

WALTER BESANT

ARMOREL OF LYONESSE:
A ROMANCE OF TO-DAY

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Walter Besant

Armored of Lyonesse: A Romance of To-day

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE CHILD OF SAMSON

It was the evening of a fine September day. Through the square window, built out so as to form another room almost as large as that which had been thus enlarged, the autumn sun, now fast declining to the west, poured in warm and strong; but not too warm or too strong for the girl on whose head it fell as she sat leaning back in the low chair, her face turned towards the window. The sun of Scilly is never too fierce or too burning in summer, nor in winter does it ever lose its force; in July, when the people of the adjacent islands of Great Britain and Ireland venture not forth into the glare of the sun, here the soft sea mists and the strong sea air temper the heat; and in December the sun still shines with a lingering warmth, as if he loved the place. This girl lived in the sunshine all the year round; rowed in it; lay in it; basked in it bare-headed, summer and winter; in the winter she would sit sheltered from the wind in some warm corner of the rocks; in summer she would lie on the hillside or stand upon the high headlands and the sea-beat crags, while the breezes, which in the Land of Lyonesse do never cease, played with her long tresses and kept her soft cheek cool.

The window was wide open on all three sides; the girl had been doing some kind of work, but it had dropped from her hands, and now lay unregarded on the floor; she was gazing upon the scene before her, but with the accustomed eyes which looked out upon it every day. A girl who has such a picture continually before her all day long never tires of it, though she may not be always consciously considering it and praising it. The stranger, for his part, cannot choose but cry aloud for admiration; but the native, who knows it as no stranger can, is silent. The house, half-way up the low hill, looked out upon the south – to be exact, its aspect was S. W. by S. – so that from this window the girl saw always, stretched out at her feet, the ocean, now glowing in the golden sunshine of September. Had she been tall enough, she might even have seen the coast of South America, the nearest land in the far distance. Looking S. W., that is, she would have seen the broad mouth of Oroonooke and the shores of El Dorado. This broad sea-scape was broken exactly in the middle by the Bishop's Rock and its stately lighthouse rising tall and straight out of the water; on the left hand the low hill of Annet shut out the sea; and on the right Great Minalto, rugged and black, the white foam always playing round its foot or flying over its great black northern headland, bounded and framed the picture. Almost in the middle of the water, not more than two miles distant, a sailing ship, all sails set, made swift way, bound outward one knows not whither. Lovely at all times is a ship in full sail, but doubly lovely when she is seen from afar, sailing on a smooth sea, under a cloudless sky, the sun of afternoon lighting up her white sails. No other ships were in sight; there was not even the long line of smoke which proclaims the steamer below the horizon; there was not even a Penzance fishing-boat tacking slowly homewards with brown sails and its two masts: in this direction there was no other sign of man.

The girl, I say, saw this sight every day: she never tired of it, partly because no one ever tires of the place in which he was born and has lived – not even an Arab of the Great Sandy Desert; partly because the sea, which has been called, by unobservant poets, unchanging, does in fact change – face, colour, mood, even shape – every day, and is never the same, except, perhaps, when the east wind of March covers the sky with a monotony of grey, and takes the colour out of the face of ocean as

it takes the colour from the granite rocks, last year's brown and yellow fern, and the purple heath. To this girl, who lived with the sea around her, it always formed a setting, a background, a frame for her thoughts and dreams. Wherever she went, whatever she said or sang, or thought or did, there was always in her ears the lapping or the lashing of the waves; always before her eyes was the white surge flying over the rocks; always the tumbling waves. But, as for what she actually thought or what she dreamed, seeing how ignorant of the world she was, and how innocent and how young, and as for what was passing in her mind this afternoon as she sat at the window, I know not. On the first consideration of the thing, one would be inclined to ask how, without knowledge, can a girl think, or imagine, or dream anything? On further thought, one understands that knowledge has very little to do with dreams or fancies. Yet, with or without knowledge, no poet, sacred bard, or prophet has ever been able to divine the thoughts of a girl, or to interpret them, or even to set them down in consecutive language. I suppose they are not, in truth, thoughts. Thought implies reasoning and the connection of facts, and the experience of life as far as it has gone. A young maiden's mind is full of dimly seen shadows and pallid ghosts which flit across the brain and disappear. These shadows have the semblance of shape, but it is dim and uncertain: they have the pretence of colour, but it changes every moment: if they seem to show a face, it vanishes immediately and is forgotten. Yet these shadows smile upon the young with kindly eyes; they beckon with their fingers, and point to where, low down on the horizon, with cloudy outline, lies the Purple Island – to such a girl as this the future is always a small island girt by the sea, far off and lonely. The shadows whisper to her; they sing to her; but no girl has ever yet told us – even if she understands – what it is they tell her.

She had been lying there, quiet and motionless, for an hour or more, ever since the tea-things had been taken away – at Holy Hill they have tea at half-past four. The ancient lady who was in the room with her had fallen back again into the slumber which held her nearly all day long as well as all the night. The house seemed thoroughly wrapped and lapped in the softest peace and stillness; in one corner a high clock, wooden-cased, swung its brass pendulum behind a pane of glass with solemn and sonorous chronicle of the moments, so that they seemed to march rather than to fly. A clock ought not to tick as if Father Time were hurried and driven along without dignity and by a scourge. This clock, for one, was not in a hurry. Its tick showed that Time rests not – but hastes not. There is admonition in such a clock. When it has no one to admonish but a girl whose work depends on her own sweet will, its voice might seem thrown away; yet one never knows the worth of an admonition. Besides, the clock suited the place and the room. Where should Time march with solemn step and slow, if not on the quiet island of Samson, in the archipelago of Scilly? On its face was written the name of its maker, plain for all the world to see – 'Peter Trevellick, Penzance, A.D. 1741.'

The room was not ceiled, but showed the dark joists and beams above, once painted, but a long time ago. The walls were wainscotted and painted drab, after an old fashion now gone out: within the panels hung coloured prints, which must have been there since the beginning of this century. They represented rural subjects – the farmer sitting before a sirloin of beef, while his wife, a cheerful nymph, brought him 'Brown George,' foaming with her best home-brewed; the children hung about his knees expectant of morsels; or the rustic bade farewell to his sweetheart, the recruiting-sergeant waiting for him, and the villagers, to a woman, bathed in tears. There were half a dozen of those compositions simply coloured. I believe they are now worth much money. But there were many other things in this room worth money. Opposite the fireplace stood a cabinet of carved oak, black with age, precious beyond price. Behind its glass windows one could see a collection of things once strange and rare – things which used to be brought home by sailors long before steamers ploughed every ocean and globe-trotters trotted over every land. There were wonderful things in coral, white and red and pink; Venus's-fingers from the Philippines; fans from the Seychelles; stuffed birds of wondrous hue, daggers and knives, carven tomahawks, ivory toys, and many other wonders from the far East and fabulous Cathay. Beside the cabinet was a wooden desk, carved in mahogany, with a date of 1645, said to have been brought to the islands by one of the Royalist prisoners whom Cromwell hanged

upon the highest carn of Hangman's Island. There was no escaping Cromwell – not even in Scilly any more than in Jamaica. In one corner was a cupboard, the door standing open. No collector ever came here to gaze upon the treasures unspeakable of cups and saucers, plates and punch-bowls. On the mantelshelf were brass candlesticks and silver candlesticks, side by side with 'ornaments' of china, pink and gold, belonging to the artistic reign of good King George the Fourth. On the hearthrug before the fire, which was always burning in this room all the year round, lay an old dog sleeping.

Everybody knows the feeling of a room or a house belonging to the old. Even if the windows are kept open, the air is always close. Rest, a gentle, elderly angel, sits in the least frequented room with folded wings. Sleep is always coming to the doors at all hours: for the sake of Rest and Sleep the house must be kept very quiet: nobody must ever laugh in the house: there is none of the litter that children make: nothing is out of its place: nothing is disturbed: the furniture is old-fashioned and formal: the curtains are old and faded: the carpets are old, faded, and worn: it is always evening: everything belonging to the house has done its work: all together, like the tenant, are sitting still – solemn, hushed, at rest, waiting for the approaching end.

The only young thing at Holy Hill was the girl at the window. Everything else was old – the servants, the farm labourers, the house and the furniture. In the great hooded arm-chair beside the fire reposed the proprietor, tenant, or owner of all. She was the oldest and most venerable dame ever seen. At this time she was asleep: her head had dropped forward a little, but not much; her eyes were closed; her hands were folded in her lap. She was now so very ancient that she never left her chair except for her bed; also, by reason of her great antiquity, she now passed most of the day in sleep, partly awake in the morning, when she gazed about and asked questions of the day. But sometimes, as you will presently see, she revived again in the evening, became lively and talkative, and suffered her memory to return to the ancient days.

By the assistance of her handmaidens, this venerable lady was enabled to present an appearance both picturesque and pleasing, chiefly because it carried the imagination back to a period so very remote. To begin with, she wore her bonnet all day long. Fifty years ago it was not uncommon in country places to find very old ladies who wore their bonnets all day long. Ursula Rosevean, however, was the last who still preserved that ancient custom. It was a large bonnet that she wore, a kind of bonnet calculated to impress very deeply the imagination of one – whether male or female – who saw it for the first time: it was of bold design, as capacious as a store-ship, as flowing in its lines as an old man-of-war – inspired to a certain extent by the fashions of the Waterloo period – yet, in great part, of independent design. Those few who were permitted to gaze upon the bonnet beheld it reverently. Within the bonnet an adroit arrangement of cap and ribbons concealed whatever of baldness or exiguity as to locks – but what does one know? Venus Calva has never been worshipped by men; and women only pay their tribute at her shrine from fear – never from love. The face of the sleeping lady reminded one – at first, vaguely – of history. Presently one perceived that it was the identical face which that dread occidental star, Queen Elizabeth herself, would have assumed had she lived to the age of ninety-five, which was Ursula's time of life in the year 1884. For it was an aquiline face, thin and sharp; and if her eyes had been open you would have remarked that they were bright and piercing, also like those of the Tudor Queen. Her cheek still preserved something of the colour which had once made it beautiful; but cheek and forehead alike were covered with lines innumerable, and her withered hands seemed to have grown too small for their natural glove. She was dressed in black silk, and wore a gold chain about her neck.

The clock struck half-past five, melodiously. Then the girl started and sat upright – as awakened out of her dream. 'Armored,' it seemed to say – nay, since it seemed to say, it actually did say – 'Child Armored, I am old and wise. For a hundred and forty-three years, ever since I left the hands of the ingenious Peter Trevellick, of Penzance, in the year 1741, I have been counting the moments, never ceasing save at those periods when surgical operations have been necessary. In each year there are 31,536,000 moments. Judge, therefore, for yourself how many moments in all I have counted. I must,

you will own, be very wise indeed. I am older even than your great-great-grandmother. I remember her a baby first, and then a pretty child, and then a beautiful woman, for all she is now so worn and wizened. I remember her father and her grandfather. Also her brothers and her son, and her grandson – and your own father, dear Armored. The moments pass: they never cease: I tell them as they go. You have but short space to do all you wish to do. You, child, have done nothing at all yet. But the moments pass. Patience. For you, too, work will be found. Youth passes. You can hear it pass. I tell the moments in which it melts away and vanishes. Age itself shall pass. You may listen if you please. I tell the moments in which it slowly passes.'

Armored looked at the clock with serious eyes during the delivery of this fine sermon, the whole bearing of which she did not perhaps comprehend. Then she started up suddenly and sprang to her feet, stung by a sudden pang of restlessness, with a quick breath and a sigh. We who have passed the noon of life are apt to forget the disease of restlessness to which youth is prone: it is an affection which greatly troubles that period of life, though it should be the happiest and the most contented; it is a disorder due to anticipation, impatience, and inexperience. The voyage is all before: youth is eager to be sailing on that unknown ocean full of strange islands. Who would not be restless with such a journey before one and such discoveries to make?

Armored opened the door noiselessly, and slipped out. At the same moment the old dog awoke and crept out with her, going delicately and on tiptoe, lest he should awaken the ancient lady. In the hall outside the girl stood listening. The house was quite silent, save that from the kitchen there was wafted on the air a soft droning – gentle, melodious, and murmurous, like the contented booming of a bumble-bee among the figwort. Armored laughed gently. 'Oh!' she murmured, 'they are all asleep. Grandmother is asleep in the parlour; Dorcas and Chessun are asleep in the kitchen; Justinian is asleep in the cottage; and I suppose the boy is asleep somewhere in the farmyard.'

The girl led the way, and the dog followed.

She passed through the door into the garden of the front. It was not exactly a well-ordered garden, because everything seemed to grow as it pleased; but then in Samson you have not to coax flowers and plants into growing: they grow because it pleases them to grow: this is the reason why they grow so tall and so fast. The garden faced the south-west, and was protected from the north and east by the house itself and by a high stone wall. There is not anywhere on the island a warmer and sunnier corner than this little front garden of Holy Hill. The geranium clambered up the walls beside and among the branches of the tree-fuchsia, both together covering the front of the house with the rich colouring of their flowers. On either side of the door grew a great tree, with gnarled trunk and twisted branches, of lemon verbena, fragrant and sweet, perfuming the air; the myrtles were like unto trees for size; the very marguerites ran to timber of the smaller kind; the pampas-grass in the warmest corner rose eight feet high, waving its long silver plumes; the tall stalk still stood which had borne the flowers of an aloe that very summer; the leaves of the plant itself were slowly dying away, their life-work, which is nothing at all but the production of that one flowering stem, finished. That done, the world has no more attractions for the aloe: it is content – it slowly dies away. And in the front of the garden was a row of tall dracæna palms. An old ship's figure-head, thrown ashore after a wreck, representing the head and bust of a beautiful maiden, gilded, but with a good deal of the gilt rubbed off, stood on the left hand of the garden, half hidden by another fuchsia-tree in flower: and a huge old-fashioned ship's lantern hung from an iron bar projecting over the door of the house.

The house itself was of stone, with a roof of small slates. Impossible to say how old it was, because in this land stone-work ages rapidly, and soon becomes covered with yellow and orange lichen, while in the interstices there grows the grey sandwort; and in the soft sea air and the damp sea mists the sharp edges even of granite are quickly rounded off and crumbled. But it was a very old house, save for the square projecting window, which had been added recently – say thirty or forty years ago – a long, low house of two storeys, simply built; it stands half-way up the hill which slopes down to the water's edge; it is protected from the north and north-east winds, which are the deadliest

enemies to Scilly, partly by the hill behind and partly by a spur of grey rock running like an ancient Cyclopean wall down the whole face of the hill into the sea, where for many a fathom it sticks out black teeth, round which the white surge rises and tumbles, even in the calmest time.

Beyond the garden-wall – why they wanted a garden-wall I know not, except for the pride and dignity of the thing – was a narrow green, with a little, a very little, pond; in the pond there were ducks; and beside the green was a small farmyard, containing everything that a farmyard should contain, except a stable. It had no stable, because there are no horses or carts upon the island. Pigs there are, and cows; fowls there are, and ducks and geese, and a single donkey for the purpose of carrying the flower-baskets from the farm to the landing-place; but neither horse nor cart.

Beyond the farmyard was a cottage, exactly like the house, but smaller. It was thatched, and on the thatch grew clumps of samphire. This was the abode of Justinian Tryeth, bailiff, head man, or foreman, who managed the farm. When you have named Ursula Rosevean, and Armored, her great-great-granddaughter, and Justinian Tryeth, and Dorcas his wife – she was a native of St. Agnes, and therefore a Hicks by birth – Peter his son, and Chessun his daughter, you have a complete directory of the island, because nobody else now lives on Samson. Formerly, however, and almost within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, according to the computation of antiquaries and the voice of tradition, this island maintained a population of over two score.

The hill which rises behind the house is the southern hill of the two, which, with the broad valley between them, make up the island of Samson. This hill slopes steeply seaward to south and west. It is not a lofty hill, by any means. In Scilly there are no lofty hills. When Nature addressed herself to the construction of this archipelago she brought to the task a light touch: at the moment she happened to be full of feeling for the great and artistic effects which may be produced by small elevations, especially in those places where the material is granite. Therefore, though she raised no Alpine peak in Scilly, she provided great abundance and any variety of bold coast-line with rugged cliffs, lofty carns, and headlands piled with rocks. And her success as an artist in this *genre* has been undoubtedly wonderful. The actual measurement of Holy Hill, Samson – but why should we measure? – has been taken, for the admiration of the world, by the Ordnance Survey. It is really no more than a hundred and thirty-two feet – not a foot more or less. But then one knows hills ten times that height – the Herefordshire Beacon, for example – which are not half so mountainous in the effect produced. Only a hundred and thirty-two feet – yet on its summit one feels the exhilaration of spirits caused by the air, elsewhere of five thousand feet at least. On its southern and western slopes lie the fields which form the flower-farm of Holy Hill.

Below the farmyard the ground sloped more steeply to the water: the slope was covered with short heather fern, now brown and yellow, and long trailing branches of bramble, now laden with ripe blackberries, the leaves enriched with blazon of gold and purple and crimson.

Armored ran across the green and plunged among the fern, tossing her arms and singing aloud, the old dog trotting and jumping, but with less elasticity, beside her. She was bare-headed; the sunshine made her dark cheeks ruddy and caused her black eyes to glow. Hebe, young and strong, loves Phœbus, and fears not any freckles. When she came to the water's edge, where the boulders lie piled in a broken mass among and above the water, she stood still and looked across the sea, silent for a moment. Then she began to sing in a strong contralto; but no one could hear her, not even the coastguard on Telegraph Hill, or he of the Star Fort: the song she sang was one taught her by the old lady, who had sung it herself in the old, old days, when the road was always filled with merchantmen waiting for convoy up the Channel, and when the islands were rich with the trade of the ships, and their piloting, and their wrecks – to say nothing of the free trade which went on gallantly and without break or stop. As she sang she lifted her arms and swung them in slow cadence, as a Nautch-girl sometimes swings her arms. What she sang was none other than the old song —

Early one morning, just as the sun was rising,

I heard a maid sing in the valley below:
Oh! don't deceive me. Oh! never leave me.
How could you use a poor maiden so?

In the year of grace 1884 Armored was fifteen years of age. But she looked nineteen or twenty, because she was so tall and so well-grown. She was dressed simply in a blue flannel; the straw hat which she carried in her hand was trimmed with red ribbons; at her throat she had stuck a red verbena – she naturally took to red, because her complexion was so dark. Black hair; black eyes; a strongly marked brow; a dark cheek of warm and ruddy hue; the lips full, but the mouth finely curved; features large but regular – she was already, though so young, a tall and handsome woman. Those able to understand things would recognise in her dark complexion, in her carriage, in her eyes, and in her upright figure, the true Castilian touch. The gipsy is swarthy; the negro is black; the mulatto is dusky: it is not the colour alone, but the figure and the carriage also, which mark the Spanish blood. A noble Spanish lady; yet how could she get to Samson?

She wore no gloves – you cannot buy gloves in Samson – and her hands were brown with exposure to sea and sun, to wind and rain: they were by no means tiny hands, but strong and capable hands; her arms – no one ever saw them, but for shape and whiteness they could not be matched – would have disgraced no young fellow of her own age for strength and muscle. That was fairly to be expected in one who continually sailed and rowed across the inland seas of this archipelago; who went to church by boat and to market by boat; who paid her visits by boat and transacted her business by boat, and went by boat to do her shopping. She who rows every day upon the salt water, and knows how to manage a sail when the breeze is strong and the Atlantic surge rolls over the rocks and roughens the still water of the road, must needs be strong and sound. For my own part, I admire not the fragile maiden so much as her who rejoices in her strength. Youth, in woman as well as in man, should be brave and lusty; clean of limb as well as of heart; strong of arm as well as of will; enduring hardness of voluntary labour as well as hardness of involuntary pain; with feet that can walk, run, and climb, and with hands that can hold on. Such a girl as Armored – so tall, so strong, so healthy – offers, methinks, a home ready-made for all the virtues, and especially the virtues feminine, to house themselves therein. Here they will remain, growing stronger every day, until at last they have become part and parcel of the very girl herself, and cannot be parted from her. Whereas, when they visit the puny creature, weak, timid, delicate – but no – 'tis better to remain silent.

How many times had the girl wandered, morning or afternoon, down the rough face of the hill, and stood looking vaguely out to sea, and presently returned home again? How many such walks had she taken and forgotten? For a hundred times – yea, a thousand times – we do over and over again the old familiar action, the little piece of the day's routine, and forget it when we lie down to sleep. But there comes the thousandth time, when the same thing is done again in the same way, yet is never to be forgotten. For on that day happens the thing which changes and charges a whole life. It is the first of many days. It is the beginning of new days. From it, whatever may have happened before, everything shall now be dated until the end. Mohammed lived many years, but all the things that happened unto him or his successors are dated from the Flight. Is it for nothing that it has been told what things Armored did and how she looked on this day? Not so, but for the sake of what happened afterwards, and because the history of Armored begins with this restless fit, which drove her out of the quiet room down the hillside to the sea. Her history begins, like every history of a woman worth relating, with the man cast by the sea upon the shores of her island. The maiden always lives upon an island, and whether the man is cast upon the shore by the sea of Society, or the sea of travel, or the sea of accident, or the sea of adventure, or the sea of briny waves and roaring winds and jagged rocks, matters little. To Armored it was the last. To you, dear Dorothy or Violet, it will doubtless be by the sea of Society. And the day that casts him before your feet will ever after begin a new period in your reckoning.

Armored stopped her song as suddenly as she had begun it. She stopped because on the water below her, not far from the shore, she saw a strange thing. She had good sea eyes – an ordinary telescope does not afford a field of vision much larger or clearer across water than Armored's eyes – but the thing was so strange that she shaded her forehead with her hand, and looked more curiously.

It would be strange on any evening, even after the calmest day of summer, when the sun is setting low, to see a small boat going out beyond Samson towards the Western Islets. There the swell of ocean is always rolling among the rocks and round the crags and headlands of the isles. Only in calm weather and in broad daylight can the boatman who knows the place venture in those waters. Not even the most skilled boatman would steer for the Outer Islands at sunset. For there are hidden rocks, long ridges of teeth that run out from the islands to tear and grind to powder any boat that should be caught in their devouring jaws. There are currents also which run swiftly and unexpectedly between the islands to sweep the boat along with them till it shall strike the rocks and so go down with any who are abroad; and there are strong gusts which sweep round the headlands and blow through the narrow sounds. So that it is only when the day is calm and in the full light of the sun that a boat can sail among these islands.

Yet Armored saw a boat on the water, not half a mile from Samson, with two men on board. More than this, the boat was apparently without oars or sails, and it was drifting out to sea. What did this mean?

She looked and wondered. She looked again, and she remembered.

The tide was ebbing, the boat was floating out with the tide; the breeze had dropped, but there was still something left – what there was came from the south-east and helped the boat along; there was not much sea, but the feet of Great Minalto were white, and the white foam kept leaping up the sides, and on her right, over the ledges round White Island, the water was tearing and boiling, a white and angry heap. Why, the wind was getting up, and the sun was setting, and if they did not begin to row back as hard as they could, and that soon, they would be out to sea and in the dark.

She looked again, and she thought more. The sinking sun fell upon the boat, and lit it up so plainly that she could now see very well two things. First, that the boat was really without any oars or sails at all; and next, that the two men in her were not natives of Scilly. She could not discern their faces, but she could tell by their appearance and the way they sat in the boat that they were not men of the place. Besides, what would an islander want out in a boat at such a time and in such a place? They were, therefore, visitors; and by the quiet way in which they sat, as if it mattered not at all, it was perfectly plain that they understood little or nothing of their danger.

Again she considered, and now it became certain to her, looking down upon the boat, that the current was not taking her out to sea at all, which would be dangerous enough, but actually straight on the ridge or ledge of rocks lying off the south-west of White Island. Then, seized with sudden terror, she turned and fled back to the farm.

CHAPTER II

PRESENTED BY THE SEA

'Peter!' cried Armored in the farmyard. 'Peter! Peter! Wake up! Where is the boy? Wake up and come quick!'

The boy was not sleeping, however, and came forth slowly, but obediently, in rustic fashion. He was a little older than most of those who still permit themselves to be called boys: unless his looks deceived one, he was a great deal older, for he was entirely bald, save for a few long, scattered hairs, which were white. His beard and whiskers also consisted of nothing but a few sparse white hairs. He moved heavily, without the spring of boyhood in his feet. Had Peter jumped or run, one might in haste have inferred a condition of drink or mental disorder. As for his shoulders, too, they were rounded, as if by the weight of years – a thing which is rarely seen in boys. Yet Armored called this antique person 'the boy,' and he answered to the name without remonstrance.

'Quick, Peter!' she cried. 'There's a boat drifting on White Island Ledge, and the tide's running out strong; and there are two men in her, and they've got no oars in the boat. Ignorant trippers, I suppose! They will both be killed to a certainty, unless – Quick!'

Peter followed her flying footsteps with a show of haste and a movement of the legs approaching alacrity. But then he was always a slow boy, and one who loved to have his work done for him. Therefore, when he reached the landing-place, he found that Armored was well before him, and that she had already shipped mast and sail and oars, and was waiting for him to shove off.

Samson has two landing beaches, one on the north-east below Bryher Hill, and the other farther south, on the eastern side of the valley. There might be a third, better than either, on Porth Bay, if anyone desired to put off there, on the west side facing the other islands, where nobody has any business at all except to see the rocks or shoot wild birds.

The beach used by the Holy Hill folk was the second of these two; here they kept their boats, and had their old stone boat-house to store the gear; and it was here that Armored stood waiting for her companion.

Peter was slow on land; at sea, however, he alone is slow who does not know what can be got out of a boat, and how it can be got. Peter did possess this knowledge; all the islanders, in fact, have it. They are born with it. They also know that nothing at sea is gained by hurry. It is a maxim which is said to rule or govern their conduct on land as well as afloat. Peter, therefore, when he had pushed off, sat down and took an oar with no more appearance of hurry than if he were taking a boat-load of boxes filled with flowers across to the port. Armored took the other oar.

'They are drifting on White Island Ledge,' repeated Armored; 'and the tide is running out fast.'

Peter made no reply – Armored expected none – but dipped his oar. They rowed in silence for ten minutes. Then Peter found utterance, and spoke slowly.

'Twenty years ago – I remember it well – a boat went ashore on that very Ledge. The tide was running out – strong, like to-night. There was three men in her – visitors they were, who wanted to save the boatman's pay. Their bodies was never found.'

Then both pulled on in silence, and doggedly.

In ten minutes or more they had rounded the Point at a respectful distance, for reasons well known to the navigator and the nautical surveyor of Scilly. Peter, without a word, shipped his oar. Armored did likewise. Then Peter stepped the mast and hoisted the sail, keeping the line in his own hand, and looked ahead, while Armored took the helm.

'It's Jenkins's boat,' said Peter, because they were now in sight of her. 'What'll Jenkins say when he hears that his boat's gone to pieces?'

'And the two men? Who are they? Will Jenkins say nothing about the men?'

'Strangers they are; gentlemen, I suppose. Well, if the breeze doesn't soon – Ah, here it is!'

The wind suddenly filled the sail. The boat heeled over under the breeze, and a moment after was flying through the water straight up the broad channel between the two Minaltos and Samson.

The sun was very low now. Between them and the west lay the boat they were pursuing – a small black object, with two black silhouettes of figures clear against the crimson sky. And now Armored perceived that they had by this time gotten an inkling, at least, of their danger, for they no longer sat passive, but had torn up a plank from the bottom, with which one, kneeling in the bows, was working as with a paddle, but without science. The boat yawed this way and that, but still kept on her course drifting to the rocks.

'If she touches the Ledge, Peter,' said Armored, 'she will be in little bits in five minutes. The water is rushing over it like a mill-stream.'

This she said ignorant of mill-streams, because there are none on Scilly; but the comparison served.

'If she touches,' Peter replied, 'we may just go home again. For we shall be no good to nobody.'

Beyond the boat they could plainly see the waters breaking over the Ledge; the sun lit up the white foam that leaped and flew over the black rocks just showing their teeth above the water as the tide went down.

Here is a problem – you may find plenty like it in every book of algebra. Given a boat drifting upon a ledge of rocks with the current and the tide; given a boat sailing in pursuit with a fair wind aft; given also the velocity of the current and the speed of the boat and the distance of the first boat from the rocks: at what distance must the second boat commence the race in order to catch up the first before it drives upon the rocks?

This second boat, paying close attention to the problem, came up hand over hand, rapidly overtaking the first boat, where the two men not only understood at last the danger they were in, but also that an attempt was being made to save them. In fact, one of them, who had some tincture or flavour of the mathematics left in him from his school days, remembered the problems of this class, and would have given a great deal to have been back again in school working out one of them.

Presently the boats were so near that Peter hailed, 'Boat ahoy! Back her! Back her! or you'll be upon the rocks. Back her all you know!'

'We've broken our oars,' they shouted.

'Keep her off!' Peter bawled again.

Even with a plank taken from the bottom of the boat a practised boatman would have been able to keep her off long enough to clear the rocks; but these two young men were not used to the ways of the sea.

'Put up your hellum,' said Peter, quietly.

'What are you going to do?' The girl obeyed first, as one must do at sea, and asked the question afterwards.

'There's only one chance. We must cut across her bows. Two lubbers! They ought not to be trusted with a boat. There's plenty of room.' He looked at the Ledge ahead and at his own sail. 'Now – steady.' He tightened the rope, the boat changed her course. Then Peter stood up and called again, his hand to his mouth, 'Back her! Back her! Back her all you know!' He sat down and said quietly, 'Now, then – luff it is – luff – all you can.'

The boat turned suddenly. It was high time. Right in front of them – only a few yards in front – the water rushed as if over a cascade, boiling and surging among the rocks. At high tide there would have been the calm, unruffled surface of the ocean swell; now there were roaring floods and swelling whirlpools. The girl looked round, but only for an instant. Then the boat crossed the bows of the other, and Armored, as they passed, caught the rope that was held out to her.

One moment more and they were off the rocks, in deep water, towing the other boat after them.

Then Peter arose, lowered the sail, and took down his mast.

'Nothing,' he said, 'between us and Mincarlo. Now, gentlemen, if you will step into this boat we can tow yours along with us. So – take care, sir! Sit in the stern beside the young lady. Can you row, either of you?'

They could both row, they said. In these days a man is as much ashamed of not being able to row as, fifty years ago, he was ashamed of not being able to ride. Peter took one oar and gave the other to the stranger nearest. Then, without more words, he dipped his oar and began to row back again. The sun went down, and it suddenly became cold.

Armored perceived that the man beside her was quite a young man – not more than one- or two-and-twenty. He wore brave attire – even a brown velvet jacket, a white waistcoat, and a crimson necktie; he also had a soft felt hat. Nature had not yet given him much beard, but what there was of it he wore pointed, with a light moustache so arranged as to show how it would be worn when it became of a respectable length. As he sat in the boat he seemed tall; and he did not look at all like one of the bawling and boastful trippers who sometimes come over to the islands for a night and pretend to know how to manage a boat. Yet —

'What do you mean,' asked the girl, severely, 'by going out in a boat, when you ought to have known very well that you could not manage her?'

'We thought we could,' replied this disconcerted pretender, with meekness suitable to the occasion. Indeed, under such humiliating circumstances, Captain Parolles himself would become meek.

'If we had not seen you,' she continued, 'you would most certainly have been killed.'

'I begin to think we might. We should certainly have gone on those rocks. But there is an island close by. We could swim.'

'If your boat had touched those rocks you would have been dead in three minutes,' this maid of wisdom continued. 'Nothing could have saved you. No boat could have come near you. And to think of standing or swimming in that current and among those rocks! Oh! but you don't know Scilly.'

'No,' he replied, still with a meekness that disarmed wrath, 'I'm afraid not.'

'Tell me how it happened.'

The other man struck in – he who was wielding the oar. He also was a young man, of shorter and more sturdy build than the other. Had he not, unfortunately, confined his whole attention in youth to football, he might have made a good boatman. Really, a young man whose appearance conveyed no information or suggestion at all about him except that he seemed healthy, active, and vigorous, and that he was presumably short-sighted, or he would not have worn spectacles.

'I will tell you how it came about,' he said. 'This man would go sketching the coast. I told him that the islands are so beautifully and benevolently built that every good bit has got another bit on the next island, or across a cove, or on the other side of a bay, put there on purpose for the finest view of the first bit. You only get that arrangement, you know, in the Isles of Scilly and the Isles of Greece. But he wouldn't be persuaded, and so we took a boat and went to sea, like the three merchants of Bristol city. We saw Jerusalem and Madagascar very well, and if you hadn't turned up in the nick of time I believe we should have seen the river Styx as well, with Cocytus very likely: good old Charon certainly: and Tantalus, too much punished – overdone – up to his neck.'

Armored heard, wondering what, in the name of goodness, this talker of strange language might mean.

'When his oar broke, you know,' the talker went on, 'I began to laugh, and so I caught a crab; and while I lay in the bottom laughing like Tom of Bedlam, my oar dropped overboard, and there we were. Five mortal hours we drifted; but we had tobacco and a flask, and we didn't mind so very much. Some boat, we thought, might pick us up.'

'Some boat!' echoed Armored. 'And outside Samson!'

'As for the rocks, we never thought about them. Had we known of the rocks, we should not have laughed –'

'You have saved our lives,' said the young man in the velvet jacket. He had a soft sweet voice, which trembled a little as he spoke. And, indeed, it is a solemn thing to be rescued from certain death.

'Peter did it,' Armored replied. 'You may thank Peter.'

'Let me thank you,' he said, softly and persuasively. 'The other man may thank Peter.'

'Just as you like. So long, that is, as you remember that it will have to be a lesson to you as long as you live never to go out in a boat without a man.'

'It shall be a lesson. I promise. And the man I go out with, next time, shall not be you, Dick.'

'Never,' she went on, enforcing the lesson, 'never go in a boat alone, unless you know the waters. Are you Plymouth trippers? But then Plymouth people generally know how to handle a boat.'

'We are from London.' In the twilight the blush caused by being taken for a Plymouth tripper was not perceived. 'I am an artist, and I came to sketch.' He said this with some slight emphasis and distinction. There must be no mistaking an artist from London for a Plymouth tripper.

'You must be hungry.'

'We are ravenous, but at this moment one can only feel that it is better to be hungry and alive than to be drowned and dead.'

'Oh!' she said, earnestly, 'you don't know how strong the water is. It would have thrown you down and rolled you over and over among the rocks, your head would have been knocked to pieces, your face would have been crushed out of shape, every bone would have been broken: Peter has seen them so.'

'Ay! ay!' said Peter. 'I've picked 'em up just so. You are well off those rocks, gentlemen.'

Silence fell upon them. The twilight was deepening, the breeze was chill. Armored felt that the young man beside her was shivering – perhaps with the cold. He looked across the dark water and gasped: 'We are coming up,' he said, 'out of the gates of death and the jaws of hell. Strange! to have been so near unto dying. Five minutes more, and there would have been an end, and two more men would have been created for no other purpose but to be drowned.'

Armored made no reply. The oars kept dipping, dipping, evenly and steadily. Across the waters on either hand flashed lights: St. Agnes and the Bishop from the south – they are white lights; and from the north the crimson splendour of Round Island: the wind was dropping, and there was a little phosphorescence on the water, which gleamed along the blade of the oar.

In half an hour the boat rounded the new pier, and they were in the harbour of Hugh Town at the foot of the landing steps.

'Now,' said Armored, 'you had better get home as fast as you can and have some supper.'

'Why,' cried the artist, realising the fact for the first time, 'you are bare-headed! You will kill yourself.'

'I am used to going about bare-headed. I shall come to no harm. Now go and get some food.'

'And you?' The young man stood on the stepping-stones ready to mount.

'We shall put up the sail and get back to Samson in twenty minutes. There is breeze enough for that.'

'Will you tell us,' said the artist, 'before you go – to whom we are indebted for our very lives?'

'My name is Armored.'

'May we call upon you? To-night we are too bewildered. We cannot say what we ought and must say.'

'I live on Samson. What is your name?'

'My name is Roland Lee. My friend here is called Dick Stephenson.'

'You can come if you wish. I shall be glad to see you,' she corrected herself, thinking she had been inhospitable and ungracious.

'Am I to ask for Miss Armored?'

She laughed merrily. 'You will find no one to ask, I am afraid. Nobody else, you see, lives on Samson. When you land, just turn to the left, walk over the hill, and you will find the house on the

other side. Samson is not so big that you can miss the house. Good-night, Roland Lee! Good-night, Dick Stephenson!

'She's only a child,' said the young man called Dick, as he climbed painfully and fearfully up the dark and narrow steps, slippery with sea-weed and not even protected by an inner bar. 'I suppose it doesn't much matter since she's only a child. But I merely desire to point out that it's always the way. If there does happen to be an adventure accompanied by a girl – most adventures bring along the girl: nobody cares, in fact, for an adventure without a girl in it – I'm put in the background and made to do the work while you sit down and talk to the girl. Don't tell me it was accidental. It was the accident of design. Hang it all! I'll turn painter myself.'

CHAPTER III

IN THE BAR PARLOUR

At nine o'clock the little bar parlour of Tregarthen's was nearly full. It is a very little room, low as well as little, therefore it is easily filled. And though it is the principal club-room of Hugh Town, where the better sort and the notables meet, it can easily accommodate them all. They do not, however, meet every evening, and they do not all come at once. There is a wooden settle along the wall, beautifully polished by constant use, which holds four: a smaller one beside the fire, where at a pinch two might sit; there is a seat in the window which also might hold two, but is only comfortable for one. A small round table only leaves room for one chair. This makes sitting accommodation for nine, and when all are present, and all nine are smoking tobacco like one, the atmosphere is convivially pungent. This evening there were only seven. They consisted of the two young men whose perils on the deep you have just witnessed; a Justice of the Peace – but his office is a sinecure, because on the Scilly Isles virtue reigns in every heart; a flower-farmer of the highest standing; two other gentlemen weighed down with the mercantile anxieties and interests of the place – they ought to have been in wigs and square brown coats, with silver buckles to their shoes; and one who held office and exercised authority.

The art of conversation cannot be successfully cultivated on a small island, on board ship, or in a small country town. Conversation requires a continual change of company, and a great variety of topics. Your great talker, when he inconsiderately remains too long among the same set, becomes a bore. After a little, unless he goes away, or dies, or becomes silent, they kill him, or lock him up in an asylum. At Tregarthen's he would be made to understand that either he or the rest of the population must leave the archipelago and go elsewhere. In some colonial circles they play whist, which is an excellent method, perhaps the best ever invented, for disguising the poverty or the absence of conversation. At Tregarthen's they do not feel this necessity – they are contented with their conversation; they are so happily contented that they do not repine even though they get no more than an observation dropped every ten minutes or so. They are not anxious to reply hurriedly; they are even contented to sit silently enjoying the proximity of each other – the thing, in fact, which lies at the root of all society. The evening is not felt to be dull, though there are no fireworks of wit and repartee. Indeed, if Douglas Jerrold himself were to appear with a bag full of the most sparkling epigrams and repartees, nobody would laugh, even when he was kicked out into the cold and unappreciative night – the stars have no sense of humour – as a punishment for impudence.

This evening the notables spoke occasionally; they spoke slowly – the Scillonians all talk slowly – they neither attempted nor looked for smartness. They did not tell stories, because all the stories are known, and they can now only be told to strangers. The two young men from London listened without taking any part in the talk: people who have just escaped – and that narrowly – a sharp and painful death by drowning and banging on jagged rocks are expected to be hushed for awhile. But they listened. And they became aware that the talk, in whatever direction it wandered, always came back to the sea. Everything in Scilly belongs to the sea: they may go up country, which is a journey of a mile and a half, or even two miles – and speak for a moment of the crops and the farms; but that leads to the question of import and export, and, therefore, to the vessels lying within the pier, and to the steam service to Penzance and to vessels in other ports, and, generally, to steam service about the world. And again, wherever two or three are gathered together in Scilly, one at least will be found to have ploughed the seas in distant parts. This confers a superiority on the society of the islands which cannot, even in these days, be denied or concealed. In the last century, when a man who was known to have crossed the Pacific entered a coffee-house, the company with one accord gazed upon him with envy and wonder. Even now, familiarity hath not quite bred contempt. We still look with unconcealed respect upon one who can tell of Tahiti and the New Hebrides, and has stood upon

the mysterious shores of Papua. And, at Tregarthen's this evening, these two strangers were young; they had not yet made the circuit of the round earth; they had had, as yet, not many opportunities of talking with travellers and sailors. Therefore, they listened, and were silent.

Presently, one after the other, the company got up and went out. There is no sitting late at night in Scilly. There were left of all only the Permanent Official.

'I hear, gentlemen,' he said, 'that you have had rather a nasty time this evening.'

'We should have been lost,' said the artist, 'but for a – young lady, who saw our danger and came out to us.'

'Armored. I saw her towing in your boat and landing you. Yes, it was a mighty lucky job that she saw you in time. There's a girl! Not yet sixteen years old! Yet I'd rather trust myself with her in a boat, especially if she had the boy Peter with her, than any boatman of the islands. And there's not a rock or an islet, not a bay or a headland in this country of bays and capes and rocks, that she does not know. She could find her way blindfold by the feel of the wind and the force of the current. But it's in her blood. Father to son – father to son and daughter too – the Roseveans are born boatmen.'

'She saved our lives,' repeated the artist. 'That is all we know of her. It is a good deal to know, perhaps, from our own point of view.'

'She belongs to Samson. They've always lived on Samson. Once there were Roseveans, Tryeths, Jenkinsses, and Woodcocks on Samson. Now, they are nearly all gone – only one family of Rosevean left, and one of Tryeth.'

'She said that nobody else lived there.'

'Well, it is only her own family. They've started a flower-farm lately on Holy Hill, and I hear it's doing pretty well. It's a likely situation, too, facing south-west and well sheltered. You should go and see the flower-farm. Armored will be glad to show you the farm, and the island too. Samson has got a good many curious things – more curious, perhaps, than she knows, poor child!'

He paused for a moment, and then continued: 'There's nobody on the island now but themselves. There's the old woman, first – you should see her too. She's a curiosity by herself – Ursula Rosevean – she was a Traverse, and came from Bryher to be married. She married Methusalem Rosevean, Armored's great-great-grandfather – that was nigh upon eighty years ago; she's close upon a hundred now; and she's been a widow since – when was it? – I believe she'd only been a wife for twelve months or so. He was drowned on a smuggling run – his brother Emanuel, too. Widow used to look for him from the hill-top every night for a year and more afterwards. A wonderful old woman! Go and look at her. Perhaps she will talk to you. Sometimes, when Armored plays the fiddle, she will brighten up and talk for an hour. She knows how to cure all diseases, and she can foretell the future. But she's too old now, and mostly she's asleep. Then there's Justinian Tryeth and Dorcas, his wife – they're over seventy, both of them, if they're a day. Dorcas was a St. Agnes girl – that's the reason why her name was Hicks: if she'd come from Bryher she'd have been a Traverse; if from Tresco she'd have been a Jenkins. But she was a Hicks. She's as old as her husband, I should say. As for the boy, Peter –'

'She called him the boy, I remember. But he seemed to me –'

'He's fifty, but he's always been the boy. He never married, because there was nobody left on Samson for him to marry, and he's always been too busy on the farm to come over here after a wife. And he looks more than fifty, because once he fell off the pier, head first, into the stern of a boat, and after he'd been unconscious for three days, all his hair fell off except a few stragglers, and they'd turned white. Looks most as old as his father. Chessun's near fifty-two.'

'Who is Chessun?'

'She's the girl. She's always been the girl. She's never married, just like Peter her brother, because there was no one left on Samson for her. And she never leaves the island except once or twice a year, when she goes to the afternoon service at Bryher. Well, gentlemen, that's all the people left on Samson. There used to be more – a great many more – quite a population, and if all stories are true, they were a lively lot. You'll see their cottages standing in ruins. As for getting drowned, you'd hardly

believe! Why, take Armored alone. Her father, Emanuel – he'd be about fifty-seven now – he was drowned – twelve years ago it must be now – with his wife and his three boys, Emanuel, John, and Andrew, crossing over from a wedding at St. Agnes. He married Rovená Wetherel, from St. Mary's. Then there was her grandfather, he was a pilot – but they were all pilots – and he was cast away taking an East Indiaman up the Channel, cast away on Chesil Bank in a fog – that was in the year 1845 – and all hands lost. His father – no, no, that was his uncle – all in the line were drowned; that one's uncle died in his bed unexpectedly – you can see the bed still – but they do say, just before some officers came over about a little bit of business connected with French brandy. One of the Roseveans went away, and became a purser in the Royal Navy. Those were the days for pursers! Their accounts were never audited, and when they'd squared the captain and paid him the wages and allowances for the dummies and the dead men, they had left as much – ay, as a couple of thousand a year. After this he left the Navy and purveyed for the Fleet, and became so rich that they had to make him a knight.'

'Was there much smuggling here in the old days?'

'Look here, sir; a Scillonian in the old days called himself a pilot, a fisherman, a shopkeeper, or a farmer, just as he pleased. That was his pleasant way. But he was always – mind you – a smuggler. Armored's great-great-great-grandfather, father of the old lady's husband – him who was never heard of afterwards, but was supposed to have been cast away off the French coast – he was known to have made great sums of money. Never was anyone on the islands in such a big way. Lots of money came to the islands from smuggling. They say that the St. Martin's people have kept theirs, and have got it invested; but, for all the rest, it's gone. And they were wreckers too. Many and many a good ship before the islands were lit up have struck on the rocks and gone to pieces. What do you think became of the cargoes? Where were the Scilly boats when the craft was breaking up? And did you never hear of the ship's lantern tied to the horns of a cow? They've got one on Samson could tell a tale or two; and they've still got a figure-head there which ought to have haunted old Emanuel Rosevean when his boat capsized off the coast of France.'

'An interesting family history.'

'Yes. Until the Preventive Service put an end to the trade, the Roseveans were the most successful and the most daring smugglers in the islands. But an unlucky family. All these drownings make people talk. Old wives' talk, I dare say. But for something one of them did – wrecking a ship, robbing the dead, who knows – they say the bad luck will go on till something is done – I know not what.'

He got up and put on his cap, the blue-cloth cap with a cloth peak, much affected in Scilly, because the wind blows off any other form of hat ever invented.

'It is ten o'clock – I must go. Did you ever hear the story, gentlemen, of the Scillonian sailor?' He sat down again. 'I believe it must have been one of the Roseveans. He was on board a West Indiaman, homeward bound, and the skipper got into a fog and lost his reckoning. Then he asked this man if he knew the Scilly Isles. "Better nor any book," says the sailor. "Then," says the skipper, "take the wheel." In an hour crash went the ship upon the rocks. "Damn your eyes!" says the skipper, "you said you knew the Scilly Isles." "So I do," says the man; "this is one of 'em." The ship went to pieces, and near all the hands were lost. But the people of the islands had a fine time with the flotsam and the jetsam for a good many days afterwards.'

'I believe,' said the young man – he who answered to the name of Dick – 'that this patriot is buried in the old churchyard. I saw an inscription to-day which probably marks his tomb. Under the name is written the words "Dulce et decor" – but the rest is obliterated.'

'Very likely – they would bury him in the old churchyard. Good-night, gentlemen!'

'Roland!' The young man called Dick jumped from the settle. 'Roland! Pinch me – shake me – stick a knife into me – but not too far – I feel as if I was going off my head. The fair Armored's father was a corsair, who was drowned on his way from the coast of France, with his grandfather and his great-grandfather and great-grand-uncles, after having been cast away upon the Chesil Bank, and

never heard of again, though he was wanted on account of a keg of French brandy picked up in the Channel. He made an immense pile of money, which has been lost; and there's an old lady at the farm so old – so old – so very, very old – it takes your breath away only to think of it – that she married Methusalem. Her husband was drowned – a new light, this, on history – and of course she escaped on the Ark – as a stowaway or a cabin passenger. Armored plays the fiddle and makes the old lady jump.'

'We'll go over there to-morrow.'

'We will. It is a Land of Enchantment, this outlying bit of Lyonesse. Meanwhile, just to clear my brain, I think I must have a whisky. The weakness of humanity demands it.'

Oh! 'twas in Tregarthen's bar,
Where the pipes and whiskies are —

'They are an unlucky family,' he went on, 'because they "did something." Remark, Roland, that here is the very element of romance. My ancestors have "done something" too. I am sure they have, because my grandfather kept a shop, and you can't keep a shop without "doing something." But Fate never persecuted my father, the dean, and I am not in much anxiety that I too shall be shadowed on account of the old man. Yet look at Armored Rosevean! There's distinction, mind you, in being selected by Fate for vicarious punishment. The old corsair wrecked a ship and robbed the bodies: therefore, all his descendants have got to be drowned. Dear me! If we were all to be drowned because our people had once "done something," the hungry, insatiate sea would be choked, and the world would come to an end. A Scotch whisky, Rebecca, if you please, and a seltzer! To-morrow, Roland, we will once more cross the raging main, but under protection. If you break an oar again, you shall be put overboard. We will visit this fair child of Samson. Child of Samson! The Child of Samson! Was Delilah her mother, or is she the grand daughter of the Timnite? Has she inherited the virtues of her father as well as his strength? Were the latter days of Delilah sanctified and purified? Happily, she is only as yet a child – only a child, Roland' – he emphasised the words – 'although a child of Samson.'

In the night a vision came to Roland Lee. He saw Armored once more sailing to his rescue. And in his vision he was seized with a mighty terror and a shaking of the limbs, and his heart sank and his cheek blanched; and he cried aloud, as he sank beneath the cold waters: 'Oh, Armored, you have come too late! Armored, you cannot save me now.'

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN TORQUE

The morning was bright, the sky blue, the breeze fresh – so fresh that even in the Road the sea broke over the bows and the boat ran almost gunwale under. This time the two lands-men were not unprotected: they were in charge of two boatmen. Humiliating, perhaps; but your true courage consisteth not in vain boasting and arrogant pretence, and he is safest who doth not ignorantly presume to manage a boat. Therefore, boatmen twain now guided the light bark and held the ropes.

'Dick,' said Roland, presently, looking ahead, 'I see her. There she is – upon the hillside among the brown fern. I can see her, with her blue dress.'

Dick looked, and shook his short-sighted head.

'I only see Samson,' he said. 'He groweth bigger as we approach. That is not uncommon with islands. I perceive that he hath two hills, one on the north and the other on the south; he showeth – perhaps with pride – a narrow plain in the middle. The hills appear to be strewn with boulders, and there are carns, and perhaps Logan stones. There is always a Logan stone, but you can never find it. There are also, I perceive, ruins. Samson looks quite a large island when you come near to it. Life on Samson must be curiously peaceful. No post-office, no telegrams, no telephones, no tennis, no shops, no papers, no people – good heavens! For a whole month one would enjoy Samson.'

'Don't you see her?' repeated Roland. 'She is coming down the hillside.'

'I dare say I do see her if I knew it; but I cannot at this distance, even with assisted eyes –'

'Oh! a blue dress – blue – against the brown and yellow of the fern. Can you not –?'

Dick gazed with the slow, uncertain eyes of short sight, and adjusted his glasses.

'My pal,' he said, 'to please you I would pretend to see anything. In fact, I always do: it saves trouble. I see her plainly – blue dress, you say – certainly – sitting on a rock –'

'Nonsense! She is walking down the hill. You don't see her at all.'

'Quite so. Coming down the hill,' Dick replied, unmoved.

'She has been in my mind all night. I have been thinking all kinds of things – impossible things – about this nymph. She is not in the least common, to begin with. She is –'

'She is only a child, Roland. Don't –'

'A child? Why shouldn't she be a child? I suppose I may admire a beautiful child? Do you insinuate that I am going to make love to her?'

'Well, old man, you mostly do.'

'It was not so dark last night but one could see that she is a very beautiful girl. She looks eighteen, but our friend last night assured us that she is not yet sixteen. A very beautiful girl she is: features regular, and a head that ought to be modelled. She is dark, like a Spaniard.'

'Gipsy, probably. Name of Stanley or Smith – Pharaoh Stanley was, most likely, her papa.'

'Gipsy yourself! Who ever heard of a gipsy on Scilly? You might as well look for an organ-grinder! Spanish blood, I swear! Castilian of the deepest blue. Then her eyes! You didn't observe her eyes?'

'I was too hungry. Besides, as usual, I was doing all the work.'

'They are black eyes –'

'The Romany have black eyes – roving eyes – hard, bold, bad, black eyes.'

'Soft black – not hard black. The dark velvet eyes which hold the light. Dick, I should like to paint those eyes. She is now looking at our boat. I can see her lifting her hand to shade her eyes. I should like to paint those eyes just at the moment when she gives away her heart.'

'You cannot, Childe Roland, because there could only be one other person present on that interesting occasion. And that person must not be you.'

'Dick, too often you are little better than an ass.'

'If you painted those eyes when she was giving away her heart it might lead to another and a later picture when she was giving away her temper. Eyes which hold the light also hold the fire. You might be killed with lightning, or, at least, blinded with excess of light. Take care!'

'Better be blinded with excess of light than pass by insensible. Some men are worse than the fellow with the muck-rake. He was only insensible to a golden crown; they are insensible to Venus. Without loveliness, where is love? Without love, what is life?'

'Yet,' said Dick, drily, 'most of us have got to shape our lives for ourselves before we can afford to think of Venus.'

It will be understood that these two young men represented two large classes of humanity. One would not go so far as to say that mankind may be divided into those two classes only: but, undoubtedly, they are always with us. First, the young man who walketh humbly, doing his appointed task with honesty, and taking with gratitude any good thing that is bestowed upon him by Fate. Next, the young man who believes that the whole round world and all that therein is are created for his own special pleasure and enjoyment; that for him the lovely girls attire themselves, and for his pleasure go forth to dance and ball; for him the actress plays her best; for him the feasts are spread, the corks are popped, the fruits are ripened, the suns shine. To the former class belonged Dick Stephenson: to the latter, Roland Lee. Indeed, the artistic temperament not uncommonly enlists a young man in the latter class.

'Look!' cried the artist. 'She sees us. She is coming down the hill. Even you can see her now. Oh! the light, elastic step! Nothing in the world more beautiful than the light, elastic step of a girl. Somehow, I don't remember it in pictures. Perhaps – some day – I may – ' He began to talk in unconnected jerks. 'As for the Greek maiden by the sea-shore playing at ball and showing bony shoulders, and all that – I don't like it. Only very young girls should play at ball and jump about – not women grown and formed. They may walk or spring as much as they like, but they must not jump, and they must not run. They must not laugh loud. Violent emotions are masculine. Figure and dress alike make violence ungraceful: that is why I don't like to see women jump about. If they knew how it uglifies most of them! Armored is only a child – yes – but how graceful, how complete she is in her movements!'

She was now visible, even to a short-sighted man, tripping lightly through the fern on the slope of the hill. As she ran, she tossed her arms to balance herself from boulder to boulder. She was singing, too, but those in the boat could not hear her; and before the keel touched the sand she was silent.

She stood waiting for them on the beach, her old dog Jack beside her, a smile of welcome in her eyes, and the sunlight on her cheeks. Hebe herself – who remained always fifteen from prehistoric times until the melancholy catastrophe of the fourth century, when, with the other Olympians, she was snuffed out – was not sweeter, more dainty, or stronger, or more vigorous of aspect.

'I thought you would come across this morning,' she said. 'I went to the top of the hill and looked out, and presently I saw your boat. You have not ventured out alone again, I see. Good-morning, Roland Lee! Good-morning, Dick Stephenson!'

She called them thus by their Christian names, not with familiarity, but quite naturally, and because when she went into the world – that is to say, to Bryher Church – on Sunday afternoon, each called unto each by his Christian name. And to each she gave her hand with a smile of welcome. But it seemed to Dick, who was observant rather than jealous, that his companion appropriated to himself and absorbed both smiles.

'Shall I show you Samson? Have you seen the islands yet?'

No; they had only arrived two days before, and were going back the next day.

'Many do that,' said the girl. 'They stay here a day or two: they go across to Tresco and see the gardens: then perhaps they walk over Sallakey Down, and they see Peninnis and Porthellick and the old church, and they think they have seen the islands. You will know nothing whatever about Scilly if you go to-morrow.'

'Why should we go to-morrow?' asked the artist. 'Tell me, that, Dick.'

'I, because my time is up, and Somerset House once more expects me. You, my friend,' Dick replied, with meaning, 'because you have got your work to do and you must not fool around any longer.'

Roland Lee laughed. 'We came first of all,' he said, turning to Armored, 'in order to thank you for –'

'Oh! you thanked me last night. Besides it was Peter –'

'No, no. I refuse to believe in Peter.'

'Well, do not let us say any more about it. Come with me.'

The landing-place of Samson is a flat beach, covered with a fine white sand and strewn with little shells – yellow and grey, green and blue. Behind the beach is a low bank on which grow the sea-holly, the sea-lavender, the horned poppy, and the spurge, and behind the bank stretches a small plain, low and sandy, raised above the high tide by no more than a foot or two. Armored led the way across this plain to the foot of the northern hill. It is a rough and rugged hill, wild and uncultivated. The slope facing the south is covered with gorse and fern, the latter brown and yellow in September. Among the fern at this season stood the tall dead stalks of foxglove. Here and there were patches of short turf set about with the withered flowers of the sea-pink, and the long branches of the bramble lay trailing over the ground. The hand of some prehistoric giant has sprinkled the slopes of this hill with boulders of granite: they are piled above each other so as to make carns, headlands, and capes with strange resemblances and odd surprises. Upon the top they found a small plateau sloping gently to the north.

'See!' said Armored. 'This is the finest thing we have to show on Samson, or on any of the islands. This is the burial-place of the kings. Here are their tombs.'

'What kings?' asked Dick, looking about him. 'Where are the tombs?'

'The kings,' Roland repeated; 'there can be no other kings. These are their tombs. Do not interrupt.'

'The ancient kings,' Armored replied, with historic precision. 'These mounds are their tombs. See – one – two – half a dozen of them are here. Only kings had barrows raised over them. Did you expect graves and headstones, Dick Stephenson?'

'Oh, these are barrows, are they?' he replied, in some confusion. A man of the world does not expect to be caught in ignorance by the solitary inhabitant of a desert island.

'A long time ago,' Armored went on, 'these islands formed part of the mainland. Bryher and Tresco, St. Helen's, Tean, St. Martin's and St. Mary's, were all joined together, and the road was only a creek of the sea. Then the sea washed away all the land between Scilly and the Land's End. They used to call the place Lyonesse. The kings of Lyonesse were buried on Samson. Their kingdom is gone, but their graves remain. It is said that their ghosts have been seen. Dorcas saw them once.'

'I should like to see them very much,' said Roland.

'If you were here at night, we could go out and look for them. I have been here often after dark looking for them.'

'What did you see?'

She answered like unto the bold Sir Bedivere – who, perhaps, was standing on that occasion not far from this hill-top.

'I saw the moonlight on the rocks, and I heard the beating of the waves.'

Quoth Dick: 'The spook of a king of Lyonesse would be indeed worth coming out to see.'

Armored led the way to a barrow, the top of which showed signs of the spade.

'See!' she said. 'Here is one that has been opened. It was a long time ago.'

There were the four slabs of stone still in position which formed the sides of the grave, and the slab which had been its cover lying close beside.

Armored looked into the grave. 'They found,' she whispered, 'the bones of the king lying on the stone. But when someone touched them they turned to dust. There is the dust at your feet in the

grave. The wind cannot bear it away. It may blow the sand and earth into it, but the dust remains. The rain can turn it into mud, but it cannot melt it. This is the dust of a king.'

The young men stood beside her silent, awed a little, partly by the serious look in the girl's face, and partly because, though it now lay open to the wind and rain, it was really a grave. One must not laugh beside the grave of a man. The wind lifted Armored's long locks and blew them off her white forehead: her eyes were sad and even solemn. Even the short-sighted Dick saw that his friend was right: they were soft black eyes, not of the gipsy kind; and he repented him of a hasty inference. To the artist it seemed as if here was a princess of Lyonesse mourning over the grave of her buried king and – what? – father – brother – cousin – lover? Everything, in his imagination, vanished – except that one figure: even her clothes were changed for the raiment – say the court mourning – of that vanished realm. And also, like Sir Bedivere, he heard nothing but the wild water lapping on the crag.

And here followed a thing so strange that the historian hesitates about putting it down.

Let us remember that it is thirty years, or thereabouts, since this barrow was laid open; that we may suppose those who opened it to have had eyes in their heads; that it has been lying open ever since; and that every visitor – to be sure there are not many – who lands on Samson is bound to climb this hill and visit this open barrow with its perfect kistvaen. These things borne in mind, it will seem indeed wonderful that anything in the grave should have escaped discovery.

Roland Lee, leaning over, began idly to poke about the mould and dust of the grave with his stick. He was thinking of the girl and of the romance with which his imagination had already clothed this lonely spot; he was also thinking of a picture which might be made of her; he was wondering what excuse he could make for staying another week at Tregarthen's – when he was startled by striking his stick against metal. He knelt down and felt about with his hands. Then he found something and drew it out, and arose with the triumph that belongs to an archæologist who picks up an ancient thing – say, a rose noble in a newly ploughed field. The thing which he found was a hoop or ring. It was covered and encrusted with mould; he rubbed this off with his fingers. Lo! it was of gold: a hoop of gold as thick as a lady's little finger, twisted spirally, bent into the form of a circle, the two ends not joined, but turned back. Pure gold: yellow, soft gold.

'I believe,' he said, gasping, 'that this must be – it *is* – a torque. I think I have seen something like it in museums. And I've read of them. It was your king's necklace: it was buried with him: it lay around the skeleton neck all these thousand years. Take it, Miss Armored. It is yours.'

'No! no! Let me look at it. Let me have it in my hands. It is yours' – in ignorance of ancient law and the rights of the lord proprietor – 'it is yours because you found it.'

'Then I will give it to you, because you are the Princess of the Island.'

She took it with a blush and placed it round her own neck, bending open the ends and closing them again. It lay there – the red, red gold – as if it belonged to her and had been made for her.

'The buried king is your ancestor,' said Roland. 'It is his legacy to his descendant. Wear the king's necklace.'

'My luck, as usual,' grumbled Dick, aside. 'Why couldn't I find a torque and say pretty things?'

'Come,' said Armored, 'we have seen the barrows. There are others scattered about – but this is the best place for them. Now I will show you the island.'

The hill slopes gently northward till it reaches a headland or carn of granite boldly projecting. Here it breaks away sharply to the sea. Armored climbed lightly up the carn and stood upon the highest boulder, a pretty figure against the sky. The young men followed and stood below her.

At their feet the waves broke in white foam (in the calmest weather the Atlantic surge rolling over the rocks is broken into foam), a broad sound or channel lay between Samson and the adjacent island: in the channel half a dozen rocks and islets showed black and threatening.

'The island across the channel,' said Armored, 'is Bryher. This is Bryher Hill, because it faces Bryher Island. Yonder, on Bryher is Samson Hill, because it faces Samson Island. Bryher is a large place. There are houses and farms on Bryher, and a church where they have service every Sunday

afternoon. If you were here on Sunday, you could go in our boat with Peter, Chessun, and me. Justinian and Dorcas mostly stay at home now, because they are old.'

'Can anybody stay on the island, then?' asked Roland, quickly.

'Once the doctor came for Justinian's rheumatism, and bad weather began and he had to stay a week.'

'His other patients meanly took advantage and got well, I suppose,' said Dick.

'I hope so,' Armored replied simply.

She turned and looked to the north-east, where lie the eastern islands, the group between St. Martin's and St. Mary's, a miniature in little of the greater group. From this point they looked to the eye of ignorance like one island. Armored distinguished them. There were Great and Little Arthur; Ganilly, with his two hills, like Samson; the Ganninicks and Meneweather, Ragged Island, and Inisvouls.

'They are not inhabited,' said the girl, pointing to them one by one; 'but it is pleasant to row about among them in fine weather. In the old time, when they made kelp, people would go and live there for weeks together. But they are not cultivated.'

Then she turned northwards, and showed them the long island of St. Martin's, with its white houses, its church, its gentle hills, and its white and red daymark on the highest point. Half of St. Martin's was hidden by Tresco, and more than half of Tresco by Bryher. Over the downs of Tresco rose the dome of Round Island, crowned with its white lighthouse. And over Bryher, out at sea, showed the rent and jagged crest of the great rock Menovawr.

'You should land on Tresco,' said Armored. 'There is the church to see. Oh! it is a most beautiful church. They say that in Cornwall itself there is hardly any church so fine as Tresco Church. And then there are the gardens and the lake. Everybody goes to see the gardens, but they do not walk over the down to Cromwell's Castle. Yet there is nothing in the islands like Cromwell's Castle, standing on the Sound, with Shipman's Head beyond. And you must go out beyond Tresco, to the islands which we cannot see here – Tean and St. Helen's, and the rest.'

Then she turned westward. Lying scattered among the bright waters, whitened by the breeze, there lay before their eyes – dots and specks upon the biggest maps, but here great massive rocks and rugged islets piled with granite, surrounded by ledges and reefs, cut and carved by winds and flying foam into ragged edges, bold peaks, and defiant cliffs – places where all the year round the seals play and the sea-gulls scream, and, in spring, the puffins lay their eggs, with the oyster-catchers and the sherewaters, the shags and the hern. Over all shone the golden sun of September, and round them all the water leaped and sparkled in the light.

'Those are the Outer Islands.' The girl pointed them out, her eyes brightening. 'It is among the Outer Islands that I like best to sail. Look! that great rock with the ledge at foot is Castle Bryher; that noble rock beyond is Maiden Bower; the rock farthest out is Scilly. If you were going to stay, we would sail round Scilly and watch the waves always tearing at his sides. You cannot see from here, but he is divided by a narrow channel; the water always rushes through this channel roaring and tearing. But once we found it calm – and we got through; only Peter would never try again. If you were going to stay – sometimes in September it is very still –'

'I did not know,' said Roland, 'that there was anything near England so wonderful and so lovely.'

'You cannot see the islands in one morning. You cannot see half of them from this hill. You like them more and more as you stay longer, and see them every day with a different light and a different sea.'

'You know them all, I suppose?' Roland asked.

'Oh! every one. If you had sailed among them so often, you would know them too. There are hundreds, and every one has got its name. I think I have stood on all, though there are some on which no one can land, even at low tide and in the calmest weather. And no one knows what beautiful bays and beaches and headlands there are hidden away and never seen by anyone. If you could stay, I would

show them to you. But since you cannot – ' She sighed. 'Well, you have not even seen the whole of Samson yet – and that is only one of all the rest.'

She leaped lightly from the rocks, and led them southward.

'See!' she said. 'On this hill there are ten great barrows at least, every one the tomb of a king – a king of Lyonesse. And on the sides of the hill – they kept the top for the kings – there are smaller barrows, I suppose of the princes and princesses. I told you that the island was a royal burying-ground. At the foot of the hill – you can see them – are some walls which they say are the ruins of a church; but I suppose that in those days they had no church.'

They left these venerable tombs behind them and descended the hill. At its foot, between the two hills, there lies a pretty little bay, circular and fringed with a beach of white sand. If one wanted a port for Samson, here is the spot, looking straight across the Atlantic, with Mincarlo lying like a lion couchant on the water a mile out.

'This is Porth Bay,' said their guide. 'Out there at the end is Shark Point. There are sharks sometimes, I believe: but I have never seen them. Now we are going up the southern hill.'

It began with a gentle ascent. There were signs of former cultivation; stone walls remained, enclosing spaces which once were fields – nothing in them now but fern and gorse and bramble and wild flowers. Half-way up there stood a ruined cottage. The walls were standing, but the roof was gone and all the woodwork. The garden-wall remained, but the little garden was overrun with fern.

'This was my great-great-grandmother's cottage,' said Armored. 'It was built by her husband. They lived in it for twelve months after they were married. Then he was drowned, and she came to live at the farm. See!' – she showed them in a corner of the garden a little wizened apple-tree, crouching under the stone wall out of the reach of the north wind – 'she planted this tree on her wedding-day. It is too old now to bear fruit; but she is still living, and her husband has been dead for seventy-five years. I often come to look at the place, and to wonder how it looked when it was first inhabited. There were flowers, I suppose, in the garden, when she was young and happy.'

'There are more ruins,' said Roland.

'Yes, there are other ruins. When all the people except ourselves went away, these cottages were deserted, and so they fell into decay. They used to live by smuggling and wrecking, you see, and when they could no longer do either, they had to go away or starve.'

They stood upon the highest point of Holy Hill, some twenty feet above the summit of the northern hill, and looked out upon the Southern Islands.

'There!' said Armored, with a flush of pride, because the view here is so different and yet so lovely.

'Here you can see the South Islands. Look! there is Minalto, which you drifted past yesterday: those are the ledges of White Island, where you were nearly cast away and lost: there is Annet, where the sea-birds lay their eggs – oh! thousands and thousands of puffins, though now there are not any: you should see them in the spring. That is St. Agnes – a beautiful island. I should like to show you Camberdizl and St. Warna's Cove. And there are the Dogs of Scilly beyond – they look to be black spots from here. You should see them close: then you would understand how big they are and how terrible. There are Gorregan and Daisy, Rosevean and Rosevear, Crebawethan and Pednathias; and there – where you see a little circle of white – that is Retarrier Ledge. Not long ago there was a great ship coming slowly up the Channel in bad weather: she was filled with Germans from New York going home to spend the money they had saved in America: most of them had their money with them tied up in bags. Suddenly, the ship struck on Retarrier. It was ten o'clock in the evening and a great sea running. For two hours the ship kept bumping on the rocks: then she began to break up, and they were all drowned – all the women and all the children, and most of the men. Some of them had life-belts on, but they did not know how to tie them, and so the things only slipped down over their legs and helped to drown them. The money was found on them. In the old days the people of the islands would have had it all; but the coastguard took care of it. There, on the right of Retarrier, is

the Bishop's Rock and lighthouse. In storms, the lighthouse rocks like a tree in the wind. You ought to sail over to those rocks, if it was only to see the surf dashing up their sides. But, since you cannot stay – ' Again she sighed.

'These are very interesting islands,' said Dick. 'Especially is it interesting to consider the consequences of being a native.'

'I should like to stay and sail among them,' said Roland.

'For instance' – Dick pursued his line of thought – 'in the study of geography. We who are from the inland parts of Great Britain must begin by learning the elements, the definitions, the terminology. Now to a Scilly boy –'

'A Scillonian,' the girl corrected him. 'We never speak of Scilly folk.'

'Naturally. To a Scillonian no explanation is needed. He knows, without being told, the meaning of peninsula, island, bay, shore, archipelago, current, tide, cape, headland, ocean, lake, road, harbour, reef, lighthouse, beacon, buoy, sounding – everything. He must know also what is meant by a gale of wind, a stiff breeze, a dead calm. He recognises, by the look of it, a lively sea, a chopping sea, a heavy sea, a roaring sea, a sulky sea. He knows everything except a river. That, I suppose, requires very careful explanation. It was a Scilly youth – I mean a Scillonian – who sat down on the river bank to wait for the water to go by. The history seems to prove the commercial intercourse which in remote antiquity took place between Phœnicia and the Cassiterides or Scilly Islands.'

Armored looked puzzled. 'I did not know that story of a Scillonian and a river,' she said, coldly.

'Never mind his stories,' said Roland. 'This place is a story in itself: you are a story: we are all in fairyland.'

'No' – she shook her head. 'Bryher is the only island in all Scilly which has any fairies. They call them pixies there. I do not think that fairies would ever like to come and live on Samson: because of the graves, you know.'

She led them down the hill along a path worn by her own feet alone, and brought them out to the level space occupied by the farm-buildings.

'This is where we live,' she said. 'If you could stay here, Roland Lee, we could give you a room. We have many empty rooms' – she sighed – 'since my father and mother and my brothers were all drowned. Will you come in?'

She took them into the 'best parlour,' a room which struck a sudden chill to anyone who entered therein. It was the room reserved for days of ceremony – for a wedding, a christening, or a funeral. Between these events the room was never used. The furniture presented the aspect common to 'best parlours,' being formal and awkward. In one corner stood a bookcase with glass doors, filled with books. Armored showed them into this apartment, drew up the blind, opened the window – there was certainly a stuffiness in the air – and looked about the room with evident pride. Few best parlours, she thought, in the adjacent islands of St. Mary's, Bryher, Tresco, or even Great Britain itself, could beat this.

She left them for a few minutes, and came back bearing a tray on which were a plate of apples, another of biscuits, and a decanter full of a very black liquid. Hospitality has its rules even on Samson, whither come so few visitors.

'Will you taste our Scilly apples?' she said. 'These are from our own orchard, behind the house. You will find them very sweet.'

Roland took one – as a general rule, this young man would rather take a dose of medicine than an apple – and munched it with avidity. 'A delicious fruit!' he cried. But his friend refused the proffered gift.

'Then you will take a biscuit, Dick Stephenson? Nothing? At least, a glass of wine?'

'Never in the morning, thank you.'

'You will, Roland Lee?' She turned, with a look of disappointment, to the other man, who was so easily pleased and who said such beautiful things. 'It is my own wine – I made it myself last year, of ripe blackberries.'

'Indeed I will! Your own wine? Your own making, Miss Armored? Wine of Samson – the glorious vintage of the blackberry! In pies and in jam-pots I know the blackberry, but not, as yet, in decanters. Thank you, thank you!'

He smiled heroically while he held the glass to the light, smelt it, rolled it gently round. Then he tasted it. 'Sweet,' he said, critically. 'And strong. Clings to the palate. A liqueur wine – a curious wine.' He drank it up, and smiled again. 'Your own making! It is wonderful! No – not another drop, thank you!'

'Shall I show you?' – the girl asked, timidly – 'would you like to see my great-great-grandmother? She is so very old that the people come all the way from St. Agnes only just to look at her. Sometimes she answers questions for them, and they think it is telling their fortunes. She is asleep. But you may talk aloud. You will not awaken her. She is so very, very old, you know. Consider: she has been a widow nearly eighty years.'

She led them into the other room, where, in effect, the ancient dame sat in her hooded chair fast asleep, in cap and bonnet, her hands, in black mittens, crossed.

'Heavens!' Roland murmured. 'What a face! I must draw that face! And' – he looked at the girl bending over the chair placing a pillow in position – 'and that other. It is wonderful!' he said aloud. 'This is, indeed, the face of one who has lived a hundred years. Does she sometimes wake up and talk?'

'In the evening she recovers her memory for awhile and talks – sometimes quite nicely, sometimes she rambles.'

'And you have a spinning-wheel in the corner.'

'She likes someone to work at the spinning-wheel while she talks. Then she thinks it is the old time back again.'

'And there is a violin.'

'I play it in the evening. It keeps her awake, and helps her to remember. Justinian taught me. He used to play very well indeed until his fingers grew stiff. I can play a great many tunes, but it is difficult to learn any new ones. Last summer there were some ladies at Tregarthen's – one of them had a most beautiful voice, and she used to sing in the evening with the window open. I used to sail across on purpose to land and listen outside. And I learned a very pretty tune. I would play it to you in the evening if you were not going away.'

'I am not obliged to go away,' the young man said, with strangely flushing cheeks.

'Roland!' That was Dick's voice – but it was unheeded.

'Will you stay here, then?' the girl asked.

'Here in this house? In your house?'

'You can have my brother Emanuel's room. I shall be very glad if you will stay. And I will show you everything.' She did not invite the young man called Dick, but this other, the young man who drank her wine and ate her apple.

'If your – your – your guardian – or your great-great-grandmother approves.'

'Oh! she will approve. Stay, Roland Lee. We will make you very happy here. And you don't know what a lot there is to see.'

'Roland!' Again Dick's warning voice.

'A thousand thanks!' he said. 'I will stay.'

CHAPTER V

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

The striking of seven by the most sonorous and musical of clocks ever heard reminded Roland of the dinner-hour. At seven most of us are preparing for this function, which civilisation has converted almost into an act of praise and worship. Some men, he remembered, were now walking in the direction of the club: some were dressing: some were making for restaurants: some had already begun. One naturally associates seven o'clock with the anticipation of dinner. There are men, it is true, who habitually take in food at midday and call it dinner: there are also those who have no dinner at all. He began to realise that he was not, this evening, going to have any dinner at all. For he was now at the farmhouse, sitting in the square window with Armored: he had gone back to Tregarthen's and returned with his portmanteau and his painting gear: fortunately he had also taken an abundant lunch at that establishment. He had become an inhabitant of Samson. The increased population, therefore, now consisted of seven souls.

In fact, there was no dinner for him. Everybody in Samson dines at half-past twelve: he had tea with Armored at half-past four: after tea they wandered along the shore and stood upon Shark Point to see the sun set behind Mincarlo, an operation performed with zeal and despatch, and with great breadth and largeness of colouring. When the shades of evening began to prevail they were fain to get home quickly, because there is no path among the boulders, nor have former inhabitants provided hand-rails for visitors on the carns. Therefore they retraced their steps to the farm, and Armored left him sitting alone in the square window while she went about some household duties. In the quiet room the solemn clock told the moments, and there was light enough left to discern the ghostly figure of the ancient dame sleeping in her chair. The place was so quiet and so strange that the visitor presently felt as if he was sitting among ghosts. It is at twilight, in fact, that the spirits of the past make themselves most readily felt, if not seen. Now, it was exactly as if he had been in the place before. He knew, now, why he had been so suddenly and strangely attracted to Samson. He *had been there before*— when, or under what conditions, he knew not, and did not ask himself. It is a condition of the mind known to everybody. A touch — a word — a look — and we are transported back — how many years ago? The hills, the rocks, the house, Armored herself — all were familiar to him. The thing was absurd, yet in his mind it was quite clear. It was so absurd that he thought his mind was wandering, and he arose and went out into the garden. There, the figure-head of the woman under the tall fuchsia-tree — the glow from the fire in the sitting-room fell upon the face through the window — seemed to smile upon him as upon an old friend. He went back again and sat down. Where was Armored?

This strange familiarity with an unknown place quickly passes, though it may return. He now began to feel as if, perhaps, he was making a mistake. He was living on an island, with, practically, no other companion than a girl of fifteen. Dick, who had become suddenly grumpy on learning his resolution to stay, might be right. Well, he would sketch and paint; he would be very careful; not a word should be said that might disturb the child's tranquillity. No — Dick was a fool. He was going to have a day or two — just a day or two — of quiet happiness. The girl was young and beautiful and innocent. She was also made happy — she showed that happiness without an attempt at concealment — because he was going to stay. What would follow?

Well — it was an adventure. One does not ask what is going to follow on first encountering an adventure. What young man, besides, sallying forth upon a simple holiday, looks to find himself upon a desert island with no other companion than a trustful and admiring maiden of fifteen?

Then Armored returned and took a chair beside him. He was a little surprised — but then, on a desert island nothing happens as on terra firma — that she did not ring for lights, and was still not without some hope of dinner. They took up the thread of talk about the islands, concerning which Roland Lee perceived that he would before long know a good deal. Local knowledge is always

interesting; but it does not, except to novelists, possess a marketable value. One cannot, for instance, at a dinner-party, turn the conversation on the respective families of St. Agnes and St. Martin's. He made a mental note that he would presently change the subject to one of deeper personal interest. Perhaps he could get Armored to talk about herself. That would be very much more interesting than to hear about the three Pipers' Holes of Tresco, White, and St. Mary's Islands. How did she live – this girl – and what did she do – and what did she think?

Meantime, while the girl herself was talking of the rocks and bays, the crags and coves, the white sand and the grey granite, the seals and the shags, the puffins and the dottrells, she was wondering, for her part, what manner of man this was – how he lived, and what he did, and what he thought. For when man and woman meet they are clothed and covered up; they are a mystery each to the other; never, since the Fall, have we been able to read each other's hearts.

But when the clock struck seven Armored sprang to her feet, as one who hath a serious duty to perform, and preparations to make for it.

First she pulled down the blind, and so shut out what was left of the twilight. The fire had sunk low, but by its light she was dimly visible. She pushed back the table; she placed two chairs opposite the old lady, and another chair before the spinning-wheel.

'Something,' said the young man to himself, 'is certainly going to happen. One can no longer hope for dinner. Family prayers, perhaps; or the worship of the old lady as an ancestor. The descendants of the ancient people of Lyonesse no doubt bow down to the sun and dance to the moon, and pass the children through the holèd stone, and make Baal fires, and worship their grandmothers. It will be an interesting function. But, perhaps, only family prayers.'

Armored took down the fiddle that hung on the wall and began to tune it, twanging the strings and drawing the bow across in the manner which so pleasantly excites the theatre before the music begins.

'Not family prayers, then,' said the young man, perhaps disappointed.

What did happen, however, was a series of things quite new and wholly unexpected. Never was known such a desert island.

First of all, the lady of many generations moved uneasily in her sleep at the twanging of the strings, and her fingers clutched at her dress as if she was startled by an uneasy dream.

And then the door opened, and a small procession of three came in. At this point, had the young man been a Roman Catholic, he would have crossed himself. As he was not, he only started and murmured, 'As I thought. The worship of the ancestor! These are the ghosts of the grandfather and the grandmother. The old lady is a mummy. They are all ghosts – I shall presently awake and find myself on my back among the barrows.'

First came an ancient dame, but not so ancient as she of the great chair. Grey-headed she was, and equipped in a large cap; wrinkled was her face, and her chin, for lack of teeth, approached her nose, quite in the ancestral manner. She was followed by an old man, also grey-headed and grey-bearded, wrinkled of face, his shoulders bent and twisted with rheumatism, his fingers gnarled and twisted. These two took the chairs set for them by Armored. The third in the procession was a woman already elderly and with streaks of grey in her hair. She was thin and sharp-faced. She sat down before the spinning-wheel and began to work, not as you may now see the amateur, but in the quiet, quick, professional manner which means business.

The stranger was not quite right in his conjecture. They were not ancestors. The old man, who had worked on the farm, man and boy, for nearly seventy years, and now managed it altogether, was Justinian Tryeth. The old woman was Dorcas, his wife. The middle-aged woman was their daughter Chessun, who had been maid on the farm, as her brother Peter had been boy, all her life.

Whatever was intended was clearly a daily function, because each dropped into his own place without hesitation. The old woman had brought some knitting with her, her daughter picked up the thread of the spindle, and the old man, taking the tongs, stimulated the coals into a flame, which he

continually nursed and maintained with new fuel. There was neither lamp nor candle in the room; the ruddy firelight, rising and falling, played about the room, warming the drab panels into crimson, sinking into the dark beams of the joists, flashing among the china in the cupboard, painting red the Venus's-fingers in the cabinet, and throwing strange lights and shadows upon the aged lady in the chair. Was she really alive? Was she, after all, only a mummy?

Roland looked on breathless. What was to be done next? Time had gone back eighty years – a hundred and eighty years – any number of years. As they sat here in the firelight with the spinning-wheel, the old serving-people with their mistress, without lamp or candle, so they sat in the generations long gone by. And again that curious feeling fell upon him that he had seen it all before. Yet he could not remember what was to be done next. Armored, the tuning complete, turned with a look of inquiry to the old man.

"'Singleton's Slip,'" he commanded with the authority of a professor.

The girl began to play this old tune. Perhaps you remember the style of the fiddler – he is getting scarce now – who used to sit in the corner and play the hornpipe for the sailors in the days when every sailor could dance the hornpipe. Perhaps you do not remember that fiddler and his style. That is your misfortune. For there was a noble freedom in the handling of his bow, and the interpretation of his melodies was bold and original. He poured into the music all the spirit it was capable of containing, and drew out of his hearers every emotion that each particular tune was able to draw. Because you see tunes have their limitations. You cannot strike every chord in the human heart with a simple hornpipe. This sailor's best friend, however, did all that could be done. And always conscientious, if you please, never allowing his playing to become slovenly or to lack spirit.

Armored played after the manner of this old fiddler, standing up to her work in the middle of the room.

'Singleton's Slip' is a ditty which was formerly much admired by those who danced the hey, the jig, or the simple country dance: it was also much played by the pipe and tabor upon the village green; it accompanied the bear when he carried the pole; it assisted those who danced on stilts; and it lent spirit to those who frolicked in the morrice. Charles II. knew it; Tom D'Urfey wrote words to it, I believe, but I have not yet found them in his collection; Rochester must certainly have danced to it. Armored played it; first cheerfully and loudly, as if to arouse the spirits of those who listened, to remind them that legs may be shaken to this tune, and that ladies may be, and should be, when this tune begins, taken to their places and presently handed round and down the middle. Then she played it trippingly, as if they were actually all dancing. Then she played it tenderly – there is, if you come to think of it, a good deal of possible tenderness in the air – and, lastly, she played it joyfully, yet softly. How had she learned all these modes and moods?

While she played the old man listened critically, nodding his head and beating the time. Then, fired with memory, he bent his arms and worked his fingers as if they held the fiddle and the bow. And he threw back his head and thrust out his leg and leaned sideways, just like that jolly fiddler of whom we have just been reminded. Such, my friends, is the power of music.

After a little while Justinian stopped this imaginary performance, and sitting forward yielded himself wholly to the influence of the tune, cracking his fingers over his head and beating time with one foot, just as you may see the old villager in the old coloured prints – no villager in these days of bad beer ever cracks his fingers or shows any external signs of joyful emotion. As for the two serving-women, they reminded the spectator of the supers on the stage who march when they are told to march, sit down to feast when they are ordered, and swell a procession for a funeral or a festival, all with unmoved countenance, showing a philosophy so great that the triumph of victory or the disaster of defeat finds them equally calm and self-contained – that is to say, the two women showed no sense at all of being pleased or moved by 'Singleton's Slip.' They went on – one with her knitting and the other with her spinning.

As for the ancient lady, however, when the music began she straightened herself, sat upright, and opened her eyes. Then Chessun hastened to adjust her bonnet: if ladies sleep in their bonnets, these adornments have a tendency to fall out of the perpendicular. Heaven forbid that we should gaze upon Ursula Rosevean with her bonnet tilted, like a lady in a van coming home to Wapping from Fairlop Fair! This done, the venerable dame looked about her with eyes curiously bright and keen. Then she began to beat time with her fingers; and then she began to talk; but – and this added to the strangeness of the whole business – nobody seemed to regard what she said. It was much as if the Oracle of Delphi were pouring out the most valuable prophecies and none of her attendants paid any heed. 'If,' thought the young man, 'I were to take down her words, they would be a Message.' And what with the voice of the Oracle, the spirited fiddling, the firelight dancing about the room, the old man snapping his fingers, and perhaps some physical exhaustion following on the absence of dinner, the young man felt as if the music had got into his head; he wanted to get up and dance with Armored round and round the room; he would not have marvelled had Dorcas and Justinian bidden him lead out Chessun and so take hands, round twice, down the middle and back again, set and turn single – where had he learnt these phrases and terms of the old country dance? Nowhere; they belonged to the place and to the music and to the time – and that was at least a hundred and eighty years back.

The fiddle stopped. Armored held it down, and looked again at her master.

"'Tis well played," he said. "A moving piece. Now, "Prince Rupert's March.""

She nodded, and began another tune. This is a piece which may be played many ways. First, to those who understand it rightly, it indicates the tramp of an army, the riding of the cavalry, the jingling of sabres. Next, it may serve for a battle-piece, and you shall hear between the bars the charge of the horse and the clashing of the steel. Or, it may be played as a triumphal march after victory; or, again, as a country dance, in which a stately dignity takes the place of youthful mirth and merriment. At such a dance, to the tune of 'Prince Rupert's March,' the elders themselves – yea, the Justice of Peace, the Vicar, the Mayor and Aldermen, and the Head-borough himself – may stand up in line.

And now Roland became conscious of the old lady's words; he heard them clear and distinct, and as she talked the firelight fell upon her eyes, and she seemed to be gazing fixedly upon the stranger.

"When the "Princess Augusta," East Indiaman, struck upon the Castinicks in the middle of the night, she went to pieces in an hour – any vessel would. They said she was wrecked by the people of Samson, who tied a ship's lantern between the horns of a cow. But it was never proved. There are other islands in Scilly, and other islanders, if you talk of wrecking. Some of the dead bodies were washed ashore, and a good part of the cargo, so that there was something for everybody; a finer wreck never came to the islands. What! If a ship is bound to be wrecked, better that she should strike on British rocks and cast her cargo ashore for the king's subjects. Better the rocks of Scilly than the rocks of France. What the sea casts up belongs to the people who find it. That is just. But you must not rob the living. No. That is a great crime. 'Twas in the year '13. When Emanuel Rosevean, my father-in-law, rescued the passenger who was lying senseless lashed to a spar, he should not have taken the bag that was hanging round his neck. That was not well done. He should have given the man his bag again. He stood here before he went away. "You have saved my life," he said. "I had all my treasure in a bag tied about my neck. If I had brought that safe ashore I could have offered you something worth your acceptance. But I have nothing. I begin the world again." Emanuel heard him say this, and he let him go. But the bag was in his box. He kept the bag. Very soon the wrath of the Lord fell upon the house, and His Hand has been heavy upon us ever since. No luck for us – nor shall be any till we find the man and give him back his bag of treasure.'

She went on repeating this story with small variations and additions. But Roland was now listening again to the fiddle.

Armored stopped again.

"Dissembling Love," said her master.

She began that tune obediently.

The stranger within the gates seemed compelled to listen. His brain reeled; the old woman fascinated him. The words which he had heard had been few, but now he seemed to see, standing before the fire, his hair powdered, and in black silk stockings and shoes with steel buckles, the man who had been saved and robbed shaking hands with the man who had saved and robbed him. Oh! it was quite clear; he had seen it all before; he remembered it. This time he heard nothing of the tune.

'My husband, Methusalem, my dear husband, with his only brother, began to pay for that wickedness. They were capsized crossing to St. Mary's, and drowned. If I had thought what was going to happen I would have taken the bag and walked through all England looking for him until I had found him. Yes – if it took me fifty years. But I knew nothing. I thought our happiness would last for ever. Five-and-twenty years after, my son, Emanuel, was cast away in the Bristol Channel piloting a vessel. They struck on Steep Holm in a fog. And your own father, Armored, was drowned with his wife and three boys on their way home from a wedding-feast at St. Agnes.'

Here her voice dropped, and Roland heard the concluding bars of 'Dissembling Love,' which Armored was playing with quite uncommon tenderness.

When she stopped, Justinian gave her no rest. "'Blue Petticoats,'" he commanded.

Armored again obeyed.

Then the old lady went back in memory to the days of her girlhood – now so long ago. Nowhere now can one find an old lady who will tell of her girlish days when the century was not yet arrived at the age of ten.

'We shall dance to-night,' she said, 'on Bryher Green. My boy will be there. We shall dance together. John Tryeth from Samson will play his fiddle. We shall dance "Prince Rupert's March" and "Blue Petticoats" and "Dissembling Love." The Ensign from the garrison is coming and the Deputy Commissary. They will drink my health. But they shall not have me for partner. My boy will be there – my own boy – the handsomest man on all the islands, though he is so black. That's the Spaniard in him. His mother was a Mureno – Honor Mureno, the last of the Murenos. He has got the old Spaniard's sword still. It's the Spanish blood. It gives my boy his black eyes and his black hair; it makes his cheeks swarthy; and it makes him proud and hot-tempered. I like a man to be quick and proud if he's strong and brave as well. When I have sons, the Lord make them all like their father!'

So she went on talking of her lover.

Armored stopped and looked again at her master.

"'The Chirping of the Lark,'" he said.

Armored began this tune. It is of an artificial character, lending itself less readily than the rest to emotion; the composer called it 'The Chirping of the Lark' because he wanted a title: it resembles the song of that warbler in no single particular. But it changed the old lady's current of thought.

'This long war,' she said, looking round cheerfully, 'will be the making of the islands if it lasts. Never was there so much money about: we roll in money: the women have all got silks and satins: the men drink port wine and the finest French brandy, which they run over for themselves: the merchantmen put into the road, and the sailors spend their money at the port. Why shouldn't we go on fighting the French until they haven't a ship left afloat? My man made the run last week, and hid the cargo – I know where. I shall help him to carry the kegs across to the garrison, where they want brandy badly. A fine run and a good day's work!'

She looked around with a jubilant countenance. Then another memory seized her, and the light left her eyes.

'Better be drowned yourself than marry a man who is going to be drowned! Better not marry at all than lose your husband six months afterwards. It is long ago, now, Armored. Time goes on – one can remember. He would be very old now – yes – very old. Sometimes I see him still. But he has not grown old where he is staying. That is bad for me, because he liked young women, not old women. Men mostly do. They are so made, even the oldest of them. Perhaps the old women, when they rise again, are made young again, so that their lovers may love them still.'

The clock struck half-past eight. Armored stopped playing and the old lady stopped talking at the same moment. Her eyes closed, her head fell forward, she became comatose.

Then the two serving-women got up and helped her, or carried her, out of the room to her bedroom behind. And the old man arose, and without so much as a good-night hobbled away to his own cottage.

'She will go to bed now,' said Armored. 'Chessun will take in her broth and her wine, and she will sleep all night.'

'Do you have this performance every night?'

'Yes; the playing seems to put life and heart into her. All the morning she dozes, or if she wakes she is not often able to talk; but in the evening, when we sit around the fire just as they used to sit in the old days, without candles – because my people were poor and candles were dear – and when Chessun spins and I play – she revives and sits up and talks, as you have seen her.'

'Yes. It is rather ghostly.'

'Justinian used to play – oh! he could play very well indeed.'

'Not so well as you.'

'Yes – much better – and he knows hundreds of tunes. But his fingers became stiff with rheumatism, and, as he had put off teaching Peter until it was too late, he taught me. That is all.'

'I think you play wonderfully well. Do you play nothing but old tunes?'

'I only know what I have learned. There is that song which I heard the lady sing last year – I don't know what it is called. Tell me if you like it.'

She struck the strings again and played a song full of life and spirit, of tenderness and fond memory – a bright, sparkling song – which wanted no words.

'Oh!' cried Roland, 'you are really wonderful. You are playing the "Kerry Dance."'

She laughed and laid down the violin.

'We must not have any more playing to-night. Do you really like to hear me play? You look as if you did.'

'It is wonderful,' he replied. 'I could listen all night. But if there is to be no more music, shall we look outside?'

If there were no light in the house the ship's lantern was hanging up, with one of those big ship's candles in it which are of such noble dimensions, and of generosity so unbounded in the matter of tallow. There was no moon; but the sky was clear and the sea could be seen by the light of the stars, and the revolving lights of Bishop's Rock and St. Agnes flashed across the water.

The young man shivered.

'We are in fairyland,' he said. 'It is a charmed island. Nothing is real. Armored, your name should be Titania. How have you made me hear and believe all these things? How do you contrive your sorceries? Are you an enchantress? Confess – you cannot, in sober truth, play those tunes; the old lady is in reality only a phantom, called into visible shape by your incantations? But you are a benevolent witch – you will not turn me into a pig?'

'I do not understand. There have been no sorceries. There are no witches left on the Scilly Islands. Formerly there were many. Dorcas knows about them. I do not know what was the good of them.'

'I suppose you are quite real, after all. It is only strange and incomprehensible.'

'It is a fine night. To-morrow it will be a fine day with a gentle breeze. We will go sailing among the Outer Islands.'

'The air is heavy with perfume. What is it? Surely an enchanted land!'

'It is the scent of the lemon-verbena tree – see, here is a sprig. It is very sweet.'

'How silent it is here! Night after night never to hear a sound.'

'Nothing but the sound of the waves. They never cease. Listen – it is a calm night. But you can hear them lapping on the beach.'

Ten minutes later, when they returned to the house, they found candles lighted and supper spread. A substantial supper, such as was owed to a man who had had no dinner. There was cold roast fowl and ham; there was a lettuce-salad and a goodly cheese. And there was the unexpected and grateful sight of a 'Brown George,' with a most delectable ball of white froth at the top. Also, Roland remarked the presence of the decanter containing the blackberry wine.

'Now you shall have some supper.' Armored assumed the head of the table and took up the carving-knife. 'No, thank you – I can carve very well. Besides, you are our visitor, and it is a pleasure to carve for you. Will you have a wing or a leg? Do you like your ham thin? Not too thin? Oh, how hungry you must be! That is ale – home-brewed ale: will you take some? or would you prefer a glass of the blackberry wine? No? – help yourself.'

'The beer for me,' said Roland. He filled and drank a tumbler of the beverage dear to every right-minded Briton. It was strong and generous, with flakes of hop floating in it like the bee's-wing in port. 'This is splendid beer,' he said. 'I do not remember that I ever tasted such beer as this. It is humming ale – October ale – stingo. No wonder our forefathers fought so well when they had such beer as this to fight upon!'

'Peter is proud of his home-brewed.'

'Do you make everything for yourselves? Is Samson sufficient for all the needs of the islanders? This beer is the beer of Samson – strong and mighty. My hair is growing long already – and curly.'

'We make all we can. There are no shops, you see, on Samson. We bake our own bread: we brew our own beer: we make our own butter: we even spin our own linen.'

'And you make your own wine, Armored.' He called her naturally by her Christian name. You could not call such a girl 'Miss Armored' or 'Miss Rosevean.' 'It is a wonderful island!'

After supper they sat by the fireside, and, by permission, he smoked his pipe.

Then, everybody else on the island being in bed and asleep, they talked. The young man had his way. That is to say, he encouraged the girl to talk about herself. He led her on: he had a soft voice, soft eyes, and a general manner of sympathy which surprised confidence.

She began, timidly at first, to talk about herself, yet with feminine reservation. No woman will ever talk about herself in the way which delights young men. But she told him all he asked: her simple lonely life – how she arose early in the morning, how she roamed about the island and sang aloud with none to hear her but the sea-gulls and the shags.

'Do you never draw?' he asked.

She had tried to draw, but there was no one to help her.

'Do you read?'

No, she seldom read. In the best parlour there was a bookcase full of books, but she never looked at them. As for the old lady and Dorcas, they had never learned to read. She had been at school over at St. Mary's, till she was thirteen, but she hardly cared to read.

'And the newspapers – do you ever read them?'

She never read them. She knew nothing that went on.

As for her ambitions and her hopes – if he could get at them. Fond youth! – as if a girl would ever tell her ambitions! But Armored, apparently, had none to tell. She lived in the present; it was joy enough for her to wander in the soft warm air of her island home, upon the hills and round the coast, to cruise among the rocks while the breeze filled out the sail and the sparkling water leaped above the bow.

So far she told: nay, she hid nothing, because there was nothing to hide. She told no more because, as yet, her ambitions and her dreams of the future had no shape: they were vague and misty – she was only aware of their existence when restlessness seized her and impelled her to get up and run over the hills to Porth Bay and back again.

But at night, when she went to bed, she experienced quite a new and disquieting sensation. It showed at least that she was no longer a child, but already on the threshold of womanhood. With

blushing cheek and beating heart she remembered that for an hour and more she had been talking about nothing but herself! What would Mr. Roland Lee think of a girl who could waste his time in talking about nothing but herself?

CHAPTER VI

THE FLOWER-FARM

Roland, startled out of sleep by the sudden feeling of danger which always seizes us in a strange bed – except a bed at an inn – sat up and looked around him. His room was small and low and simply furnished. He was lying on a feather bed of the old-fashioned kind; the bedstead was of wood, but without curtains. He presently remembered where he was: on Samson Island – the guest of a child, a girl of fifteen.

He sprang out of bed and threw open the window. His room was over the porch. The fragrance of the lemon-verbena tree arose like steam from a haystack, and filled his chamber. Below him, and beyond the garden, the geese waddled on the green, the ducks splashed in the pond, and in the farmyard Peter walked about slowly, carrying a pitchfork in his hands, but, apparently, for amusement rather than use, as if it had been a court sword.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past seven. At this time in London he would have been still in the first long slumber of the night. Now he was eager to be up and dressed, if only for a better understanding of the situation. To be the guest of a child has the freshness of novelty; but it is a situation which might lead to complications. Suppose a guardian, or a lawyer, or a cousin of some kind were to cross over in a boat and ask what he was doing there. And suppose he had no better reply than the plain truth – that this young lady had been so good as to invite him. Would a man go down to stay at a country house on the simple invitation of a school-girl? At the same time, this girl appeared to be the mistress of the establishment. There was an ancient lady – too old for superintendence – and there were servants. Well, if no guardian challenged his presence, why, then, for a single day – he must not stay more – it surely mattered little. The girl was but a child. Yet he must not stay longer. Perhaps they were not too well off: he must not be a burden. And, again, though the girl invited him to stay she named no limit of time. She did not invite him to stay, for a week or for a fortnight. Perhaps she expected him to go away that very morning.

He proceeded – with somewhat thoughtful countenance, considering these things – to dress, paying as much attention to his personal appearance as a young man should, and an old man must. It is the privilege of middle-aged men to go slovenly if they please: no one regardeth him of middle age. While their locks are turning grey and their children are growing up they are in the thick of the day's work, and they may disregard, if they choose, the mysteries of the toilette. Apollo, however, must be as jealous about his apparel and adornment as the Graces themselves, who are always represented at the moment before the choice is made. A velvet jacket and a white waistcoat are trifles in themselves, but they become a youthful figure and a face which has finely-cut features and is decorated with a promising silky beard, pointed withal, and the brown shading of a young moustache. Besides, he who is an artist thinks more than other young men about such things. Dress, to him, as to a woman, becomes costume. Colour has to be considered; such picturesqueness as is possible in modern fashion is aimed at; the artistic craving for fitness and beauty must be satisfied. Roland did what he could: and with his velvet coat, a clean white waistcoat, a crimson scarf, a good figure, and a handsome face, he was as handsome a youth of twenty-one as one is likely to find anywhere.

Again, as he opened his door and began to descend the narrow stairs, there came over him that curious feeling of having been in the place before. He had felt it in the evening when Armored played 'Dissembling Love.' Now he felt it again. And when he stood in the porch he seemed to remember standing there once – long ago, long ago – but how long he could not tell; nor, as happened to him before, could he remember what had happened on that occasion.

Armored herself was in the garden looking for some flowers for the breakfast-table. She greeted him with a smile of welcome and a friendly grasp of the hand. There was also a look of kindly solicitude on her face which would have suited a châtelaine of forty years. Had he slept well? Had he

really been provided with everything he wanted? Was there anything at all lacking? If so, would he speak to Chessun? Breakfast, she said, leaving him in the garden, would be served in a few minutes.

Would he speak to Chessun? Then, it seemed as if she meant him to stay another night. What should he do?

Then Armored came back.

'Breakfast is quite ready,' she said. 'Come in, Roland Lee. It is a beautiful morning. There is a fresh breeze and a smooth sea. We can go anywhere this morning. I have spoken to Peter, and he will be ready to go with us in an hour or so. I think we may even get out to Scilly and Maiden Bower.'

Yes; the morning was bright and the sky was clear. In the golden sunshine of September the islets across the water showed like creations of a poet's dream.

Roland drew a deep breath of admiration. 'Everybody,' he said, 'ought to come to Scilly and to stay a long time.'

He turned from the view to the girl beside him. She had changed her blue flannel dress for a daintier and a prettier costume – think not that there are no shops at Hugh Town – of grey nun's cloth, daintily embroidered in front. Still at her throat she wore a red flower, and round her neck clung the golden torque found in the old king's grave. Her dark eyes glowed: her lips were parted in a smile: her cheek showed the dewy bloom that some girls, fortunate above their sisters, can exhibit when they first appear in the morning: her long tresses were now tied up and confined; she looked as if she had just stepped forth from her chamber, fresh from her sleep. No one certainly could have guessed that she had been up since six; nor that the fish which had been hissing in the frying-pan, and were now lying meekly side by side in a dish on the breakfast-table, were of her own catching. An hour's sitting in the boat off Samson Ledge with hook and line had procured this splendid contribution to the morning banquet. Fish fragrant with the salt sea: fish that had not been packed tight in boxes, nor travelled in railway trains, nor been slapped about on counters, nor been packed in ice; fish that can never lie on a London table – these were set out before Roland's hungry gaze.

The ancient dame did not appear. The two breakfasted, as they had supped, together. I do not know how or where Armored learned the art and practice of hospitality, but certainly she showed a true feeling in the matter of feeding – especially at breakfast. First, the table was decorated with the autumn leaves of the bramble – crimson, yellow, purple – few, indeed, know how beautiful a table may be made when decorated with these leaves. There were also a few late flowers from the garden; but not many. The coffee was strong, the milk hot and thick, the bread and butter home-made, like the beer of yester eve: the ham was cured by Chessun: the eggs were collected by Armored: she had also with her own hands made the jam and the cake.

Armored sat behind the cups with as much ease as if she had been accustomed from infancy to entertain young gentlemen at breakfast. She was serious over her task, and poured out the coffee as if it was something precious, not to be wasted or carelessly administered, which is the spirit in which all good food should be approached. She did not ask any questions, nor did she talk much during the banquet. Perhaps she had an instinctive perception of the great truth that breakfast, which is taken at the beginning of the day – the sacred day, with all its possibilities and its chances of what may happen; the fateful day, which alone and unaided may change the whole course and current of a life – should be approached with a becoming gravity. At breakfast the man fortifies himself before he goes forth to work. But he has the work before him. In the evening it is done: he has passed through the dangers of the day: he still lives: he has received no hurt: he has, we hope, prospered in his honest handiwork: he may laugh and rejoice. But at breakfast we should be serious.

'What will you do,' asked Armored, breakfast completed, 'until Peter is ready? He has got some work, you know, before he can come out.'

'I should like first,' he said, 'to see your flower-farm, if I may.'

'If you please. But there is nothing to see at this time of the year. You must not think we grow flowers all the year round. If you were here in February, you would see the fields covered with

beautiful flowers – iris, anemone, jonquil, narcissus, and daffodil. They are very pretty then, and the air is sweet with their scent. But now the fields are quite bare.'

'I should like to see them, however.'

'I will show them to you. It is a great happiness to the islands,' said Armored, gravely, 'that we have found out the flower-farming. Everybody was very poor before. All the old ways of living were gone, you see. A long time ago the people had wrecks every winter – the sea cast up quantities of things which they could sell, or they went out in boats and took the things out of the hold when the ship was on the rocks. And then they were all smugglers: the Scillonians used to run over to France openly, day and night, with no one to stop them. And they used to carry fruit and vegetables out to the homeward-bound ships in the Channel. And then they were pilots as well. Some of the men used to make as much as two hundred pounds a year as pilots. My grandfathers were all pilots. They were smugglers too; and they had this farm and grew vegetables for the ships. Then the Government built the lighthouses, and there were no more wrecks; and the Preventive Service came and stopped the smuggling; and since the steamers took the place of the sailing-ships no vessels put in here, and there are no more pilots wanted. So, you see, it was as if nothing was left at all.'

'It does seem rough on the people.'

'First they tried kelp-making. They collected the sea-weed and put it in a kiln or furnace, and made a fire under it. I can show you some of the old furnaces still. But that came to an end. Then they tried a fishing company; but I believe it did not pay. And then they began to build ships; but I suppose other people could build them better. So that came to an end too. And for some time I do not know how all the people lived. As for the farms, they could never grow enough for the islands. Then a great many of the people went away. They had to go, or they would have starved. Some went to England, and some to America, and some to Australia. All the families went away from Samson, one by one, until at last there were none left but ourselves and Justinian. On Bryher and St. Martin's they became fishermen, but not here. As for Justinian, he sent away all his boys except Peter. Oh! they have done very well – splendidly. One is a coastguard, and one is bo's'n in the Queen's Navy. One is captain of a steamer trading between Philadelphia and Cuba, and one is actually chief steward on a great Pacific liner! Justinian is very proud of him.'

'Indeed, yes,' said Roland, 'with reason.'

'The Scillonians,' the girl continued, proudly, 'all get on very well wherever they go. They are honest, you see, as well as clever.'

'And the flower-farming?'

'Somebody discovered that the early spring flowers, which begin here in January, could be carried to London and sold quite fresh. And then everybody began to plant bulbs. That is all. We have had a farm of some kind here for I do not know how many generations.'

'Since the time,' Roland suggested, 'when, in consequence of the separation of Scilly from the mainland and the disappearance of Lyonesse, the royal family found themselves left in Samson.'

She laughed. 'Well, all these stone inclosures on the hill belonged to our farm. We grew things and ate them, I suppose. Perhaps we sold them. But we were then poor, I know, and now we have no more trouble.'

Beside and behind the farmhouse on the slope of the hill they came upon a series of little fields following one after the other. They were quite small – some mere patches, none larger than a garden of ordinary size, and they were all enclosed and shut in by high hedges, so that they looked like largish boxes with the lids off. Some of the hedges were of elm, growing thick and close; some of escallonia, with its red flowers; some of veronica, its purple blossom like heads of bulrush; some of the service-tree; and some, but not many, of tamarisk, its pink bunches of blossom all displayed at this time of the year. But the fields were now brown and bare, and had nothing at all growing in them, except a few patches of gladiolus, now dying. Beyond these fields, however, there were others of larger area,

with ruder hedges formed by laths, reeds, wooden palings, and stone walls. These were inclosed, and partly sheltered for the growth of vegetables.

'These are our fields,' said Armored. 'At this time of the year there is nothing to show you. Our harvest begins in January, and lasts till May; but February and March are our best months. See – there is Peter, with a young man from Bryher, planting bulbs for next year: they are taken up every three years and replanted.'

Peter, in fact, was at work. He was superintending – a form of work which he found to suit him best – while the young man from Bryher, who looked more than half sailor, with a broad, long-handled spade, was leisurely turning over the light sandy soil and laying in the bulbs side by side out of a great basket.

'It seems an easy form of agriculture,' said Roland.

'It is not hard. There is nothing to do after this until the flowers are picked. But sometimes a cold wind will come down from the north and will kill a whole field full of blossoms – in spite of all our hedges. That is a terrible loss. When everything goes well, we cut the flowers, pack them in boxes, carry them over to the port, and next morning they are sold in London – oh! and all over the country, in every big town.'

'I shall never again behold a daffodil in February,' said Roland, 'without thinking of Samson. You have lent a new association to the spring flowers. Henceforth they will bring back this glorious view of sea and islands, grey and black rocks, the splendid sunshine and the fresh breeze – and,' he added, with a winning smile and deferential eyes, 'the Lady of Lyonesse.'

Armored laughed. It was very nice to be called the Lady of Lyonesse – nobody before had ever called her anything except plain Armored. And it was quite a new experience to have a young gentleman treating her with deference as well as compliment.

At the back of the house was an orchard, through which they presently passed. Like the flower-fields, it was protected by a high hedge. But the apple-trees looked like the olives of Provence: every one seemed in the last decay of age. They were twisted and dwarfish; the branches grew in queer angles and elbows, as if they were crouching down out of reach of the north wind; the trunks were bent, and, which completed their resemblance to the olive, all alike were covered and clothed with a thick grey lichen, clinging to every bough like a glove, and hanging like a fringe. If you tear it off, the tree begins to shiver and shake, though on Samson it is never cold.

'Let us sit down,' said Roland, 'in this secluded spot and talk. Have I your leave, Armored, to – Thank you.' He filled and lit his briar-root, and lay back on the warm bank, gazing upwards at the blue sky through the leaves and the twisted branches of an aged apple-tree.

'It is good to be here. Do you know how very, very good it was of you to ask me, Armored? And do you know how very, very rash it was?'

The girl, who showed her youth and inexperience in many little ways, regarded him with admiration unconcealed. Certainly, he was a personable young man, even picturesque; when his beard should be a little longer, when his moustache should be a little stronger, he might be able to pass for Charles I. idealised, and in early manhood, when as yet he had not begun to dissimulate.

'I was so glad when you promised to stay,' she replied, truthfully.

'Again, it is most good of you to say so. But, Armored, a dreadful misgiving has possessed me. Does your – does the Ancestress approve of the invitation?'

Armored laughed. 'Why,' she said, 'we never consult her about anything. She is too old, you know.'

'Was nobody consulted at all? Did you ask me here all out of your own head, as the children say?'

'Why not? There is nobody to consult. Why should I not ask you?'

'It was very good of you – only – well – you are younger than most ladies who invite people to their house.'

'Well – but I asked you,' she replied, with a little irritation, 'and you said you would come. You asked if anybody could stay on the island.'

'Yes, of course.' He did not explain that at first he thought the place was a lodging-house. The mistake was not unnatural; but he could not explain. 'I ought to have known,' he said. 'You are the Queen of Samson, as well as a Princess in Lyonesse. I beg your Majesty to forgive the ignorance of a traveller from foreign parts.'

'Justinian and Peter manage the farm. Dorcas and Chessun manage the house. There is no one to ask,' she added, simply, 'what I am doing.'

She said this with a touch of sadness.

'Have you no relations – cousins – nobody?'

'I have some far-off cousins. They live in London, I believe. One of them went away – a long, long time ago, in the Great War – and became a purser in the Navy. After that he was purveyor for the Fleet, and was made a knight. He was my grandfather's cousin, so I suppose he is dead by this time, but I dare say he has left children.'

'You are very lonely, Armored.'

'I had three brothers; but they were all drowned – father, mother, three brothers, all drowned together coming from St. Agnes. That was ten years ago, when I was only a little girl and did not know what it meant. All our misfortunes, my great-great-grandmother says, are due to the wickedness of her husband's father, who took a bag of treasure from the neck of a passenger rescued from a wreck. You heard her last night. Do you think that God would drown my innocent brothers and my innocent father and mother all on the same day, because, eighty years ago, that wicked thing was done?'

'No, Armored. I can believe a great deal, but that I cannot believe.'

'And so, you see, I am quite alone. Why should I not invite you to stay here?'

'There is not, in reality, Armored, any reason, except that you did not know anything about me.'

'Oh! but I saw you and talked with you.'

'Yes; but that was not enough. We do not ask people into our houses unless we know something about them.'

'I could see that you were a gentleman.'

'You are very good to think so. Let me try to justify that belief. But, Armored, seriously, there are thieves and rogues and wicked men in the world. Some of these may come to Scilly. Do not ask another stranger. Believe me, it is dangerous. As for me, you have shown me your flower-farm and have entertained me hospitably: let me thank you and take my departure.'

'Go away? Take your departure? Why?' Armored looked ready to cry. 'You have only just come. You have seen nothing.'

'Do you wish me to stay another night?'

'Of course I do. What is it, Roland Lee? You have got something on your mind. Why should you not stay?'

'I should like somebody,' he replied, weakly, 'to approve. If the Ancestress, or even Dorcas, or Chessun herself, would approve –'

'Why, of course Dorcas approves. She says it is the best thing in the world for me to have someone here to talk to. She said so yesterday evening, and again this morning.'

'In that case, Armored, and since it is so delightful here – and so new – and since you are so kind, I will stay one more day.'

He remembered his friend's warning, and the grumpiness which he showed on the way back. His conscience smote him, but not severely. He would be very careful. And, after all, she was but a child. He would just stay the one day and make a sketch or two. Then he would go away.

'That is settled, then. One more day – or, perhaps, one more week, or a month, or a year,' she said, laughing. 'And now, before Peter is ready, I must leave you for ten minutes, because I have to

make a cake for your tea this evening. As for dinner, we shall have that in the boat, or on one of the islands. It is my business, you know, to make the puddings and the cakes.'

'Armored – you shall not. I would rather go without.'

'You shall certainly not go without a cake. Why, I like to make things. It would be dull here indeed if I had not got things to do all day long.'

'Do you not find it dull sometimes, even with things to do?'

'Perhaps. Sometimes. I suppose we are all of us tempted to be discontented at times, even when we have so many blessings as I enjoy.' Armored was young enough, you see, to talk the language of her nurses and serving-women.

'How do you get through the day?'

'I get up at six o'clock, except in winter, when it is too dark. I have a run with Jack after breakfast; we run up the hill and down the other side – round Porth Bay, just to see the waves beating on White Island Ledge, where you very nearly –'

'Very nearly,' Roland echoed, 'but for you.'

'Then we run up Bryher Hill and stand on the cairn just for Jack to bark at the north wind.'

'Sometimes it rains.'

'Oh, yes – and sometimes it blows such a gale of wind that I could not stand on the cairn for a moment. Then I stay at home and make or mend something. There are always things to be made or mended. Then we are always wanting stores of some kind or other, and I have to go over to Hugh Town and buy them. At Hugh Town there are shops where they keep beautiful things – you can buy anything you want at Hugh Town. We cannot make pins and needles at home, can we? Then we have dinner, and Granny is brought in. Sometimes she wakes up then, and gets lively, and knows everything that is going on. She will talk quite sensibly for an hour at a time. And I have my fiddle to practise. After tea, when the days are long enough, I go up on the hills again and wander about till dark.'

'And do you never have any companions at all?' he asked with a curious, unreasoning, perfectly inexcusable touch of jealousy, because it could not matter to him even if all the young men of St. Mary's and Bryher and Tresco and St. Martin's came over every Sunday to court this dainty damsel. Yet he did feel the least bit anxious.

'Never any companions. Nobody ever comes here. They used to come, when Granny was still able to talk, in order to ask her advice. She was so wise, you see.'

'And every evening you make music for the Ancestress and the worthy Tryeth family?'

'Yes, and then I have supper and go to bed. Generally by nine o'clock we are all asleep in the house.'

'It would be a monotonous life if you were older. But it is only a preliminary or a preparation to something else. It is the overture, played in soft music, to the happy comedy of your future life, Armored.'

'You mean to say something kind,' she replied. 'Of course, my life must seem dull to you.'

'One cannot always live on lovely skies and sunlit seas and enchanted islands.'

'Sometimes it seems to me that a little more talk would be pleasant. Justinian talks very well, to be sure; but he is the only one. He knows quantities of wrecks. It would astonish you to hear him tell of the wrecks he has seen. Dorcas talks very little now, because she has lost all her teeth. Chessun is a silent woman, because she's always been kept under by her mother. And Peter's not a talkative boy, because he's always been kept under both by his father and his mother. Besides, he got that nasty fall which made all his hair fall off. You can't wonder if he thinks about that a good deal. And they are all getting old.'

'Yes. They seem to be getting very old indeed. Some day they will follow the example of other old people and vanish. Then, Armored, you will be like Robinson Crusoe or Alexander Selkirk.'

'I know all about Alexander Selkirk. He lived alone on Juan Fernandez, having been put ashore by Captain Stradling, of the "Cinque Ports." He had been four years and four months on the island

when Captain Woodes Rogers found him. He was clothed in goat-skin. He built two huts with pimento-trees, and covered them with long grass and lined them with the skin of goats. He made fire by rubbing two sticks together on his knee. And he lived by catching goats. You mean, Roland Lee,' she said, with great seriousness, 'that some day or other all these old people will die – my great-great-grandmother, Justinian, Dorcas, and even Peter and Chessun, and that then I shall be alone on the island. That would be terrible. But it will not happen in that way. I am sure it will not, because it would be so very terrible. We are in the Lord's hand, and it will not be allowed.'

The young man coloured and dropped his eyes. There certainly was not a single girl of all those whom he knew in London who could have said such a thing so simply and so sincerely. Not the youngest girl fresh from the most religious teaching could say such a thing. Yet they go to church a good deal oftener than Armored, whose chances were only once a week, and then only when the weather was fine. This it is to be a Scillonian, and to believe what you hear in church. Roland had no reply to make. Even to hint that faith so simple and so complete was rare would have been cruel and wicked.

'You have quoted Woodes Rogers,' he said presently. 'Have you read that good old navigator? It is not often that one finds a girl quoting from Woodes Rogers.'

'Oh! I do not read much. There is a bookcase full of books; but I only read the voyages. There is a whole row of them. Woodes Rogers, Shelvocke, Commodore Anson, Wallis, Carteret, and Cook – and more besides. I like Carteret best, because his ship was so small and so crazy, and his men so few and so weak, and yet he would keep on traversing the ocean as long as he could, and discovered a great deal more than his commander, who cowardly deserted him.'

'There are other things in the world besides voyages – and other books.'

'I learned the other things at school. There was geography – the world is only the Scilly Islands spread out big – and history, too. You would be surprised to find what a lot of English history there is that belongs to Scilly. Queen Elizabeth built the Star Fort – you've seen the Star Fort on the Garrison. There is Charles the First's Castle, on Tresco, all in ruins; and, down below it, Cromwell's Castle, which I will show you. And Charles the Second stayed here. Oh! and there was the Spanish Armada; I must not forget that, because of another great-great-far-off-great-grandfather, three hundred years ago, who was wrecked here.'

'How was that?'

'He was a captain, or officer of some kind, on board one of the Spanish ships; his name was Don Hernando Mureno. After the Armada was defeated and driven away, some of the ships came down the Irish Sea, and among them his ship – and she ran ashore on one of the Outer Islands – I think on Maiden Bower. How many were saved I cannot tell you; but some were, and among them Don Hernando Mureno himself. He stayed here, and never wanted to go away any more; but married a Scillonian, and lived out his life on Bryher, and is buried at the old church at St. Mary's, where I could show you his grave and the headstone – though the letters are all gone by this time. I have his sword still, and I will show it to you. One of my grandfathers married his granddaughter. They say I take after the Spanish side.'

'You are a true Castilian, Armored; unless, indeed, you happen to be an Andalusian or a Biscayan.'

'Do you think I ought to read the other books?' she asked him, anxiously. 'If you really think so, I will try – I will, really.'

I suppose that no young man – not even the most hardened lecturers at Newnham – ever becomes quite indifferent to the spectacle of Venus entrusting the care of her intellect to a young philosopher. It is a moving spectacle, and still novel. It makes a much more beautiful picture than that of Venus handing over the care of her soul to the Shaven and Shorn. Roland coloured. He felt at once the responsibility and the delicacy of the task thus offered him.

'We will look into the shelves,' he said. 'I suppose that the Ancestress no longer reads?'

'She never learned to read at all. She can neither read nor write: yet there was never anyone who knew so much. She could cure all diseases, and the people came over here from all the islands for her advice. Dorcas knew a great deal, but she does not know the half or the quarter of her mistress's knowledge.'

'Armored' – Roland knocked out the ashes of his pipe – 'I think you want – very badly – someone to advise you.'

'Will you advise me, Roland Lee?'

'Child' – he slowly got up – 'all my life, so far, I have been looking for someone to advise and help myself. You must not lean upon a reed. Come – let us seek Peter the boy, and launch the ship and go forth upon our voyage about this sea of many islands. Perchance we may discover Circe upon one of them – unless you are yourself Circe – and I shall presently find myself transformed; but you are too good to turn me into anything except a prince or a poet. And we may light upon St. Brendan's Land; or we may find Judas Iscariot floating on that island of red-hot brass; or we may chance on Andromeda, and witness the battle of Perseus and the dragon; or we may find the weeping Ariadne – everything is possible on an island.'

'Roland Lee,' said the girl, 'you are talking like your friend Dick Stephenson. Why do you say such extravagant things? This is the island of Samson, and I am nothing in the world but Armored Rosevean.'

CHAPTER VII

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

All day long the boat sailed about among the channels and over the shallow ledges of the Outer or Western Islands, whither no boat may reach save on such a day, so quiet and so calm. The visitor who comes by one boat and goes away by the next thinks he has seen this archipelago. As well stand inside a great cathedral for half an hour and then go away thinking you have seen it all. It takes many days to see these fragments of Lyonesse, and to get a time sense of the place. They sailed round the southern point of Samson, and they steered westward, leaving Great Minalto on the lee, towards Mincarlo, lying, like an old-fashioned sofa, high at the two ends and flat in the middle. They found a landing at the southern point, and clambered up the steep and rocky sides of the low hill. On this island there are four peaks with a down in the middle, all complete. It is like a doll's island. Everywhere in Scilly there are the same features: here a hill strewn with boulders; here a little down, with fern and gorse and heath; here a bay in which the water, on such days as it can be approached, peacefully laps a smooth white beach; here dark caves and holes in which the water always, even in the calmest day of summer, grumbles and groans, and, when the least sea rises, begins to roar and bellow – in time of storm it shrieks and howls. Those who sail round these rumbling water-dungeons begin to think of sea monsters. Hidden in those recesses the awful calamary lies watching, waiting, his tentacles forty feet long stretching out in the green water, floating innocently till they touch their prey, then seizing and haling it within sight of the baleful, gleaming eyes and within reach of the devouring mouth. In these holes, too, lie the great conger-eels – they fear nothing that swims except that calamary; and in these recesses walk about the huge crabs which devour the dead bodies of shipwrecked sailors. On the sunlit rocks one looks to see a mermaiden, with glittering scales, combing out her long fair tresses: perhaps one may unfortunately miss this beautiful sight, which is rare even in Scilly; but one cannot miss seeing the seals flopping in the water and swimming out to sea, with seeming intent to cross the broad ocean. And in windy weather porpoises blow in the shallow waters of the sounds. All round the rocks at low tide hangs the long sea-weed, undisturbed since the days when they manufactured kelp, like the rank growth of a tropical creeper: at high tide it stands up erect, rocking to and fro in the wash and sway of the water like the tree-tops of the forest in the breeze. Everywhere, except in the rare places where men come and go, the wild sea-birds make their nests; the shags stand on the ledges of the highest rocks in silent rows gazing upon the water below; the sea-gulls fly, shrieking in sea-gullic rapture – there is surely no life quite so joyous as a sea-gull's; the curlews call; the herons sail across the sky; and, in spring, millions of puffins swim and dive and fly about the rocks, and lay their eggs in the hollow places of these wild and lonely islands.

These things, which one presently expects and observes without wonder in all the islands, were new to Roland when he set foot on the rugged rock of Mincarlo. He climbed up the steep sides of the rock and stood upon the top of its highest peak. He made two or three rapid sketches of rock and sea, the girl looking over his shoulder, watching curiously, for the first time in her life, the growth of a picture.

Then he stood and looked around. The great stones were piled about; the brown turf crept up their sides; where there was space to grow, the yellow branches of the fern were spread; and on all four sides lay the shining water.

'All my life,' he said, 'I have dreamed of islands. This is true joy, Armored. For a permanency, Samson is better than Mincarlo, because there is more of it. But to come here sometimes – to sit on this carn while the wind whistles in your ear, and the waves are lapping against the rocks all day long and always – Armored, is there any other world? Are there men and women living somewhere? Is there anybody but you and me – and Peter?' he added, hastily. 'I don't believe in London. It is a dream. Everything is a dream but the islands and the boat and Armored.'

She was only a child, but she turned a rosy red at the compliment. Nothing but the boat and herself. She was very fond of the boat, you see, and she felt that the words conveyed a high compliment. Then they began to explore the rest of this mountainous island, which has such a variety of scenery all packed away in the small space of twelve acres. When they had walked over the whole of Mincarlo that is accessible, they returned to their landing-place, where Peter sat in the boat keeping her off, with head bent as if he was asleep.

'It must be half-past twelve,' said Armored. 'I am sure you are hungry. We will have dinner here.'

'No better place for a picnic. Come along, Peter. Bear a hand with the basket. Here, Armored, is a rock that will do for a table, and here is one on which we two can sit. There is a rock for you, Peter. Now! The opening of a luncheon-basket is always a moment of grave anxiety. What have we got?'

'This is a rabbit-pie,' said Armored. 'And this is a cake-pudding. I made it yesterday. Do you like cake-pudding? Here are bread and salt and things. Can you make your dinner off a rabbit-pie, Roland Lee?'

'A very good dinner too.' The young man now understood that on Samson one uses the word dinner instead of lunch, and that supper is an excellent cold spread served at eight. 'A very good dinner, Armored. I mean to carve this. Sit down and let me see you make a good dinner.'

An admirable rabbit-pie, and an excellent cake-pudding. Also, there had not been forgotten a stone jar filled with that home-brewed of which the like can no longer be found in any other spot in the British Islands. I hope one need do no more than indicate the truly appreciative havoc wrought by the young gentleman among all these good gifts and blessings.

After dinner, to lie in the sunshine and have a pipe, looking across the wide stretch of sunny water to the broken line of rocks and the blue horizon beyond, was happiness undeserved. Beside him sat the girl, anxious that he should be happy – thinking of nothing but what might best please her guest.

Then they got into the boat again, and sailed half a mile or so due north by the compass, until they came within another separate archipelago, of which Mincarlo is an outlying companion.

It is the group of rocks, called the Outer or the Western Islands, lying tumbled about in the water west of Bryher and Samson. Some of them are close together, some are separated by broad channels. Here the sea is never calm: at the foot of the rocks stretch out ledges, some of them bare at low water, revealing their ugly black stone teeth: the swell of the Atlantic on the calmest days rises and falls and makes white eddies, broken water, and flying spray. Among these rocks they rowed: Peter and Roland taking the oars, while Armored steered. They rowed round Maiden Bower, with its cluster of granite forts defying the whole strength of the Atlantic, which will want another hundred thousand years to grind them down – about and among the Black Rocks and the Seal Rocks, dark and threatening: they landed on Ilyswillig, with his peak of fifty feet, a strange wild island: they stood on the ledge of Castle Bryher and looked up at the tower of granite which rises out of the water like the round keep of a Norman castle: they hoisted sail and stood out to Scilly himself, where his twin rocks command the entrance to the islands. Scilly is of the dual number: he consists of two great mountains rising from the water sheer, precipitous, and threatening: each about eighty feet high, but with the air of eight hundred; each black and square and terrible of aspect: they are separated by a narrow channel hardly broad enough for a boat to pass through.

'One day last year,' said Armored – 'it was in July, after a fortnight of fine weather – we went through this channel, Peter and I – didn't we, Peter? It was a dead calm, and at high tide.'

The boy nodded his head.

The channel was now, the tide being nearly high, like a foaming torrent, through which the water raced and rushed, boiling into whirlpools, foaming and tearing at the sides. The rapids below Niagara are not fiercer than was this channel, though the day was so fair and the sea without so quiet.

'Once,' said Peter, breaking the silence, 'there was a ship cast up by a wave right into the fork of the channel. She went to pieces in ten minutes, for she was held in a vice like, while the waves beat

her into sticks. Some of the men got on to the north rock – what they call "Cuckoo" – and there they stuck till the gale abated. Then people saw them from Bryher, and a pilot-boat put off for them.'

'So they were saved?' said Roland.

'No, they were not saved,' Peter replied, slowly. 'Twas this way: the pilot-boat that took them off the rock capsized on the way home. So they was all drowned.'

'Poor beggars! Now, if they had been brought safe ashore we might have been told what these rocks look like in rough weather: and what Scilly is like when you have climbed it: and how a man feels in the middle of a storm on Scilly.'

'You can see very well what it is like from Samson,' said Armored. 'The waves beat upon the rocks, and the white spray flies over them and hides them.'

'I should like to hear as well as to see,' said Roland. 'Fancy the thunder of the Atlantic waves against this mass of rock, the hissing and boiling in the channel, the roaring of the wind and the dashing of the waves! I wonder if any of these shipwrecked men had a sketch-book in his pocket.'

'To be drowned,' he continued, 'just by the upsetting of a boat, and after escaping death in a much more exciting manner! Their companions were torn from the deck and hurled and dashed against the rock, so that in a moment their bones were broken to fragments, and the fragments themselves were thrown against the rocks till there was nothing left of them. And these poor fellows clung to the rock, hiding under a boulder from the driving wind – cold, starving, wet, and miserable. And just as they thought of food and shelter and warmth again, to be taken and plunged into the cold water, there to roll about till they were drowned! A dreadful tragedy!'

Having thus broken the ice, Peter proceeded to relate more stories of shipwreck, taking after his father, Justinian Tryeth, whose conversational powers in this direction were, according to Armored, unrivalled. There is a shipwreck story belonging to every rock of Scilly, and to many there are several shipwrecks. As there are about as many rocks of Scilly as there are days in the year, the stories would take long in the telling.

Fortunately, Peter did not know all. It is natural, however, that a native of Samson, and the descendant of many generations of wreckers, should love to talk about wrecks. Therefore he proceeded to tell of the French frigate which came over to conquer Scilly in 1798, and was very properly driven ashore by the sea which owns allegiance to Britannia, and all hands lost, so that the Frenchmen captured no more than their graves, which now lie in a triumphant row on St. Agnes. On Maiden Bower he placed, I know not with what truth, the wreck of the Spaniard which gave Armored an ancestor. On Mincarlo he remembered the loss of an orange-ship on her way from the Azores. On Menovaur he had seen a collier driven in broad daylight and broken all to pieces in half a day, and of her crew not a man saved. Other things, similarly cheerful, he narrated slowly while the sunshine made these grey rocks put on a hospitable look and the boat danced over the rippling waves. With his droning voice, his smooth face with the long white hair upon it, like the last scanty leaves upon a tree, he was like the figure of Death at the Feast, while Armored – young, beautiful, smiling – reminded her guest of Life, and Love, and Hope.

They sailed round so many of these rocks and islets: they landed on so many: they lingered so long among the reefs, loth to leave the wild, strange place, that the sun was fast going down when they hoisted sail and steered for New Grinsey Sound on their homeward way.

You may enter New Grinsey Sound either from the north or from the south. The disadvantage of attempting it from the former on ordinary days is that those who do so are generally capsized and frequently drowned. On such a day as this, however, the northern passage may be attempted. It is the channel, dangerous and beset with rocks and ledges, between the islands of Bryher and Tresco. As the boat sailed slowly in, losing the breeze as it rounded the point, the channel spread itself out broad and clear. On the right hand rose, precipitous, the cliffs and crags of Shipman's Head, which looks like a continuation of Bryher, but is really separated from the island by a narrow passage – you may work through it in calm weather – running from Hell Bay to the Sound. On the left is Tresco, its downs

rising steeply from the water, and making a great pretence of being a very lofty ascent indeed. In the middle of the coast juts out a high promontory, surrounded on all sides but one by the water. On this rock stands Cromwell's Castle, a round tower, older than the Martello Towers. It still possesses a roof, but its interior has been long since gutted. In front of it has been built a square stone platform or bastion, where once, no doubt, they mounted guns for the purpose of defending this channel against an invader, as if Nature had not already defended it by her ledges and shallows and hardly concealed teeth of granite. To protect by a fort a channel when the way is so tortuous and difficult, and where there are so many other ways, is almost as if Warkworth Castle, five miles inland, on the winding Coquet, had been built to protect the shores of Northumberland from the invading Dane: or as if Chepstow above the muddy Wye had been built for the defence of Bristol. There, however, the castle is, and a very noble picture it made as the boat slowly voyaged through the Sound. The declining sun, not yet sunk too low behind Bryher, clothed it with light and splendour, and brought out the rich colour of grey rock and yellow fern upon the steep hillside behind. Beyond the castle, in the midst of the Sound, rose a pyramidal island, a pile of rocks, seventy or eighty feet high, on whose highest crann some of Oliver Cromwell's prisoners were hanged, according to the voice of tradition, which, somehow, always goes dead against that strong person.

Roland, who had exhausted the language of delight among the Outer Islands, contemplated this picture in silence.

'Do you not like it?' asked the girl.

'Like it?' he repeated. 'Armored! It is splendid.'

'Will you make a sketch of it?'

'I cannot. I must make a picture. I ought to come here day after day. There must be a good place to take it from – over there, I think, on that beach. Armored! It is splendid. To think that the picture is to be seen so near to London, and that no one comes to see it!'

'If you want to come day after day, Roland,' she said, softly, 'you will not be able to go away to-morrow. You must stay longer with us on Samson.'

'I ought not, child. You should not ask me.'

'Why should you not stay if you are happy with us? We will make you as comfortable as ever we can. You have only to tell us what you want.'

She looked so eagerly and sincerely anxious that he yielded.

'If you are really and truly sure,' he said.

'Of course I am really and truly sure. The weather will be fine, I think, and we will go sailing every day.'

'Then I will stay a day or two longer. I will make a picture of Cromwell's Castle – and the hill at the back of it and the water below it. I will make it for you, Armored; but I will keep a copy of it for myself. Then we shall each have a memento of this day – something to remember it by.'

'I should like to have the picture. But, oh! Roland! – as if I could ever forget this day!'

She spoke with perfect simplicity, this child of Nature, without the least touch of coquetry. Why should she not speak what was in her heart? Never before had she seen a young man so brave, so gallant, so comely: nor one who spoke so gently: nor one who treated her with so much consideration.

He turned his face: he could not meet those trustful eyes, with the innocence that lay there: he was abashed by reason of this innocence. A child – only a child. Armored would change. In a year or two this trustfulness would vanish. She would become like all other girls – shy and reserved, self-conscious in intuitive self-defence. But there was no harm as yet. She was a child – only a child.

As the sun went down the bows ran into the fine white sand of the landing-place, and their voyage was ended.

'A perfect day,' he murmured. 'A day to dream of. How shall I thank you enough, Armored?'

'You can stay and have some more days like it.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE VOYAGERS

This was the first of many such voyages and travels, though not often in the outside waters, for the vexed Bermoothes themselves are not more lashed by breezes from all the quarters of the compass than these isles of Scilly. They sailed from point to point, and from island to island, landing where they listed or where Armored led, wandering for long hours round the shores or on the hills. All the islands, except the bare rocks, are covered with down and moorland, bounded in every direction by rocky headlands and slopes covered with granite boulders. They were quite alone in their explorations: no native is ever met upon those downs: no visitor, except on St. Mary's, wanders on the beaches and around the bays. They were quite alone all the day long: the sea-breeze whistled in their ears; the gulls flew over their heads – the cormorants hardly stirred from the rocks when they climbed up; the hawk that hung motionless in the air above them changed not his place when they drew near. And always, day after day, they came continually upon unexpected places: strange places, beautiful places: beaches of dazzling white: wildly heaped cairns: here a cromlech, a logan stone, a barrow – Samson is not the only island which guards the tombs of the Great Departed – a new view of sea and sky and white-footed rock. I believe that there does not live any single man who has actually explored all the isles of Scilly: stood upon every rock, climbed every hill, and searched on every island for its treasures of ancient barrows, plants, birds, cairns, and headlands. Once there was a worthy person who came here as chaplain to St. Martin's. He started with the excellent intention of seeing everything. Alas! he never saw a single island properly: he never walked round one exhaustively. He wrote a book about them, to be sure; but he saw only half. As for Samson, this person of feeble intelligence even declared that the island was not worth a second visit! After that one would shut the book, but is lured on in the hope of finding something new.

One must not ask of the islanders themselves for information about the isles, because few of them ever go outside their own island unless to Hugh Town, where is the Port, and where are the shops. Why should they? On the other islands they have no business. Justinian Tryeth, for instance, was seventy-five years of age; Hugh Town he knew, and had often been there, though now Peter did the business of the farm at the Port: St. Agnes he knew, having wooed and won a wife there: he had been to Bryher Church, which is close to the shore – the rest of Bryher was to him as unknown as Iceland. As for St. Martin's, or Annet, or Great Ganilly, he saw them constantly; they were always within his sight, yet he had never desired to visit them. They were an emblem, a shape, a name to him, and nothing more. It is so always with those who live in strange and beautiful places: the marvels are part of their daily life: they heed them not, unless, like Armored, they have no work to do and are quick to feel the influences of things around them. Most Swiss people seem to care nothing for their Alps, but here and there is one who would gladly spend all his days high up among the fragrant pines, or climbing the slope of ice with steady step and slow.

But these young people did try to visit all the islands. Upon Roland there fell the insatiate curiosity – the rage – of an explorer and a discoverer. He became like Captain Cook himself: he longed for more islands: every day he found a new island. 'Give,' cries he who sails upon unknown seas and scans the round circle of the horizon for the cloudy peak of some far-distant mountain, 'give – give more islands – still more islands! Let us sail for yonder cloud! Let us sail on until the cloud becomes a hill-top, and the hill another island! Largesse for him who first calls "Land ahead!" There shall we find strange monsters and treasures rare, with friendly natives, and girls more blooming than those of fair Tahiti. Let us sail thither, though it prove no more than a barren rock, the resting-place of the sea-lion; though we can do no more than climb its steep sides and stand upon the top while the spray flies over the rocks and beats upon our faces.' In such a spirit as Captain Carteret (Armored's favourite) steered his frail bark from shore to shore did Roland sail among those Scilly seas.

Of course they went to Tresco, where there is the finest garden in all the world. But one should not go to see the garden more than once, because its perfumed alleys, its glasshouses, its cultivated and artificial air, are somehow incongruous with the rest of the islands. As well expect to meet a gentleman in a Court dress walking across Fylingdale Moor. Yet it is indeed a very noble and royal garden: other gardens have finer hothouses: none have a better show of flowers and trees of every kind: for variety it is like unto the botanical gardens of a tropical land: you might be standing in one of the alleys of the garden of Mauritius, or of Java, or the Cape. Here everything grows and flourishes that will grow anywhere, except, of course, those plants which carry patriotism to an extreme and refuse absolutely to leave their native soil. You cannot go picking pepper here, nor can you strip the cinnamon-tree of its bark. But here you will see the bamboos cluster, tall and graceful: the eucalyptus here parades his naked trunk and his blue leaves: here the fern-tree lifts its circle of glory of lace and embroidery twenty feet high: the prickly pear nestles in warm corners: the aloe shoots up its tall stalk of flower and of seed: the palms stand in long rows: and every lovely plant, every sweet flower, created for the solace of man, grows abundantly, and hastens with zeal to display its blossoms: the soft air is full of perfumes, strange and familiar: it is as if Kew had taken off her glass roofs and placed all her plants and trees to face the English winter. But, then, the winter of Scilly is not the winter of Great Britain. The botanist may visit this garden many times, and always find something to please him; but the ordinary traveller will go but once, and admire and come away. It is far better outside on the breezy down, where the dry fern and withered bents crack beneath your feet, and the elastic turf springs as you tread upon it. There are other things on Tresco: there is a big fresh-water lake – it would be a respectable lake even in Westmoreland – where the wild birds disport themselves: beside it South American ostriches roam gravely, after the manner of the bird. It is pleasant to see the creatures. There is a great cave, if you like dark damp caves: better than the cave, there is a splendid bold coast sloping steeply from the down all round the northern part of the island.

Then they walked all round St. Mary's. It is nine miles round; but if, as these young people did, you climb every headland and walk round every bay, and descend every possible place where the boulders make a ladder down to the boiling water below, it is nine hundred miles round, and, for its length, the most wonderful walk in all the world. They crossed the broad Sound to St. Agnes, and saw St. Werna's wondrous cove: they stood on the desolate Gugh and the lonely Annet, beloved of puffins: they climbed on every one of the Eastern Islands, and even sailed, when they found a day calm enough to permit the voyage, among the Dogs of Scilly, and clambered up the black boulders of Rosevear and scared the astonished cormorants from wild Goreggan.

One day it rained in the morning. Then they had to stay at home, and Armored showed the house. She took her guest into the dairy, where Chessun made the butter and scalded the cream – that rich cream which the West-country folk eat with everything. She made him stand by and help make a junket, which Devonshire people believe cannot be made outside the shadow of Dartmoor: she took him into the kitchen – the old room with its old furniture, the candlesticks and snuffers of brass, the bacon hanging to the joists, the blue china, the ancient pewter platters, the long bright spit – a kitchen of the eighteenth century. And then she took him into a room which no longer exists anywhere else save in name. It was the still-room, and on the shelves there stood the elixirs and cordials of ancient time: the currant gin to fortify the stomach on a raw morning before crossing the Road; the cherry brandy for a cold and stormy night; the elderberry wine, good mulled and spiced at Christmas-time; the blackberry wine; the home-made distilled waters – lavender water, Hungary water, Cyprus water, and the Divine Cordial itself, which takes three seasons to complete, and requires all the flowers of spring, summer, and autumn. Then they went into the best parlour, and Armored, opening a cupboard, took out an old sword of strange shape and with faded scabbard. On the blade there was a graven Latin legend. 'This is my ancestor's sword,' she said. 'He was an officer of the Spanish Armada – Hernando Mureno was his name.'

'You are indeed a Spanish lady, Armored. Your ancestor is well known to have been the bravest and most honourable gentleman in King Philip's service.'

'He remained here – he would not go home: he married and became a Protestant.'

She put back the sword in its place, and brought forth other things to show him – old-fashioned watches, old compasses, sextants, telescopes, flint-and-steel pistols – all kinds of things belonging to the old days of smuggling and of piloting.

Then she opened the bookcase. It should have been filled with histories of pirates and buccaneers; but it was not: it contained a whole body of theology of the Methodist kind. Roland tossed them over impatiently. 'I don't wonder,' he said, 'at your reading nothing if this is all you have.' But he found one or two books which he set aside.

As they wandered about the islands, of course they talked. It wants but little to make a young man open his heart to a girl; only a pair of soft and sympathetic eyes, a face full of interest and questions of admiration. Whether she tells him anything in return is quite another matter. Most young men, when they review the situation afterwards, discover that they have told everything and learned nothing. Perhaps there is nothing to learn. In a few days Armored knew everything about her guest. He had come from Australia – from that far-distant land – in search of fortune. He had as yet made but few friends. He was unknown and without patrons. He had no family connections which would help him. The patrimony on which he was to live until he should begin to succeed was but small, and although he held money-making in the customary contempt, it was necessary that he should make a good deal, because – which is often the case – his standard of comfort was pitched rather high: it included, for instance, a good club, good cigars, and good claret. Also, as he said, an artist should be free from sordid anxieties: Art demands an atmosphere of calm: therefore, he must have an income. This, like everything that does not exist, must be created. Man is godlike because he alone of creatures can create: he, and he alone, constantly creates things which previously did not exist – an income, honour, rank, tastes, wants, desires, necessities, habits, rules, and laws.

'How can you bear to sell your pictures?' asked the girl. 'We sell our flowers, but then we grow them by the thousand. You make every picture by itself – how can you sell the beautiful things? You must want to keep them every one to look at all your life. Those that you have given to me I could never part with.'

'One must live, fair friend of mine,' he replied, lightly. 'It is my only way of making money, and without money we can do nothing. It is not the selling of his pictures that the artist dreads – that is the necessity of Art as a profession: it is the danger that no one will care about seeing them or buying them. That is much more terrible, because it means failure. Sometimes I dream that I have become old and grey, and have been working all my life, and have had no success at all, and am still unknown and despised. In Art there are thousands of such failures. I think the artist who fails is despised more than any other man. It is truly miserable to aspire so high and to fall so low. Yet who am I that I should reach the port?'

'All good painters succeed,' said the girl, who had never seen a painter before or any painting save her own coloured engravings. 'You are a good painter, Roland. You must succeed. You will become a great painter in everybody's estimation.'

'I will take your words for an oracle,' he said. 'When I am melancholy, and the future looks dark, I will say, "Thus and thus spoke Armored."'

The young man who is about to attempt fortune by the pursuit of Art must not consider too long the wrecks that strew the shores and float about the waters, lest he lose self-confidence. Continually these wrecks occur, and there is no insurance against them: yet continually other barques hoist sail and set forth upon their perilous voyage. It may be reckoned as a good point in this aspirant that he was not over-confident.

'Some are wrecked at the outset,' he said. 'Others gain a kind of success. Heavens! what a kind! To struggle all their lives for admission to the galleries, and to rejoice if once in a while a picture is sold.'

'They are not the good painters,' the girl of large experience again reminded him.

'Am I a good painter?' he replied, humbly. 'Well, one can but try to do good work, and leave to the gods the rest. There is luck in things. It is not every good man who succeeds, Armored. To every man, however, there is allotted the highest stature possible for him to reach. Let me be contented if I grow to my full height.'

'You must, Roland. You could not be contented with anything less.'

'To reach one's full height, one must live for work alone. It is a hard saying, Armored. It is a great deal harder than you can understand.'

'If you love your work, and if you are happy in it – ' said the girl.

'You do not understand, child, Most men never reach their full height. You can see their pictures in the galleries – poor, stunted things. It is because they live for anything rather than their work. They are pictures without a soul in them.'

Now, when a young man holds forth in this strain, one or two things suggest themselves. First, one thinks that he is playing a part, putting on 'side,' affecting depths – in fact, enacting the part of the common Prig, who is now, methinks, less common than he was. If he is not a prig uttering insincere sentimentalities, he may be a young man who has preserved his ideals beyond the usual age by some accident. The ideals and beliefs and aspirations of young men, when they first begin the study of Art in any of its branches, are very beautiful things, and full of truths which can only, somehow, be expressed by very young men. The third explanation is that in certain circumstances, as in the companionship of a girl not belonging to society and the world – a young, innocent, and receptive girl – whose mind is ready for pure ideas, uncontaminated by earthly touch, the old enthusiasms are apt to return and the old beliefs to come back. Then such things may spring in the heart and rise to the lips as one could not think or utter in a London studio.

Sincere or not, this young man pursued his theme, making a kind of confession which Armored could not, as yet, understand. But she remembered. Women at all ages remember tenaciously, and treasure up in their hearts things which they may at some other time learn to understand.

'There was an old allegory, Armored,' this young man went on, 'of a young man choosing his way, once for all. It is an absurd story, because every day and all day long we are pulled the other way. Sometimes it makes me tremble all over only to think of the flowery way. I know what the end would be. But yet, Armored, what can you know or understand about the Way of Pleasure, and how men are drawn into it with ropes? My soul is sometimes sick with yearning when I think of those who run along that Way and sing and feast.'

'What kind of Way is it, Roland?'

'You cannot understand, and I cannot tell you. The Way of Pleasure and the Way of Wealth. These are the two roads by which the artistic life is ruined. Yet we are dragged into them by ropes.'

'You shall keep to the true path, Roland,' the girl said, with glistening eyes. 'Oh! how happy you will be when you have reached your full height – you will be a giant then.'

He laughed and shook his head. 'Again, Armored, I will take it from your lips – a prophecy. But you do not understand.'

'No,' she said. 'I am very ignorant. Yet if I cannot understand, I can remember. The Way of Pleasure and the Way of Wealth. I shall remember. We are told that we must not set our hearts upon the things of this world. I used to think that it meant being too fond of pretty frocks and ribbons. Dorcas said so once. Since you have come I see that there are many, many things that I know nothing of. If I am to be dragged to them by ropes, I do not want to know them. The Way of Pleasure and the Way of Wealth. They destroy the artistic life,' she repeated, as if learning a lesson. 'These ways must be ways of Sin, don't you think?' she asked, looking up with curious eyes.

Doubtless. Yet this is not quite the modern manner of regarding and speaking of the subject. And considering what an eighteenth-century and bourgeois-like manner it is, and how fond we now are of that remarkable century, one is surprised that the manner has not before now been revived. When we again tie our hair behind and assume silver-buckled shoes and white silk stockings, we shall once more adopt that manner. It was not, however, artificial with Armored. The words fell naturally from her lips. A thing that was prejudicial to the better nature of a man must, she thought, belong to ways of Sin. Again – doubtless. But Roland did not think of it in that way, and the words startled him.

'Puritan!' he said. 'But you are always right. It is the instinct of your heart always to be right. But we no longer talk that language. It is a hundred years old. In these days there is no more talk about Sin – at least, outside certain circles. There are habits, it is true, which harm an artist's eye and destroy his hand. We say that it is a pity when an artist falls into these habits. We call it a pity, Armored, not the way of Sin. A pity – that is all. It means the same thing, I dare say, so far as the artist is concerned.'

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST DAY BUT ONE

The last day but one! It always comes at length – it is bound to come – the saddest, the most sentimental of all days. The boy who leaves school – I speak of the old-fashioned boy and the ancient school – where he has been fagged and bullied and flogged, on this last day but one looks round with a choking throat upon the dingy walls and the battered desks. Even the convict who is about to be released after years of prison feels a sentimental melancholy in gazing for the last time upon the whitewashed walls. The world, which misunderstands the power of temptation and is distrustful as to the reality of repentance, will probably prove cold to him. How much more, then, when one looks around on the last day but one of a holiday! To-morrow we part. This is the last day of companionship.

Roland's holiday was to consist of a day or two, or three at the most – yet lo! the evening and the morning were the twenty-first day. There was always something new to be seen, something more to be sketched, some fresh excuse for staying in a house where this young man lived from the first as if he had been there all his life and belonged to the family. Scilly has to be seen in cloud as well as in sunshine: in wind and rain as well as in fair weather: one island had been accidentally overlooked; another must be re-visited.

So the days went on, each one like the days before it, but with a difference. The weather was for the most part fine, so that they could at least sail about the islands of the Road. Every morning the young man got up at six and, after a bathe from Shark Point, walked all round Samson and refreshed his soul by gazing upon the Outer Islands. Breakfast over, he took a pipe in the farmyard with Justinian and Peter, who continually talked of shipwrecks and of things washed ashore. During this interval Armored made the puddings and the cakes. When she had accomplished this delicate and responsible duty, she came out, prepared for the day. They took their dinner-basket with them, and sallied forth: in the afternoon they returned: in the evening, at seven o'clock, the table was pushed back: the old serving people came in; the fire was stirred into animation; Armored played the old-fashioned tunes; and the ancient lady rallied, and sat up, and talked, her mind in the past. All the days alike, yet each one differing from its neighbours. There is no monotony, though place and people remain exactly the same, when there is the semblance of variety. For, besides the discovery of so many curious and interesting islands, this fortunate young man, as we have seen, discovered that his daily companion, though so young – 'only a child' – was a girl of wonderful quickness and ready sympathy. A young artist wants sympathy – it is necessary for his growth: sympathy, interest, and flattery are necessary for the artistic temperament. All these Armored offered him in large measure, running over. She kept alive in him that faith in his own star which every artist, as well as every general, must possess. Great is the encouragement of such sympathy to the young man of ambitions. This consideration is, indeed, the principal excuse for early marriages. Three weeks of talk with such a girl – no one else to consider or to interrupt – no permission to be sought – surely these things made up a holiday which quite beat the record! Three whole weeks! Such a holiday should form the foundation of a life-long friendship! Could either of them ever forget such a holiday?

Now it was all over. For very shame Roland could make no longer any excuses for staying. His sketch-book was crammed. There were materials in it for a hundred pictures – most of them might be called Studies of Armored. She was in the boat holding the tiller, bare-headed, her hair flying in the breeze, the spray dashing into her face, and the clear blue water rushing past the boat: or she was sitting idly in the same boat lying in Grinsey Sound, with Shipman's Head behind her: or she was standing on the sea-weed at low water under the mighty rock of Castle Bryher: or she was standing upright in the low room, violin in hand, her face and figure crimsoned in the red firelight: or she was standing in the porch between the verbena-trees, the golden figure-head smiling benevolently upon her, and the old ships lanthorn swinging overhead with an innocent air, as if it had never heard of

a wreck and knew not how valuable a property may be a cow, judiciously treated – with a lighted lantern between its horns – on a stormy night. There were other things: sketches of bays and coves, and headlands and carns, gathered from all the islands – from Porthellick and Peninnis on St. Mary's, which everybody goes to see, to St. Werna's Cove on St. Agnes, whither no traveller ever wendeth.

A very noble time. No letters, no newspapers, no trouble of any kind: yet one cannot remain for ever even in a house where such a permanent guest would be welcomed. Now and then, it is true, one hears how such a one went to a friend's house and stayed there. La Fontaine, Gay, and Coleridge are examples. But I have never heard, before this case, of a young man going to a house where a quite young girl, almost a child, was the mistress, and staying there. Now the end had come: he must go back to London, where all the men and most of the women have their own shows to run, and there is not enough sympathy to go round: back to what the young artist, he who has as yet exhibited little and sold nothing, calls his Work – putting a capital letter to it, like the young clergyman. Perhaps he did not understand that under the eyes of a girl who knew nothing about Art he had done really better and finer work, and had learned more, in those three weeks than in all the time that he had spent in a studio. Well; it was all over. The sketching was ended: there would be no more sailing over the blue waves of the rolling Atlantic outside the islands: no more quiet cruising in the Road: no more fishing: no more clambering among the granite rocks: no more sitting in sunny places looking out to sea, with this bright child at his side.

Alas! And no more talks with Armored. From the first day the child sat at his feet and became his disciple, Heloise herself was not an apter pupil. She ardently desired to learn: like a curious child she asked him questions all day long, and received the answers as if they were gospel: but no child that he had ever known betrayed blacker gaps of ignorance than this girl of fifteen. Consider. What could she know? Other girls learn at school: Armored's schooling was over at fourteen, when she came home from St. Mary's to her desert island. Other girls continue their education by reading books: but Armored never read anything except voyages of the last century, which treat but little of the modern life. Other girls also learn from hearing their elders talk: but Armored's elders never talked. Other girls, again, learn from conversation with companions: but Armored had no companions. And they learn from the shops in the street, the people who walk about, from the church, the theatre, the shows: but Armored had no better street than the main street of Hugh Town. And they learn from society: but this girl had none. And they learn from newspapers, magazines, and novels: but Armored had none of these. No voice, no sound of the outer world reached Alexandra Selkirk of Samson. Juan Fernandez itself was not more cut off from men and women. Therefore, in her seclusion and her ignorance, this young man came to her like another Apollo or a Vishnu at least – a revelation of the world of which she knew nothing, and to which she never gave a thought. He opened a door and bade her look within. All she saw was a great company painting pictures and talking Art; but that was something. As for what he said, this young man ardent, she remembered and treasured all, even the lightest things, the most trivial opinions. He did not abuse her confidence. Had he been older he might have been cynical: had he not been an artist he might have been flippant: had he been a City man and a money-grub he might have shown her the sordid side of the world. Being such as he was he showed her the best and most beautiful part – the world of Art. But as for these black gaps of ignorance, most of them remained even after Roland's visit.

'Your best friend, Armored,' said her guest, 'would not deny that you are ignorant of many things. You have never gone to a dinner-party or sat in a drawing-room: you cannot play lawn-tennis; you know none of the arts feminine: you cannot talk the language of Society: oh! you are a very ignorant person indeed! But then there are compensations.'

'What are compensations? Things that make up? Do you mean the boat and the islands?'

'The boat is certainly something, and the islands give a flavour of their own to life on Samson, don't they? If I were talking the usual cant I should say that the chief compensation is the absence of the hollow world and its insincere society. That is cant and humbug, because society is very pleasant,

only, I suppose, one must not expect too much from it. Your real compensations, Armored, are of another kind. You can fiddle like a jolly sailor, all of the olden time. If you were to carry that fiddle of yours on to the Common Hard at Portsea not a man among them all, even the decayed veteran – if he still lives – who caught Nelson, the Dying Hero, in his arms, but would jump to his feet and shuffle – heel and toe, double-step, back-step, flourish and fling. I believe those terms are correct.'

'I am so glad you think I can fiddle.'

'You want only instruction in style to make you a very fine violinist. Besides, there is nothing more pleasing to look at, just now, than a girl playing a violin. It is partly fashion. Formerly it was thought graceful for a girl to play the guitar, then the harp; now it is the fiddle, when it is not the zither or the banjo. That is one compensation. There is another. I declare that I do not believe there is in all London a girl with such a genius as yours for puddings and pies, cakes and biscuits. I now understand that there is more wanted, in this confection, than industry and application. It is an art. Every art affords scope for genius born not made. The true – the really artistic – administration of spice and sugar, milk, eggs, butter, and flour requires real genius – such as yours, my child. And as to the still-room, there isn't such a thing left, I believe, in the whole world except on Samson, any more than there is a spinning-wheel. Who but yourself, Armored, possesses the secret, long since supposed to be hopelessly lost, of composing Cyprus water, and the Divine Cordial? In this respect, you belong to a hundred years ago, when the modern ignorance was unknown. And where can I find – I should like to know – a London girl who understands cherry brandy, and can make her own blackberry wine?'

'You want to please me, Roland, because you are going away and I am unhappy.' She hung her head in sadness too deep for tears. 'That is why you say all these fine things. But I know that they mean very little. I am only an ignorant girl.'

'I must always, out of common gratitude, want to please you. But I am only speaking the bare truth. Then there is the delicate question of dress. An ordinary man is not supposed to know anything about dress, but an artist has always to consider it. There are certainly other girls – thousands of other girls – more expensively dressed than you, Armored; but you have the taste for costume, which is far better than any amount of costly stuff.'

'Chess taught me how to sew and how to cut out.' But the assurance of this excellence brought her no comfort.

'When I am gone, Armored, you will go on with your drawing, will you not?' It will be seen that he endeavoured, as an Apostle of Art, to introduce its cult even on remote Samson. That was so, and not without success. The girl, he discovered, had been always making untaught attempts at drawing, and wanted nothing but a little instruction. This was a fresh discovery. 'That you should have the gift of the pencil is delightful to think of. The pencil, you see, is like the Jinn – I fear you have no Jinn on Samson – who could do almost anything for those who knew how to command his obedience, but only made those people ridiculous who ignorantly tried to order him around. If you go on drawing every day I am sure you will learn how to make that Jinn obedient. I will send you, when I get home, some simple books for your guidance. Promise, child, that you will not throw away this gift.'

'I will draw every day,' she replied, obediently, but with profound dejection.

'Then there is your reading. You must read something. I have looked through your shelves, and have picked out some books for you. There is a volume of Cowper and of Pope, and an old copy of the *Spectator*, and there is Goldsmith's "Deserted Village."

'I will read anything you wish me to read,' she replied.

'I will send you some more books. You ought to know something about the world of to-day. Addison and Goldsmith will not teach you that. But I don't know what to send you. Novels are supposed to represent life; but then they pre-suppose a knowledge of the world, to begin with. You want an account of modern society as it is, and the thing does not exist. I will consider about it.'

'I will read whatever you send me. Roland, when I have read all the books and learned to draw, shall I have grown to my full height? Remember what you said about yourself.'

'I don't know, Armored. It is not reading. But – ' He left the sentence unfinished.

'Who is to tell me – on Samson?' she asked.

In the afternoon of this day Roland planted his easel on the plateau of the northern hill, where the barrows are, and put the last touches to the sketch, which he afterwards made into the first picture which he ever exhibited. It appeared in the Grosvenor of '85: of course everybody remembers the picture, which attracted a very respectable amount of attention. It was called the 'Daughter of Lyonesse.' It represented a maiden in the first blossom of womanhood – tall and shapely. She was dressed in a robe of white wool thrown over her left shoulder and gathered at the waist by a simple belt of brown leather: a white linen vest was seen below the wool: round her neck was a golden torque: behind her was the setting sun: she stood upon the highest of a low pile of granite boulders, round the feet of which were spread the yellow branches of the fern and the faded flowers of the heather: she shaded her eyes from the sun with her left hand, and looked out to sea. She was bare-headed: the strong breeze lifted her long black hair and blew it from her shoulders: her eyes were black and her complexion was dark. Behind her and below her was the splendour of sun and sky and sea, with the Western Islands rising black above the golden waters.

The sketch showed the figure, but the drapery was not complete: as yet it was a study of light and colour and a portrait.

'I don't quite know,' said the painter, thoughtfully, 'whether you ought not to wear a purple chiton: Phœnician trade must have brought Phœnician luxuries to Lyonesse. Your ancestors were tin-men – rich miners – no doubt the ladies of the family went dressed in the very, very best. I wonder whether in those days the King's daughter was barefooted. The *caliga*, I think – the leather sandal – would have been early introduced into the royal family on account of the spikiness of the fern in autumn and the thorns of the gorse all the year round. The slaves and common people, of course, would have to endure the thorns.'

He continued his work while he talked, Armored making no reply, enacting the model with zeal.

'It is a strange sunset,' he went on, as if talking to himself, 'a day of clouds, but in the west a broad belt of blue low down in the horizon: in the midst of the belt the sun flaming crimson: on either hand the sky aglow, but only in the belt of clear: above is the solid cloud, grey and sulky, receiving none of the colour: below is also the solid, sulky cloud, but under the sun there spreads out a fan of light which strikes the waters and sets them aflame in a long broad road from the heavens to your feet, O child of Lyonesse. Outside this road of light the waters are dull and gloomy: in the sky the coloured belt of light fades gradually into soft yellows, clear greens, and azure blues. A strange sunset! A strange effect of light! Armored, you see your life: it is prefigured by the light. Overhead the sky is grey and colourless: where the glow of the future does not lie on the waters they are grey and colourless. Nothing around you but the waste of grey sea: before you black rocks – life is always full of black rocks: and beyond, the splendid sun – soft, warm, and glowing. You shall interpret that in your own way.'

Armored listened, standing motionless, her left hand shading her eyes.

'If the picture,' he went on, 'comes out as I hope it may, it will be one of those that suggest many things. Every good picture, Armored, as well as every good poem, suggests. It is like that statue of Christ which is always taller than the tallest man. Nobody can ever get above the thought and soul of a good picture or a good poem. There is always more in it than the wisest man knows. That is the proof of genius. That is why I long all day for the mysterious power of putting into my work the soul of everyone who looks upon it – as well as my own soul. When you come to stand before a great picture, Armored, perhaps you will understand what I mean. You will find your heart agitated with strange emotions – you will leave it with new thoughts. When you go away from your desert island, remember every day to read a piece of great verse, to look upon a great picture, and to hear a piece of great music. As for these suggested thoughts, you will not perhaps be able to put them into words. But they will be there.'

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