

“Really, I have very little to say. I am doing this thing because you are my husband. Under ordinary circumstances we shall be together for thirty years. Under the present conditions that would be intolerable. The mere thought of it is maddening. So you have got to go out into the world to suffer and to learn the great lesson that comes to us all in time. You will learn that work is noble, you will learn to toil for your daily bread—learn that a man can fight for his daily crust and believe in Christ at the same time. You will see people who have nothing to sacrifice, yet are making noble sacrifices; you will come back to me with shamed,

widely-opened eyes, and together we will make Tregarthen blossom like a rose. Only come back to me soon, Tregarthen, for, strange as it may seem, I love you, my husband."

Mary spoke above her usual voice, her tones were clear and sweet, and her words came rapidly and from her heart. She stood there like a beautiful inspired prophetess, something beyond the grasp of man. A proud sense of possession, an unutterable sense of loss filled Tregarthen at the same time.

"Heavens!" he cried, "is it possible?"

"It is true," said Mary. "Ah, there are many, many things that you do not understand, Tregarthen, and the heart of a woman is one of them. Still, you may stay if you please. It is not too late."

"I am going," Tregarthen said slowly. "You will never see me again; you will never bring me round to your views. But if ever my eyes are opened, and I see as you, then will I come back and ask for forgiveness."

This was final, and Mary recognized the fact. Both turned from one another simultaneously, Tregarthen towards the chapel, and Mary in the direction of her rooms. There she lay down and slept uneasily till morning. She passed through the chapel after she had dressed, and Tregarthen was still there. There were grey and white and black monuments to dead and gone Tregarthens, crowned with golden legends testifying to their ripe virtues; a pale sun filtered through the stained glass and rested upon carved rafters, beams and angels wrought cunningly in stone. Beyond the floating dust Mary could see Tregarthen kneeling before the altar.

A feeling of utter loneliness came over her. She must have cheerful society and that at once, not the society of Ruth or Naomi, but something more modern and spontaneous. Mary caught herself wondering if she could be always happy on Tregarthen. At any rate she was hungering for Miriam and the others now.

She fled out into the open. She saw a plunging, sullen, leaden sea with a ragged foam tearing like white teeth at the forefeet of Tintagel; she saw a thin cloudwrack with a threat of snow in it racing over a sickly sun. Jacob Bishop was coming over towards the old quay.

"Take me across, Jacob," she said. "I am going to Trevose."

She got there just as the rector's guests were sitting down to luncheon. How sweet and refined and homelike it all looked; the brown walls, the pictures, the flowers artistically arranged, the shadow of the Norman tower beyond. As the tears rushed into Mary's eyes she became conscious of her hunger.

"Here is a salmon and an early cucumber," Guy said. "Also new potatoes grown in my forcing house. Have you young people been quarrelling?"

Mary explained. She told the whole story with candour. Everybody, save Miriam, was profoundly impressed. Rarely had a story-teller a more flatteringly silent audience. Maud Barry was tearfully sympathetic.

"I am afraid Tregarthen will be terribly upset," Mrs. Guy said.

"Sure and he won't be upset at all," Maud cried. "I have seen the same thing many and many a time in Ireland—the family on the roadside, and the father with the grey face of him set and simple. 'Twill just break his heart."

"Very likely," the rector said, with some indifference. "My heart was broken when I had to sacrifice my career, but that does not prevent my feeling personally

affronted if I am offered anything but meal-fed bacon for breakfast. Mary has done a very sensible thing."

"A pity these sensible things always hurt so," Mary said unsteadily. "I wish I was not quite so fond of the man."

Maud's lovely eyes rounded; the exquisitely tender beauty of her face was almost a reproach to Mary.

"You mean that you love him?" Maud said.

"Well, yes," Mary confessed, with the red roses flying. "Did you ever love a man?"

It was Maud's turn to rival the clear crimson of the other's cheeks; but she turned it off with a laugh that ended in a half sigh.

"I'll go and see him," she said.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Guy said crisply. "Do you think that I am going to find salmon and cucumber at this time of the year for wild Irish girls who are as tactless as they are beautiful? And if I can say any more than that, tell me, and I will say it."

"You cannot possibly do any good," Miriam remarked. "Maud, you are illogical."

"Is it possible for an Irish man or woman to be logical?" Guy put in.

"We never have been, and we never shall be," Maud said defiantly.

"And therein lies one of the chief charms of your race," Miriam resumed. "Now, what do you regard Tregarthen as being? An evicted tenant—"

"A man turned out of his home, Miriam. If Mary was in Ireland I should lead a crusade against her on the spot."

"For doing what? Getting rid of a man who has boldly declared that he meant to evict every tenant on Tregarthen? If he had not been rendered powerless you would have seen the most terrible distress and misery on the island. And there would have been a crusade ready to your hand then."

"Ay," Maud cried. "The tyrant should have had his lesson at my hand. He should have knelt at the feet of his peasantry and howled for mercy. And, if it's not a rude question, what are you all laughing at?"

She answered the question by bursting into a merry peal herself as the absurdity of the position dawned upon her. As a matter of fact, any mirth there was at the table was a little forced; they were driven back presently on the weather. It had grown colder, and ever and again a thin powder of snow smote the window-panes. A big wood fire roared up the open grate.

"If I were in the States," Miriam said presently, "I should calculate on a blizzard. Is it going to be bad, doctor?"

Julien came in unannounced as usual. He dropped into the vacant place at table, where he was greeted with effusion by all but Maud, who was shy and silent.

"I am afraid it is," he said. "They have had two feet of snow in Devonshire and further north. We had a time here in '94—hardly enough to eat. We were at our last gasp when they came to us from Wadebridge. And the Wednesday the storm commenced was just such another day as this. I was precious glad to finish my outlying rounds to-day."

By four o'clock it was snowing in earnest, a fine dry powder carried along on the breast of the east wind. Patches were flung upon the uplands, whilst here and there the ground was clean and bare. Mary rose and huddled her furs about her.

"Nay, I must go," she said. "Bishop is waiting for me, and, with this east wind, there will be no sea on. I must get back to my people before it gets worse."

She went at length, and went alone, refusing the rector's escort. Miriam and Mrs. Guy had gone to the drawing-room, the other two were discussing politics furiously, and Maud was getting the worst of it.

The Castle was reached at length, the great log fire in the hall glowed cheerfully. Outside the moving gale smote the windows. It is only once in a decade or so that the white phantoms fall upon Cornwall, but when the blizzard comes there it comes with bare teeth and the blackness of the night in its throat. Ruth came in presently from the Sanctuary with the grey powder in her hair.

"Wild night that will be wilder," she said. "Mistress, what have you done to Tregarthen? When I went out hours ago he was kneeling in the chapel; when I came back he was there still. When I asked if he was ill he drove me away fiercely, with a face as white as all outside. Is it the same quarrel?"

"To-morrow," Mary said wearily, "to-morrow I will tell you everything. I am too tired and worn out to say anything at present."

Dinner came and dinner passed, but no Tregarthen. Mary lay back in her chair and slept dreamlessly. The gale had risen to the full force of its passion; the snow lay deep in the valley. There was a keenness in the air that cut like a knife. It was past twelve o'clock when Mary awoke to the knowledge of the white war outside and that Tregarthen was not here. Was he still starving in the chapel?

He was not in his room, he was nowhere to be seen. In her own room Ruth lay on her bed still dressed but fast asleep. Desirous of company as she was, Mary refrained from waking her. Surely it was not possible that Tregarthen had gone off into the white whirling horror of such a night!

With her furs drawn close, Mary opened the big door. The force of the gale smote her in the face like a blow, in one instant she was covered from head to foot. The bitter wind chilled her blood, it was only after a struggle that she managed to close the oaken barrier again. There was a roar and a rumbling in the chimneys, a sharp switching against the painted casements. A dreadful night, an awful night, with peril on land and death on sea.

But where was Tregarthen? Not in the chapel, for his place there was vacant. In an absent kind of way Mary walked up the aisle to the altar, where some time before she had seen Tregarthen kneeling. On the fair white cloth lay a paper with a few words scratched in pencil on it.

"I have gone; I shall never trouble you more. Good-bye. Let it be between you and your God how you deal with my people."

Only this and nothing more. One long, breathless pause and Mary fled to the room where Ruth was sleeping. She shook the girl with passionate force till her splendid eyes were opened curiously.

"Mistress," Ruth said, "what is the matter?"

"Tregarthen has gone," Mary cried. "Gone off in the storm. Raise the house, call Gervase Tretire, do something to save me from the crime of murder to-night. For if Tregarthen dies, as sure as there is a heaven above me, I shall have killed him."

She grasped the silken bell-pull and tore at it passionately. And the wind and the storm outside mocked her hideously.

Chapter XXIX

White Wings.

MARY'S words rang clear to the roof. She spoke with an abandonment of despair that fairly touched Ruth. She would not have given this usually cool, self-possessed beauty credit for so much passionate feeling.

But Mary was rocked by a great grief now, moved with the mistaken consciousness that if Tregarthen perished his death would lie against her evermore.

She raged up and down the room much as Tregarthen might have done, her face was all broken up with a deluge of conflicting emotions. That Tregarthen had done an exceedingly foolish and dangerous thing never occurred to her for a moment. He had gone off amongst the white graves of the night and she would follow him and die by his side if the Lord willed. Nor did she know that she was saying all these wild things aloud, until Ruth caught her and forced her with a gentle strength into a chair. Struggle as she would, Mary was absolutely powerless in that grasp.

"You must let me go," she cried. "I must follow him. I drove him to this. Every crash of snow on the windows is a sharp pain in my heart."

"You will do nothing of the kind," Ruth said. "Tregarthen need not have gone."

"My dear Ruth, I turned him out."

"You turned Tregarthen out of his own house! This is madness."

"Madness, yes. And I thought there was method in it. Listen."

Mary explained almost in a breath. Ruth listened without astonishment. Nothing could amaze her that Mary said or did. Then there was a knock at the door, and Gervase Tretire entered. A big pilot coat was about him, his face hidden under an oilskin sou'wester.

"I'll go and look for him, and, what's more, I shall find him," he said presently. "There's no cause for fear. Tregarthen could find his way from one end of the island to the other blindfold. A bitter night, and bitter days to follow. I must get on to Wadebridge if possible."

"Don't try it, Gervase," Ruth cried. "Don't try it."

Gervase nodded resolutely; both knew the danger. It had happened thus three years before, when Tregarthen island and Trevose were cut off from the world and stood for three days face to face with absolute starvation. Then along the seven weary miles of hill and dale, cutting, and open moor, Tretire alone had thrashed his dogged way into Wadebridge and saved the lives of them all. Once he had lain down to die, once he had stumbled into a deep drift and broken a collar bone. But the grinding pain kept him conscious, and he had fought into safety at last. But to this day Tretire never cares to think of that forty hours' tramp, that usually takes

about twice as many minutes. Other people talk about it, and they will, so long as Trevose remains.

"I'll have to go," he said. "I've done it before and I can do it again. It's bad outside now, but there's worse to follow."

"You'll find Tregarthen?" Mary asked imploringly.

"If he is to be found, yes, mistress. I'll go now."

He turned away resolutely, Ruth's eyes following him with tears unshed. She dashed them proudly away.

"There goes a man," she cried, "a man who takes his life in both hands to save the body of a fool. Put either of us down to-night a hundred paces from the Castle and I wouldn't give a catch of mackerel for our chances. Gervase knows the danger, and yet he goes."

Tretire closed the great oaken door behind him and plunged into the night. The icy blast caught him on the chest like a blow. The grey squadron, horsed by the gale, smote him until he was forced to hold his head down and wipe his smarting eyes. There was no roar of the sea to-night, for the easterly gale was off shore and kept the waves down. The fine dry powder tinkled on his oilskin cap like a long discharge of small shot. Just for a moment he was utterly dazed, the transformation was so painfully sudden.

He stopped for a moment to recover his scattered senses. It was so dreadfully, shudderingly dark that the warm picture of the Castle hall, with its blazing fire, polished oak and armour, was still sharply defined before his eyes. He knew every inch of the ground there, and yet, for the life of him, he could not recall the path to the quay. Even when his eyes became attuned to the darkness, huge piles of drift here and there seemed to have changed the very formation of the soil.

Presently it came to him, the knowledge of his position returned. With his eyes shut he progressed fairly well, but directly he tried to see confusion came down on him. A less strong and resolute man would have abandoned the task in sheer despair. But then, Gervase Tretire was far from being an ordinary man.

He knew the whole story now, and he felt assured that Tregarthen would fly from the island. He had had a good start, and could easily have crossed over to the mainland before the fury of the gale shut down on a shuddering world. Even now the passage of the channel was possible. Gervase felt rather than knew that he was nearing the quay. But he did not dream that he had been over an hour getting the better of six hundred yards; all the same he had. He could hear the swish of the sea now. He staggered on against something moving, something that clung to him and demanded in the name of Heaven to know where he was. Gervase recognized the voice.

"What are you doing here, Jackson?" he yelled. It was no use to speak quietly.

"I don't know," Jackson replied. "I was fearsome for my boat, and I came down. But the boat was gone, so I came back. I ought to be close to home, but I might be out o' Cornwall altogether for all I know."

Gervase explained the position; but Jackson clung to him, and prayed to be guided back to his cottage. There was deadly fear in every note of the deep voice, the voice that always sounded the cheeriest when there was work to be done and the lifeboat was battling for souls in peril on the sea. Gervase piloted him to the cottage as if he had been a little child.

Jackson paused breathlessly, with his hand on the latch of his cottage door.

"I shouldn't ha' so much feared but for the wife and young ones," he said. "Come in, lad, it isn't safe to be out-o'-doors."

But Gervase had already turned away. Jackson had unwittingly given him certain information as to Tregarthen's movements. With the wind in its present quarter the boats were perfectly safe, and therefore, if Jackson's craft was missing, somebody must have taken it. Nobody would have done so on a night like this but Tregarthen. Therefore Tregarthen must have crossed over to the mainland not so very long before. A few minutes later and Gervase was following. There was not so much danger here, for he knew every ripple and current, he could calculate his position to a nicety, and presently he made Trevose harbour in safety. But he was chilled to the bone and sorely tempted to seek a little warmth behind the red gleaming lights he could see dotted all up the hillside. With head bent, he pressed on resolutely.

Tregarthen would have to clear the village, he knew that. Therefore there was no chance of finding him until the Rectory was passed. Within the next two hours Gervase was two miles along the Wadebridge road. No other man in Cornwall could have done anything of the kind.

He was half dead with cold by this time, and full of the bitter consciousness that he was going to fail. For death he cared nothing; but it was hard to leave Ruth and all the sweets that life held for him. If only the fury of the gale would slacken a bit, if only that stinging white desolation would cease! A branch of a tree, swayed by the wind, smote him fairly on the face, and he dropped to his knees like a bullock.

"Lord help me, I am going to faint," he muttered. "Once down, I am done for."

He opened his mouth, and yelled for help with the full force of his oaken lungs. Then he dropped over sideways and fell to dreaming that he was seated by a fireside with the woodsparks pricking on his cheek. When he opened his eyes again, surely he was by a fireside, and there opposite him was the very man of whom he was in search—Rupert Tregarthen!

The wild whiteness had gone from his face, the hard gleam from his eyes. He nodded with a certain assumed carelessness to Gervase.

"A nasty blow in the face," he said; "but your oilskin saved you. That bough nearly killed you; but the bough happened to be hanging over the cottage, and I heard you yell. You fell on the doorstep. I shouldn't wonder if you had come to look for me, Gervase."

"One fool makes many," Gervase said pointedly.

"Ah, I am right. Do you know anything, friend?"

"I know that the grey mare is the better horse of the two."

"Well, perhaps you are as well to be guarded. The people who belong to this cottage have all migrated to Trevose for the bridge building. I got here just as the storm was at its worst, and here I am. Gervase, this is a serious matter."

Gervase nodded. He had not all his senses yet, but he was not blind to the fact that some great change had come over Tregarthen. The latter stirred the fire till the crocus blue-and-yellow sparks danced again. Outside the gale was blowing with a fury that rendered conversation difficult.

"You mean about Trevose and Tregarthen?" Tretire asked.

“Of course I do. The bridge has brought four hundred strange men there. How are they going to be fed unless we get to Wadebridge? You and I must fight our way there as soon as day dawns. Our lives are too valuable to others to be risked before then. If one of us perishes by the way, then the other may reach the goal.”

All this Tregarthen said quietly, with his eyes fixed upon the blazing logs. He seemed so different, so gentle, so thoughtful for the others that Gervase could only gaze at him with mild amazement.

“What’s come over you to-night?” he asked bluntly.

It was some time before Tregarthen replied.

“I have been very near to death for one thing,” he said. “When I reached here I was utterly exhausted. Had I fallen in the snow I should have perished. And as I fought my way here many thoughts came to me. But I am not going back to Tregarthen.”

He flashed out the last words with all the old defiance. Gervase was discreet enough not to contest the point. There was a long tempestuous silence before Tregarthen spoke again.

“My wife says that I am utterly wrong,” he said tentatively.

Gervase took up the challenge at once, as Tregarthen expected.

“She says truly. Never a greater fool than Rupert Tregarthen was ever born. And you’ll come to see it; you’ll come back for pardon, on your knees. And the woman who loves you drove you away because she preferred that the one should suffer for the many.”

“My wife loves me! Did she tell you so?”

“Tell me so!” Gervase echoed, with fine scorn. “There’s no need. There’s a heart to me and a heart to Ruth, and through the light of our hearts we can read the hearts of others. Some day you’ll know. Come back to Tregarthen with me. Make your peace and be happy.”

Tregarthen’s face was still turned to the glowing logs so that Gervase could not see the strange light leaping in his eyes. In a vague way Tregarthen was wondering why he felt so happy.

“There is stern work before us,” he said, “and it must be done before we see Tregarthen—if ever we do see it again. Gervase, how can you dwell upon such matters, knowing what is before us? I am ashamed of you.”

“Then we’re quits,” Tretire growled. “Suppose we get to Wadebridge? What then?”

“Why, then you return—alone. I have work to do.”

“What work can you have to do?”

Tregarthen rose and paced the room with long strides.

“To see the world,” he cried. “To learn things for myself. Gervase, I will tell you something, but you must not repeat it again in Tregarthen. I have come to the conclusion that it is just possible for you to be right and me to be wrong. And if I *am* wrong, why, why—But I am not coming back to Tregarthen.”

Chapter XXX

After the Gale.

A FAIR smiling heaven above, white desolation below. Here was the sun shining as it might have done on the vale of Cachmire, upon the pregnant buds of Bendemeer's stream—a grim mockery floating upon a still, frosty air. Out of the blinding pall the Castle stood stark and brown, away over a plunging leaden sea Tintagel sat dark and brooding. The clamour of the silence smote on Mary's ears painfully. It was all so patently, horribly still.

Right as far as the eyes could reach the white walls extended. Was this Tregarthen the smiling? Mary wondered, as she stood on the Castle tower. Could it be possible that here, only a few fleeting gossamer days since, she had caught the fragrance of the violet and jonquil over the saffron sheets of daffodils bending from the Atlantic breeze? She tried to think of deep woods, of trembling green ferns washed with dew, of the autumn gold smitten into the covert side, of the flaming profligacy of a September hedgerow, but the snow seemed to have numbed her brain. There was a pain at her heart as she thought of Tregarthen and Tretire.

For the rest she saw no danger, she did not realize what the storm meant as yet. In America people are prepared for these things; they have their stores and depots, their powerful steam ploughs by which they make light of the blizzard. Not for one moment did Mary realize that Trevose and Tregarthen were cut off from the world, and that all the horrors of famine stared them in the face. And there were four hundred extra mouths to feed in Trevose.

Presently human forms began to appear here and there, men who called to one another in the Titanic tones that the snow-blanketed earth seems to develop. Even a whisper sounded loud and harsh and fearful. With a strong glass Mary could see gangs of men at work in Trevose and up the slopes of the hillside. And it was cold, chilling to the very marrow of the bones. So much for the tender English April that Elizabethan poets and other playful humorists had made familiar to Mary. The whole thing filled her with a deep sadness.

Presently it was possible to get outside, for paths had been cut here and there in the white billows. Mary found her people grave and silent.

It was from Jackson that she learnt the true nature of the catastrophe. If Tretire failed to reach Wadebridge it would go hard with them indeed. In 1804 Tregarthen had suffered a week's famine, and forty people had perished.

"An' the rest was like ghosts," Jackson concluded. "Couldn't walk, I've heard my old grandfather say."

"I think," Mary said quietly, "I'll try and see the rector."

She managed to get across presently and so up the cliff path that serves Trevose instead of a road. All round the Rectory the earth was bare and black, but half the house was buried so that there were lamps in the drawing-room and dining-room. Guy hailed Mary from the old pigeon loft where his homers were kept.

"Well, you are pretty plucky," he cried.

"It was necessity," Mary replied. "Old Jackson has been telling me terrible tales of famine and disaster after snow here."

She came up the ladder into the old pigeon loft, a tumbledown place in itself, but filled with carved oak beyond price. The beautiful birds plumed and strutted

there, walking like young soldiers proudly on parade. One of these birds fluttered on to Mary's shoulder and stayed there.

"Pretty creature," she said. "They seem none the worse. Is this a valuable bird?"

"Will be," Guy explained. "It isn't mine, but belongs to Preston of St. Osyth Vicarage, near Wadebridge. He has some of my birds and I have some of his. My bishop says this pigeon-flying business is immoral."

"Immoral! It is decidedly interesting."

"Anyway, there is a good deal that is shady connected with it. Remember how pigeons sapped the morals of Rob the Grinder. Preston and I fell into the shady practice when we were at Oxford together. I lured the bishop in here the last time he was over, but he declined to do more than admire the oak panels."

Mary said nothing, for she was wondering. Doubtless by this time Tretire was fighting his way to Wadebridge, if he was still alive. Mary explained to the rector all that had happened the previous day.

"I feel like a murderess," she said. "First Tregarthen and now Tretire. And I drove them both to the death. You may shake your head, you may bring a thousand sophistries to prove that I am wrong. But the fact remains. If either of these men die I shall never know a moment's happiness again. I may be wrong, but I have an idea that Tretire has gone to Wadebridge."

"Towards Wadebridge," Guy said grimly.

"Well, you know what I mean. Tregarthen would make the same direction. I have proof that he crossed over from the island. My dear friend, could you not send a message to St. Osyth by that bird and get a reply?"

Guy patted Mary's shoulder approvingly. Nothing but a rigid sense of the proprieties restrained him from slapping her on the back.

"I dodder, I am growing senile," he said. "A message detailing our gruesome plight shall be sent and inquiries for the wanderers made. Before nightfall I expect we shall have some kind of reply."

Mrs. Guy and her two guests were sitting round the dining-room fire. Miriam was coiled up in the ingle nook with her slippers on the hammered brass dogs. In her own words, Miriam 'froze on to anything old.' They greeted Mary with loud approbation.

"Now I have got you I am going to keep you," Mrs. Guy said.

But Mary demurred. She had her people to think of; but she compromised. For the present she would sleep at the Rectory so long as she had the untangled freedom of her days. And the more they talked over the matter of the blizzard, the more serious did the future seem. Mary flared out angrily—

"Are these people utterly improvident and blind?" she said.

The rector met the full gleam of her blue eyes almost apologetically. Mary repeated her question with Olympian fire.

"I beg your pardon," Guy said. "I was calculating how many people we could feed for a week on potatoes. These people are improvident in a sense. They are possessed of a fierce, almost hysterical Puritan spirit that prevents them from doing things. This vein renders them as fatalistic as a Turk. In some respects they resemble the Scotch. 'It is, and it will be, and the Lord hath ordered it.' There you have the whole policy in a nutshell. In vain have I pointed out the immorality and the wickedness of this tendency. They rely entirely on their Maker with a

selfishness that is absolutely colossal. Mind you, they have not the remotest idea that they are selfish, that they are as criminal and foolish in this respect as the old man who prayed Jupiter to aid him without putting out a hand to aid himself. A man here who prepares for a contingency is showing a want of faith in his God. Ah, how I hammered my head and bruised my flesh against the walls of complacent fanatic tenets when I came here first. But they will never learn. They will perish by the wayside for want of common prudence, and cry out, 'The Lord's will be done.'"

The rector raved up and down the room, with the burning words pouring from his lips. The great kindly gentleman was gone, the man of whom great things had been prophesied stood there instead. Here was an ally after Mary's own heart. Miriam's eyes were glistening and her mouth quivered. Maud burst into stormy applause.

"My people over again," she cried. "Only they laugh at misfortune whilst these frown. Mary, my dear, what are you going to do about it?"

Mary had not the remotest idea, and admitted the fact freely. Not for the first time in her life she realized that here was a rock that the golden rod could not touch.

"We can only divide the provisions and wait for aid," she said.

But she could not sit there, with her hands before her, blinking at the fire. The shadow of a crime—for crime she deemed it—hung heavy on her conscience. She felt that she must be doing something if only walking about the village. And the rector, shrewd, kindly soul that he was, saw this, and proposed a walk to Trevose. The others rose at once; but Guy objected to a crowd. He felt sure that Mary did not desire it, and she looked towards him gratefully.

Down in the village the imported labour was clearing the snow away. A group of Trevose fishermen, with Challen and Hawkes, were looking on. Toil like that was a fearful and wonderful thing to them. Men who walked upright, toiling like slaves at the bidding of a none too sweet-tongued 'ganger,' struck them dumb with a pitiful amazement. From prehistoric times no human being in Trevose had ever been in a hurry.

"How refreshing," said Mary. "I love to see big strong men at work. They are doing *something*. I feel like taking a hand myself."

"What's the good?" Hawkes asked, with slow contempt. "The Lord smites us, and the Lord cherishes us, just as He's a mind. That's my faith."

A laggard approval followed. Challen supplemented this trashy philosophy with something equally profound and meaningless. Like Jack Bunsby, he was given to loud-sounding phrases odorous of obscurity.

"To my belief it's the bridge," said another of the group. "You be all for it, even Challen and Hawkes, as should know better. No good can come to Trevose from the hand of man without the blessing of the Lord. An' He ain't blessed the bridge. I couldn't sleep last night for the gale, so I opened the Book. And what did I find, same as if I'd been inspired, in the fourteenth chapter——"

Guy was upon him like a flash. He had seen more than one promising enterprise here damned by crass ignorance with a quotation from Holy Writ. The speaker was a fanatic, a wallower in ignorance.

“Not another word,” Guy cried. “Who are you, James Pascoe, that you should dare to put your opinions before such as Hawkes and Challen?”

The two great men smiled as Pascoe slunk sullenly away. It seemed to them that the rector had stated their position with a nicety and precision beyond all praise. From an intellectual point of view they had hitherto underrated him.

“That was a good word, Parson,” Challen said, with ponderous approval. “You stay to Trevose with us, and we’ll make something of you yet.”

“Just possible,” Guy said meekly. “We haven’t all gigantic intellects, but we try to do our best. Keep an eye upon me, Challen, and get Hawkes to do the same. I may be a credit to you yet.”

The ponderous twain smiled benignly, and Guy passed on.

“What were you afraid of?” asked Mary. “For you were afraid.”

“Of Pascoe. You don’t understand these people. A dexterously twisted text, in face of this trouble, might easily pull your proposed bridge about your ears. That is why I had to play off those two good-natured old asses against Pascoe. Come along, and let us see what we can do on the island.”

It was a hard day’s work, but Mary threw herself into it heart and soul. She was a born administrator, and she had a congenial spirit in the rector. Long before nightfall a system of provisioning the island, so far as supplies went, was perfected. Mary felt almost happy as she toiled up Trevose hill by Guy’s side. The sun was going down like amber in the west, a soft beating of wings was heard overhead. The rector stopped and whistled softly. Then a pigeon lighted on the loft and preened his feathers, as young birds will.

Mary anxiously watched the bird strut into the loft. There was no need for the rector to tell her what that messenger represented. He came fluttering through the gloom as the rector called, and a small scroll was detached from his leg. With a gesture and a grip at her throat Mary signified him to read.

“It’s all right,” he said. “Tregarthen and Tretire both arrived in Wadebridge an hour ago, greatly exhausted, but otherwise well. There is not much snow to the south, and they will send to us as soon as possible. But we shall be hard pressed for it before provisions arrive.”

Mary caught at the world that seemed to be swaying away from her, and beat at the mist before her eyes. Then the swaying globe grew steady, and she took the pigeon to her eager breast and kissed its soft eyes.

Illustration:
„Pretty bird, you have flown away with all my misery“

“God bless you,” she murmured. “The dove to the ark was no more welcome. Pretty bird, you have flown away with all my misery.”

For a long time the rector was busy doing nothing, with painful exactitude. For Mary was crying quietly, and the good parson had resolutely made up his mind to know nothing of the fact.

Chapter XXXI

A Royal Progress.

TREGARTHEN awoke cold, and shivering, with the grey of the dawn heavy on his eyes. On the floor by his side Tretire lay like a dead man. A heap of dun ashes powdered the hearth; the cold was piercing. But there was wood and to spare piled up in the ingle. So, with his own hands, Tregarthen built up a cheerful blaze again. There were no bellows, and he was fain to rely upon his own lung power, with disastrous results so far as facial cleanliness was concerned. But there was no glass for the deposed monarch to scan his features in, so that resigned dignity of visage and wood smuts passed together, and the humour of the situation was lost.

After all, it was grim humour. These two men were in the direst peril of starvation. They were three miles from anywhere, and off the main road. One of Fenimore Cooper's scouts would have been unable to keep to his tracks in a blizzard.

They would not be missed until it was too late, and they had the alternative of fighting through to Wadebridge over four miles of drift and hidden hedges and pitfalls beyond belief. They might get there; but if they failed to do so before dark, all would be over. Once they failed, it would be over with Trevose and Tregarthen also. Perhaps at the end of a week Wadebridge would awake to the fact that nobody had heard of Trevose lately, when perhaps a relief party would be despatched. At the end of that week Trevose would be a place too horrible for description. Nothing so horrible in the British Isles since the Irish Potato Famine. All this sounds impossible to polite ears within the region of the London daily papers; but ask the islanders near Orkney and Shetland, and the like, what their opinion is on the matter!

In the way of food the house contained nothing. Presently Tretire awoke raging. He had forgotten that he was not alone, and there were words to his tongue that he had no mind for any man to hear. There was only one thing for it—to fall foul of Tregarthen and abuse him.

"This is all your doing," he said truculently.

"What, the snow and the frost and the gale?" asked Tregarthen.

"Not that, but the starvation that follows it. But for you Tregarthen would have lain snug and warm and sleek till the Lord sent the south wind home again. I fought this fight in '94, and I warned you then. Man, do you ever pray?"

"Ay, many and many a time on my knees for mercy on myself and my people. Don't you dare to say that my heart is not all for my people, or I shall do you a mischief. After all, I am as God made me."

"I dare say," Tretire returned dubiously. "Though it's hard to see how He's moving in a case like yours. He gave you Tregarthen as a sacred trust. How you have violated that trust is between you and your conscience."

Tregarthen was bending dejectedly over the fire. Tretire's words were as lashes on his bare back. When once a proud man admits to himself that he may be wrong, there is no length to the measure of his repentance.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "I begin to see things differently now. And if I am wrong, I am the vilest wretch on earth."

Tretire opened the door, saying nothing. Without a word he tramped off into the snow with Tregarthen pushing doggedly behind him. If only there had been food they might have managed it, despite the bitter cold. On and on they plodded, sometimes walking fairly, anon breast deep in the cruel grey powder. Tretire stumbled heavily, and lay snoring, with his head on a white-crowned patch of gorse. Tregarthen bent over and shook him passionately. His eyes were filled with tears, tears blended of anger and anguish, remorse and impotence. He smote Tretire a blow on the face that brought him up staggering again.

"For the love of Heaven," Tregarthen cried. "Gervase, you are stronger than I. Once you sleep here you will awaken no more this side the grave. Forgive me that blow; strike me in return, and I will bear it. Gervase, my brother, are we going to be beaten now with the—"

Tretire was crying quietly; he was utterly overcome. The battling toil of the previous night, and the want of food, told on him now. They were both more or less mad, for the time being, with glimmerings of sense in between—the bush madness of those perishing for want of water. Tretire fought it off first. He rose and pushed on, with a certain blind fury. It was Tregarthen's turn to break down next, and for Tretire to chide him bitterly. Tregarthen took no notice whatever. He sat on a knoll looking fixedly before him.

"Smoke," he said. "There is a house yonder."

Tretire could see nothing but the vivid white cruelty of it all, and the fact that he had a madman to deal with. Was Tregarthen getting on his nerves? Was it fancy, or was there a thin unstable vapour rising from the little valley? Then something brown came twisting upwards, and Tretire yelled.

Illustration:
„Smoke it is," he cried; „we are saved!"

"Smoke it is," he cried; "we are saved! Give us food and warmth, and we shall be in Wadebridge before dark."

They found the farmhouse sheltered by a belt of firs. There were high gorsed hurdles opposite, forming a perfect screen from the wind and snow. A small, old, half-timbered house it was, showing signs of thrift and prosperity. Tretire smote on the door, and a woman opened it.

Such a woman! She was a good six feet in her stout shoes and homespun stockings, and broad in proportion. A huge cap surmounted her grey hair; she had a calm, strong face, and lips that spelt resolution. A woman of sorrows, too, as the reflective eyes proved—a woman to be trusted with a life, or a secret, or the care of desolate and motherless children. As she saw Tregarthen, she threw up her hands with a loud cry. But she would say no more till she had fed them on cold pork pasties, home-made bread, and beer brewed on the premises.

"You seem to know me," said Tregarthen.

“Ay, sure, lad,” the hostess responded. She spoke with a burr. When you heard her speak you thought of the Yorkshire wolds. “I’m Martha Pemberthy, widow of James Pemberthy to Port Gwynn. And I’m worth four thousand pounds. If you don’t believe me, go and ask Bolitho’s Bank at Bodmin.”

She spoke half defiantly, half proudly, standing there, big and strong, and yet with the kindliest light in her big eyes.

“That is a reflection on me, I suppose?” said Tregarthen.

“Ay, it is. James Pemberthy came and took me from Port of Hull. Then I came to Tregarthen with him, and starved with him there better than fourteen years. I saw want and care and shiftlessness on that island like to turn my hair grey. I called shame down on the head of your father; but nobody heeded. And yet there’s a place where every housewife should be prosperous as me. When James died they offered me the Sanctuary. Me! I took this place with nothing, and I’ve made it what it is with my cows and my poultry, and my summer boarders. That’s what me and two lasses have done in ten years. Tregarthen, Tregarthen, the hand of God will be heavy on you for this.”

“The hand lies heavy on me now,” Tregarthen said wearily.

He glanced round the parlour, with its pictures, and carpet, and the fine old chairs, and sideboard that many a wealthy man might have envied. All this sweet comfort had come to this woman once she was free from the blighting influence of Tregarthen Island. And she had spoken truly. All the islanders might to-day have enjoyed a similar prosperity under an enlightened ruler. There was nothing in the woman beyond thrift and industry. The storm had no terrors for her. And she was not in the least afraid of Tregarthen.

“What could I have done?” he asked.

“What could you have done? What could you not have done? Make me over Tregarthen tomorrow and I’ll pay you £10,000 rent a year for it; give me two years and your people will forget what poverty and distress mean. Ask Tretire there what you could have done. He knows.”

Tregarthen pursued the subject no further. This was not the least humiliating moment of his life, and he had had many lately. To be beaten and despised by a mere daughter of the soil was bitter, and it was none the less bitter to know that every word of what she said was true. Nay, more, Tregarthen could not hug to his soul the delusion that prosperity had done anything but sweeten and purify the mind of this woman.

“Let us go on again,” he cried. “I am tortured here.”

Once more they were plunging and fighting the white battalions, fast at first, but gradually moving more slowly. There was a limit to human endurance, and this limit was perilously near. They were dazed and half asleep now; they stumbled over rocks and bushes and stones; they were cut and bleeding, with the congealed red blood frozen on their faces. Tretire burst half defiantly into a snatch of song anent Trelawney and what would happen should he die. It was horribly suggestive of the situation; but they were too far gone to see this. With a last wailing scream of defiance on his lips Tretire pitched headlong, and Tregarthen fell over him, heedless if he lived or died. As the crow flies, they were no more than a rifle shot from their destination. Was this the end? Tregarthen wondered. Well, it did not much matter. And he was so tired…

Not quite the end, for close by that big, jolly, Northumbrian giant, called Edward Preston, vicar of St. Osyth, was tending his pigeons, and to his ears came the yell of the Trelawney song as Tretire fell. Preston had received his message by pigeon post, and was half expecting Tregarthen and his companion. He pushed his way into the road by a deep cutting in the snow, and stumbled over the prostrate forms.

"Bless my heart!" the big man exclaimed. "Poor fellows! We must get them into the house at once. Wake up, there!"

Tregarthen opened a pair of wild eyes. Those eyes looked insanity now, and Tregarthen babbled something incoherent. Preston bent over him and carried him into the house like a sack of flour. A moment later and Tretire was dumped down beside him. Tregarthen was sitting up now, glaring wildly round him. Tretire was still defiant on the subject of Trelawney and what would happen in case of his premature dissolution. It was horrible, ludicrous, grotesque—that strange admixture of tears and laughter, pathos and terror, that fringes all tragedies. A little dark-eyed woman came into the room swiftly.

"Ted," she cried, "has all bedlam broken loose here? Why, it's Tregarthen!"

"A poor player, madam," Tregarthen raved, "who frets and fumes his hour upon the stage, and then is seen no more. Shakespeare's words, madam, or Ben Jonson's. Tretire's gone mad, and I'm his keeper."

"What shall I do with them?" the big man asked helplessly. Brave and strong as he was, he was quite helpless here. "Maria, I am beaten. What is the matter?"

"Nervous exhaustion," Mrs. Preston snapped. "Mental anxiety and the solitude of that awful snow. Often happens in the northern regions, I'm told. Brandy and water hot. Then blankets and a very warm bath."

"Maria, you are really a most wonderful woman."

"Of course I am. Never was a woman like me in the world before, and I very much doubt if there will be again. This is not conceit on my part, but a mere statement of fact. Get the brandy."

The brandy was produced and coaxed, hot, down the throats of the two battered wayfarers. The effect was magical. Tretire sat up and rubbed his eyes, whilst Tregarthen ceased to rave any longer. Perhaps they realized the full measure of their folly, for they sat there, like schoolboys with the stolen apples in their pockets. Meanwhile Mrs. Preston bustled about cheerfully.

"You will have to go to bed at once," she said.

"Excuse me, but I shall do nothing of the kind," Tregarthen said politely but firmly. "I assure you I am all right again——"

"Never better," Tretire said parenthetically.

"Presently I shall be able to express my deep sense of gratitude for your kindness. I am only just learning what a deal of wisdom and kindness there is in the world. Mr. Preston will have guessed why we came here."

"I know," Preston said heartily. "A finer thing has never been done on this rugged coast of fine things. But look you here, Tregarthen; if you let your people face such another catastrophe unprepared, you are a scoundrel. I hope this will be a lesson to you all your life."

Chapter XXXII

Adversity.

MAUD BARRY sat at breakfast scolding the rector in her furious Celtic way. The Trevose and Tregarthen people had no spirit at all, she declared. They had been ground too long under the iron heel of the oppressor. She denounced Tregarthen and all his works roundly, in a clear sweet voice full of music. Some people would have taken her seriously; but Guy knew her better.

"So you can't help them at all?" he asked.

"Never a bit. They are pinched for food, and most of the houses are without fire. I can't even induce them to hold an indignation meeting to keep themselves warm."

"Why not a faction fight between the fishermen and the navvies?" Guy suggested. "You might produce a certain amount of excitement out of that, and, if you are lucky, perhaps bloodshed. As for me, I am disgusted with the whole business. All my home-cured bacon gone at one fell swoop! There was no bacon like mine in the west of England."

"He gave it amongst the women and children of his own free will," Mrs. Guy said. "Reggie is the most unselfish of men. As a matter of fact, I did try to keep some of it back; but he wouldn't hear of it."

The rector changed the subject hastily. He was the kind of man who always gave his good deeds an air of selfishness. Every spare pound of provisions had gone down to the thriftless, heedless villagers. But Tregarthen and some of the others would hear of this before long.

"If the frost holds, Tretire and his commissariat should be here to-day. They must have been on the road eight and forty hours now. Pray God the frost lasts. If the thaw comes they may be a week getting here."

"And there will be rioting and bloodshed in the village," Maud suggested.

"Nothing of the kind, you quarrelsome Celt," Guy replied. "I have my little gibes at the people here, but nobody admires their sterling qualities more than I do. In an extraordinary degree they know how to suffer and be strong. If they starve, they will starve silently and uncomplainingly. The whimper of the child will be stifled on the mother's breast because God has willed this thing, and His people dare not murmur. Ah, they are a fine race!"

Maud's tongue was silent for a moment, for the rector had impressed her. Her quick excitable nature recognized immediately the truth of Guy's words. These people were meeting their misfortunes splendidly. It was the will of God. And these same people had stood outraged and shocked when the rector cut the trees from around his barn after it had been struck with lightning. They had reeled from the contemplation of this blasphemy, the deliberate attempt to evade the designs of the Almighty, or so they regarded it. Yet they knew how to suffer, how to take one stroke of adversity after another with marvellous patience and philosophy. Who ever heard of riot or internal disorder in Cornwall? How often do you see a beggar or a drunkard there? And yet it is one of the poorest counties in England.

And yet these very virtues were near allied to vice—the vice of shiftlessness and a disposition to place the whole burden upon the shoulders of Providence. These very qualities angered as well as moved Guy to admiration. Now he was thankful to take things as they were. Another day and people would be starving in a land where plenty ought to have smiled.

From the top of the hill Guy looked anxiously towards Wadebridge. Down below from the village came murmurs and the unmistakable clamour of strife.

Maud smiled.

"Sure, and they are fighting," she cried.

"Nonsense. They couldn't do it. They don't know how."

"Just as if I can be deceived," Maud said. "Haven't I seen rows enough in my time? I'm a connoisseur in them. Not that I ever had a blackthorn in my hand, save in the way of kindness. Rector dear, don't let my nonsense annoy you. You are uneasy and anxious about something."

Guy nodded as he strode rapidly down the hill. On the sands that backed the quay a mob of men were gathered together. Facing the plateau was the only hostel in the place, the low half-timbered house, known far and near as The Silver Catch. At the top of the wooden steps stood Hawkes and Challen, a group of fishermen below them. And facing this crowd was another—a moleskinned, kneestrapped crowd, with cloth caps and no collars, a grinning mischievous crowd, fragant of the soil, pungent with past perspirations. They jostled to and fro with rough chaff on their lips, did their ringleaders, but there was a thin line between good humour and boundless licence.

"You can't come in," said Challen, ponderously. "When you work and when you eat, then you can drink. But you don't bring riot here on an empty stomach. No, not if landlord Polley has to pull every spigot first."

"That's just what he's doing," a cavernous voice said from the whitewashed straddling barn that served the tenant of The Silver Catch for cellars. "There's lots of stuff here, ten times as much as usual, but it's all going to waste before Trevose becomes a sink of iniquity."

A big navvy grew so lurid that Maud stopped her ears. She had never met the polyglot navvy before, the man who excavates empires and builds up his converse upon one vivid and loathsome adjective. Then another navvy shot out a ponderous fist, and the luminous one collapsed into heavy mutterings.

"Don't 'ee see t' parson and t' lady?" growled the assailant. "Lor, look at that! A burning shame and a sin I call it."

From a spout on the side of the barn a foaming amber-hued stream issued and spent itself instantly on the sopping sands. Polley was good as his word. The stern old Puritan was half ruining himself by his action; but he had a proud boast that no drunken man had ever sat on his settle, and he was going to have none of it now. These navvies were half starving; they could not work at present, so they were bent on a heavy orgie. The shades of bygone village fathers looked on, and, shuddering, fled.

Just for an instant it looked like riot. A feather in the scale would have turned the balance either way. Guy stood praying fiercely for inspiration. But the quick nimble wit of the girl by his side found a way. Right in front of her stood a gigantic excavator, a heedless, creedless savage, with an air of many climes about him. His

big clean-shaven mouth looked capable of humour. Maud stepped up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Sure now, and phwat d' ye say to that?" she asked.

The brogue touched him. Maud had not mistaken her man.

"Kilkenny," he yelled. "Lord bless the purty eyes of her. Begob, we'll have a word made for it—divil a one have I got mysilf."

This from the recognized wit, the man of resource of the whole wild crew. Maud laughed sweetly, the silver in her voice rang true to the edge of the crowd. Then there went up a long stentorian roar of laughter. The crowd had caught the humour of the situation, and the many headed was pleased to be pleased. You will find the same mood in crowds the world over.

"Trevose owes you something for this, Maud," Guy said unsteadily. "You have saved the situation. Lord forgive me for my folly, but I was going to scold them. And a pretty mess I should have made of it."

Hawkes and Challen came down from their high places, followed by Polley, truculently. He came prepared for trouble, yet ready to face it out. He would have minded that less than the laughter and applause and Celtic wit that greeted him. The man who had defied them all turned and fled before it, for chaff is a thing good Cornish fishers do not understand. He fled to his cellars fearfully, whilst the raging badinage went on. But all danger was utterly past and gone. Polley got to know the uncouth Anaks after a time, got to see how they respected him, and to this day his boast of never giving rooftree and warm hearthstone to a man in liquor holds good.

"Dear fellows," said Maud. "My heart always warms to a crowd of workmen. But I wish their language was not so vigorous. One never gets that sort of thing in Ireland. They couldn't do it."

"Can't they?" Guy said grimly. "Ask your Irish priests in London and Liverpool. But why are they so suddenly silent?"

Fishermen and navvies were all mingled together now. A curious silence had fallen on them, a silence broken by the wild scream of the seafowl, the day-dirge unceasing of that thundering desolate coast. The hill up beyond the church was clear cut as polished brass, on the summit of it a figure stood wildly waving a pair of arms. It was no appeal for aid, no dumb call from one in distress, but an outburst of delirious joy. The figure was dancing madly on the powdered snow. Maud covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Who is it, what is it?" Guy asked.

"It's Dr. Julien," Maud cried. "I recognize him. And he is trying to tell us that the relief from Wadebridge is in sight. See! There is Nell."

Another figure stood out clear against the granite sky now, Mrs. Guy waving her handkerchief. A roar of delight broke from the gang of navvies, their grimy faces tossed like the surface of a broken sea. Presently on the crest of the hill a waggon appeared, drawn by six horses, then another and another. After a time Guy became conscious that somebody was pinching his arm. He turned to see Mary. Her face was set, and grave as the faces of the Trevose people. For they had displayed not the least sign of joy or gratification. The hand of the Lord had lain heavy on them, and in silence they had suffered. The hand of the Lord came out to

them filled with peace and plenty, and they were glad. But it was not, nor ever will be, the gladness that comes beyond the heart to the shouting lips.

"Has it come at last?" Mary asked.

"At last," Guy replied. "My dear girl, you must not faint here. Consider the feelings of poor Polley under the circumstances. Think of me who might have saved my bacon, after all."

Mary laughed unsteadily. The rector's nonsense was well meant, and, like most nonsense, had the due effect.

She could hear the waggons rumbling down the hill, and presently the first one stood in the village. On the top of a large load, covered with tarpaulin sheets, sat Tregarthen and Tretire. Fagged, dirty, unshaven, with bloodshot eyes, they yet looked like what they were—two heroes who had not taken their lives in their hands in vain. Tregarthen climbed down, staggering almost to Mary's feet. She caught him up and kissed him there and then before them all.

"God bless you for this day's work," she murmured.

Tregarthen put her aside gently. He was pale and hollow-eyed, but the change had gone far deeper than that. There were lines on his forehead and a deep shadow in his eyes, the shadow of painful thought. There was a great struggle going on within the man, and Mary saw it instantly.

"Thank Tretire, not me," he said. "But for him I should be lying dead in the snow by now. We have brought you all we could get, which is a great deal, for the line is fairly clear from Wadebridge to Plymouth. I have had to pledge your credit for a large amount. They would not trust *me*."

There was a tinge of bitterness in the last word that Mary wisely ignored. She had more to say to Tregarthen; but he turned to and worked feverishly until the waggon was empty. Then there were boats to fill for Tregarthen and the good things to be distributed across the water. Before the afternoon was done all things were decent and in order again. Mary surveyed the result of the work with placid satisfaction.

"This shall never happen again," she said. "Now, let us be happy once more. All you good people are going to eat your dinner at the Castle to-night. We will have a feast in honour of the occasion. And we will worship at the shrine of the heroes of the day."

"Where is Tregarthen?" Mrs. Guy asked. "I want to see him. I want to make him a handsome apology."

Tretire offered to find him. He was close by somewhere. He could not eat till all the poor people were satisfied. Tregarthen was the finest man on the North Coast of Cornwall, etc. But search high and low on the island or at Trevose, Tregarthen was nowhere to be found.

Chapter XXXIII

„I Could Not Love Thee, Dear, So Well..."

THERE may be some people in this weary old world of ours who have never endured the long-drawn agony of suspense that goes to every great trouble. Most of us know it only too well. Have you never paced the garden in the grey dawn watching the shadows come and go across the red blinds and wondered with weary impatience if the doctor is ever coming downstairs? It may be that you are standing on the cliffs, with eyes strained to catch that blurred black blot in the yeasty seas with things like flies clinging to her, and the man in the oilskins by your side whispers that if she can hold till the tide turns they will be saved. It may be that you are waiting for Her answer, and the postman is late; you may possibly—God help you—be straining your eyes to read the minds of those twelve good men, and true, who have just been considering their verdict. Put it anyway you please, but we have all been through it at one time or another.

Then the black cloud lifts, and the sun shines again. The doctor comes out with a smile and a laugh for your fears, the tide turns, *her* message is tender and true and sweet, you are discharged amidst applause in Court without a stain on your character, to say nothing of being implored to accept a partnership in the firm. Then your heart goes up to God with mingled shame and gratitude and your mind is bent on doing good things. The 'toothache of the mind' is over, and you are with your Maker in the golden splendour of the day. Ah, life is worth living then, my friend, as life was worth living on Tregarthen the afternoon when the siege was raised and the hungry were fed again.

Everything seemed to have changed within the magic circle of the hour, even the wind had gone round to the south and blew wonderfully mild and balmy. There was a promise of Spring in it. Mary and Miriam stood outside the Castle inhaling the sweetness of the air. It mattered little now that the world was still grey and desolate.

"Tregarthen has behaved very well over this business," said Miriam.

"He has come out splendidly. I have had the whole story from Gervase. We shall make a true and noble man of my husband yet. And in honour of the day I am going to give a grand dinner to-night. All our friends are to come, and sleep here afterwards. There are still plenty of luxuries in the Castle kept back in case of sickness, which will not be needed now. This is going to be what Artemus Ward calls a 'clean biled shirt' affair. Find them for me, Miriam, bid them to the feast at seven. For our day's work is done and the stalled ox will be sweet as the herbs and contentment withal to-night."

So they came a little before seven and were solemnly announced by Mary's butler—one Hankin, still in a state of complacent admiration of his own importance—much as if they were bidden to a great banquet at Lord St. Kew's Cornish seat over by Tintagel yonder. Mrs. Guy was lovely in pale blue and pearls, Maud exquisite in white, with no ornaments but flowers. Mary had more diamonds than the average English woman cares for, but then she simply could not look in anything but taste. Julien came in behind, in a white waistcoat that touched the new butler deeply. But that smart young Hankin got used to many things in time. Mary received her guests with a dignity that was greatly exaggerated.

"And yet I might have been a bishop," Guy said reproachfully.

"Well, you are not a bishop, and I'm very glad of it," Mary replied. "Don't you see that I'm playing the great lady, sir? Mary Tregarthen is going to be a success.

Princes shall come down here, and the paragraphists shall romance over me with stars between their pink fictions. And here's a setting for you."

It was a very perfect and beautiful setting indeed. Here was a great saloon, one of the finest specimens of decorated oak in the world, with priceless pictures and cabinets of works of art, mostly predatory and all having some dark history, but none the less alluring for that. There were shaded lamps here and there, a big wood fire blazing, the log reflected in dogs and andirons that later on a duchess actually cried for—and failed to get. Also there were flowers everywhere, waving palms and ferns and oleanders in Majolica tubs. It was the kind of place in which you could lie back and feast the delighted eye for hours.

"There never was a house like it," Mrs. Guy said.

"It's not quite complete," Miriam observed. "It wants a dark stern-looking man with slightly grey hair to be standing alongside Mary. The one necessary piece of furniture here is her husband. He should wear a velvet dinner jacket and a black tie. Where is he?"

"No doubt that will come in time," said Mary. "Unfortunately Tregarthen is not to be found, I am sorry to say."

Maud looked up from the cosy corner where she had established herself with Julien.

"Do you mean to say you regret him?" she asked.

"Indeed I do. I would give a great deal to have my husband here—yes, even if he came in knickerbockers and a flannel shirt."

The words were light, but the voice trembled. Mrs. Guy nodded approvingly, and Miriam felt that her speech had not been in vain. And all the rest of the evening there was a strong yearning look in Mary's eyes as if she were seeking for something and could not find it.

They came into the dining-room presently where dinner was served. Here was the splendour and refinement and good taste repeated all over again. On the whole it was a most successful night, despite the yearning look in Mary's eyes. She seemed a little apart from her guests, and they respected her reticence. In the big saloon Maud walked over to the piano and began to play softly, with Julien leaning over her. Guy was still in the dining-room ruminating over a cigar, Miriam had opened one of the long windows in the ante-room, for the night had suddenly grown moist and warm. Mary stood just outside the window, looking into the room at a point where she could take in best all the softened and chastened beauty of the picture. She could see the faint light on Maud's exquisite face, on Julien's brown one. A sweeter picture it was impossible to imagine or a nobler one either. Mary was a girl of many cities, she had a fine artistic eye, but she had seen nothing that pleased her more than Tregarthen Castle.

It was all her own, the home of her ancestors, the abode of the man she was ready to love with all her strength when the corn was ripe. But would he ever love her, would he ever come back to her? What was Tregarthen without him? A sense of loneliness came over Mary, she would have given much to recall her old independence of feeling. The precious jewel was hers, but she had no pride in it. It was like the possession of some old picture with the Florentine frame demolished, an empty conservatory, an organ without stops. Life, says a sapient but

anonymous philosopher, is the pursuit of a walnut which you never attain until you lack teeth to crack it. Thus Mary.

She stood in the shadow, quite concealed, and yet seeing everything. For instance, she saw the beauty of the shining romance before Maud, when the Prince should have kissed her sleeping parted lips, she saw the stars in the sky, she felt the balmy breeze on her cheek. Maud was gently playing some soothing variation of *Home, Sweet Home*, hardly conscious what she was doing, and talking to Julien meanwhile. Then Mary saw the light focus on a pair of melancholy yearning eyes, eyes that seemed to fall into the darkness. With a sudden inspiration upon her Mary spoke.

"Tregarthen," she said quietly. "Tregarthen, come here."

He came forward obediently, gently. Mary drew the window to. She saw the big figure that loomed over her, and noticed that it was bent and dejected.

"You have been watching us?" she asked.

"Yes," Tregarthen admitted simply. "As far as I could, all the evening. That is what you call an ideal English home?"

"The highest ideal attainable. There is nothing like it in the world. And this home is waiting for you. Why did you keep out of my way?"

Illustration:
„I did not dare to come"

"I did not dare to come."

"Ah, but you must say more than that. Why did you not dare to come?"

"Because you fascinate me, despite myself. Because you show me things that I have never dreamt of before. To-night you have shown me what a refined lady can do with the house of her husband. Under Heaven, I have never dreamt of anything so sweet and fair before. For the last hour I have been watching you in dazed fascination. If you cared for me—"

"Stop. I do care for you. I love you, Rupert. Why I love you, how I came to love you, is no matter. I state a fact. Perhaps it is because I have made you the central figure in my life's romance. But there is nothing will alter it on this side of the grave. Come!"

But Tregarthen hung back, with a strange hesitation for him.

"I dare not," he said. "What is that girl playing?"

"You don't know! You never heard *Home, Sweet Home* before?"

"Never. Of course I knew it by repute. And yet if anybody had asked me to guess what the girl was playing, I should have guessed right. It *sounds* just what it is. And still it is very melancholy."

The quiet strains were going on, the lights within seemed to grow stronger. Half timidly Mary laid her hand on Tregarthen's arm.

"Not inside," she said. "Oh, it is so different then. Come in, Tregarthen, and *stay*."

He shivered, but he did not move, though a mighty impulse was impelling him forward. He could hear the dim beat of the swell upon the shore, he could see the outline of the cliffs, but he could not see Mary's pleading face.

“I can’t see you, and I’m glad,” he said. “I thought I was stronger than others, but I find I am only a man who cannot look unmoved on a perfect face. If I could see your face now I should yield.”

“Tregarthen, why should you not yield?”

“Because I have not found my full salvation. You can’t satisfy a starving man with a single crust. My eyes are opening, I am beginning to see things in the gloom of my past existence. If I come to you now, I come in vain; I should be trying to dominate you in a week. I want to *know*, not merely to feel, that all you say and all you do is right. Can’t you understand now why I dare not come to you?”

“It would be more courteous to my—to our guests.”

Tregarthen flamed out with a touch of his old passion.

“You will never fine me down to that point,” he cried. “I shall never be a squire of dames dandling over a teacup in a drawing-room. I may come to see eye to eye with you, and God knows I am trying to do so. Perhaps you are right in your views about the island, perhaps prosperity will do good instead of harm to the people.”

“Of course it will. Prosperity is like sunshine to the peach, developing its sweetness and beauty. Some day you will see this. And when you have learnt your lesson, your life and mine will be full of sunshine. *Now* come.”

Tregarthen made a step forward, and then hesitated. The sweet dreamy music was going on inside, Maude’s exquisite face with the light upon it was turned to Julien. As he saw this Tregarthen drew back.

“No,” he said hoarsely, “I will not come. I don’t want to be fascinated like *that*, I don’t want to fall under a woman’s influence. I want to learn and to know for myself. You bade me go and I went.”

“And now I bid you return, Rupert.”

“Not yet. Your voice is sweet and pleading. And you love me. That I love you also is a mere nothing. But I am not coming back—yet. I am not coming till I find the truth, till I have suffered and learnt for myself. Let me go. Do you hear? let me go.”

The tone was hard and commanding, so that Mary fell back. Tregarthen bent and kissed her on the lips, and the next moment his place was empty. The night had opened up and swallowed him.

“Tregarthen,” Mary whispered. “Tregarthen, come back.”

She called again without reply. The music inside had ceased and Julien had his hand caressingly on Maud’s shining hair.

Chapter XXXIV

Towards the Light.

WITH the somewhat trite remark that the best of friends must part, Guy buttoned his pilot coat about him and turned his back upon the Castle. He was the only one not sleeping there to-night; he had to be in London on business to-morrow, and a friend at Wadebridge was putting him up for the night. With the perversity of human nature, Guy did not want to go, though, as a rule, he enjoyed

his rare days in London immensely. The best part of a week spent at the Castle seemed to have changed all that. In no specially good humour, he shoved his boat down to the water with a gloomy figure looking on out of the mist.

"Come," Guy said sharply, "why don't you lend a hand?"

"I'll lend a hand cheerfully," said the other; "but on condition that you let me accompany you to the mainland."

"Tregarthen!" Guy cried. "What does this nonsense mean?"

Tregarthen explained that so far as he was concerned there was no nonsense about it at all. He went into no details for his reasons for absenting himself from Mary's house party, but he certainly was frank so far as his own news was concerned. He was going to give the Opposition platform a fair trial.

"As how?" asked Guy, astonished, and consequently slangy. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, Guy. What is the difference between Liberal and Conservative? Nothing, really. What are the differences between my wife and myself?"

"I am afraid they are both deep and wide."

"Nothing of the kind. My point is that prosperity will spoil and pauperize the island. She holds an exactly contrary opinion. I say your highly paid workman is a fearful product of a bastard civilization—"

"Never having *seen* a skilled artisan in your life."

"You have me there. Civilization is bound to produce certain types of race. But Mary says the big towns contain amongst the poor quite as much honour and integrity and kindness and nobility of character as obtain on Tregarthen."

"Well, any fool knows that," Guy said bluntly.

"Pardon me, but there is a fool in this boat who doesn't," Tregarthen replied. "Miriam Murch is pleased to say that I haven't brains enough to appreciate my own ignorance. That is what you call an epigram. I am going to see if Mary is right. If she is, I shall be a happy man, because I want to believe her. And if she is right, then she shall be free to make Tregarthen blossom like a rose. I am going to-night to offer my services to the engineer, James Cutress, in any capacity, I am going to live amongst the navvies. I am going to earn my salt. If I see that which is good and sweet amongst these men, then I shall go to Mary and beg of her, *beg* of her to let me have the right of assisting her to make Tregarthen as she desires. That is my scheme."

"And a ripping good scheme too," the delighted rector cried. "My dear Tregarthen, you are on the high-road to a sovereign cure. Within six months you and Mary will be ideally happy, and Cornwall will be the richer for a good landlord and a man of sense. Good night and good luck to you."

Guy trudged up between the shelf-like houses, and Tregarthen turned resolutely into The Silver Catch. He entered a long low panelled room, the walls and roof of which were black and shiny with age. There were just a few Trevose men in their jerseys, but for the most part the room reeked with the earthy smell of navvy. There were fifty or more of them there, short pipes in their mouths, caps drawn over their eyes, somnolent, ox-eyed, stupid, yet magnificent. They were perfectly well-behaved, and their language essentially parliamentary. Polley would stand no nonsense of that kind; indeed, a man who could throw away eight hogsheads of

strong ale without emotion was entitled to respect. They looked half shyly at Tregarthen, whose history was known to all of them. They knew also that to-morrow they would see Tregarthen working amongst them, one of themselves.

"Is there any one here named Prescott?" he asked, half defiantly. As defiantly a burly greyheaded Scot indicated a pleasant-looking young man in a corner. He made room for the intruder—for he was little else—and then the rest of the company resumed their low growling rumble of conversation again. For your navvy, tired after a hard day's toil, is a ruminating animal. He is given to noise and world-wide defiance in his cups, which is generally the fault of the poison that a wise legislature allows him to drink, but he is a good fellow. He lives hard and works hard, and, alas! generally dies hard. But if you are in trouble, in sickness, in pain, then he can be gentle as a child. I lived with four thousand of him once for a week up on a wild Welsh hillside, and some day I will tell you the story of his life.

The man who made room for Tregarthen eyed him curiously. Tregarthen saw a sturdy young fellow with the limbs of a giant and the torso of a Hercules, a handsome fellow, with a reckless face and melancholy blue eyes. His hands were hard and knotted, his features were burnt mahogany.

"You are Tregarthen," he said. "I have been expecting you. I like you all the better for your determination, and I am sure we shall be friends. You are going to share my room up at old Dan Edis' cottage."

"If you don't mind. I am going to work with these men, but I don't think I could sleep with them. You look like a gentleman."

"I am. They call me Dandy Dick. But they don't know that I am the only son of Sir George Prescott of Southwick, Lancashire. He is the big engineer millionaire of those parts. Will you take anything?"

"No, I thank you; I only drink my own native wine."

"Ah, well, that accounts for all your eccentric doings. Come outside with me, come to our joint sanctum. Cutress asked me to share diggings with you. Cutress knows all about me. Come along."

They were comfortably settled presently in the room that was to be Tregarthen's home for some time to come. He had taken a sudden liking to the big corded giant opposite him, and the liking was mutual.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Working out my salvation," Prescott explained. "Do you know that I am one of the cleverest mechanical engineers in England, sir? And incidentally one of the biggest fools. I got amongst a bad set, an extravagant set."

"And she threw you over," Tregarthen suggested.

He was highly pleased with the suggestion as he saw Prescott redden. It was his first essay into the wide field of deduction which we all of us have to learn, and begin to learn at school. Tregarthen was getting on. He began to believe that he was no end of a smart fellow.

"She did nothing of the sort," Prescott replied. "I did a disgraceful thing, and my father turned me out of the house. And it was *she*, God bless her, who got me another chance. That is why I am toiling here, toiling with these men and working out a big new invention. I have set myself to the task for a year, and then I am going back to marry Brenda. Meanwhile I am living on thirty shillings a week, and I do assure you that I am earning it."

“That I am sure of. Your father is a very rich man.”

“A very rich man indeed. He started with the pick and spade in his hand. When he commenced, Southwick was a dreary desert with some three thousand people in a state of ignorance and sloth and dirt and semi-starvation. It was one of the plague spots of England. Vice was rampant there. Your islanders were Sybarites by the side of those people. And they fought my father when he started his machines—he was near to death on many occasions. You have no monopoly of ignorance and prejudice here. And yet look at Southwick to-day. It has a population of seventeen thousand souls all well housed, well educated, and prosperous. The people have their baths and their clubs, their institutes and libraries, everything. Mention my father’s name to any one in Southwick and see what they will say of him.”

Prescott spoke with honest pride glowing in his eyes. Tregarthen was strangely softened, deeply interested, and asking for details. All this was exactly contrary to his tenets and his faith. Nor could he doubt for a moment the truth of every word that Prescott said.

“The people are not pauperized?” he asked.

Prescott gave an honest shout of laughter.

“Bless the man, no,” he cried. “They are far too independent for that. They are mostly strong Liberal, and my father is a Tory. Much as they love him, the first and only time he contested the constituency he was beaten by a majority of two to one by a pushing barrister who subsequently had to be escorted by the police to save him from his own constituents. Lots of our men actually cried over it, but they voted against the governor. Not much pauperization there. Now, what would you have done had Tregarthen Island served you in the same way?”

“Done?” Tregarthen cried. “Why, expatriated every man in the island. I should—”

He paused, ashamed, as he caught Prescott’s smiling eyes. Why, the thing he would fain condemn was a magnificent example of the firm independence which had been Tregarthen Island’s most treasured possession. He was condemning the very thing he was fighting for. And this modern young Prescott had a wider toleration than ever he possessed.

“Did, did your father mind?” he asked.

“Not a bit. He was more proud of his people than ever. My dear fellow, you simply can’t pauperize a Briton who has strength and resolution. You may help him when he is down, but he won’t be your creature for money. Believe me, you are utterly and entirely wrong in your views as regards your island.”

“Perhaps Southwick is an exceptional place.”

“Not a bit of it; there are lots of similar modern instances. Look at the noble work done by Masham and Salt and Peabody. Look at the prosperity that follows the track of the Peases and the Cadburys. But you really must see their places for yourself. This new bridge will do much for Tregarthen; it will open the eyes of your people. If the place were mine I should build tasteful villa bungalows along Port Gwynn. You would have nothing but the very best people down here, you could build your cottages, have good schools, and your peasantry would soon be prosperous. Go to some of the fashionable resorts in Scotland and see if the sons of the soil there are spoilt by prosperity. And you let your people starve because—”

“I have starved with them, Prescott.”

“Very likely, and very foolishly. Do you suppose the people loved you any the more for that? See how quickly they took in the new regime. Now come out and see the night shifts at work; you don’t know what work is.”

It was only a week later than Mary’s dinner-party, and already all traces of snow had disappeared. There was a balmy touch in the air, the night was full of stars. Down at the foot of the quay at low-water mark a great lamp was roaring and flaming like an arc; in the centre of it the scores of men were slaving away under the watchful eye of the gangers. There was the clink of hammers, the sound of smitten stone, a waving forest of bare hairy arms, broad backs swinging rhythmically, an ordered silence, a cheery din. Then one man called out upon his Maker suddenly, and lay a huddled heap in the wet sand. He had slipped forward suddenly and a pick in front had ripped the hair off his scalp.

Tregarthen ran forward, but a dozen were before him. With infinite tenderness they raised the wounded man and laid him down on a pile of sacks. There was order in the scene, quietness, as if trained women were at work there.

“I didn’t go to do it,” said the unhappy perpetrator, with a quivering lip. “And him with a missis and three kids!”

“Don’t you fret, Bill,” came from the pile of sacks. “I’m all right. And the kids and the old woman, they’ll be all right. A fortnight’s loafing and full pay. I’ll do the same for you some day, Jim.”

It was simply said, with tact and feeling, so that the lorn Bill smiled again. Eton or Harrow could have produced nothing better. The others stood round and applauded gently, whilst a ganger dexterously bound up the hurt.

“What do you think of that?” Prescott asked pointedly.

“I can’t think,” said Tregarthen. “It was splendid. Man, I am not fit to black the shoes of any of these fellows. And yet I thought that—let me go to bed. I am utterly worn out and tired.”

“And yet not unhappy, Tregarthen?”

“No; I never felt happier in my life.”

Chapter XXXV

With the Best Intentions.

THUS it came about that when Mary had not the least idea where Tregarthen was, that unfortunate but by no means unhappy individual was close to her all the time. It was nobody’s business to tell her, and Guy and the rest Tregarthen carefully avoided. He allowed his beard to grow, his hands became hard, he could take a spade or shovel with the best of them. Long afterwards he confessed to Mary that he had been afraid to go away. He had no money, and he had his living to get. And he speedily learnt from the rough and ready navvies that five and thirty shillings a week were not easily earned.

He learnt many other things exceedingly useful to him in after-life. He learnt to recognize authority, which was perhaps the most valuable of all lessons. He learnt to say 'sir' when he spoke to Cutress the engineer and his subordinates. He saw the many kindnesses and self-sacrifices that went on; he learnt to admire the good qualities of his mates, and to see what a blessed and soothing influence a good living wage had on them. In short—though he was not quite prepared to admit it yet—he saw that from the first Mary had been right and he absolutely and entirely wrong.

He could see what a blessing this bridge was to Tregarthen. Under normal conditions the islanders would have been starving by this time. As it was, a steady stream of money passed into the island. The children looked fat and well, the mothers had lost that haunting fear from their eyes, of nights the men sat contentedly smoking on the quay-head. It was a golden time all round and golden weather with it. In their grand way the islanders had absorbed and assimilated the new order of things, and not one amongst them so far had waxed fat or kicked. There is no more soothing or civilizing influence than prosperity poured out on heads strong enough to stand it.

The bridge was moving slowly along. It was to be a light cast-iron affair, carried on three pillars, and it would come ready for fixing. Meanwhile the solid piles of masonry were gradually rearing their heads, the spring tides were serving, and the work went on apace. From her dressing-room, Mary could see the evolution of her pet scheme. It was beginning to get dark, and Ruth was brushing out her mistress's shining hair. The Guys were at the Castle again, and dinner would be served presently.

"It will be finished in good time, Ruth," said Mary. "And when it is finished you and Gervase are going to be married."

Ruth flushed redly. Her eyes were shining like deep forest pools.

"Dear mistress!" she murmured. "Oh, the good Lord was kind to us all when He guided your footsteps here. But you must take care."

"No more trouble, Mary, is there?"

"Well, that depends. It's that dear young lady, Miss Maud. She is always amongst the men. She goes to see that they are not ground under the iron heel of the tyrant capitalist. I hope she won't make mischief."

"So that is what she calls me, because these men are really my servants. And they are good servants on the whole, though there have been complaints. I have asked Mr. Cutress to discharge a half-dozen or so, who, Polley tells me, are a reproach to the place. They go this week."

"And that is where the trouble will come in," said Ruth. "Miss Maud is so sweet and good one can't help loving her; but I wish she wouldn't interfere. Can't you get Dr. Julien to stop it?"

"Oh, so you've seen that going on?" Mary laughed. "Let the girl shoot her bolt. Julien will stand none of that nonsense when they are married. And if—"

Somebody knocked at the door, and somebody said that Mr. Cutress desired to see Mrs. Tregarthen on urgent business. With her beautiful hair piled high on her head, and a white wrap around her, Mary went down to see Cutress. His keen face had a half-amused, half-vexed expression.

“There’s a bother amongst the men,” he said. “There is another side to their nature of which you know nothing. It is over those rascals I discharged. That lovely young Irish friend has been making a speech to the gang, and they are coming out unless these half-dozen scoundrels are reinstated. You never saw or heard anything like it in your life, madam. She stood up on the quay head and spoke like a silver flute with Paganini playing the fiddle as accompaniment. Why, I was more than once on the point of throwing up my hat and going on strike with the rest. I shall want my wages raised next.”

Mary laughed, none too well pleased. She was trying to feel violently angry with Maud and conscious of her utter failure to produce the necessary indignation.

“Are they all out?” she asked.

“Not yet. A few men, led by—by a workman who is a little superior to the rest, set a fine example. He had something to say too, and the Trevose and island people stuck to us manfully. My lot don’t fuse with yours, but they respect them. At present the thing hangs in the balance, but I can manage if you can silence that lovely young Irish friend of yours.”

“I’ll manage her,” Mary said, ominously calm. “At least, I know somebody who can. Go back to the works, Mr. Cutress. I don’t think you are likely to be troubled in the same way again.”

Mary marched up to her room which she called her office and rang up Lloyd’s agent on the telephone. She would like to be put in touch with Dr. Julien, she said. Her new telephone had already proved a blessing, and it was going to be useful now. Julien was fortunately at home, clearing off prescriptions before coming over to dine at the Castle. As Mary poured out her indignant woes she heard stifled sounds at the other end of the wire.

“You are laughing, sir,” she said severely.

“Of course I am,” Julien responded. “So will you, when you know the name of the navvy who fought so stoutly for your rights and the interests of the bridge. I have often noticed in this queer world of ours that—”

“Don’t be philosophical,” Mary pleaded. “Throw physic to the dogs and go and bring Maud to me. I’ll send for your dinner things, and you can dress here.”

An hour later Maud burst in upon Mary.

“I could find it in my heart never to speak to Dr. Julien,” she cried.

“So he has brought you to your senses?” Mary asked coolly.

“He made me come here,” Maud admitted. “I don’t know how he managed it, but he did. And those rascals laughed at me, me who had championed their cause! And one had the impudence to say that we should make a handsome couple.”

“He is evidently a good judge,” Mary said soothingly.

Maud laughed with the sweetest good nature. All the anger had died out of her face, she seemed to be deeply amused about something. It was impossible to be angry with her; it was impossible to be anything but charmed with her.

“All the same I could ruin your silly old bridge,” she said.

“Of course you could,” Mary replied, “and Tregarthen at the same time. You chose to take up the cause of a handful of rascals who are poisoning the place, and you chose to do it knowing how wrong you are. I wish I could be angry with you, dear. I wish I could point out to you how shamefully you are abusing our kindness and hospitality. But, being a lady, I can’t do that.”

Mary spoke half playfully, but there was a certain ring in her voice that touched Maud. The swift tears came remorsefully to her eyes, and yet, with it all, Mary could see that she was amused about something.

"I am ashamed of myself," she whispered, with her arms about Mary's neck. "Sure, I'd die for you, darling. But there was a man there who stood up and fought me with my own weapons, a splendid man; and when I heard him, all the humour of it came to me; I laughed, and I am laughing now."

"But I don't see the humour of it," said Mary.

"No, dear; but you would if you'd been there," Maud responded coolly. "The joke isn't all my own, you see, and it isn't George Julien's either. Be a good child, and you shall know it all in good time."

Mary pressed the matter no further, nor was the subject alluded to again during the evening. Maud was a little subdued and quiet, but her manner towards Julien was full of laughter and sweetness. Nothing sufficed to sully that beautiful temper for long. And as Mary glanced from her window next morning she saw the human hive teeming, the figures bending over the uprising masonry, and the click of the pick was as music to her ears. Cutress came up, smiling, after breakfast. Evidently the little storm had passed away.

"I came as arranged to go over the site for those new villas at Port Gwynn," he explained. "Oh yes; we have got rid of those mauvais sujets. But it was a pretty near thing. But for one of my hands, who spoke like a prophet and worked like a horse, we should have had trouble. Those fellows are very loyal to each other."

"I should like to see your man, Mr. Cutress," said Mary.

"So you shall. He might have been yourself by the way in which he used your arguments. I have sent him up with the measuring chains to Port Gwynn. He is so hot and strong and loyal to you that I deemed it best to keep him away from the rest to-day. Wasn't it Talleyrand who cautioned a young diplomat against too much zeal?"

Illustration:
Mary was the first to speak

They came up to Port Gwynn presently, where a big stalwart man in a beard, a man who looked like a prince in his moleskins, was waiting. And when Mary saw him her little hands went out trembling to him, and her lips parted in a dumb cry. For the man was Tregarthen, and he was looking at her with admiring, yearning, and yet half-amused, partly defiant eyes. And that usually cool young lady was trembling from head to foot with a dizzy joy that covered her like a garment. Cutress might have known all about it—probably he did—for he went off ostensibly for a tape and left the two together. Mary was the first to speak.

"I heard all about your conduct yesterday," she hazarded.

"I saved your bridge," Tregarthen responded. He was perfectly cool. "You should lock that Irish girl up. But Julien's a match for her. I have found out that Julien is a remarkably fine fellow, Mary."

"Your eyes tell me you have found out many things, Rupert."

"Yes; the greatest discovery is that I have been a fool. The other great discovery is that I am proud to be able to earn my own living. I didn't mean to see you yet,

not till I had found a full salvation, and I owe Cutress one for playing this little trick upon me.—I've got it here, sir."

This last to Cutress, who had called for something.

Mary smiled. "You call him 'sir,' then? How do you like that? I am pretty much of a democrat, and I couldn't do it for the life of me."

"Why not? It is a mere matter of discipline, and discipline must be maintained. And that man is my employer. Do I displease you?"

For Mary had turned her head away so that Tregarthen might not see the tears in her eyes. He asked the question with a strange humility for him, and yet his voice had a frank, manly ring in it. Mary came round, her face rosy pink, her splendid eyes smiling tenderly.

"On the contrary, you have made me very happy indeed," she said. "I always knew that you would prove to the world what a man you are. You are going to help me to make the islanders happy, Rupert."

"Ay, I am. Their happiness has always been mine, and their sufferings also. Let that be accounted to me for righteousness. Mary, if I might—"

"Suggest that you placed the houses below the first terrace," said Cutress, who came up prosaically at the moment. "You would then save a deal of money in the excavating, and build the bungalows so that the valley view was not marred by the sight of houses. You follow me?"

"Oh yes," Mary said confusedly. "We will place the foundations on the top of—dear Mr. Cutress, what *was* it you said about the bungalows?"

Chapter XXXVI

Despite Himself.

SOME day it may be possible to extract the whole truth of the matter from Cutress. The rector declares that he knew all about it, that it was a mere dramatic display got up to give Tregarthen a chance of showing his mettle. But since Cutress so distinguished him last year over those Nile dams, and since his C.B. is within his grasp, he has grown exceedingly cautious. Perhaps he did assist a little—indeed, he admits knowing that Tregarthen was amongst his workmen—and good fortune, aided by Maud Barry, was responsible for the rest.

Now, your navvy is an exceedingly good fellow. He may be rough and unsweet of speech (the speech is the parrot's, after all), he is prone to overmuch beer, and is cruelly ready with his fists. But he is kind and gentle at heart, and women and children are sacred things in his eyes. But there are always black sheep, and there were half a dozen in Trevose who gave Cutress a deal of trouble—men with a generation of Cockney blood in them, which is a nasty thing and fortunately seldom found.

These men were shirkers, malingerers, their leader a sometime Hyde Park orator who for politic reasons desired country air. A tall, loose-lipped, shifty-eyed fellow who could argue in a wild-cat-like style with all the old stock arguments about the

down-trodden workman and the bloated capitalist. No gang working with this man ever got through more than two-thirds of their allotted task per diem. So Ganger Masson told Cutress that Finlay and his lot must go, and Masson had curtly given the order to that effect.

Finlay was distinctly aggrieved. So were the half-dozen who received their *walking ticket* at the same time. Most of the hands were slaving away till five o'clock, when there was a short interval for tea. The tides were serving well just at present, and there would be secession of labour for the next four hours at least. On the other hand, during some part of the day it was impossible to do but very little.

"So I'm to go," Finlay said, sidling up to Masson as if he had a knife up his sleeve, as possibly he had. "No use for me, eh? And no use for half a dozen of the best lads in the works. It isn't men you want, but slaves. Why, if there was a *man* here at all, not a pick 'ud be raised till me and my mates was on the pay-sheets again. But they ain't men—they're blacklegs."

Masson listened stolidly. He was a big man, with a calm face and voice husky with harrying those under him.

"Ain't you all coming out?" Finlay demanded. "Are you going to sit there and see us driven forth like swine?"

He spoke fiercely, in that terribly dry, husky voice that only the purlieus of great cities seems to produce. There was an uneasy movement amongst the four hundred or so of fragrant perspiring humans seated around, eating bread and butter, and drinking cold tea from sooty tin cans. Each man glanced at his neighbour and shook his head.

"Not a soul," Finlay said mournfully. "Not a soul to stick up for the rights of us pore downtrodden chaps as done nothing."

"Not even worked," Masson growled. "Get out of it."

He advanced threateningly, as an ox turns on a dog. Finlay retreated sideways, with an upward evil gleam in his eye. His allies closed around him, but nobody moved to Masson's assistance. Doubtless he would prove equal to the occasion. Then something slight and fair, and dressed in white, came from nowhere apparently, and immediately became the central figure of the group.

"What is the meaning of all this? What are you doing to those poor men?"

Masson was dumb for the instant. He was looking at the most beautiful creature he had ever seen in his life, a lovely face framed in tangled hair that seemed to have caught the sunshine, eyes large and lustrous and fascinating. Finlay recognized her; he had seen her in Dublin two years before. And he hoped she would not recognize him for the gaol-bird he was.

"It's no fault of ours, miss," he said, with that horrible forced, fawning smile that proclaims the old convict aloud. "All we asts is to live. 'Live and let live' is our motto. But you can slave and slave, and never please Mr. Masson."

"*Mr.* Masson—that individual?"

"Never please him, miss, till you died at his feet, and then you'd be asked to harrange your own funeral. And so Mr. Masson, he turns six of us out to starve, starve miles away from our 'appy 'omes. Look at them."

Behind this fawning, whining voice was a certain subtle chaff so that, according to the impression made, the conversation can be continued. If the victim is callous

the chaff becomes pronounced and personal, otherwise it grows still more lachrymose till the desired result is reached. But Maud was touched at once. She turned flamingly upon Masson and from her silver tongue flowed the oratory she knew so well how to use. She had every man within earshot thrilling to her feet in five minutes. Cutress came out of his hut office and took in the situation at a glance. A moment later he was flying up the valley in the direction of the Castle.

"What a girl!" he gasped. "Nobody but Julien can save us now."

And how Julien came we are already aware. As for Maud, she was making the speech of her life. It was her swan song. Perhaps some instinct told her that the time was coming when she would orate no more. But she had those men about her growing intoxicated with the beauty of her eyes as she had done many a time before. But the girl was born too late. Put the clock back a century or two, and she would have played chess with the map of Europe.

"Not one stroke of work till those men are reinstated," she cried.

"Lord forgive those purty eyes of yours," Masson muttered. "Trust a woman to set up trouble if she gets the chance."

The men stood round with sullen admiration, Finlay and his shiftless crew modestly in the background wearing the martyr's crown with touching resignation. Masson muttered that the first man who grinned would have his ugly head knocked off. But the mischief was done, and already one or two hot-headed ones were loudly demanding to know why Finlay and Co. had deserved this treatment. All this had taken time, for Maud had been fluent; and then there came another addition to the party in the shape of Dr. Julien. Maud's face flamed, her stag-like head drooped, she was no longer the fascinating power that dominated men's minds. She was more like a schoolgirl who had done something foolish. She could not meet the dancing scorn in Julien's eyes. If he had been angry so that she could play off her anger against his! He was partly amused, and not a little vexed.

"Will you come along with me?" he asked. "This is hardly the place for a lady. And it isn't as if you meant what you said. Come along."

But Finlay had no mind to allow this. Once deprived of his beautiful ally, the hovering mischief might dissolve into clear air. He shuffled sideways until he fairly hustled Julien. He wanted to feel if the other meant to show fight. He did. His blue eyes were blazing.

"And what might you call yourself at present?" Julien asked.

"By my own name, guv'nor—Jim Finlay."

"*Alias* Martin, *alias* Clement, under which name you got five years at Exeter for half murdering your wife. And you are the kind of cattle that honest men are ready to suffer for. Stand aside."

Finlay did so, muttering. Julien pulled Maud's arm through his own, and passed down the valley with her. Then it somehow came to the minds of the watchers that she was only a headstrong young woman who was going to 'catch it' from her sweetheart, after all. It was just the little touch of human nature that makes the whole world kin. And here it was that a reckless young navvy hazarded, with terrible distinctness, the suggestion that Miss and the doctor would make 'a remarkable handsome couple.' He could not see the cruel colour flush on Maud's face or the salt tears in her eyes.

The oxlike Masson grasped the situation.

“Blow up, lads,” he cried; “time to push on.”

Nobody moved as yet. And really you could not expect four hundred free-born Britons to go about-face quite as rapidly as that. Then there arose a tall man with a month-old beard, and a pick on his shoulders, who opened out on these navvies. They would be ashamed of themselves to-morrow. They were taking the side of a handful of worthless wretches; they might cause the bridge to be abandoned in disgust. On their heads would be the starvation of hundreds of honest men, ay, and women and children too. On cold nights, by their own firesides, the recollection of this cruel wrong would come home to them with shame. He was not of them, but he admired them none the less. Then the speaker strode off, followed by a score or so of shamefaced men, and the jeers of Finlay and Co. But Masson soon stopped that. There was a blow and a howl, a sound of maudlin tearfulness, and then the music of the clinking picks began again. Masson followed up with his cavalry.

“Are you goin’ to stand loafin’ here all day, or are you not?” he yelled. Once he found that terrible tongue of his, it went home. “Get a move on you.”

They got a move on them. They were terribly silent, but they obeyed. It was all a storm in a teapot; but teapots boil over sometimes and scald fingers in high places. And the man who had pleaded so eloquently, and heartily, and sincerely for the bridge, was Rupert Tregarthen. Verily it is a strange world.

He had spoken from a deep sense of the righteousness of the thing—he, the man who not so long ago had threatened to depopulate Tregarthen if a single islander dared to raise a hand to help. He gloried in his conversion; he expanded as he thought of the pleasure Mary would feel when she heard of this thing.

Meanwhile Julien and Maud were moving along silently together. The doctor was waiting for his companion to speak. It was very rude and ungentlemanly of him, but the fact remained.

“Of course you think I am wrong?” Maud challenged defiantly.

“Of course,” Julien replied calmly. “It admits of no argument. Now, honestly, don’t you recognize those fellows for six utter blackguards?”

Maud was forced to admit it. She recalled those evil lowering faces and those whining voices with disgust.

“Perhaps I should have declined to interfere,” she said.

“Declined to interfere! Who on earth asked you to interfere? Why, you actually thrust yourself into the midst of the fray. If you had been a mere man you would be on your way to Redruth Hospital by this time. And I will say nothing of the fact that you may have stopped Mrs. Tregarthen’s bridge.”

A scared expression came over Maud’s face. With true Celtic impulsiveness she had gone to the marrow of the quarrel with no heed of the future or the sweet grass she was trampling down in her eagerness to root up the tares. And Mary’s bridge was as the salvation of Tregarthen.

“I never thought of that,” she said tearfully. “What shall I do? And Mary Tregarthen has been so very kind to me.”

“Let it alone,” Julien replied. “Still, it was a queer way to repay hospitality.”

“And all the fault of those low scoundrels,” Maud cried, with a sudden change of front that filled Julien with inward laughter. “Those navvies are detestable. The truth is not in any one of them.”

Julien looked down into the beautiful flushed face of his companion. There was an expression in his eye that fortunately she did not see. He bent over in the easy, possessive way that was one of his great charms in her eyes. There was nothing conceited about it; it was an air of possession, of protection.

"There you are wrong," he said. "One navvy said a beautiful thing. I was exceedingly pleased with his good taste."

"What was that?" Maud asked, hot all over, yet wilfully ignorant.

"Why, he said that we should make an exceedingly handsome couple. Also I heard him make a bet with a comrade, to the extent of a gallon of beer, that we should be married before the summer was out. Maud!"

"Well, George?"

"Ought we to allow that poor young man to lose the comparatively large sum of eighteen-pence?"

But never a word would Maud say.

Chapter XXXVII

Mandragora.

THERE are golden days that dwell in the memory without the shadow of a single cloud upon them. They come back to us afterwards in times of sorrow, healthy Nepenthe, Mandragora that leaves no hurt behind. A sunset flames in the western sky, the purple shadows chase one another playfully down the tawny side of the mountains, a violet nods under the tender green of the hedgerow. It is nothing; and yet it is everything, for it brings back the memory of that happy time, and the heart is uplifted and comforted.

Thus Mary on that sunny morning. So far as she could see, there was no cloud anywhere. She had the man she loved on her side, poverty and sorrow and care seemed far away. There was a new gentle tenderness about Tregarthen that she had never seen before. Yet he had lost none of his manliness; indeed, he seemed to have gained in that respect. Cutress appeared to take the whole thing as a matter of course. He assumed at first not to have recognized Tregarthen, then he made a kind of smooth casual apology which was in the best possible taste, and Mary was grateful. She knew that he was doing his best to bring husband and wife together.

In sooth, there was very little need, Tregarthen had burnt his boats entirely, he had crossed the Rubicon. His defence of the bridge on the previous evening had been generous and heartwhole. He was lost in the contemplation of his own folly and blindness. He was only amazed now that he had not seen the beauty and wisdom of Mary's plans before. He did not know that the whole island was ringing with his defence of the bridge and that he had come back again to the warm hearts of his people.

But he found that out presently when he came up to the terrace hard by Bishop's cottage. Here, in a kind of natural amphitheatre, with hanging gardens

below, Mary had proposed to build a series of bungalows. The charm of the situation was at once apparent to Tregarthen's artistic eye.

"But who is going to occupy them?" he asked.

Mary turned her flushed, enthusiastic, beautiful face to his. They stood alone together, the woman in her dainty attire, the man in his moleskins, but a noble pair of lovers for gods and men to see.

"Why, the islanders, of course," Mary cried.

"My dear Mary! Where will they get the money to furnish them? And how can they possibly pay the rent you are bound to ask? I am not going to protest, I shall never protest against anything you do in future; but this seems to me to be entirely out of proportion—"

"Listen to me," Mary said—her voice was glad and strong. "The history of Tregarthen, the story of its rule, the story of the Charter, the narrative of my coming, will see the light of day in many papers. Miriam will look to that. Both here and across the water Tregarthen is going to make a sensation. Artists will come here, and Fashion, the *best* Fashion will follow. Those bungalows will let furnished in the summer for large sums of money. And not one rood of the ground will be sold; we shall be able to choose our own tenants. I shall advance certain of our best people the money to buy furniture at four per cent. Their rents will be as low as possible. They will nearly make enough in the summer to last the winter."

"But they can't all have bungalows?"

"Of course not, Rupert. I shall only build where the land is of no significant value. The rest of the soil will be tilled for flowers and crops as usual. I shall plant large larch plantations to keep the frost from the flowers. The boys and the elderly men will look after the flowers, and the corn, and the grapes. The old apple trees will be replaced by new ones of choice vintage sorts. I am going to have French experts over to try and improve the quality of the grapes. We are going to produce all our corn and drink on the island as usual—and all the girls who show a talent that way will be taught lace-making by Naomi. Oh, this is going to be the paradise of terrestrial governments."

Mary spoke with the deepest feeling and enthusiasm. And she spoke as one does who sees everything laid out before her. There was no reason whatever why all these brave things should not come to pass. Natural circumstances lent aid to the scheme, and there was boundless wealth behind it. Tregarthen's new-born imagination was working as he looked around him. And the heart that was in him was very warm for Mary.

She stepped away in front of him a little eagerly to discuss some suggested improvement made by Cutress. Tregarthen was not sorry to be alone for a moment. The bitter controversial spirit was no longer upon him, it never would be again. He had surrendered at discretion, he freely acknowledged that Mary was right. He could see the golden rain falling on Tregarthen, he could see the people rising up and calling Mary blessed. What had he done to deserve all the blessings she was thrusting upon him? And did she love him still? She had told him that she did, and she was not the woman to go from her word. Did he love her?

Tregarthen lifted his hat reverently.

"Ay, ay," he said. "I love her surely enough. Till death do us part. How sweet and beautiful it all sounds *now!*"

His eyes fell, and then he tumbled headlong to earth, for Mrs. Bishop, with the ubiquitous child in her arms, stood before him. Mary and Cutress were some distance below and retreat was impossible. Tregarthen vividly recalled his last meeting with Mrs. Bishop and smiled in an ingratiating manner. But there was no reason to fear. The woman stood before him meekly. Her lips were trembling.

"Tregarthen," she said, "I came to humbly ask your pardon."

"As for that," Tregarthen replied, "the need for it seems to be mutual."

"Yes, it was kind of you to say that. They tell me that you have changed, they say that you are sitting in the light at last. I was told of what you did yesterday. And to-day you are loved and respected in the island as a Tregarthen never was before. And I ask your pardon humbly."

The woman was as much changed and transformed as Tregarthen himself. The hard lines had gone from her mouth, the restless, hungry look from her eyes. The blessed spirit of the new times had possessed her. And all this Mary had brought about. Strange that Tregarthen had been so wilfully blind.

"I am on your side now," Tregarthen said.

"Ay, that is good hearing, master. On the side of the angels, our good mistress calls it. And you will sit by her side and make Tregarthen happy. Yes, I can see in your face that you will. I know it and we all know it. Look at my child. There's a contentment there on his little face I never saw before. He knows, he knows, bless him."

Tregarthen turned and followed Mary down the path. There was a mist before his eyes, and the sea seemed to dance in them. Old Bishop was toiling up the cliffs. He paused for a moment.

"I'm wrong, and we were all wrong," he said huskily. "God bless you, Tregarthen. Seems as if I had no words to-day."

Tregarthen was conscious of the same poverty. He could only wave his hand and smile upon the yearning Jacob. There was a new warmth in the sunshine, a new joy in life, the joy of doing good.

"And now we are going off to the Sanctuary," said Mary. "I fancy that I shall have a surprise there for you, Tregarthen."

"I have no doubt, and I have no doubt that it will be a pleasant one."

Cutress had returned to Trevose with an intimation that he would like to have a few words with Tregarthen later on. Down in the Sanctuary a group of girls and women had gathered in the lesser hall. There was a clicking of bobbins and a rustle of slender filaments over the big oaken pillows, while Naomi moved from one to the other with fingers restlessly, yet lovingly, at work. A brilliant sunshine came filtered through the painted windows on to the bright, flushed faces of the girls. It was a pleasant sight and one that Tregarthen could have contemplated for a considerable time.

"Tregarthen, you are not angry?" Naomi asked timidly.

"Not I, indeed," Tregarthen replied. "My wife told me she had a surprise for me here, and I said I was sure it would be a pleasant one. Naomi, you look like a girl who has found a lover."

Naomi smiled tenderly upon the exquisite pattern of lace that lay on the big table before her. Her eyes were bright as those of a child. She had something to

live for now, some door for the outpouring of her artistic soul. Heaven only knew how many years she had been eating her heart out in silence.

"Ay, I have," she said. "I am happy at last. Look at these patterns. Did you ever see anything like them before? There are scores of them—they have come from cupboards and hiding-places all over the island. It is all supposed to be a lost art, but before long Tregarthen will take first place in all the Courts of Europe. The art is mine, and it is Ruth's, and it will soon belong to others. I have five people here who will some day know more than I know myself. Ay, it was a blessed day for me when mistress Mary first came to the island."

"It was a blessed day for us all," Tregarthen cried aloud. He stood there big and strong, and good to look upon. He was going to do penance before these girls, and he was going to do it well. "Otherwise the island was doomed, and I a lost man. And now, if my wife will forget my folly and wickedness, and take me to her heart, why then I shall not have lived in vain. She has made a man of me, and I hope she will finish the good work. Naomi, I have been very cruel to you."

Naomi was crying gently. Ruth, who had come in, was standing behind her, admiration and gladness shining in her great dark eyes. Mary caught at Tregarthen's fingers and carried them to her lips.

"Don't let us say any more," said Naomi. "Oh, thank God, thank God."

Tregarthen strode outside. He wanted air. Presently Mary followed him. For a long time they walked side by side in silence. Then Mary looked up with face aflame, with love on her quivering lips.

"Rupert, you will not go away again?" she said.

"Ah. You are asking me to come to you, dearest. Why?"

"Why? Because I love you, I have loved you all along. Because you have found the light, and because I believe I am as essential to your happiness as you are to mine. Do not go away again, Rupert."

"I will not go far. Give me a day or two to find myself. And I can't desert Cutress altogether. As if I could leave you now!"

Her hands fluttered out to him, and he caught them in his strong fingers. Then she seemed to come to his breast like a dove. Their lips met in a long pressure, and there was no need for words when heart spoke to heart as a flower blooms. Then Mary gently released herself and walked homewards. Tregarthen made no attempt to follow her—he knew that there was no need.

He walked almost blindly on, stumbling over his own happiness. He did not seem to know that Tretire stood before him and was trying to attract his attention. Earth rose up to the level of his eyes at last.

"What did you say I had cause to fear?" he asked hazily.

"Finlay and his lot," said Gervase. "I came to warn you, ay, to save you, for your life is too precious to be sacrificed now. Tregarthen, I found your worth out long ago, and now that the island—"

"My good Gervase, I am satiated. They have all been chanting my praises to-day, little as I deserve it. What are these men going to do?"

"Well, they are loitering in the neighbourhood. They fancy that you got them discharged. Maybe they will do you a mischief or maybe they will try to harm the new pier of the bridge. That means putting the clock back for six months. And

Cutress and Masson shake their heads, saying they have had that kind of idle threat from such cattle before."

Tregarthen was listening curiously. It was possible that Tretire was right. And one of those men had threatened him personally. The thing touched his imagination, it touched his courage also.

"We shall see," he said. "Gervase, I shall not sleep to-night."

"And where you are," Tretire replied, "there shall I be—master."

Then their hands met, and the cloud between them rolled away for ever.

Chapter XXXVIII

Pro Patria Mori.

TREGARTHEN had no fear for himself, moreover his contempt for those beneath him was by no means a dead letter. He still believed in his heart of hearts that the islanders would do anything he desired. Even now, at the last gasp, he was under the impression that his people would go any lengths for him. And even in Trevose those miscreants would never dare—

But Prescott was of a different opinion. He sat smoking in the gloom, the glowing bowl of his pipe lighting up his face redly.

"They are a reckless lot, and none the less dangerous because they are a set of miserable cowards. Personally, I'm glad Cutress is rid of them. I'm going home in a few days, my weary probation is nearly at an end, and I should not like to leave a tragedy behind me."

"But they wouldn't murder one?"

"Perhaps not, unless they were certain of safety, and even then it would take the whole gang to do it. But I should fancy that violence was hardly their game. They belong to the old bad machinery-wrecking school. What I fear for is the safety of the piers."

"But how could they damage the piers?"

"Easily, my friend. There are dynamite cartridges to be had. I could pick the lock of the dynamite chest with the greatest ease. We are too careless over these things."

Tregarthen refused to consider the matter, but it lingered with him long after he and Prescott had fallen upon the discussion of other things. He could not sleep, Prescott's regular breathing annoyed him.

He rose and dressed and slipped out into the silent night. It was very still, for the tide was high so that work was utterly at a standstill. A ragged moon was climbing up over the purple shoulder of Tintagel. Like a sentinel the first fair white feet of the new pier stood from the lopping sea. The boats were drawn high up under the herring-curing house.

A little further on stood piles of sand, and brick, and iron bars, and the implements with which the sons of labour won their concrete marvels from the sea. At the back of this was the cave where dynamite was stored. In something

more than idle curiousity Tregarthen examined the lock by the aid of a match. He saw at once that it had been tampered with. There were marks of some sharp steel tool on the staple.

Tregarthen flamed indignantly. Those miscreants had been here. Without a doubt they were bent upon some mischief, and that mischief could mean nothing less than the destruction of the new pier. Tregarthen could imagine Mary's disappointment and vexation. If this foul thing was done, then Tregarthen would have to face another winter in the old dangerous fashion, and no winter ever passed without the sea taking its toll of those who had business or pleasure between the island and the mainland.

And nobody ever knew who the next victim might be. Suppose it was Guy or his wife, or the popular Julien. It might even be Mary. Tregarthen felt sick and faint as the thought flashed upon him. His strained eyes were looking seaward for the first faint signs of mischief. Was it imagination or was there a faint light twinkling at the base of the pier? The average man would not have seen it, but Tregarthen's sight, like those of the islanders generally, was wonderfully quick and keen.

It was a light. Tregarthen was certain of it. Already the tide was on the turn, and soon the ledge of rock upon which the base of the new pier was built would be clear of the water. The light vanished, only to reappear again, and then it gradually moved a little unsteady distance.

"The miscreants!" Tregarthen muttered. "But they shall have a lesson."

He took the first boat to hand and dragged it down to the water. He tumbled in and pulled steadily for the pier. He was too angry and annoyed to take anything like proper precautions, and was utterly heedless that the steady 'flick-flack' of his sculls was plainly audible to those on mischief bent. Finlay paused, drill in hand, and his furtive face grew shifty and uneasy. A tall reed of a man with an ugly scar on his lip stood over him with a candle. Finlay spoke in a whisper, his metaphor plentifully interlarded with oaths.

"Put down the candle," he said huskily. "Here's somebody coming."

"Let's hook it in the boat," the weedy man suggested eagerly. "What's the good o' this? They'll build it up again, and they'll bring it home to us for certain. Better to have knocked the cove on the 'ead."

"Ay, there's a lot of knockin' on the 'ead about you, long 'un," Finlay said, with sarcastic emphasis. "Spile the work, I say. Make the nobs pay for it. *Will* you hold that candle down!"

The long gentleman looked uneasily about him. He could swear and threaten, he could use brutal violence towards the poor forsaken creature who so timidly called him husband, but he had no stomach for personal strife. And it was borne in upon his narrow intelligence that somebody was coming. A boat grated on the shore and Tregarthen came forward.

"Come out of that, you scoundrels!" he cried.

There were three of them. They were caught red-handed, with the dynamite cartridges at their feet and the drills in their hands. It would mean what their picturesque language called 'a five stretch,' e.g. five years' penal servitude. And this very fact meant danger to Tregarthen. Given the avenue, these rascals would have bolted like hares from the meanest thing that stands upright; but here they were cornered, and consequently desperate.

“We ain’t a doin’ no ‘arm,” Finlay said cringingly. “Gimme that spanner, Bill.” The last words in a feline purring whisper to the third man, broad like a wall, red as a fox, and horribly marked with smallpox. “We ain’t up to no mischief. You take and ‘ook it, mister.”

A wise man would have scented danger here and retired discreetly. Tregarthen was almost beside himself with indignation. Outrage, outrage in the shadow of the island where crime had never been before! The Homeric wrath came well from the man whose Castle was packed with the artistic stories of lost lives. But Tregarthen Island is loftily aloof on the subject of wrecking.

“You are three infamous scoundrels,” Tregarthen cried. “There is the dynamite, and there are the drills. You are going to destroy the pier. You shall pay for this.”

Thus spoke blind, unreasoning anger. Beyond the fear that rendered him hoarse, Finlay was beginning to feel a deep contempt for his antagonist. The fool might have known, he argued, that no explosion could take place till their precious hides were safe. A wise man would have lain low like the historic Brer Rabbit, and quietly withdrawn the charge after their departure. Then he would have gone to bed and had them arrested in the morning. But Tregarthen had no diplomacy, he had been too autocratic a man for that. Finlay signed for the big man to come forward, whilst he crept behind Tregarthen with the spanner.

The tall man with the weak knees took up his cue immediately. He assumed an air of deep personal injury. He was ‘doin’ of nothink;’ he had been ‘doin’ of nothink’ all his lifetime, and the consequence was that oppression had marked him down for her own. He could lay his hand upon his bosom and swear to the gentleman as he was not up to *hanythink*. Consequently, why should he be selected?

He danced forward with an evil change of face as the spanner came down with full force on Tregarthen’s head. He fell over on his knees, half blind for an instant and dazed by the violence of the attack. But for that sudden vengeful change on the tall man’s face, he would never have understood.

Tregarthen did not come of a wild reckless stock for nothing. If he was going to lose his life he would exact a price for it. If he lay dead here, as white stark fruit for the next creeping tide, the men who had done the deed should be their own damning witnesses. The blood streamed off his face, but he staggered to his feet and pushed off his boat. There was a big jack-knife in his pocket. He wrenched open the blade and lurched for the tall man. He skipped across the narrow platform of rock, and as he did so Tregarthen dropped to his knees.

“Not yet,” he muttered. “Lord, give me a little strength!”

He scrambled along to where the other boat lay. Finlay dashed upon him and beat him on the shoulders with the spanner. But Tregarthen had his teeth set now, he was going through with it. He had his hand on the painter of the boat, a keen down stroke of the knife and the strands parted. The second boat floated away, away into the darkness, all that could be seen was a ledge of rock with its white pier—three white angry faces gleaming in the feeble light of a ship’s candle. Tregarthen had not failed. Come what may, he had saved the initial stage of the bridge from destruction.

“Now then, you scoundrels,” he cried, “you are helpless. You dare not destroy the bridge for the sake of your miserable lives. You will be discovered in the

morning and handed over to the police. As for me, I have done the best day's work I ever did in my life. But what of you now?"

He fell over on his side speechless, blind, half insensible. He lay there as if dead; indeed, the miscreants believed that they had finished him. Not that they felt the smallest compunction on that account, being fully occupied with the best methods of preserving their own lives for the benefit of an anxious community. But the three faces in the candle gleam were ghastly white.

"Now you've done it!" the pock-marked man muttered. "What shall we do?"

"Fling the dynamite and the tools into the sea," Finlay said huskily. "Ay, an' fling 'im into the sea too. When the tide is low, before daylight, we'll swim for it and trust to chanst. Come along."

"Perhaps he ain't dead," suggested the big man.

"Well, he precious soon will be. Come along."

Urged by oaths and reproaches the others obeyed. It was not a pleasant job, but there was no other way out of it. The limp ghastly burden hung in their hands a moment, there was a sudden plunge and then silence. And the silence on that ledge of rock lasted till the dawn came up grey and gloomy.

But Tregarthen was not dead. At the cold touch of the water a certain vague consciousness came to him; as in a dream, he remembered everything. He knew, and yet he did not know, that he was in the sea. Many a time he had swum those waters, and he knew the current and tides by heart. If he could only keep up his strength all would be well yet. He let himself drift, and then once again the black unconsciousness shut down on him.

But only for the moment. Once more the clouded brain struggled to the light. He felt the shingle and gritty sand under his knees, he dragged himself up to the valley painfully and slowly. The shock had stopped the bleeding, but he was weak and staggering, and intensely cold. If he could reach shelter all would be well. Once he got down he knew that he must die.

His memory was not clear now, he could not for the life of him recollect where he was. As he staggered along he saw a light burning high and clear before him. The lantern in the Castle tower!

The tower, of course. And why not the Castle? He was certain of a welcome there, for had not Mary asked him to return? He had declined before, but he felt that he could do so now, for he had won the right. He had cried *mea culpa*, he had been ready to give his life to save the bridge. Mary would take him up tenderly, she would pour oil into his wounds. If he could only get there!

To lie here and die when love and home and a true sweet wife were waiting for him would be too bitter, something beyond words.

He made one more effort, he staggered on till he stood in the shadow of the Castle. Thank God there were lights in the lower rooms, so they had not gone to bed. As a matter of fact it was not yet eleven o'clock. Tregarthen rose and pulled the bell with the might of a warrior. Then he fell on the threshold, a wet, limp, wasted rag of a man, spent to his last breath.

The clanging peal startled the household, it brought Mary into the hall. With the rest she pressed to the door. And she was first to recognize both the man and the tragedy. Her face was deadly pale, but her voice was steady. She motioned Gervase Tretire and Ruth to her side.

"It is your master," she said. "He has come to us at last, thank God, *come home!*"

"Across the golden bridge," said Tregarthen.

Chapter XXXIX

The Blooming of the Rose.

TREGARTHEN lay in a confused tangle of dreams, the warm languorous phantasy that is pink and tender. He seemed to see a pair of melting eyes looking into his and the outline of a lovely face full of sympathy. A long way off somewhere a voice was speaking.

"Poor fellow! If you let him die I'll call shame on you all. And listen to what I have to say."

"You have a great deal too much to say, sweetheart," said Julien or his ghost. "Will you please be silent?"

"But, George, all I was going to—"

"Maud, I command silence. Die! Nonsense!"

"Well, well," Maud whispered, with the suggestion of a smile in her voice. "It's an evil day for a woman when she calls a man her master, George dear."

Tregarthen opened his eyes. He was lying, fully dressed, on a lounge in the big saloon, and the afternoon sun came filtered through the stained windows on his face. He looked round vaguely for a figure he could not see. And yet Maud was very pleasant to gaze upon. Tregarthen wondered how he got there, wondered why his head felt stiff and sore. Then it came back to him.

"What are you young people quarrelling about?" he asked.

"George has asked me to marry him, and I have said yes," Maud explained. "I should like to know if you have any objection to that?"

"It is outside my jurisdiction. And I am sincerely glad. Because I have so frequently quarrelled with Julien, that is no reason why I should have failed to recognize him as a good fellow. So we are both tamed, Miss Maud."

Maud not only admitted the terrible accusation, but seemed to rejoice in the new fetters. There was a gentle playfulness about her which was very charming. And Tregarthen's eyes were full of sympathy.

"So it is all settled," Maud cried gaily. "The Dowager Lady Carrib has signified her gracious approval, and piously and publicly returns thanks for the cloud removed from our house. She has also given me some diamonds."

"And so shall I," Tregarthen declared. "You have, unwittingly perhaps, been a far better surgeon to me than Dr. Julien ever was."

"Including an indirect influence in a crude surgical operation," Julien suggested.

They all laughed. It was a small jest, but there are times when small jests assume large proportions. Tregarthen had been there for ten days in a kind of living coma, to the great anxiety of his friends, excepting Julien, who had

prophesied a speedy recovery. He had been clothed and fed all the time, but he had no recollection of anything. Anyway, there was no damage done beyond a certain loss of blood. A good meal would do more good than all the physic in the world.

"Where is my wife?" he asked.

"Gone down to the Sanctuary with Eleanor Guy," said Maud. "I begged to be allowed to see you. They haven't caught any of those men."

"What men?" said Tregarthen.

"Why, the men who attacked you! We know all about that, because when you got here you told your story pretty fully. And those miscreants I was so foolish as to defend have got clear away."

Tregarthen declared that he was very glad to hear it. It pleased him to regard himself as being under great personal obligations to Finlay and Co. They had swept away the last of his prejudices and carried him over bodily to the side of the angels. He was glad that he had shed his blood for Mary and the bridge that was to bring such blessings to Tregarthen Island.

"I'm real pleased to know that you are one of us," Maud said gravely.

Tregarthen glanced into Maud's sweet face before catching the dancing demon of mirth all agog in Julien's eye. Then he burst into a laugh, such a clear, heartwhole, ringing mirth as he had never given before—the forefather of an illustrious line of laughs, like Ebenezer Scrooge's on that cheery Christmas morning. Then Maud caught the spirit of the fun, and her own illogical position came clear before her. So she laughed also, and upon the honest laughter, which must surely have been the echo of a distant joyful Heaven, Mary came in. She could not have had a more perfect welcome.

"I feel," she said unsteadily, "that I am home at last."

"Thank God," Tregarthen cried. "So do I. Mary, Mary!"

She saw his hands go out to her, he saw her quiver under her jacket. Mrs. Guy, following behind, became suddenly absorbed in a picture, to the great bewilderment of the honest rector, who stood beside her. As Julien came out, most wickedly and ostentatiously quarrelling with Maud, Guy understood.

Illustration:

Mary had her hand tenderly upon Tregarthen's grey hair

Those two were close together at last. Mary had her hand tenderly upon Tregarthen's grey hair, a little greyer than it had been some months before. But the proud look had gone from his eyes and the hard lines from his mouth. It was another man who filled Mary's blue eyes.

"Do you remember the last time we were close together?" she asked.

"Ay, ay." He could say no more for the moment. "Ay, ay, dear wife. You were cruel; but you were only cruel to be kind."

"God is my witness to that. Do you feel better, Rupert?"

"My dear, there is nothing the matter with me at all. I am stronger and happier than I have ever been before I tried to make Tregarthen the ideally perfect island, and yet never was a man further from his conceptions. You are right, Mary; you have been right from the very first. Every word you have said was true, every

action has been inspired. The island will be better for honest work and prosperity. I have learnt all that. I learnt it in that awful journey to Wadebridge; I learnt it from watching Tretire; I learnt it from that grand old woman who gave us shelter on the way. When the light began to come to me, I made up my mind to finish the lesson in the great cities. But I discovered my weakness and my impotence, and I dared not go. So I stayed here and learnt it amongst the navvies. Every one of them was a better man than I. I found goodness and tenderness and feeling amongst them, and the few bad qualities were balanced by the good. I see now to what a pitch of misery and sloth my pride was bringing on the island. Mary, let me stay here and work out my salvation."

"You want to stay here as my husband?"

"Yes, yes. To *help* you, to be your right hand. Is it too much to ask?"

"Oh no, no," Mary cried. "Rupert, I *want* you. I love you, Rupert. I believe that I have been in love with you since I was a child. I have a portrait of yours taken some years ago by an American artist. I expect I fell in love with that. Let us join hands, Rupert, for the good of Tregarthen. And so you will stay with me and I will be happy ever afterwards."

She was laughing and crying in a breath, the happy tears rose in her eyes. Tregarthen stretched out his arms to her, and she came. For a long time she knelt there, with her head on his breast. There was no need for words, for between their hearts was a perfect understanding. For the Spring had come, the prophecy would be fulfilled, and Tregarthen would blossom like a rose.

"So it is settled, then?" Mary spoke at length. "I can hear the grand anthem that love and happiness are singing in my ears. I see the golden avenue spring out at my feet. I have done the first stage of my work, and I shall resign the sceptre. Nay, I will, Rupert. I can do so by the Charter. A man should rule, and you are going to rule, with me by your side."

"And you will *rule* me to the end of time, sweetheart."

"Of course," Mary said demurely. "By love and perfect trust alone. But there should be a man on the throne, and you shall be Tregarthen of Tregarthen again. Ah, when you come to realize how those people can care for you!"

She broke off suddenly, and, stooping down, kissed Tregarthen on the lips.

"I am going to fetch in the others," she said.

They came presently, and one look filled them all with satisfaction. They had no need for Mary's trembling eager explanation. Maud burst into a new panegyric that was as the music of her own Celtic waters. For once the mad strain was uppermost, and Julien made no effort to stop it.

"I don't ever recollect shedding tears in my life," said Miriam; "but at the present time I could do so with the faintest encouragement. I shall never be able to take an interest in American politics again."

"Then stay here," Mrs. Guy urged. "Stay near me. My prayers have been answered, and I shall have, not one, but two, congenial houses near me. Stay here and keep Mary in order."

"Be her slave, you mean," Miriam laughed. "Well, that will be no novelty. I always felt that I ought to be near her."

"Don't worry about me," Maud said, with dignity.

“You have been worry enough,” said Mrs. Guy, candidly. “If you only knew the trouble I had in getting you and George Julien together. Even after I saw that you were in love with one another I was fearful of some mad Celtic prank of Maud’s upsetting everything. But it’s all right now.”

“I will stay here,” Miriam said. “At least, for part of the year. I shall take one of the new bungalows. After that there is no more to be said.”

“I beg your pardon,” Tregarthen put in. “A most important thing. I am exceedingly hungry. Let me have dinner early, and I will grace the festive board with my presence. Guy, you like a good dinner.”

“I dote upon it,” Guy admitted; “but quite in a Pickwickian sense, of course.”

They dined early in the small hall, with the shaded lights upon palms and flowers, upon crystal glass and old silver, and there was a gaiety and happiness in the air that comes but seldom in the lives of any of us. They talked for the most part of the future of Tregarthen and afterwards they broke up in groups. Julien with Maud at the piano, Guy and his wife and Miriam, whilst Tregarthen and Mary slipped through the ante-room and out by the long open window on to the lawn that looked far away to sea. A crescent moon rode high on the purple bosom of the night, the boom of the surges came droning inland. Tregarthen stood there looking into the room.

“Do those two young people fascinate you?” Mary asked.

“It isn’t that,” Tregarthen explained. “It reminds me of the night you found me, like a disconsolate Adam out of Paradise, and urged me to come in. In the light of that miserable evening, I like to stand here and see Julien making love to that lovely creature. I may be playing the spy, but I can’t help it. Ah, Mary, there is a fine contrast between then and now.”

“Life is made up of contrasts,” Mary said gravely. “We go from one extreme to the other without knowing it hardly. Look at Tregarthen to-day, and think what it will be this time next year. And see the happy faces now and recollect—”

“How I held the veil over them. I—”

Tregarthen paused, and Mary drew him back. There, in the moonlight, Tretire and Ruth were walking. His arm was about her waist, her head near his shoulder. So engrossed were they in their own happiness that they seemed to see and hear nothing of the world.

“And to think how nearly I ruined that romance,” said Tregarthen. “Whichever way I look I see something to be sorry for.”

“Then look at me,” Mary said eagerly. “Look to the future, and strive to make that future a happy one. Yonder will be houses and gardens that shall bring money and prosperity here. Over yonder again shall be such cottages as Tregarthen never dreamt of. Along the edges of the valley green larches shall grow and keep the frost from the flowers for ever. My garden of sleep is going to be no dull desert of pain. And God only helps those who help themselves. Look to the future, Rupert, work and hope and toil, and the day is not far distant when Tregarthen shall blossom like a rose.”

Mary spoke with a fine sense of prophecy upon her, spoke with glittering eye and cheek aflame. She made a lovely picture as she stood there in the moonlight. Tregarthen caught her to his heart and kissed her.

“Mary,” he said, “ah, Mary! And it shall be as you say. Tregarthen shall blossom like a rose, but the fairest bloom in all the garden will be my own Rose of Sharon, my heart’s delight.”