EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,

and be thy guide,

In thy most need to go by thy side

PIERRE LOTI

(pseudonym of Louis Marie Julien Viaud)

Born at Rochefort on 14th January 1850. He entered the navy in 1867, became lieutenant in 1881 and captain in 1906, and was transferred to the reserve in 1910. Died at Hendaye on 10th June 1923.

PIERRE LOTI

Iceland Fisherman

TRANSLATED BY
W. P. BAINES

DENT: LONDON
EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY
DUTTON: NEW YORK

Made in Great Britain
at the
Aldine Press · Letchworth · Herts
for
J. M. DENT & SONS LTD
Aldine House · Bedford Street · London
First included in Everyman's Library 1935
Last reprinted 1965

NO. 920

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Pêcheur d'Islande, in English *Iceland Fisherman*, was Pierre Loti's seventh book, and the story that established his greater fame as a novelist and story-teller. He had been a sailor serving in the French navy many years when he wrote it, and his intimate understanding of the sea in all its moods, its northern and wintry aspects and its summer calms, was never turned to finer effect. His Breton strain aided in the interpretation of the characters who were like his hero Yann, both sturdy and wayward, or like the girl Gaud, simple and complex by turns. Those who know the Breton coast and its 'Sept Isles' and their azure setting, or its bleak moors and rocky coasts will recognize the truth of his scene-painting. His Paimpol and his Porseven become alive and real in his tale-teller's page. The touch of Celtic fatalism in the story may be traced to his temperamental reactions and the same early influences.

Here and there possibly an ultra modern reader may question his use of the idyllic note and his frequent dropping into the minor key. But that too was typical of the man and his narrative method, for he could be gay and melancholy, with equal instinct; and he could not resist at the end of all a cadence that is almost too affectionately turned. When the final summing up of Pierre Loti as a French novelist comes to be made, it will be to the books in which his Breton and his seafaring early memories give fictive reality to the writing that the old Censor, Time, will turn—and in that earlier cycle of stories *Iceland Fisherman* will hold a sure place.

ERNEST RHYS.

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Loti also did a little dramatization, including versions of *Pêcheur d'Islande* and *Madame Chrysanthème*, and a play written in collaboration with Judith Gautier called *La Fille du Ciel*. His two best-known miscellaneous works are the *Discours de Reception de Pierre Loti à la Séance de l'Académie Française*, 1892, and *L'Outrage des Barbares*, 1917, translated into English by Madox Hueffer. A collected edition of his works was published in eleven vols., 1893–1911.

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Most of Loti's work has been translated into English, and Werner Laurie Limited have published the majority of the translations. It is by their courtesy that this translation is reprinted in Everyman's Library.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

THERE were five of them, mighty-shouldered fellows, round a table drinking, in a gloomy sort of room which smelt of brine and the sea. The den, for so it might be described, was too low for men of their stature, and tapered towards one end, like the interior of a great hollow sea-gull; it rocked gently, giving out a monotonous plaint, with a slowness of sleep.

Outside, no doubt, was the sea and the night, but there was little or no indication of this within: a single opening cut in the roof was closed by a wooden lid, and the light came from an old hanging lamp which swung slowly.

There was a fire in a stove; their wet clothes were drying, shedding a vapour of steam which mingled with the smoke from their clay pipes.

Their massive table occupied the whole of the room, conforming exactly to its shape, and there remained just room to get round in order to sit on the shallow lockers fixed to the oaken walls. Large beams passed above them, almost touching their heads; and, behind their backs, sleeping berths, which seemed to have been hollowed out of the thickness of the timber, opened like the niches of a vault for the dead. All the woodwork was massive and defaced, impregnated with dampness and sea salt; worn, polished by the rubbings of their hands.

They had been drinking wine and cider out of their bowls, and the joy of physical well-being brightened

their faces which were open and honest. And they remained now round the table, talking of women and marriage.

Against a panel at the end of the room a Holy Virgin in faïence was fixed on a little shelf, in a place of honour. She was rather ancient, the patron saint of these sailors, and coloured with an art still crude. But personages in faïence last much longer than real men and women; and her red and blue robe still produced the effect of a little something very bright amid all the sombre greys of that poor wooden house. She had heard, doubtless, more than one heartfelt prayer, in hours of distress and peril; at her feet someone had nailed two bunches of artificial flowers and a rosary.

These five men were clothed all alike: a thick jersey of blue wool fitting tight to the body and disappearing inside the waistband of their trousers; on the head, the kind of helmet of tarred canvas which is called a sou'wester (from the name of the wind which in our hemisphere brings the rains).

They were of divers ages. The captain might have been forty; three others, between twenty-five and thirty; the last, whom they called Sylvestre or Lurlu, was no more than seventeen. He was already a man in stature and strength; a dark beard, very fine and very curly, covered his cheeks; but he had kept his boyish eyes—grey-blue eyes, which were extremely gentle and quite innocent.

Very close to one another, for want of space, they seemed to be enjoying a great sense of ease, talking thus in their dark little room.

Outside, no doubt, was the sea and the night, the infinite desolation of dark and profound waters. A brass watch, hanging on the wall, marked the hour

of eleven—eleven at night, doubtless; and against the wooden roof could be heard the pattering of rain.

They were discussing very merrily among themselves these questions of marriage, but without saying anything that was indecent. Simply projects for those who were still unmarried, or, maybe, droll stories of things that had happened in their villages during wedding festivities. True that sometimes they uttered, with an honest laugh, an allusion a little too frank to the pleasure of love. But love, as men so tempered understand it, is always a healthy thing, and in its very crudity remains almost chaste.

Sylvestre, however, was a little restless, on account of another called Jean (a name which the Bretons pronounce Yann), who had not come.

Where, in fact, was this Yann; still at work above? Why had he not come down to take a share in this feast?

'It 's nearly midnight, too,' said the captain.

And, standing upright, he raised with his head the wooden lid, in order to call, through the opening, this fellow Yann. A very strange light fell then from above.

'Yann! Yann! Eh! You man there!'

The *man* replied roughly from without.

And through this lid, half opened for a minute, the pale light which entered was almost like the light of day. 'Nearly midnight'—and yet the light seemed to be sunlight, a sort of crepuscular light transmitted from afar by mysterious mirrors.

The opening closed, darkness returned, the little pendent lamp resumed its yellow glare, and one heard the *man*, in huge clogs, descending a wooden ladder.

He entered, obliged to bend double like a great bear, for he was almost a giant. And, at the outset,

he made a grimace and held his nose on account of the acrid odour of the brine.

He exceeded by rather too much the ordinary proportions of men, especially in the breadth of his shoulders, which were as square as a cross-bar; when he faced you, the muscles of his shoulders, outlined under his blue jersey, formed, as it were, two balls at the top of his arms. He had large brown eyes, very mobile, at once shy and proud in expression.

Sylvestre, passing his arms round this Yann, hugged him affectionately, as children do; he was betrothed to his sister, and treated him as an elder brother. The other allowed himself to be caressed with the air of a spoilt lion, responding by a good-humoured smile, which showed his white teeth.

His teeth, which had more room in which to arrange themselves than is the case with other men, had little spaces between them, and seemed quite small. His fair moustache was rather short, although it was never cut; it was curled very closely in two little symmetrical rolls above his lips, which were thin and beautifully shaped; and then, at the two ends, it spread out in disorder on either side of the deep-set corners of his mouth. The rest of his beard was clipped close, and his ruddy cheeks had preserved a fresh bloom, like that of fruits which no one has touched.

The glasses were refilled when Yann had sat down, and they called the shipboy to refill the pipes and light them.

This lighting of the pipes enabled him to smoke a little himself. He was a sturdy lad, round-faced, a distant cousin of all these sailors, who were all more or less related to one another; apart from his work, which was hard enough, he was the spoilt child of the

ship. Yann gave him to drink out of his glass, and then he was sent to bed.

Afterwards they took up again the great topic of marriage.

'And you, Yann,' asked Sylvestre, 'when are you going to get married?'

'Aren't you ashamed,' said the captain, 'a great fellow like you, at twenty-seven, to be still unmarried? What must the girls think when they see you!'

He shrugged his formidable shoulders with a gesture that was full of disdain for women, and replied:

'I marry in the night; at other times, I marry when the opportunity offers; it all depends.'

Yann had just finished his five years' service in the navy, and it was there, as a gunner in the fleet, that he had learnt to speak French and to entertain sceptical notions. And he began to tell of his most recent 'marriage,' which, it appeared, had lasted a fortnight.

It was at Nantes, with a singing-girl. One night, going ashore, he had entered, a little the worse for drink, an alcazar. At the door was a woman selling enormous bouquets at twenty francs apiece. He had bought one, without knowing very well what he was going to do with it, and then, as soon as he got in, he had thrown it full in the face of the singer on the stage—partly in rough homage, partly in mockery of the painted doll, who seemed to him too 'made up.' The girl fell from the blow; afterwards, she had worshipped him for nearly three weeks.

'She even,' he said, 'when I was going away, made me a present of this gold watch.'

And, so that they might see it, he threw it on the table, as if it were a contemptible plaything.

This was related in homely words and with characteristic imagery. Nevertheless, this commonplace of civilized life was sadly out of tune among these primitive men, with the great silence of the sea which was felt to be around them; with the luminous midnight, glimpsed a short while before through the opening above, which had brought the notion of the dying summers of the Pole.

And, especially, these ways of Yann pained and surprised Sylvestre. He was a wholly innocent lad, brought up in the respect of the sacraments by an old grandmother, the widow of a fisherman of the village of Ploubazlanec. When quite little he used to go daily with her to recite the rosary on his knees at the grave of his mother. From this same cemetery, situated on the cliff, he could see in the distance the grey waters of the Channel, where his father had disappeared some time before in a shipwreck. As they were poor, his grandmother and he, it had been necessary for him at a very early age to join in the fishing, and his childhood had been passed on the open sea. He used still to say his prayers every night, and his eyes had preserved a religious candour. He, too, was good-looking, and, after Yann, the best set-up of those on board. His gentle voice and childlike intonations contrasted a little with his tall figure and dark beard; he had grown up very quickly, and he felt almost embarrassed at having become all at once so big and tall. He hoped soon to marry Yann's sister, but he had never yet responded to the advances of any woman.

On board they possessed but three sleeping-berths —one for two—in which they slept in turn, dividing the night between them.

When they had finished their fête—celebrated in

honour of the Assumption of the Virgin, their patron saint—it was a little after midnight. Three of them curled themselves up to sleep in the dark little niches that resembled sepulchres, and the three others climbed up on deck to resume the interrupted labour of the fishing; they were Yann, Sylvestre, and one of their country, called Guillaume.

Outside it was quite light, eternally light.

But it was a pale, pale light, which resembled nothing; it cast on things what might have been reflections of a dead sun. Around them began at once an immense void which was without colour, and, apart from the planks of their boat, everything seemed diaphanous, impalpable, chimerical.

The eye scarcely perceived that which was no doubt the sea; what they saw at first had the aspect of a kind of trembling mirror which had no image to reflect; as it stretched away it seemed to become a plain of vapour, and then nothing at all; it had neither horizon nor contours.

The damp freshness of the air was more intense, more penetrating, than real cold; and, as they breathed, they savoured very strongly the taste of salt. It was quite calm and the rain had ceased; above, shapeless and colourless clouds seemed to contain this latent light which remained inexplicable; one saw clearly, while being conscious, nevertheless, of the night, and all the palenesses of things were of no colour that can be named.

The three men who were standing there had lived since their boyhood on these frigid seas, in the midst of their phantasmagorias, which are as vague and confused as visions. All this changing infinitude they had been used to see play around their narrow house of planks, and their eyes had become as much

accustomed to it as those of the great birds of the high sea.

The boat rocked slowly where it lay, giving out unceasingly its same plaint, as monotonous as a song of Brittany repeated in a dream by a man asleep. Yann and Sylvestre had prepared their hooks and lines very quickly, while the other opened a barrel of salt, and, sharpening his large knife, sat down behind them to wait.

He had not to wait long. Scarcely had they cast their lines into this cold and tranquil water than they brought them back again, weighted with heavy fish, which glistened with the shining grey of steel.

And still, and still, the live cod allowed themselves to be caught; it was rapid and incessant, this silent fishing. The other gutted with his large knife, flattened, salted and counted, and all the time the soused fish which was to make their fortune on their return was piling up behind them, streaming and fresh.

The hours passed monotonous, and, in the great empty regions round about, slowly the light changed; it seemed now more real. What had been a wan twilight, a sort of evening of hyperborean summer, had become, without the intermedium of night, something like a dawn, which the multitudinous mirrors of the sea reflected in hazy trails of ruddy light. . . .

'Really, you know, you ought to marry, Yann,' said Sylvestre suddenly, speaking very seriously this time, his eyes upon the water. (It seemed as if he knew that there was a certain someone in Brittany who had fallen captive to the brown eyes of his brother but felt rather shy in broaching so serious a matter.)

'I! . . . Oh, yes; one of these days I shall marry' —and he smiled, this fellow Yann, disdainful still, rolling his lively eyes—'but not with any of the girls

of the country. No, my marriage will be with the sea, and I invite you all, here as you stand, to the ball which I shall give. . . .'

They went on with their fishing, for there was no time to lose in conversation; they were in the midst of an immense population of fish, of a migrating shoal, which for two days now had passed without ceasing.

They had all worked through the preceding night, and caught in thirty hours more than a thousand very large cod; and their arms were tired, and their spirit drowsy. Only their body kept vigil and continued mechanically the movement of the fishing, while, for minutes at a time, their mind was wrapt in sleep. But this air of the wide sea which they were breathing was pure as in the first days of the world, and so vivifying that, in spite of their weariness, they felt their lungs dilated and their cheeks aglow.

The light of morning—the real light—had come at last; as in the days of Genesis, it had separated itself from the darkness, which seemed now to be heaped on the horizon and to rest there in a solid mass; and, seeing it there so clearly, one perceived unmistakably now that one had issued from the night—that the preceding light had been indeterminate and strange, like that of dreams.

In the heavy overcast sky there were breaks here and there, like openings in a dome, through which came wide beams of the colour of ruddy silver.

The lower clouds were arranged in a belt of intense shadow, making a circle round the waters, filling the distances with indistinctness and gloom. They gave the illusion of an enclosed space, of a limit; it was as if they were curtains drawn over the infinite, as if they were veils stretched out to hide some too gigantic mysteries which might have troubled the imagination

of men. On this morning, around the little assemblage of planks which carried Yann and Sylvestre, the changing world without had assumed an aspect of immense calm; it had turned itself into a kind of sanctuary, and the sheaves of rays which entered through the openings of the temple vault were prolonged in reflections on the still water as on a marble parvise. And then, gradually, in the distance another chimera took shape in the growing light; a kind of rosy figuring, very high; a promontory of gloomy Iceland. . . .

The marriage of Yann with the sea . . . Sylvestre had pondered it in his mind, as he continued to fish, not daring to speak of it again. It grieved him to hear the sacrament of marriage turned thus into mockery by his elder brother; and, what was more, it made him afraid, for he was superstitious.

He had thought for so long of this marriage of Yann! He had dreamt that it would be with Gaud Mével—a fair-haired girl of Paimpol—and that he would have the happiness of being present at the wedding feast before he departed for his service at sea, before that five years' exile, with its doubtful return, the inevitable approach of which began already to weigh upon his heart. . . .

Four o'clock in the morning. The others, who had remained to sleep below, came up, all three, to relieve them. Still a little drowsy, breathing deeply of the fresh, cold air, they had fastened their long sea-boots as they ascended, and they screwed up their eyes, dazzled at first by all these reflections of pale light.

Then Yann and Sylvestre made a hasty breakfast of biscuits; after having broken them by hammering, they began to crunch them in very noisy fashion, laughing to find them so hard. They were very merry

again at the prospect of going down to sleep, of being cosily warm in their little berths, and, with arms round one another's waist, they moved off towards the hatchway, traipsing to the tune of an old song.

Before disappearing down this hole, they stopped to play with a certain Turk, the boat's dog, a Newfoundland puppy, which had enormous paws, still clumsy and babyish. They teased him with their hands, while he mouthed them like a wolf and ended by hurting them. Then Yann, with a frown of anger in his expressive eyes, pushed him off rather violently, so that he rolled over and howled.

He was good-hearted, this Yann, but his nature had remained a little wild; and when the physical part of him was alone in play a gentle caress was often, with him, very near to an angry blow.

CHAPTER II

THEIR boat was called the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur. It used to go every year to take a part in the dangerous sea-fishing in those cold regions where the summers are nightless.

It was very old, like the faïence Virgin, its patroness. Its thick sides, ribbed with oak, were roughened, wrinkled, impregnated with moisture and brine; but sound withal, and strong, exhaling the quickening savour of tar. At rest, it had a clumsy air, with its massive framing, but when a stiff breeze blew from the west it recovered its lightsome vigour, as the gulls do when the wind awakens them. Then it had a way of its own of rising to the wave and of rebounding, more nimbly than many a younger boat, fashioned with modern fineness.

As to its crew, the six men and the boy, they were 'Icelanders,' a valiant race of mariners which is bred especially in the country round Paimpol and Tréguier, and is dedicated from father to son to this particular kind of fishing.

They had scarcely ever seen a French summer.

At the end of every winter they received, with the other fishermen, in the harbour of Paimpol, the benediction of those about to depart. For this day of festival, a kind of altar, always the same, was constructed on the quay; it was in the form of a rocky grotto, and, within it, among trophies of anchors, oars, and nets, was enthroned, gentle and impressive,

the Virgin, patroness of mariners, come for their sake out of her church, gazing always, from generation to generation, with her same lifeless eyes, on the fortunate for whom the season was going to be prosperous —and on the others, those who would not return.

The Blessed Sacrament, followed by a slow-moving procession of wives and mothers, sweethearts and sisters, made the round of the harbour, where all the boats of the Icelanders, gaily beflagged, saluted as it passed. The priest, stopping before each of them, said the words and made the gestures of blessing.

Afterwards they all departed, like a fleet, leaving the country almost empty of husbands, lovers, and sons. As they moved off, the crews sang together, with full, resonant voices, the hymns of Mary Star-of-the-Sea.

And every year there was the same ceremonial of departure, every year there were the same adieux.

Afterwards, began again the life of the ocean, the isolation, with three or four rough companions, on this floating house of wood, amid the cold waters of the hyperborean sea.

Until now, they had returned—the Virgin Star-of-the-Sea had protected this boat which bore her name.

The end of August was the time of their return. But the *Marie* followed the custom of many of the Icelanders, which is simply to call at Paimpol, and then to proceed to the Gulf of Gascony, where their catch sells well, and to the sandy, salt-marshed islands where they buy the salt for their next voyage.

In these ports of the south, which the sun still warms, the sturdy crews run loose for a few days, avid of pleasure, intoxicated by this remnant of summer, by this warmer air—by the earth and by the women.

And then, with the first mists of autumn, they would return to their hearths, at Paimpol or in the little scattered cottages of the country of Goëlo, to busy themselves for a while with domestic matters, and with love, with marriages, and births. Almost always they found there little newcomers, conceived the winter before, who had been waiting for godparents in order to receive the sacrament of baptism —there is need of many children in the families of these fishermen, whom Iceland devours.

CHAPTER III

AT Paimpol, on a fine evening of this same year, a Sunday evening in June, two women were busily occupied in writing a letter.

They were sitting before a large window which was open and of which the sill, of old and massive granite, bore a row of flower-pots.

Bent over their table, both seemed young; one wore a coif extremely large, in the fashion of former days; the other, quite a small coif, of the new form adopted by the women of Paimpol—two fond ones, one would have said, composing together a tender message for some handsome Icelander.

She who dictated—the one in the large coif—raised her head, casting about for ideas. And, wonderful to tell, she was old, very old, in spite of her youthful figure, seen thus from behind, beneath her little brown shawl. Quite, quite old: a worthy grandmother, of at least seventy years. Still comely, nevertheless, and fresh-looking, with the rosy cheeks which some old people have the gift of preserving. Her coif, very low on the forehead and on the top of the head, was composed of two or three cornets in muslin, which seemed to escape one from the other and fell on the nape of her neck. Her venerable face was meetly framed in all this whiteness and in these folds which had a religious aspect. Her eyes, very kindly, were full of an honest worthiness. She had no trace of teeth, none at all, and, when she smiled, you saw in

their place her round gums, which had a little air of youth. In spite of her chin which, as she was accustomed to say, was pointed like a sabot, her profile was not too much marred by her years; one could see still that it must have been as regular and pure as that of the saints of the church.

She gazed out of the window, trying to think what more she could tell to amuse her grandson.

Truly, there did not exist elsewhere, in all the country round Paimpol, such another old woman as she for finding entertaining things to say about one, or about another, or about nothing at all. In this letter there were already three or four priceless stories —but without the least malice, for there was nothing of evil in her soul.

The other, seeing that the well of ideas had dried up, began carefully to write the address: 'To Monsieur Moan, Sylvestre, on board the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur, in the waters of Iceland, by Reikiavik.'

Having done that she raised her head and asked:

'Is that all, Grannie Moan?'

She was quite young, this one, adorably young, a face of twenty years. Very fair, a rare colouring in this part of Brittany, where the people are dark; very fair, with eyes of gridelin and lashes almost black. Her eyebrows, fair like her hair, were, as it were, retouched in the middle with a line of deeper, more reddish colour, which gave an expression of vigour and will. Her profile, a little short, was very noble, the nose prolonging the line of the forehead with an absolute straightness, as in the faces of the Greeks. A deep dimple, sunk beneath her lower lip, accentuated deliciously the line of the lip, and, every now and then, when preoccupied with a thought, she bit her lip with her white upper teeth, which made

little trails of deeper pink course beneath the fine skin. In all her slim person there was something proud, something, too, a little serious, which came to her from the hardy mariners of Iceland, her ancestors. In her eyes was an expression at once obstinate and gentle.

Her coif was in the form of a shell; it came down low on the forehead, fitting tight almost like a band, and was then caught up on either side, exposing the thick plaits of hair rolled snail-like above the ears—a fashion of hairdressing handed down from very ancient times, which still gives an old-time air to the women of Paimpol.

One felt that she had been brought up differently from this poor old woman to whom she gave the name of grandmother, but who, in fact, was only a distant relation, fallen upon evil days.

She was the daughter of M. Mével, a sometime Icelander, a little bit of a pirate, too, who had enriched himself by dangerous enterprises on the sea.

This seemly room in which the letter had just been written was hers: a new bed of the fashion used in the great cities, with muslin curtains edged with lace; and, on the thick walls, a light-coloured paper, which accentuated the irregularities of the granite. On the ceiling a coating of whitewash covered the great beams which bore witness to the antiquity of the dwelling—it was a typical home of the comfortable middle-class. And the windows overlooked the old grey square of Paimpol, where the markets were held and the pardons.

'Is that all, Grannie Yvonne? Have you anything more to tell him?'

'No, my child; but just ask him, if you will, to remember me to the boy Gaos.'

The boy Gaos! . . . That is to say, Yann . . . The proud, fair girl became very red as she wrote that name.

As soon as she had made this addition in a flowing hand at the bottom of the page, she got up, averting her head, as if she wanted to see something very interesting that was happening in the square.

Standing, she was rather tall: her figure was moulded like that of a fashionable lady of the town in a tight-fitting bodice which was without fold or crease. In spite of her coif she had an air of breeding. Even her hands, without having that excessive etiolated smallness which has become a beauty by convention, were shapely and white, having done no rough work.

It is true that she had begun by being a little Gaud who ran barefoot in the water, having no mother, going almost uncared for during the seasons of fishing which her father passed in Iceland; pretty, rosy-cheeked, dishevelled, wilful, headstrong, waxing vigorous in the strong keen breezes of the Channel. In those days she had her home with this poor grannie Moan, who entrusted little Sylvestre to her during her days of hard work for the good folk of Paimpol.

And she had the adoration of a little mother for this other little one, scarce eighteen months younger than herself, who had been placed in her care; as dark as she was fair, as submissive and affectionate as she was lively and capricious.

She looked back on this beginning of her life, as one whose head was in no wise turned by riches and the attractions of the big cities; it returned to her mind as a far-off dream of wild freedom, as a memory of a shadowy and mysterious time when the sands of the

sea-shore were somehow more spacious, when certainly the cliffs were more gigantic. . . .

When she was about five or six years old, still very early days for her, her father having made money by buying and selling ships' cargoes, she was taken by him to Saint Brieuc, and later to Paris. Then, from little Gaud she had become a *Mademoiselle Marguerite*, tall, thoughtful, serious-looking. Still left a good deal to herself in a different kind of freedom from that of the Breton sea-shore, she had retained the self-willed nature of her childhood. What she knew of the things of life had been learnt quite by chance, without any sort of discrimination; but an excessive, innate dignity had served her for safeguard. Now and then she took on an air of boldness, saying straight out to people things which surprised by their frankness; and her brave, clear eyes were not always lowered before those of young men; but they were such honest eyes and so indifferent that it was scarcely possible that any one should misunderstand them; it was clear that one had to deal with a sensible girl whose heart was as pure as her complexion.

In the great cities her clothes had changed more than herself. Although she had retained her coif, which the Breton women are loth to lay aside, she had quickly learnt to dress herself in another fashion. And this young body of the little fisher-girl, formerly so untrammelled, in developing, in taking on the plenitude of those graceful contours which had germinated in the wind of the sea, had been made slender at the waist by the long corsets of fashion.

Every year, with her father, she used to return to Brittany—in the summer only like the fair bathers—renewing for a few days her memories of earlier days, and her name of Gaud (which in Breton means

Marguerite); a little curious, perhaps, to see these Icelanders of whom she heard so much, but who were never there, and of whom every year some few more were missing from the muster; hearing everywhere talk of this Iceland which appeared to her as a distant abyss—and where now was he whom she loved. . . .

And, then, one fine day, she had been brought back for good to the country of the fishermen, by a whim of her father's, who had wished to end his days there, and to live in well-to-do retirement on the square of Paimpol.

The good old grandmother, poor and neat, got up to go with an expression of thanks, as soon as the letter had been read over and the envelope sealed. She lived some distance away, on the border of the district of Ploubazlanec, in a hamlet of the coast, still in the same cottage where she was born, where she had had her sons and her grandsons.

As she passed through the town she answered a great many people who greeted her. She was one of the old inhabitants of the country, the remnant of a valiant and esteemed family.

By a miracle of method and care she contrived to appear almost well-dressed, in poor mended clothes which scarcely any longer held together. Always that little brown shawl of the Paimpol women, which was her best wear and on which had fallen for more than sixty years the muslin cornets of her large coif: the shawl she had worn at her marriage, once upon a time blue, dyed for the wedding of her son, Pierre, and since that time kept carefully for Sundays and looking still quite presentable.

She had continued to carry herself very straight

when she walked, not a bit like an old woman; and truly, in spite of that chin which asserted itself a little too much, it was impossible not to admit that she was charming to look upon.

She was greatly respected, as might be seen even from the greetings which people gave her.

On her way she passed before the house of an old admirer of hers, who formerly had been an aspirant for her hand. He was a carpenter by trade, an octogenarian now, who used to sit all day at his door, leaving to the young, his sons, the work at the bench. He had never consoled himself, so people said, for her refusal of him, both in first and in second marriage; but with age his disappointment had turned into a kind of comical rancour, half-malignant, and he used always to call out to her:

'Well, old lady, when are they going to send for me to come and measure you? . . .'

She thanked him and said she had not yet decided to have that particular dress made for her. The fact is that this old fellow, in his rather heavy pleasantry, was speaking of a certain dress made of spruce wood which is the last of this world's habiliments.

'Very well, then, when you wish; but don't hesitate, my dear, you know. . . .'

He had already made this same little joke a hundred times. And to-day she was not in the mood to smile at it; for she felt more weary than usual, more broken by her life of incessant toil—and she thought of her beloved grandson, her last, who, on his return from Iceland, was going away for his service in the Navy. Five years . . . Going away to China, perhaps, to war! . . . Would she still be here, when he returned? An anguish seized her at the thought. . . . No, decidedly, she was not so cheerful as she looked, this

poor old soul; and presently her face contracted painfully as if she were about to weep.

It was possible, then, nay, it was certain, that they were going soon to take him from her, her last grandson. . . . Alas! to die, perhaps, all alone, without having seen him again. . . . Steps had indeed been taken (by some worthy people in the town whom she knew) to prevent his departure, on the plea that he was the support of a grandmother almost indigent who soon would be past working. They had not been successful—on account of the other, Jean Moan, the deserter, an elder brother of Sylvestre, of whom one no longer spoke in the family, but who existed nevertheless somewhere in America, debarring his younger brother from the benefit of military exemption. And a further objection was that she had a small pension as the widow of a sailor. It was not considered that she was poor enough.

When she was back in her home she prayed for a long time for all her dead ones, sons and grandsons: afterwards she prayed also, with an ardent hope, for her little Sylvestre; and then she tried to sleep, thinking of that wooden dress, her heart pitifully wrung to feel herself so old at the moment of this departure. . . .

The other, she who was young, remained sitting at her window, watching on the granite of the walls the yellow reflections of the setting sun, and, in the sky, the eddying of the dark swallows. Paimpol was always very dead, even on a Sunday, during these long evenings of May; some young women, who had no men now to pay them court, walked about two by two, three by three, dreaming of the gallants of Iceland. . . .

'. . . Remember me to the boy Gaos . . .' It had greatly troubled her to write that phrase, and that name which, now, was never out of her mind.

She often passed her evenings at this window, like a little lady. Her father did not care for her to go about with the other girls of her age, who, formerly, had been her equals. And besides, when, coming out of his café, he took a stroll, smoking his pipe, with other old sailors like himself, it pleased him to see, above, at her window, framed in granite, behind the pots of flowers, his daughter installed in his prosperous-looking house.

The boy Gaos! . . . She looked in spite of herself in the direction of the sea, which could not be seen, but was felt to be there, quite close, at the bottom of these narrow little streets by which the boatmen ascended. And her thoughts travelled on into the infinities of this alluring thing, which fascinates and which devours; her thoughts travelled on until they reached the distant polar seas, where sailed the *Marie, Captain Guermeur.*

What a strange fellow this boy Gaos was! . . . Fleeing, elusive now, after having come forward in a way at once so bold and so charming.

. . . . . .

Afterwards, in her long reverie, she went over again the recollections of her return to Brittany in the preceding year.

One morning in December, after travelling through the night, the train from Paris had dropped them, her father and her, at Guincamp, in the misty, whitish half-light of a cold dawn. She had been seized then by an impression previously unknown: this old little

town, which she had never passed through except in summer, she no longer recognized it; she experienced something like the sensation of plunging into the distant times of the past. This silence, after Paris! This tranquil current of life of people of another world, going about their little affairs in the mist! These old houses of sombre granite, darkened by damp and what remained of the night. All these Breton things —which charmed her now that she loved Yann—had impressed her that morning with a desolating sadness. Here and there a busy housewife, up betimes, had already opened her door, and, as she passed, she looked into these old, open-hearthed interiors, where were sitting, in attitudes of quietude, old coifed grandams who had just got up. As soon as it became a little brighter, she had gone into the church to say her prayers. And how immense and gloomy it had seemed to her, this magnificent nave—and different from the churches of Paris—with its rough pillars worn at the base by the centuries, its savour of cavern, of old age, of saltpetre! In a deep recess, behind some columns, a candle was burning and a woman was on her knees before it, no doubt making a vow; the light of this slender little flame was lost in the indistinct emptiness of the vaults. . . . She had rediscovered there suddenly, in herself, the trace of a sentiment she had quite forgotten: that sort of sadness and awe which she had experienced formerly, while still a child, when she was taken to the early mass on winter mornings in the church at Paimpol.

And yet, very surely, she had no regret for the Paris which she had left, although there were there many beautiful and interesting things. In the first place she found herself almost cramped there, she who had in her veins the blood of the sea-rovers.

And, then, she felt she was a stranger there and out of place: the Parisiennes, they were women whose slim bodies had at the hips an artificial camber, who affected a manner of their own of walking, of fluttering in whaleboned sheathes: she had too much intelligence ever to try to copy these things closely. With her coifs, ordered every year from the maker in Paimpol, she was ill at ease in the streets of Paris, not realizing that, if people turned round so much to look at her, it was because she was charming to look upon.

There were some of these Parisiennes, indeed, whose bearing had a distinction which attracted her, but she knew that these were unapproachable. And the others, those of a lower order, who would have been pleased to make her acquaintance, she kept them disdainfully at a distance, not deeming them worthy. And so she had lived without friends, almost without other society than that of her father, often busy and preoccupied. She did not regret this life of exile and solitude.

But, all the same, on this day of arrival, she had been surprised in a painful way by the roughness of this Brittany, seen now in mid-winter. And the thought that it would be necessary to drive for four or five hours more, to penetrate much further still into this mournful country in order to reach Paimpol, had weighed on her like an oppression.

All the afternoon of this same grey day they had, in fact, travelled, her father and she, in a crazy, old little diligence, open to all the winds of heaven; passing, as darkness fell, through forlorn villages, under ghosts of trees which seemed to ooze the mist in fine little drops. And presently it had been necessary to light the lamps, and then they could see nothing—except two tracks of green Bengal-fire

which seemed to run ahead of the horses on each side, and which were the lights of these two lamps thrown on the interminable hedges of the road. How came it that this verdure should suddenly be so green, in December? . . . Surprised at first, she leant over so that she might see better, and then she seemed to understand and to remember: the gorse, the evergreen gorse of the lanes and cliffs, which never withers in this country of Paimpol. At the same time a warmer breeze began to blow, which also she thought she recognized, and which smelt of the sea. . . .

Towards the end of the journey she had been quite awakened and interested by this reflection which had come to her:

'Why, since we are now in winter I shall see, this time, the handsome fishermen of Iceland.'

In December they should be there, home, all of them, the brothers, the sweethearts, the lovers, the cousins, of whom her friends, large and small, had spoken so much, on each of her summer visits, during their walks together in the evening. And this idea had filled her mind while her feet were freezing in the immobility of the little diligence.

And, in fact, she had seen them . . . and now she had lost her heart to one of them. . . .

CHAPTER IV

THE first time she saw him, saw this fellow Yann, was on the day following her arrival, at the pardon of the Icelanders, which is held on the 8th of December, the Feast of our Lady of Good-Tidings, patroness of fishermen—shortly after the procession, while the sombre streets were still hung with white draperies, on which had been fastened ivy and holly, winter foliage and winter flowers.

At this pardon the rejoicing was heavy and a little barbarous, under a mournful sky. A rejoicing without merriment, made up in the main of recklessness and defiance: of physical strength and alcohol; on which weighed, less disguised here than elsewhere, the universal menace of death.

Paimpol was agog with noise, ringing of bells and chanting of priests. Coarse and monotonous songs in the taverns; old sea chaunties, old ballads come from the sea, come from Heaven knows where, from the deep night of time. Groups of sailors linked arm in arm, zig-zagging in the streets, partly from the habit of rolling, partly from incipient intoxication, casting on the women glances a little too appreciative after the long continence of the sea. Groups of maidens in the white coifs of nuns, their bosoms full and fluttering, their young eyes filled with the desires of a whole summer. Old granite houses enclosing this human swarming; old roofs bearing witness to their struggles of many centuries against the west wind, against the fogs, the rains, against all that comes from the sea; bearing witness, too, to the living stories they

had sheltered, to dead and gone deeds of daring and love.

And a sentiment of religion, an impression of the past, hung over all this, with a respect for the ancient cult, for the protecting symbols, for the Virgin, white and immaculate. By the side of the taverns, the church, its flight of steps littered with foliage, thrown open in the form of a wide sombre bay, with its odour of incense, with its candles seen in the obscurity within, and its ex-voto of sailors suspended everywhere from the sacred vault. By the side of the maidens bright with thoughts of love, the fiancées of sailors who had disappeared, the widows of men shipwrecked, issuing from the little chapel of the dead, in their long shawls of mourning, in their little glazed coifs; their eyes on the ground, silent, passing in the midst of this noise of life, like a dark warning. And hard by the sea, always the sea, the great nurse and the great devourer of these vigorous generations, stirring itself, too, making its noise, taking its part in the festival . . .

Of all these things together Gaud received a confused impression. Excited and laughing, but with heart strangely moved, she felt a kind of anguish seize her at the thought that this country now was become hers for always. On the square, where there were games and mountebank shows, she walked about with her friends who pointed out to her by name, on right and left, the young men of Paimpol and of Ploubazlanec. Before some singers of ballads, a group of these Icelanders had stopped, their backs turned to them. And, at first, struck by one of them who had the stature of a giant and shoulders almost too broad, she had said simply, even with a shade of mockery:

'Look at that one, how tall he is!'

There was almost this of undermeaning in her phrase:

'For her who marries him, what an encumbrance in the house, a husband of that size!'

He had turned round as if he had heard her, and from head to foot he had enveloped her in a rapid glance which seemed to say:

'Who is this who wears the coif of Paimpol and is so elegant and whom I have never seen before?'

And then he had lowered his eyes very quickly, out of politeness, and had seemed to be very occupied again with the singers, not letting any more be seen of his head than his dark hair, which was rather long and very curly behind, on his neck.

She had asked without hesitation the names of a number of others, but she had not dared to ask his. That fine profile seen for a brief moment; that proud and rather shy regard; those brown pupils lightly flicked with fawn, moving very rapidly on the bluish opal of his eyes, had impressed her and intimidated her also.

He was, in fact, that 'boy Gaos,' whom she had heard spoken of so often, at the Moans, as a great friend of Sylvestre; on the evening of this same pardon, Sylvestre and he, walking arm in arm, had met her with her father, and had stopped to exchange greetings. . . .

. . . And little Sylvestre had immediately become for her again a kind of brother. Cousins as they were, they had continued to address each other by their Christian names—it is true she had hesitated at first, before this great fellow of seventeen who already had a dark beard; but as his eyes were the same honest, gentle eyes of his childhood she had quickly got to

know him again well enough to imagine that she had never lost sight of him. When he came into Paimpol, she made him stay to dinner in the evening: it meant nothing, and he ate very heartily, for he was on rather short commons at home. . . .

If the truth must be told, Yann had not been very gallant to her at this first presentation—at the turning of a little grey street bestrewn with green branches. He had done no more than raise his hat to her, with a gesture which, though graceful enough, was almost shy; and then having looked her over with that same rapid glance of his, he had turned his eyes in another direction, appearing to be a little irked by this meeting, and to be impatient to proceed on his way. A strong west wind, which had risen during the procession, had littered the street with branches of box-tree and spread over the sky a curtain of dark grey. . . . Gaud, in her reverie of recollection, saw all that again very clearly: the mournful oncoming of night at the close of the pardon; all the white draperies decked with flowers which twisted in the wind along the walls; the noisy groups of Icelanders, children of the wind and the tempest, singing as they entered the taverns to take shelter there against the impending rain; and above all this tall fellow, standing before her, his head turned away, looking bored and rather annoyed at having met her. What a profound change had taken place in her since that time! . . .

And what a difference between the noise of that close of a day of festival and the peacefulness now! How silent and empty was this same Paimpol this evening, during the long May twilight which held her at her window, alone, thoughtful, and enamoured! . . .

CHAPTER V

THE second time they saw each other was at a wedding. This 'boy Gaos' had been named to give her his arm. At first she imagined that she was annoyed about it: to walk in procession through the street with this young man whom every one would look at on account of his height, and who, besides, would probably not know what to say to her on the way! . . . And, then, he intimidated her, did this Yann, there was no doubt about it, with his large, untamed air.

At the hour appointed, when all were assembled for the procession, Yann had not appeared. Time passed and still he did not come; and already it was being suggested that they should wait for him no longer. Then she had realized that it was for him alone that she had attired herself; that with any other of these young men, no matter whom, the feast, the walk would be for her spoilt and without pleasure. . . .

At last he had arrived, in festive attire also, excusing himself without embarrassment to the parents of the bride. It appeared that a large shoal of fish, which had been quite unexpected, had been signalled from England as being due to pass towards evening, a little off-shore from Aurigny; and all the boats in Ploubazlanec had been got under sail in haste. Excitement in the villages, women seeking their husbands in the taverns, pushing them to make them run; lending a hand themselves to hoist the sails; helping in the manœuvring; in short, a regular 'all hands on deck' in the countryside.

Amid all these people who gathered round him, he

related this with an extreme ease; with gestures of his own, rolling his eyes, and with a charming smile which disclosed his glistening teeth. The better to express the haste with which the boats were made ready, he interjected every now and then in the midst of his phrases a certain prolonged little 'Hoo,' very comical, which is a sailor's cry giving an impression of speed and resembling the whistling noise of the wind. He himself had been obliged to find a substitute in a great hurry and to get him accepted by the owner of the boat to whom he had engaged himself for the winter. Hence his lateness; and through his unwillingness to miss the wedding he had sacrificed his share in the catch.

These motives had been perfectly understood by the fishermen who heard him, and none of them dreamt of finding fault with him for his delay—for is it not well known that, in life, everything is more or less dependent on the unforeseen chances of the sea, more or less subject to the changes of the weather and to the mysterious migrations of fish? The other Icelanders who were there regretted only that they had not received the notice early enough to profit, like the men of Ploubazlanec, by this good fortune which was about to pass in the offing.

It was too late now, and, since ill-luck would have it so, there was nothing to do but to offer an arm to the girls. Outside the violins began their music, and the procession set off gaily.

At first he had uttered nothing but aimless, complimentary things, such as one says at a wedding to a girl whom one scarcely knows. Among these wedding couples, they alone were strangers to each other; in fact, in the procession there were only cousins and betrothed couples, with perhaps some pairs of lovers

too; for in this district of Paimpol one falls deep in love at the time of the return from Iceland. (But it is an honest love, and ends in marriage.)

But in the evening, when the dancing was on, the conversation between them having turned again to the shoal of fish, he said suddenly, looking full into her eyes, this unexpected thing:

'You are the only one in Paimpol—and even in the world—who could have made me miss this expedition; there is no one else, I can tell you that, Mademoiselle Gaud, for whom I would have missed my share in the fishing. . . .'

Astonished at first that this fisherman should dare to speak to her thus, to her who had come to this ball a little as a queen, and then thrilled deliciously, she had ended by saying:

'Thank you, Monsieur Yann, and I, too, I prefer to be with you rather than with any other.'

That had been all. But, from that moment until the end of the dancing, they had fallen to talking together in a different way, with voices lower and gentler. . . .

The dancing went on to the tune of a hurdy-gurdy, to the strains of a violin, the same couples nearly always together. When he returned to claim her, after dancing, out of politeness, with someone else, they exchanged a smile as of old friends meeting, and continued their conversation of before, which had become quite intimate. Simply, Yann told her of his life as a fisherman, his labours, his earnings, the struggle his parents had formerly had to bring up the fourteen little Gaoses, of whom he was the eldest brother—now they were freed from anxiety, mainly on account of a derelict which their father had come across in the Channel, the sale of which had brought

them ten thousand francs, part of which had to be rendered to the State; in this way they had been enabled to build an upper story to their house—which was at the extremity of the district of Ploubazlanec, on the land's edge, in the hamlet of Pors-Even, overlooking the Channel, with a very fine view.

'It was a hard calling,' he told her, 'this Iceland fishing: to leave, as they had to leave, in the month of February, for such a country, where it was so cold and gloomy, where the sea was so rough. . . .'

Gaud, who recalled it as if it had been a thing of yesterday, went over in her memory, as she watched the May night descend on Paimpol, all their conversation at the ball. If he had had no thought of marriage, why had he acquainted her with all these details of his existence, which she had listened to a little as a fiancée might. He had not the air of a commonplace youth fond of communicating his affairs to all and sundry. . . .

'And yet the calling is not so bad, after all,' he had said, 'and for myself, I would not change it. Some years, it is eight hundred francs; others, twelve hundred, that I receive on our return and that I hand over to my mother.'

'That you hand over to your mother, Monsieur Yann?'

'Surely, yes, all of it, always. Amongst us Icelanders it is the custom, Mademoiselle Gaud' (he said this as if it were a thing very fitting and natural). 'I, for example, you would not think it, I have scarcely ever any money. On Sunday, my mother gives me a little when I come to Paimpol. For everything it is the same. Thus, this year my father made me get these new clothes, without which I should never have dared to come to the wedding. Oh, I assure you, I

would not have come to give you my arm in the clothes I wore last year.'

For her, accustomed to see the men of Paris, they were not very smart, perhaps, these new clothes of Yann's, this very short jacket, open on a rather old-fashioned waistcoat; but the figure which they moulded was irreproachably handsome, and somehow the dancer had a distinguished air in spite of all.

He gazed, smiling, straight into her eyes every time he said anything to her, to see what she thought of it. And how simple and honest his gaze was, while he recounted all this so that she might be forewarned that he was not rich!

She also smiled at him, looking always straight into his eyes, saying very little, but listening with all her soul, ever more surprised and more attracted towards him. What a mixture he was, of rough strength and winning childlikeness! His deep voice, which with others was brusque and decided, became, when he spoke to her, more and more tender and caressing; for her alone he could make it vibrate with an extreme softness, like the muted music of stringed instruments.

And how singular and unexpected it was to learn that this tall young man with his devil-may-care airs, his formidable aspect, should still be treated in his home as if he were a child, and should find it quite natural: having roamed the world, tasted all its adventures, all its dangers, and preserving for his parents this respectful, this absolute submission.

She compared him with others, with three or four coxcombs of Paris, clerks, scribblers, or what not, who had pursued her with their attentions, for the sake of her money. And this simple fisherman seemed to her what she had known of most worth, at the same time that he was the most handsome.

In order to place herself more within his reach she had told him that, in her home, also, circumstances had not always been as rosy as they were at present; that her father had begun by being an Iceland fisherman, and held the Icelanders in high esteem; that she herself remembered having run barefoot when she was quite small—on the shore—after the death of her mother.

Oh! that wonderful night of the ball; that delightful night, decisive and unique in her life—it was already almost distant, since it dated from December, and it was now May. And all the gallant dancers were fishing now far away, scattered over the sea of Iceland—seeing clear there, in the pale sunlight, in their immense loneliness, while darkness settled peacefully on the land of Brittany.

Gaud remained at her window. The square of Paimpol, almost entirely enclosed on all sides by its old houses, became more and more mournful with the night; there was scarcely a sound to be heard anywhere. Above the houses, the still luminous void of the sky seemed to become hollow, to lift, to separate itself more from terrestrial things—which now, in this twilight hour, were all ranged in a single dark silhouette of gables and old roofs. Every now and then a door was shut or a window; some old sailor, with rolling gait, issued from a tavern, and made his way along the gloomy little streets; and presently some belated damsels returned from their walk with bouquets of May flowers. One, who knew Gaud, in bidding her good night, held high towards her with outstretched arm a sheaf of hawthorn as though to let her smell it; in the transparent darkness the light tufts of the little white flowers could still be more or less distinguished. There was, besides, another soft

perfume which had ascended from the gardens and the courtyards, that of the honeysuckle blooming on the granite of the walls—and also a vague savour of seaweed which came from the harbour. The last bats glided through the air, in silent flight, like the beasts of dreams.

Gaud had passed many evenings at this window, looking out on the melancholy square, dreaming of the Icelanders who had departed, and always of this same ball. . . .

. . . It became very warm towards the end of the wedding festival and the heads of many of the dancers began to swim. She recalled how she had seen him, dancing with others, with wives and maids of whom he must have been more or less the lover; she recalled his half-disdainful condescension in answering to their appeals. . . . How different he was with them! . . .

He was an excellent dancer, straight as a forest oak, and turning with a grace at once light and dignified, his head thrown slightly back. His brown hair, which was long and curly, fell a little over his forehead, and stirred in the wind of the dance. Gaud, who was rather tall, felt it brush against her coif when he bent towards her in order to hold her more firmly in the quick waltzes.

From time to time he indicated to her with a sign his little sister Marie and Sylvestre, the affianced pair, who were dancing together. He smiled, very good-humouredly at sight of them, so young, so reserved with each other, so ceremonious, looking so shy as they said to each other, very low, things which, no doubt, were very pleasing. He would not have permitted that it should be otherwise, no doubt; but, none the less, it amused him, rakish and venturous as he had become, to find them so simple; he exchanged

with Gaud smiles of intimate understanding which said: 'How quaint and sweet they are, *our* little brother and sister! . . .'

There was a great deal of embracing at the close of the night: kisses of cousins, kisses of betrothed, kisses of lovers, which retained nevertheless a seemly air of frankness and modesty, kisses of mouth on mouth, given there in the sight of all. But he, Yann, had not kissed her; none would have ventured so far with the daughter of Mons. Mével; he had done no more than press her a little more closely against his heart, during the concluding dances, and she, confident, had not resisted, nay, had clung to him rather, yielding with all her soul. In this sudden whirl, profound, delightful, which drew her body and soul towards him, her senses of twenty years counted, no doubt, for something, but it was in her heart that the movement had begun.

'Have you seen how she looks at him, the bold-faced minx!' said two or three fair damsels, with eyes chastely lowered under blond or dark eyebrows, who had among the dancers one lover at least, if not two. And it was true that she looked at him; but she had this excuse, that he was the first and the only man to whom she had ever given attention in her life.

As they separated in the frosty dawn, when the party broke up, they had said good-bye to each other in a special way, as two lovers might who were going to meet again on the following day. And then, on her way home, she had crossed this same square, with her father, conscious of no fatigue, feeling alert and joyous, ravished by the mere act of breathing, loving the chill mist outside and the mournful dawn finding everything delightful, everything gracious.

. . . The May night had fallen some time now;

one by one the windows had all been closed, with little creakings of their bolts. But Gaud was still there, leaving hers open. The last rare passers-by, discerning in the darkness the white shape of her coif, must have said: 'There is a girl who, one may bet, is dreaming of her lover.' And it was true. She was dreaming there—but with half a mind to weep; her little white teeth were biting her lips, unmaking continually the dimple which emphasized the contour of her fresh mouth. And her eyes remained fixed in the darkness, looking at nothing that was real. . . .

But, after this ball, why had he not returned? What was the meaning of this change in him? Met by chance, he seemed to shun her, turning away his eyes, the movements of which were always so rapid.

She had often spoken of it to Sylvestre, but he understood no more than she.

'But nevertheless it is with him that you ought to marry, Gaud,' he said, 'if your father will permit it, for you will not find in the countryside another who is his equal. In the first place I can tell you that he is very steady, without seeming to be so; it is very rarely that he gets tipsy. It is true he is a little headstrong sometimes, but at bottom he is quite gentle. You cannot realize how good he is. And as a sailor! At every fishing season the captains contend among themselves for his services.'

The permission of her father she was quite sure of obtaining, for she had never been crossed in her wishes. Nor did it matter to her that he was not rich. For a sailor such as he it would need but a small advance payment to enable him to follow for six months the coasting trade course, and he would

become a captain to whom any of the shipowners would be willing to entrust his vessels.

And it did not matter to her either that he was something of a giant; to be too strong may become a defect in a woman, but in a man it does not detract at all from his beauty.

Without committing herself she had made inquiries of the girls of the district who might be trusted to know all the gossip of love; none had knowledge of any engagement of his; without appearing to be more attached to one than another, he went hither and thither, to Lézardrieux as well as to Paimpol, with the fair creatures who were enamoured of him.

One Sunday evening, very late, she had seen him pass beneath her window, escorting, his arm about her waist, a certain Jeannie Caroff, who was pretty, undoubtedly, but whose reputation was very doubtful. That, indeed, had hurt her cruelly.

She had been assured also that he was very violent; that one evening, when he was drunk, in a certain tavern in Paimpol where the Icelanders were wont to hold their feasts, he had hurled a large marble table through a door which had been closed against him. . . .

But all this she forgave him: one knows what sailors are sometimes, when the fit takes them. . . . But if his heart was good, why had he come to seek her out, she who was fancy-free, only to leave her afterwards: what need had he to gaze at her a whole night long, with that bright smile which seemed so frank, what need to lower his voice to impart confidences as to a betrothed? Now she was incapable of giving her affections to another, incapable of changing. In this same country, many years ago, when she was quite a child, they had been used to say of her that she was a wilful mite, obstinate in her ideas as no other; and so

she was still. Become in these days a fine little lady, rather serious and proud of bearing, whom no one had fashioned, she remained in essence the same.

After this ball the winter had been passed in the expectation of seeing him again, and he had not even come to say good-bye before his departure for Iceland. Now that he was no longer there nothing existed for her: the flagging time seemed to drag on very slowly —towards the return of the autumn for which she had formed her projects for reaching an understanding and settling the matter once and for all. . . .

. . . Eleven by the Town Hall clock—with that peculiar sonority which bells assume during the calm nights of spring.

In Paimpol eleven o'clock is very late; and Gaud closed her window and lit her lamp in order to go to bed. . . .

Perhaps, after all, with Yann, it was only shyness; or, since he too was proud, was it the fear of being refused, thinking her too rich? . . . She had already wanted to ask him this herself, quite simply; and it was Sylvestre who judged that it could not be done, that it would not be well for a young girl to appear so bold. In Paimpol people were already criticizing her manner and her dress. . . .

. . . She undressed with the absent-minded slowness of a maid bemused: first her muslin coif, then her dress of fashion, fitting in the manner of the towns, which she threw at hazard over a chair.

And afterwards the long corsets, which made folk talk, for the Parisian air they gave her. Then her figure, free once more, became more perfect; being no longer compressed, nor too narrowed at the waist, it resumed its natural lines, which were full and gracious as those of marble statues. As she moved

they changed their aspects, and each one of her poses was exquisite to behold.

Her little lamp, which was burning alone at this late hour, illumined with a certain mystery her shoulders and her breast, her admirable form which no eye had ever gazed on, and which no eye now would ever gaze on, which would wither without ever having been seen, since Yann did not wish to make it his own. . . .

She knew that her face was pretty, but she was quite unconscious of the beauty of her body. For that matter, in this region of Brittany, among the daughters of these Iceland fishermen, this beauty is a kind of natural attribute; it is scarcely noticed, and even the least modest among them, so far from making a parade of it, would feel a shame to let it be seen. It is the over-civilized people of the towns who attach so much importance to these things that they mould them and paint them. . . .

She began to undo the snail-like coils of hair above her ears, and the two plaits fell down her back like two sleepy serpents. She gathered them up in the form of a crown on the top of her head—more convenient so for sleeping—and then with her straight profile she resembled a Roman virgin.

But her arms remained raised, and, biting her lip still, she continued to toy with her fair tresses, much as a child, its thoughts elsewhere, might torment a casual plaything; afterwards, letting them fall again, she began very quickly to undo them in a spirit of play, to shake them out, and soon they covered her to her waist, and she had the appearance of a druidess of the forest.

And then, sleep having come in spite of love and in spite of the inclination to weep, she threw herself

suddenly into her bed, hiding her face in the silky mass of her hair, which was spread out now like a veil. . . .

In her cottage in Ploubazlanec Grandmother Moan, who was on the other and darker slope of life, had ended also by falling asleep, the frigid sleep of the old, thinking of her grandson and of death.

And, at this same hour, on board the *Marie*—on the northern sea which this evening was moving restlessly—Yann and Sylvestre, the two beloved ones, were singing to themselves, as merrily they went on with their fishing in the unending light of day. . . .

CHAPTER VI

• • • • •

ABOUT a month later—in June.

Around Iceland the weather was of that rare sort which sailors call a 'white calm'; that is to say, there was no stir in the air; it was as if all the breezes were exhausted, finished.

The sky was covered with an immense whitish veil, which darkened in the distance, towards the horizon, turned to leaden grey, to the dull colour of pewter. And, below, the inert waters gave out a pale glare, which wearied the eyes and created an impression of cold.

And on this particular day there were waterings, nothing but changing waterings which played over the surface of the sea; blurrings of the lightest sort, such as one may make by breathing on a mirror. The whole gleaming expanse seemed covered with a network of vague designs which intermingled and lost their shape, very quickly effaced, very fugitive.

Eternal evening or eternal morning, it was impossible to tell: a sun which no longer indicated any hour remained in position always, presiding over this splendour of dead things; it was itself only another blur, almost without shape, enlarged so that it looked immense by a troubled halo.

Yann and Sylvestre, as they fished side by side, were singing *Jean François de Nantes,* a song which never ends—amusing themselves by its very monotony, and looking at each other out of the corner of

their eye to laugh at the kind of childish drollery with which they continued the couplets indefinitely, seeking each time to infuse into them a new humour. Their cheeks were ruddy from the salty freshness of the atmosphere; the air they breathed was vivifying and virgin; they filled their lungs with it, at the very source of all vigour and of all existence.

And yet the aspect around them was of a kind of non-life, of a world dead or not yet created: the light gave no heat; things remained motionless and as if frozen for ever, under the gaze of this sort of great spectral eye which was the sun.

The *Marie* cast on this expanse a shadow which was very long, like the shadows of evening, and which looked green, amid these polished surfaces reflecting the whiteness of the sky; and in all that shadowed part which gave no reflection one could distinguish by transparency what was happening under the water: innumerable fish, myriads and myriads, all alike, gliding noiselessly in the same direction, as if they had a goal in their perpetual journeying. They were the cod which were executing their evolutions together, all lengthwise in the same direction, strictly parallel, making an effect of grey hatchings, and agitated unceasingly with a rapid quivering, which gave an air of fluidity to this mass of silent lives. Sometimes, with a sudden stroke of the tail, they all turned together, showing the gleam of their silvered bellies and then the same stroke of tail, the same turn were propagated through the entire shoal in slow undulations, as if thousands of metal blades had given, under water, each a little flash.

The sun, already very low, was sinking: it was clear, therefore, that it was evening. As it descended into the leaden-coloured zone which rested on the sea

it became yellow, and its circle became more clearly defined, looked more real. It was possible to fix it with your eyes, as one may the moon.

It gave light still; but one would have said that it was no great distance away; it seemed that if one but went in a boat as far as the edge of the horizon, one would encounter there this large mournful balloon, floating in the air some few feet above the water.

The fishing was proceeding busily enough; looking into the still water one could see very clearly the manner of it; the cod coming to bite, with a gluttonous movement; then shaking themselves a little, at the nip of the hook, as if to tighten the grip on their muzzle. And from minute to minute, rapidly, with both hands, the fishermen hauled in their lines—throwing the beast to him whose business it was to gut it and flatten it.

The little fleet of the Paimpol men was scattered over this tranquil mirror, animating this desert. Here and there appeared the distant little sails, spread for form's sake, for there was no breath of air, and very white, outlined clearly against the greyness of the horizon.

And on this day the occupation of the Iceland fisherman seemed a very peaceful one, a very easy one—a ladylike occupation.

• • • • •

Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!

They sang on, the two great children.

And Yann gave little thought to his fine looks and distinguished bearing. Nevertheless, he unbent only

with Sylvestre, singing or playing only with him; with the others, on the contrary, he was reserved, and inclined to be proud and solemn—very kindly, none the less, when one had need of him, always good-humoured and obliging when he was not irritated.

And they continued to sing this one same song; the two others, a few yards away, sang a different song, another melody compact of somnolence, of health and vague melancholy.

They were kept busy and time passed quickly.

Below, in the cabin, there was still a fire, smouldering at the bottom of the iron stove, and the cover of the hatchway was kept shut to produce an illusion of night for those who wanted to sleep. They needed little air in their slumbers, and men less robust, men bred in towns, would have wanted more. But when the deep chest has been filled throughout the day, directly from the infinite atmosphere, it sleeps itself in turn afterwards, and scarcely any longer stirs; then one can snuggle down in any little hole that offers, as the beasts do.

After their spell of fishing they turned in at will, at any time they pleased, the hour being of no account in this continual daylight. And always they slept soundly, without moving, without dreaming, a sleep of complete repose.

When, by chance, their thoughts turned to women, then, no doubt, the sleepers stirred: as they told themselves that in six weeks the fishing would be over, and that soon they would possess new mistresses, or maybe old ones loved already, they opened wide their eyes.

But that happened rarely; and when it did more often than not the thoughts were honest thoughts: of wives, sweethearts, sisters, relatives. . . . In the

habit of continence the senses also slept—for long periods at a time.

. . . . .

Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!

They were looking now, on the far background of their grey horizon, at something scarcely perceptible. A long column of smoke, ascending from the waters like a microscopic tail, of a different grey, a very slightly deeper grey than that of the sky. With their eyes used to probing the depths, they had quickly perceived it.

'A steamer!'

'It seems to me,' said the captain, looking at it narrowly, 'it seems to me it 's a warship—the cruiser going its round. . . .'

This faint smoke was bringing to the fishermen news of France, and, amongst others, a certain letter from an old grandmother, written by the hand of a fair girl.

It came on slowly; presently one saw its dark hull—it was the cruiser, sure enough, which was making a tour of the western fiords.

At the same time a light breeze which had sprung up, stimulating to breathe, began to marble in places the surface of the dead waters; it traced on the gleaming mirror designs of a blue-green, which were prolonged in trails, spreading out like fans, or ramifying in the form of madrepores; and this happened very quickly with a light rustling; it was a sign of awakening, presaging the end of this immense torpor. And the sky, freed of its veil, became clear; the vapours fallen on the horizon were heaped there in accumulations of grey wads, forming, as it were, soft walls round the sea. The two limitless glasses, between

which the fishermen were—that above and that below —took on once more their deep transparency, as if someone had wiped away the mists which had tarnished them. The weather was changing, but in a sudden fashion which boded no good.

And from different points of the sea, from different sides of this expanse, came the fishing boats: all the French fishing boats, which roamed these latitudes, Bretons and Normans, Boulogne boats, and Dunkirk boats. Like birds rallying to a call, they assembled at the coming of the cruiser; they appeared even from the empty corners of the horizon, and their little greyish wings could be seen on every side. They peopled the pale desert.

Not drifting slowly any more, they had spread their sails to the new fresh breeze and gained speed as they approached.

Iceland, in the distance, had appeared also, as if it, too, had wished to draw near; it showed more and more clearly its tall mountains of bare rock—which have never been illumined except from the side, from below, and as if grudgingly. It was continued, even, by another Iceland similar in colour which took shape gradually—but this other Iceland was chimerical, and its mountains, more gigantic than their real counterpart, were only a condensation of vapours. And the sun, still low and languishing, incapable of climbing, showed itself through this illusory isle in such wise that it appeared as if it were suspended in front of it, having for human eye an incomprehensible aspect. It had no longer a halo and its round disk, which had taken on again a sharply defined contour, seemed rather some poor planet, yellow, dying, which had come to a halt there irresolutely, in the middle of chaos.

The cruiser, which had stopped, was surrounded now by this pleiad of Icelanders. From all these boats smaller boats put off, little nutshells, taking to the cruiser rough-looking men with long beards, in accoutrements that smacked of savagery.

They all had some request to make, a little in the manner of children, remedies for minor wounds, renewals, provisions, letters.

Others came from their captains to be put in irons, in expiation of some refractoriness; as they had all served in the Navy, they found the thing quite natural. And when the narrow spar-deck of the cruiser was encumbered with four or five of these great fellows lying with pinioned feet, the old boatswain, who had padlocked them, said to them: 'Lie skew-wise, my lads, so that folk may pass,' which they did obediently, with a smile.

There were many letters this time for the Icelanders. Amongst others, two for the *Marie, Captain Guermeur,* one to *Monsieur Gaos, Yann,* the second to *Monsieur Moan, Sylvestre,* the latter having come by way of Denmark to Reikiavik, where the cruiser had collected it.

The postman, diving into his sailcloth bag, delivered them over, having difficulty often in reading the addresses which had not all been written by very practised hands.

And the captain said:

'Hurry up, hurry up, the glass is falling.'

He was a little concerned to see all these nutshells loosed upon the sea, and so many fishermen assembled in this very doubtful region.

Yann and Sylvestre were used to reading their letters together.

This time it was by the light of the midnight sun which remained still high above the horizon, with its same aspect of a dead star.

Sitting together, apart from the rest, in a corner of the deck, each with an arm round the other's shoulders, they read very slowly, as if to let these tidings of home sink in better.

In Yann's letter, Sylvestre found news of Marie Gaos, his little betrothed. In Sylvestre's, Yann read the droll stories of old Grandmother Moan, who had not her equal for amusing the absent; and then the last paragraph which concerned him: 'Remember me to the boy Gaos.'

And when the letters were read Sylvestre shyly showed his to his big friend, to try to make him appreciate the hand which had written it.

'Look, is it not a beautiful handwriting, Yann?'

But Yann, who knew very well whose girlish hand it was, turned away his head and shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that he was getting tired of hearing of this Gaud.

Then Sylvestre carefully folded the despised little letter, put it back into its envelope, and slipped it beneath his jersey against his heart, saying quite sadly to himself:

'I 'm afraid it 's hopeless, they will never marry. . . . But what can have turned him against her in this way? . . .'

The cruiser's bell sounded midnight. And still they remained there, sitting side by side, thinking of their homeland, of their dear ones, of a thousand things, in a dream. . . .

And now this eternal sun, which had dipped its rim slightly in the waters, began slowly to rise.

It was morning. . . .

PART II

CHAPTER I

. . . It had changed its aspect, also, and its colour, the sun of Iceland, and it opened this new day by a sinister morning. Completely rid of its veil, it gave out great rays which traversed the sky in jets, announcing impending storms.

It had been too fine in the last few days and a change was due. The wind blew on this assembly of boats, as if it felt the need of scattering them, of ridding the sea of them; and they began to disperse, to flee like a routed army—simply before this menace written in the air, about which there could be no mistake.

And it steadily increased in strength, until men and ships alike shivered at it.

The waves, still small, began to chase one another, to group themselves. They had been marbled at first with a white foam which spread over them in slaver; but presently, with a sound of crackling, they gave out a smoke of spray; one would have said that the sea was boiling, that it was burning—and the shrill noise of it all augmented from minute to minute.

There was no thought now for the fishing, but only for the management of the boats. The lines had been hauled in long before. All were hurrying to get away, some to seek a shelter in the fiords, striving to arrive in time; others, preparing to pass the southern point of Iceland, deeming it the safer course to take to the open sea and have free space in which to sail before

the wind. They still saw one another a little; here and there, in the hollows of the waves, sails rose up, poor little things, wet, weary, fugitive—but keeping upright nevertheless, like those children's toys of pith of elder-wood which one may lay flat by blowing on them, but which always raise themselves again.

The great shag of clouds which had condensed on the western horizon with the aspect of an island began to break up at the top and the tatters coursed across the sky. It seemed inexhaustible, this shag: the wind stretched it, extended it, unravelled it, making issue from it an indefinite succession of dark curtains, which it outspread over the clear yellow sky, become now livid in its cold depths.

And still the wind increased, agitating everything.

The cruiser had made off towards the shelters of Iceland, the fishermen remained alone on this agitated sea, which now had an angry air and a dreadful colour. They made haste in their preparations for foul weather. The distance between them increased. Soon they were lost from sight of one another.

The waves, curling in volutes, continued to chase one another, to unite, to join forces in order to become still higher, and, between them, the hollows deepened.

In a few hours all was ploughed up, convulsed in this region which on the preceding evening had been so calm, and, in place of the silence of before, one was deafened with noise. Very quickly the scene had changed, and all now was agitation, unconscious, useless. What was the object of it all? . . . What a mystery of blind destruction! . . .

The clouds were completing their unfolding, coming always from the west, overlaying one another, hurrying, swift obscuring everything. There remained

now only a few yellow openings, by which the sun sent down its last rays in sheaves. And the water, greenish now, was veined more and more with white slaver.

By midday the *Marie* had assumed completely her foul-weather trim; with closed hatches and reefed sails, she bounded supple and light; amid the disorder that was commencing she had the air of playing as play the porpoises whom storms amuse. With only her foresail spread she ran before the wind, according to the nautical expression which describes this particular trim.

Above, the heavens had become completely overcast, a closed, oppressive vault—with darker shadings spread over it in shapeless smudges; the impression was almost of an immobile dome, and it was necessary to look close to realize that on the contrary it was in a very whirl of movement: great grey sheets, hastening to pass, and replaced without ceasing by others which came from below the horizon; funereal tapestries unwinding as if from an inexhaustible roll. . . .

She ran before the wind, the *Marie,* ever more quickly—and the wind ran, too—before I know not what mysterious and terrible power. The wind, the sea, the *Marie,* the clouds, all were seized with the same madness of flight and speed in the same direction. That which ran ahead the fastest was the wind; then the great heavings of the water, more lumbering, slower, followed after it; then the *Marie,* dragged in the universal movement. The waves pursued her, with their pale crests, which rolled on in a perpetual crashing, and she—continually overtaken, continually outstripped—escaped them, none the less, thanks to a wake she skilfully left behind her, an eddy on which their fury broke.

And in this movement of flight the chief sensation was an illusion of lightness; without any difficulty, without an effort, one felt oneself leap. When the *Marie* rose on the waves she rose without a shock as if the wind had lifted her, and her descent afterwards was like a sliding, causing those internal qualms one has in the simulated fallings of the switchback or in the imaginary descents of dreams. She slid backwards, as it were, the racing mountains slipping away from under her to continue their course, and then she was plunged again in one of those deep troughs which raced in their turn; without taking hurt she touched the dreadful bottom of them, in a shower of spray which did not even wet her, but which sped on like everything else; which sped on and vanished ahead of her like smoke, like an intangible nothing. . . .

At the bottom of these troughs there was a deeper gloom, and as each wave passed one saw behind another coming on; another larger still which rose up quite green by transparency, with furious writhings, with volutes that threatened to close, with an air of saying: 'Now I have got you, now I will engulf you.'

But no; it raised you merely, as with a lifting of a shoulder one might raise a feather; and, almost gently, you felt it passing under you, with its rustling foam, its roar as of a cascade.

And so it went on continuously. But getting worse all the time. The waves followed one another, becoming ever more enormous, in long chains of mountains, the valleys of which began to cause fear. And all this madness of movement became faster, under a sky that grew darker and darker, amid a noise that swelled until it became a roar.

It was very heavy weather indeed, and it was necessary to keep watch. But, then, there was so

much free space before them, space in which to run! And it happened also that this year the *Marie* had spent the season in the most western part of the Iceland fisheries; so that this headlong flight towards the coast was so much way made in their voyage home.

Yann and Sylvestre were at the helm lashed by the waist. They were singing again the song of *Jean-François de Nantes*; drunk with movement and speed, they sang at the top of their voices, laughing to find they could not hear each other amid all this unloosing of noise, turning round in their high spirits, to sing against the wind, and losing breath for their pains.

'Hallo, there! you youngsters, do you find it stuffy up there?' Guermeur asked them, putting his bearded face through the half-opened hatchway, like a devil ready to leap out of his box.

No, there was no lack of air on deck, that was certain!

They were not afraid, having a very exact notion of what was manageable, having confidence in the solidity of their boat, in the strength of their arms. And also in the protection of the faïence Virgin who, during forty years of voyages to Iceland, had so often danced this same disagreeable dance, forever smiling between her bouquets of artificial flowers. . . .

Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!

In general they could see but a short distance around them: some hundreds of yards away everything seemed to end in monstrous waves whose pale crests stood erect, shutting out the view. One seemed always to be in the middle of a restricted scene, which, nevertheless, was perpetually changing; and, in addition, things were drowned in this kind of

watery smoke, which scudded like a cloud, with an extreme swiftness, over all the surface of the sea.

But, from time to time, a rift appeared in the north-west, from which a sudden shift of wind would come; then, a glancing light arrived from the horizon; a trailing reflection, making the dome of the sky seem darker, shed itself on the white agitated crests. And this rift was sad to see; these glimpsed distances, these vistas oppressed the heart the more in that they made you realize only too well that there was the same chaos everywhere, the same fury—even beyond the great empty horizon, and infinitely beyond that again: the terror had no limits, and one was alone in the midst of it.

A gigantic clamour issued from things like an apocalyptic prelude sounding the alarm of the end of the world. And thousands of voices could be distinguished in it; from above came whistling voices and deep voices, which seemed almost distant because they were immense: that was the wind, the mighty soul of this disorder, the invisible power directing the whole commotion. It was terrifying enough; but there were other noises, closer, more material, carrying a more imminent menace of destruction, which the tormented water gave out, spluttering as if on burning coals.

And still the storm waxed fiercer.

And, in spite of their close trim, the sea began to cover them, to 'eat' them as they said: first, the spray lashing from behind, then water in masses, hurled with smashing force. The waves rose higher still, more madly high, and the higher they rose the more jagged they became; one saw large greenish tatters of them, rags of falling water, which the wind scattered everywhere. Some of them fell in heavy masses on the

deck, with a smacking sound, and then the *Marie* shook in her whole being as if in pain. Now one could distinguish nothing, on account of all this white scattering foam; when the blasts roared more fiercely, one saw it rushing in thicker clouds—like the dust of the roads in summer. A heavy rain, which had begun, fell slantwise also, almost horizontally, and these things together whistled, whipped, hurt like blows of a lash.

They remained both at the helm, bound and holding firm, clothed in their oilskins, which were tough and glistening as the skins of sharks; they had tied them tight at the neck, by tarred laces, and tight at the wrists and ankles, so as to keep the water out; and everything streamed over them, who bowed their backs when it fell too thick, buttressing themselves well, so as not to be borne completely over. The skin of their cheeks burnt, and at every minute they caught their breath. After each great mass of water had fallen they looked at each other—and smiled to see the salt amassed in their beards.

In time, nevertheless, it became an extreme weariness, this fury which did not abate, which remained always at its same exasperated paroxysm. The rage of men, the rage of beasts, exhausts itself and quickly subsides; one has perforce to suffer long the rage of inanimate things which is without cause and without aim, mysterious as life and as death.

Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!

Through their lips, which had become white, the refrain of the old song passed still, but like an aphonous thing, continued from time to time unconsciously. The excess of movement and noise had made them

drunk; it was in vain that they were young, their smiles grimaced on their teeth which chattered in their trembling from the cold; their eyes, half-closed under burning, flickering eyelids, remained fixed in a grim atony. Lashed to the helm like two marble buttresses, they made, with their cramped, blue fingers, the efforts that were necessary, almost without thinking, by simple habit of the muscles. With streaming hair, and contracted mouths, they had become strange, and in them reappeared a whole background of primitive savagery.

They could see no longer! They knew only that they were still there, side by side. At the moments of greatest danger, every time that behind them the new mountain of water rose up, overhanging, clamorous, horrible, dashing against their boat with a mighty thud, one of their hands moved involuntarily in the sign of the cross. They no longer thought of anything, not of Gaud, not of any woman, nor of any marriage. It was lasting too long and they were past all thinking; their intoxication of noise, of weariness, of cold, obscured everything in their heads. They were now only two pillars of stiff flesh who kept the helm; only two vigorous beasts clinging there by instinct so that they should not die.

CHAPTER II

. . . .

. . . It was in Brittany, in the latter part of September, on a day already cool. Gaud was making her way alone over the barren moor of Ploubazlanec in the direction of Pors-Even.

Nearly a month before the Iceland boats had returned—save two which had disappeared in that June storm. But the *Marie* having held fast, Yann and all those of the ship's company were at home, peacefully.

Gaud was very perturbed at the idea that she was bound for Yann's home.

Once only had she seen him since the return from Iceland; it was when they had gone, all together, to bid good-bye to poor little Sylvestre, on his departure for service. (They had accompanied him as far as the diligence, Sylvestre weeping a little, his old grandmother weeping much, and he had gone to join the depot at Brest.) Yann, who had also come to embrace his little friend, had seemed to avert his eyes when she looked at him, and, as there were many people round the diligence—other conscripts who were departing also, and relatives assembled to bid them good-bye—they had no opportunity of speaking to each other.

And so she had taken at last a great resolution, and, a little fearful, was on her way now to the home of the Gaoses.

Her father had formerly had some common interests

with Yann (affairs of that complicated sort which, among fishermen, as among peasants, seem never to end), and owed him some hundred francs in respect of the sale of a boat which had just been completed.

'You ought,' she had said, 'to let me take him this money, father. In the first place, I should be very pleased to see Marie Gaos; and, then, I have never been so far into Ploubazlanec, and it would interest me to make the long tramp.'

In her heart she had an anxious curiosity to see this family of Yann's, into which one day perhaps she would enter, to see his home, his village.

In a last conversation, Sylvestre, before departing, had explained to her in his fashion the unmannerliness of his friend:

'You know, Gaud, it 's because he is made like that: he doesn 't want to marry any one. It's an idea he has got into his head. He loves only the sea, and one day, even, in a jest, he told us he had promised himself to the sea in marriage.'

And so she pardoned him his little ways and, treasuring always in her memory his kind, frank smile of the night of the ball, continued to cherish hope.

If she met him there, in his home, she would not say anything to him on any account; she would not have dreamt of doing anything so forward. But, perhaps, he, seeing her again in the familiarity of his home, perhaps he would speak. . . .

CHAPTER III

SHE had been walking for an hour, alert, agitated, breathing the wholesome breeze from the sea.

There were large calvaries planted at the cross-roads.

From time to time she passed through sailors' villages, little hamlets which are beaten the year through by the wind and have the colour of rocks. In one, where the lane narrowed suddenly between sad-looking walls, between high thatched roofs, pointed like Celtic huts, an inn sign made her smile: 'The Chinese Ciderhouse'; someone had painted two ape-like personages in green and red robes, with pigtails, drinking cider. No doubt a fancy of some old sailor man returned from foreign parts. . . . As she passed she looked at everything; people who are very preoccupied by the object of their journey are always more interested than others in the thousand and one details of the road.

The little village was far behind her now, and, as she advanced over this lost promontory of Breton land, the trees became rarer about her, the country more forlorn.

The ground was undulating, rocky, and from all the heights could be seen the open sea. There were no hills at all now; nothing but the bare sandy moor with its green furze and, here and there, the crucifixes, outlining against the sky their spreading arms, giving to all this country the appearance of an immense place of justice.

At a cross-way, protected by one of these enormous Christs, she hesitated between two roads which disappeared between banks of thorn.

A little girl, coming up in the nick of time, relieved her from her embarrassment:

'Good morning, Mademoiselle Gaud!'

It was a little Gaos girl, a little sister of Yann. After she had embraced her she asked her if her parents were at home.

'Daddy and mummy, yes. All except my brother Yann,' said the little one, without any malice, 'who has gone to Loguivy; but I think he will be back before long.'

He was not there! Again this perverse fate which kept him at a distance from her, everywhere and always. She was strongly inclined to postpone her visit until another time. But this child, who had seen her on the road, who would surely tell . . . What would they think of that at Pors-Even? She decided, therefore, to continue her journey, dawdling as much as possible in order to give him time to return.

In measure, as she drew near to Yann's village, to this point remote and lost, things became wilder still and more desolate. This great air of the sea, which makes men more vigorous, also makes the plants lower, shorter, stunts them, flattens them on the unkindly soil. In the lane there were seaweeds which trailed over the ground, foliage of a foreign sort, indicating that another world was close by. They shed in the air their salty odour.

Gaud met a few passers-by, men of the sea, whom one saw at a great distance in this bare country, outlining themselves in a kind of magnified way, against the high and distant line of the waters. Pilots or

fishermen, they seemed always to have their eyes on the far distance, to be keeping vigil over the sea; as she passed them, they gave her good day. Bronzed faces, very masculine and decided, under a sailor's bonnet.

Time did not pass, and now she was at a loss to know what to do to prolong her journey; the people she passed wondered to see her walking so slowly.

What was Yann doing at Loguivy? Running after the girls, perhaps. . . .

Ah, if she had known how little he bothered his head about them, these fair charmers! At any time, when the mood seized him, he had, as a rule, but to present himself to make a conquest. The little ladies of Paimpol, as the old Icelander song says, are somewhat lavish of their favours, and could not be expected to resist so handsome a suitor. No, quite simply, he had gone to give an order to a certain basket-maker in the village, who alone in the country round had the true art of weaving lobster-traps. His head at that moment was very free from love.

She reached a chapel, which she had seen from a distance on a hill. It was a chapel all in grey. Very small and very old; in the midst of the arid surroundings, a cluster of trees, grey also and already leafless, served it for tresses, tresses tossed all on the same side, as by a hand which had been passed there.

And this hand was the same as made founder the boats of the fishermen, the eternal hand of the west wind, which bends back, in the direction of the waves and the swell, the twisted branches of the shore. They had grown slantwise and dishevelled, the old trees, bowing their backs under the age-long pressure of this same hand.

Gaud was now almost at her journey's end, for this was the chapel of Pors-Even. She stopped, therefore, to gain a little more time.

A low crumbling wall made a boundary round an enclosure containing crosses. And everything was of the same colour, the chapel, the trees, and the tombs; the whole place seemed uniformly weather-beaten, gnawed by the wind from the sea; an identical greyish lichen, with pale sulphur-yellow patches, covered the stones, the gnarled branches, and the granite saints who stood in the niches of the wall.

On one of these wooden crosses a name was inscribed in large letters: 'Gaos—Gaos, Joël, eighty years.'

Ah, yes, the grandfather; she knew that. The sea had not wanted him, had not wanted this old sailor. To be sure, many relatives of Yann must be sleeping in this enclosure; it was natural, and she ought to have expected it; nevertheless, this name read on this tomb made a painful impression on her.

To pass yet another minute or two she entered to say a prayer under the ancient porch, which was very small, and worn, and coated with lime-wash. And then she stopped short, with a more marked contraction of the heart.

Gaos! The same name again, graven on one of the memorial plaques, such as are placed to preserve the memory of those who die at sea.

She read the inscription:

In memory of
GAOS, JEAN-LOUIS,
Aged 24 years, sailor on board the *Marguerite*, who disappeared in Iceland on the 3rd of August 1877.
May he rest in peace!

Iceland—always Iceland!—All about, at this

entrance to the chapel, were nailed other wooden plaques, with the names of dead mariners. It was the corner of the shipwrecked sons of Pors-Even, and she regretted she had entered, seized by a dark presentiment.

At Paimpol, in the church, she had seen similar inscriptions; but here, in this village, it was smaller, ruder, wilder, this empty tomb of the Iceland fishermen. On either side was a granite seat for the widows, for the mothers: and this low place, irregular as a grotto, was protected by a very ancient statue of the Virgin, painted over in red, with large, unfriendly eyes, which resembled Cybele, the primitive goddess of the world.

Gaos, again!

In memory of

GAOS, FRANÇOIS,

Husband of Anne-Marie Le Goaster, Captain on board the *Paimpolais*, lost in Iceland between the 1st and 3rd of April 1877, with the twenty-three men of his crew.

May they rest in peace!

And, below, two cross-bones, under a dark skull with green eyes, a painting crude and grotesque, savouring still of the barbarism of an earlier age.

Gaos! The name was everywhere!

Another Gaos, called Yves, 'swept overboard and lost in the neighbourhood of Norden Fiord in Iceland, at the age of twenty-two years.' The plaque seemed to have been there for many years. He must have been quite forgotten, this Yves. . . .

As she read, there came to her for this Yann yearnings of great tenderness, which were charged also

with despair. Never, oh, never, would he be hers! How could she dispute him with the sea, which had claimed so many other Gaoses, ancestors, brothers, who must have been so like him in many ways.

She entered the chapel, already dark, the light scarcely penetrating through the low windows in the thick walls. And there, her heart full of tears which wanted to flow, she knelt down to pray before the large statues of saints, surrounded with common flowers, whose heads almost touched the vault. Outside, the wind which had risen began to groan, as though bringing to this Breton land the plaint of young men dead.

The evening was approaching: it was necessary, therefore, to make up her mind to pay her visit and acquit herself of her commission.

She took to the road again, and, having made inquiries in the village, she found the house of the Gaoses, which backed against a high cliff; a dozen or so granite steps led up to it.

Trembling a little at the idea that Yann might have returned, she crossed the little garden in which chrysanthemums and speedwell were growing.

On entering she said that she had brought the money realized by the sale of the boat, and she was asked, very politely, to sit down and await the return of the father, who would sign the receipt for her. Among the people who were there she looked for Yann, but did not see him.

There was an air of business in the house. On a large, very white table, they were already cutting out, from a piece of new cotton cloth, the garments called oilskins, for the next Iceland season.

'For you see, Mademoiselle Gaud, they must each have two changes complete for the trip.'

They explained to her how they would afterwards dye them and wax them, these garbs of suffering. And while they described these things to her, she surveyed attentively this dwelling of the Gaoses.

It was laid out in the traditional manner of Breton cottages; a large fireplace occupied the back, and press beds were ranged on either side. But it had not the gloom nor the melancholy of those labourers' dwellings, which stand always half-buried by the roadside; it was bright and clean, as is usual with the homes of sailor-men.

Several little Gaoses were there, boys and girls, all the brothers or sisters of Yann—not counting the two grown-up men at sea; and, in addition, a fair little girl, pathetic-looking and neat, who was like none of the others.

'One we adopted last year,' explained the mother; 'not that we hadn't enough already; but what could we do, Mademoiselle Gaud! Her father was on the *Maria-Dieu-t'aime*, which was lost in Iceland last season, as you know—and, amongst the neighbours, they divided the five children who were left, and this one has fallen to us.'

Hearing that they were talking of her the little adopted one lowered her head and smiled, as she hid herself behind little Laumec Gaos, who was her special friend.

There was an air of comfort everywhere about the house, and the ruddy cheeks of all these children glowed with eager health.

They were at pains to show Gaud every attention —as a young lady whose visit was an honour to the family. They led her by a staircase of new white wood, up to the first floor room, which was the glory

of the dwelling. She remembered well the history of the construction of this upper story; it followed the finding of a derelict ship in the Channel by the elder Gaos and his cousin the pilot; on the night of the ball Yann had told her all about it.

This room of the derelict was pretty and cheerful in its new whiteness; there were two beds in it, beds of the modern type, with curtains of pink chintz; a large table in the middle. From the window one saw all Paimpol, all the roadstead, with the Iceland boats beyond, at anchor—and the channel by which they went to sea.

She did not dare to ask, but she would have greatly liked to know where Yann slept; evidently, when he was quite small he must have slept below, in one of those old press beds. But now, perhaps, it was here, between these pretty pink curtains. And she would have dearly loved to know the details of his life. Especially to know how he passed the long winter evenings. . . .

. . . A rather heavy step on the stairs made her tremble.

No, it was not Yann, but a man who resembled him in spite of his white hair, who had almost his tall stature, and who was as erect as he: the elder Gaos returned from his fishing.

After having saluted her and inquired the object of her visit, he signed the receipt for her. It took him rather long, for his hand, as he said, was no longer steady. Nevertheless, he did not accept the hundred francs as a final payment, in full settlement for the sale of the boat, but only as a payment on account; he would talk it over with M. Mével. And Gaud, to whom the money signified little, smiled a scarcely perceptible smile: so then the story was not

yet finished; very quickly she caught at the wild hope; at any rate, it meant that she would still have business with the Gaoses.

They were almost apologetic in the house about Yann's absence, as if they would have found it more seemly that all the family should be assembled to receive her. The elder Gaos had perhaps guessed, with his old sailor's shrewdness, that his son was not indifferent to this fair heiress, for he was rather insistent in his references to him:

'It 's very odd,' he said, 'he is never out so late. He went to Loguivy, Mademoiselle Gaud, to buy some lobster-traps; as you know, that is our chief fishing in the winter.'

She, inattentive, prolonged her visit, although she knew that she was staying too long; her heart ached at the thought that she would not see him.

'A sober fellow like him, what can he be doing? He is not in a tavern, that is certain; we have not that to fear with our son. . . . I don't say that once in a way, on a Sunday perhaps, with old friends . . . You know, Mademoiselle Gaud, what sailors are. . . . And, bless my soul, when a man is young, you know, why should he deny himself altogether? . . . But the thing is very rare with him, he 's a steady fellow, we can speak as to that.'

And now darkness was falling: the oilskins were being folded up, work was suspended. The little Gaoses, and their little adopted sister, sitting on benches, snuggled close to one another, subdued by this grey hour of the evening, and looked at Gaud, as who should say:

'What is she staying for; why doesn't she go?'

And, in the fireplace, the fire began to burn red in the falling twilight.

'You must stay and have supper with us, Mademoiselle Gaud.'

Oh, no; she could not do that; the blood rushed suddenly to her face at the thought of having stayed so long. She got up and said good-bye.

Yann's father had got up also to accompany her to the end of the road, to the farther side of a certain lonely valley, where aged trees made the way dark.

While they walked side by side she felt herself moved by a feeling of respect for him and of tenderness; she wanted to speak to him as to a father, in impulses which came to her: but the words died away in her throat, and she said nothing.

They walked on, in the cold wind of the evening which savoured of the sea, passing here and there, on the bare plain, cottages already shut up for the night, very gloomy, under the hump-backed roofs, poor nests in which the fishermen were hidden; passing crucifixes, and furze, and stones.

How remote it was, this Pors-Even, and how late she had stayed there!

From time to time they met people returning from Paimpol and Loguivy; as she watched the silhouettes approach she thought each time of Yann; but it was easy to recognize him in the distance, and she was quickly undeceived. Her feet caught in long brown plants, intertwined like coils of hair, which were seaweeds trailing over the ground.

At the cross of Plouëzoch she said good-bye to the old man, begging him to return. The lights of Paimpol were already visible, and there was no longer any reason to be afraid.

And so it was finished for this time. . . . And who could tell now when she would see Yann. . . .

She might have found pretexts enough for returning

to Pors-Even; but she would have had too forward an air in repeating the visit. She would have to be more courageous and prouder. If only Sylvestre, her little confidant, had been here still, she could have charged him, perhaps, to seek out Yann on her behalf and endeavour to ascertain his intentions. But he had gone away, and it would be years before he returned.

CHAPTER IV

'I MARRY?' said Yann to his parents that same evening; 'I marry? And, bless my soul, why should I? Shall I ever be so happy as here with you; nothing to worry about, no one to wrangle with, and a good supper piping hot every evening, when I return from the sea. . . . Oh! I know very well that you are thinking of her who came to see you to-day. But, in the first place, a girl so rich as she, how should she care about poor folk like us? It doesn't seem reasonable to me. And, anyhow, neither with her nor any one else. I have thought it out well, and my mind is made up. I will not marry.'

They looked at one another in silence, the two old Gaoses, profoundly disappointed; for, after they had talked it over together, they had formed a very sure belief that this young girl would not refuse their handsome Yann. But they did not attempt to press the matter, knowing how useless it would be. His mother, in particular, bowed her head and said not another word. She respected the wishes of this son, of this eldest son, who ranked almost as the head of the house; although he was always very gentle and very considerate with her, more submissive even than a child in the little things of life, he had for long now been his absolute master in things that mattered, brushing aside all pressure with a calmly stern independence.

He never stayed up late, being used, like the other fishermen, to rise before daybreak. And after supper,

at eight o'clock sharp, having given a last look of satisfaction at the traps he had brought from Loguivy, at his new nets, he began to undress, his mind, to all appearance, completely at ease; then he went upstairs to bed, to the bed with the pink chintz curtains, which he shared with his little brother Laumec.

CHAPTER V

. . . FOR the past fortnight Sylvestre, Gaud's little confidant, had been in the depot at Brest—very much out of his element, but very steady; wearing with a swagger his open blue collar and his red pom-pomed bonnet; a rather proud and very handsome sailor, with his rolling gait and tall figure; at bottom regretting still his fond old grandmother and remaining the innocent lad of old.

On one evening only had he got tipsy—with the lads of his native district; it was a custom, and they had returned to their quarters, the whole band of them, arm in arm, and singing at the top of their voices.

One Sunday, also, he had gone to the theatre, and sat in the gallery. The play was one of those thrilling dramas at which the sailors, exasperated against the villain, greet him with hootings which they utter in unison, making a noise like the deep roar of the west wind. What he noticed most was that it was very warm, that there was a lack of air and room: an attempt to remove his overcoat brought him a rebuke from the officer in charge. And he had ended by falling asleep.

As he was returning to the barracks after midnight he had come upon some women, no longer in their first youth, without covering on their heads, who were strolling up and down the footpath.

'Good night, dear,' they said in deep, hoarse voices.

He had understood at once what they wanted, not being by any means so simple as one might have thought. But the memory, evoked immediately, of his old grandmother and of Marie Gaos had caused him to pass them by contemptuously, surveying them from the height of his beauty and his youth with a smile of childlike mockery. He had surprised them, even, for they were not used to such reserve in a sailor.

'Did you see him! . . . Take care, run, my boy; run quickly, or else you 'll be eaten!'

And the noise of the very vile things they shouted after him had been drowned in the vague hum which filled the streets on this Sunday night.

He lived in Brest as in Iceland, as at sea, a life of continence. But the others did not make fun of him, because he was very strong, and strength is a thing which sailors respect.

CHAPTER VI

ONE day he was called to the office of his company; he was told that he had been named for China, for the Formosa Squadron! . . .

He had half expected for some time past that this would happen, having heard said by those who read the newspapers that the war in that part of the world showed no sign of finishing. On account of the urgency of the departure it was intimated to him also that it would not be possible to allow him the leave to say good-bye, usually given to those about to make a voyage: in five days he would have to pack his kit-bag and be off.

He was assailed by very conflicting emotions: first, the delight of a long voyage, the lure of the unknown, the thrill of war; and then the pain of leave-taking, with the vague fear that he might never return.

A thousand things whirled in his head. There was a great commotion around him, in the barrack rooms, where many others had just been named also for this same China squadron.

And quickly he wrote to his poor old grandmother, quickly, in pencil, sitting on the floor, wrapt in an agitated reverie, amid the coming and going and the clamour of all these young men who, like him, were about to depart.

CHAPTER VII

'SHE is a little ancient, his lady-love!' said the others, two days afterwards, as they smiled behind him: 'all the same, they seem to be getting on very well.'

They were amused to see him, for the first time, walking in the streets of Recouvrance with a woman on his arm, like everybody else, bending towards her with a tender air, saying things to her which seemed to be very winning.

A little person, whose figure was alert enough—seen from behind—a skirt rather short, to be sure, for the fashion of the day; a little brown shawl, and a large Paimpol coif.

She also, hanging on his arm, turned towards him, and gazed tenderly at him.

'She is a little ancient, his lady-love!'

They said that, the others, without any great malice, seeing quite well that it was a fond old grandmother, come from the country.

. . . Come in haste, seized with a dreadful fear, at the news of the departure of her grandson—for this war in China had already cost the district of Paimpol many a sailor.

Having gathered together all her poor little savings, and packed in a pasteboard case her best Sunday dress and a second coif, she had set off to embrace him at least once more.

She had gone straight to the barracks to ask for him, and at first the adjutant of his company had refused to let him out.

'If you want to make an application, my good woman, you must address yourself to the captain; that is he over there.'

And straightway she had gone to him. He, the captain, allowed himself to be touched.

'Send Moan to change,' he said.

And Moan, three steps at a time, had gone up to change into his holiday wear—while the old woman, to amuse him, as always, made behind the adjutant's back an inimitable little grimace, with a curtsey.

When he reappeared, this grandson of hers, very *décolleté* in his outdoor rig, she had been astonished to find him so handsome: his dark beard, which a barber had trimmed for him, was pointed in the fashion affected that year by sailors, the frills of his open shirt were neatly gauffered, and his bonnet had long floating ribbons terminated by golden anchors.

For a moment she had imagined she saw her son Pierre, who, twenty years before, had also been a topman in the Navy, and the memory of this distant past already grown so remote, of all her dear ones dead, had cast a fleeting shadow of sadness over the present hour.

But it was a sadness quickly effaced. They had set off arm in arm, in the joy of being together; and it was then that, taking her for his lady-love, his companions had judged her 'a little ancient.'

She had taken him to dinner, for a little spree, in a tavern kept by some Paimpol people, which had been recommended to her as not being too dear. Afterwards, still arm in arm, they had gone into Brest, to look at the shops. And there was nothing so amusing as the mirth-provoking tales she found to tell her grandson—in the Breton of Paimpol which the passers-by could not understand.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE had remained three days with him, three days of holiday, over which hung an *afterwards* gloomy indeed; they might have been called three days of grace.

And at last it had been necessary to leave, to return to Ploubazlanec. In the first place she had reached the end of her slender financial resources. And, secondly, Sylvestre was to embark on the day but one following, and the sailors are always confined rigorously to their quarters on the day before departure (a custom which at first sight seems a little barbarous, but which is a necessary precaution against deserting which they have a tendency to do when on the point of leaving for a voyage).

Oh, this last day! In vain had she tried, in vain had she sought in her head to find further amusing things to tell her grandson; she could think of none; and now there were tears which would not be denied, sobs which at every moment rose to her throat. Hanging on his arm, she gave him a thousand and one recommendations, which made him in turn inclined to weep. And they had ended by going into a church to pray together.

It was by the evening train that she went away. To save money they had repaired to the station on foot; he carrying her pasteboard case and supporting her with his strong arm on which she leant with all her weight. She was very, very tired, the poor old soul; she could do no more, after the heavy strain of the past three or four days. With back bowed under

her brown shawl, having no longer strength to bear herself erect, there was nothing now of youthfulness in her figure, and she was conscious of all the overwhelming weight of her seventy-six years. At the thought that her visit was over, that in a few minutes more she would have to leave him, her heart was wrung in a piteous manner. And it was to China that he was going, to far-off China, to the place of slaughter! She had him with her still; she clung to him still with her poor worn hands. . . . And, nevertheless, he was going away; not all her will, nor all her tears, nor all her aged despair could avail one whit to keep him! . . .

Encumbered with her ticket, her basket of provisions, her mittens, agitated, trembling, she gave him some last words of advice to which he replied in a low voice by a little submissive 'yes,' his head bent tenderly towards her, looking at her with his gentle eyes, with a small-boy air.

'Now, then, old lady, you must make up your mind if you want to go!'

The engine whistled. Seized with the fear of missing the train, she took her pasteboard case from him—then let it fall to the ground in order to hang on his neck in a last embrace.

Many people looked at them in the station, but no one now was inclined to smile. Pushed by the porters, exhausted, bewildered, she threw herself into the first compartment that offered, the door of which was shut brusquely on her heels; while he, with the nimbleness of a sailor, made a birdlike sweep in order to reach the barrier outside, in time to see the train pass.

A shrill blast of the whistle, a noisy rattling of wheels—and the old grandmother passed. He,

against the barrier, waved with a youthful grace his beribboned bonnet, and she, leaning out of the window of her third-class carriage, signalled with her handkerchief, so that she might be better recognized. As long as she could, as long as she distinguished the blue-black figure which still was her grandson, she followed him with her eyes, throwing him with all her soul that always uncertain 'au revoir,' which one says to sailors when they are going away.

Look at him well, poor old woman, at your little Sylvestre; until the last moment keep your eyes on that diminishing silhouette, which is effacing itself in the distance for ever. . . .

And when she could see him no longer she fell back in her seat, heedless of the rumpling of her pretty coif, sobbing bitterly, in an anguish of death. . . .

And he made his way back slowly, head bowed, with tears rolling down his cheeks. The autumn night had fallen, the lights were lit everywhere, the sailors' festival was beginning. Heedless of everything, he passed through Brest, then across the bridge at Recouvrance, returning to his quarters.

'Good night, dear,' might be heard already in the husky voices of the ladies who had commenced their evening strolling up and down the footpaths.

He rolled himself in his hammock, and wept alone, scarcely sleeping until the morning.

CHAPTER IX

. . . . . .

. . . He had put to sea, borne very quickly over unknown waters, much bluer than those of Iceland.

The ship which was carrying him to the Far East had orders to hasten, to stop nowhere.

He felt already that he had travelled a great distance on account of the speed they made, which was incessant, unvarying, without intermission, almost heedless either of the wind or the sea. Being a topman he lived in his crow's-nest, perched like a bird, aloof from the soldiers crowded on the deck, from the crush below.

They had stopped twice on the coast of Tunis to take on more Zouaves and mules; from afar he had perceived white towns on the sands and mountains. He had even come down from his top to look curiously at some very dark men, draped in white veils, who had come in boats selling fruit: the others had told him they were Bedouins.

The heat and the sunshine, which persisted still in spite of the autumn season, gave him an impression of an extreme foreignness.

One day they reached a town called Port Said. All the flags of Europe floated above it at the top of long staffs, giving it the air of a festive Babel, and glistening sands surrounded it like a sea. They had anchored there alongside the quay, almost in the middle of the long streets of wooden houses. Never, since their departure, had he seen so clearly and so

closely the outside world, and this movement, this profusion of ships, interested him greatly.

With a continual noise of whistles and steam sirens all these ships engulfed themselves in a kind of long canal, narrow as a ditch, which disappeared in a silvery line across the infinitude of the sands. From the height of his top he saw them make their way as in a procession to lose themselves in the plain.

On the quay circulated every kind of costume; men in robes of every colour, busy, shouting, in the great bustle of the transit. And in the evening, with the diabolical whistlings of the engines, was mingled the confused racket of numerous orchestras, playing noisy tunes, as if to soothe the poignant regrets of all these passing exiles.

On the following day, as soon as the sun rose, they, too, had entered the narrow ribbon of water which stretched across the sands, followed by a queue of boats of different countries. It had lasted for two days, this promenade in file across the desert; then another sea had opened before them, and they had run for the offing again.

They were steaming at full speed still; this warmer sea had red marblings on its surface, and sometimes the churned water in their wake had the colour of blood. He lived almost all the time in his top, singing softly to himself *Jean-François de Nantes,* to remind himself of his brother Yann, of Iceland, of the good times past.

Sometimes, in the background of distances full of mirage, he would see appear some mountain of an extraordinary colour. Those who steered the ship knew, no doubt, in spite of the distance and the vagueness, these advanced capes of continents, which are, as it were, the eternal guiding points on the great

highways of the sea. But, when one is a topman, one is borne along as a chattel, without knowing anything, ignorant of distances and measurements on the expanse which never ends.

Sylvestre had only the notion of a dismaying distance which increased continually; but his notion of this was very clear, as he watched from on high the ship's wake, noisy, rapid, for ever vanishing behind them; as he remembered how long this speed had lasted without ever slackening either by day or night.

Below, on deck, the crowd—the men huddled together in the shade of the tents—panted in the overpowering heat. The water, the air, the light had assumed a mournful, crushing splendour; and the eternal festival of these things had a kind of irony for mortal men, for our ephemeral existences.

Once, in his top, he was very interested by clouds of little birds, of an unknown species, which threw themselves on the ship like a whirling cloud of black dust. They allowed themselves to be picked up and stroked, being utterly exhausted. Every topman had one of them on his shoulders.

But presently the more weary of them began to die.

They died in thousands, on the yards, in the portholes, these tiny things, in the glare of the terrible sun of the Red Sea.

They had come from beyond the great deserts, driven by a wind of tempest. In fear of falling into the infinite blue which was all about they had flung themselves in a last despairing effort on this passing ship. Far away, in the background of some distant region of Libya, their kind had multiplied in exuberant loves; had multiplied beyond measure, until there were too many of them; and then the blind mother, Mother Nature, blind and heartless, had swept away with a

breath this excess of little birds, with the same impassiveness as if they had been a generation of men.

And they died, all of them, on the burning ironwork of the ship: the deck was strewn with their little bodies, which yesterday had palpitated with life, and song, and love. . . . Little black rags, with moistened feathers, Sylvestre and the topmen picked them up, spreading out in their hands, with an air of commiseration, the fine bluish wings, and then swept them with brooms into the great nothingness of the sea. . . .

Afterwards a swarm of locusts passed, daughters of those of Moses, and the ship was covered with them.

And then for many days they sailed in an unchanging blue, in which there was no longer any living thing—save, sometimes, for the flying fish, which skimmed the water in their flight. . . .

CHAPTER X

. . . RAIN in torrents under a dark, lowering sky—it was India. Sylvestre had just set foot on shore, chance having caused him to be chosen to complete the crew of a whaleboat.

Through the thickness of the foliage the warm rain descended on him, and he looked around him at things new and strange. All was magnificently green; the leaves of the trees were fashioned like gigantic plumes, and the people he passed had large velvety eyes, which seemed to be closing under the weight of their lids. The wind which brought the rain smelt of musk and flowers.

There were women who beckoned him; they reminded him of the 'good night, dear!' heard so many times in Brest. But, in this enchanted land, their appeal was disturbing and sent a thrill through his flesh. Their shapely bosoms swelled under the transparent muslins, which draped them; they were tawny and polished like bronze.

Still holding back, but fascinated, nevertheless, he was beginning slowly to follow them.

. . . But there came a little nautical whistle, modulated in birdlike trills, which recalled him suddenly to the whaleboat, which was about to put off.

And so he said good-bye to the beauties of India; and when the evening found him once more out at sea he was still as virgin as a babe.

After a new week of blue sea the ship stopped at

another country of rain and verdure. A cloud of little yellow men, with strange cries, immediately invaded the ship, carrying coal in baskets.

'Are we already in China, then?' asked Sylvestre, seeing that they all had ape-like faces and pigtails.

But they told him no; he must have a little patience. This was only Singapore. He climbed back to his top, to avoid the black dust which the wind blew about, while coal from thousands of little baskets was being heaped feverishly in the bunkers.

And then one day they reached a place called Tourane, where they found a certain warship called the *Circe*, at anchor, keeping a blockade. This was the ship for which he had known for some time past that he was destined, and he was transferred to it with his kit-bag.

He met there some men from his homeland, and even two Icelanders, who, at the moment, were gunners.

In the evenings of these still warm and tranquil days, when they had nothing to do, they foregathered on the deck, isolated from the rest, to make together a little Brittany of memories.

He had to pass five months of inaction and exile in this mournful bay, before the longed-for moment arrived when he went forth to battle.

CHAPTER XI

. . . . .

PAIMPOL—the last day of February—the eve of the departure of the fishermen for Iceland.

Gaud was standing against the door of her room, motionless and very pale.

And the reason was that Yann was below, talking to her father. She had seen him come and she could hear indistinctly the sound of his voice.

They had not met once during the whole of the winter. It was as if a fatality had kept them always apart.

After her journey to Pors-Even she had built some hope on the pardon of the Icelanders, at which there are many opportunities of meeting and talking, in the groups that gather in the evening on the Square. But, from the morning of that feast-day, the streets being already hung with white, decorated with green garlands, a dismal rain had fallen in torrents, driven from the west by a blustering wind; at Paimpol the sky had never been so dark. 'The Ploubazlanec folk will not come,' said the girls sadly, whose lovers lived in that district. And, as a matter of fact, they had not come, or, if they came, had disappeared at once into the taverns. No procession, no promenade, and she, her heart more oppressed than usual, had remained throughout the evening at her window, listening to the water dripping from the roofs, and the noisy songs which ascended from the interior of the taverns.

For some days past she had foreseen this visit of Yann's, shrewdly guessing that, in connection with this outstanding matter of the sale of the boat, the elder Gaos, who did not like coming to Paimpol, would send his son. And so she had made up her mind that she would go to him, a thing which commonly girls did not do, that she would speak to him in order to reach a clear understanding. She would reproach him for having troubled her and then abandoned her, in the manner of men who are without honour. Waywardness, shyness, attachment to the calling of the sea, or fear of being refused . . . if these obstacles, which Sylvestre had mentioned, were the only ones, perhaps they might be removed, who knows! after a frank discussion such as theirs would be. And then, perhaps, that engaging smile of his would reappear to settle everything—that same smile which had so surprised and charmed her the previous winter, on a certain night spent wholly dancing in his arms. And this hope gave her courage, filled her with an eager impatience.

From a distance all appears so easy, so simple to say and do.

And, as chance would have it, this visit of Yann's fell at an hour she herself would have chosen: she was sure that her father, sitting smoking as he would be, would not disturb himself to see him off the premises; in the passage, therefore, where they would be alone, she would be able at last to have her straight talk with him.

But now, the longed-for moment come, her boldness seemed to her extreme. The mere idea of meeting him, of seeing him face to face at the foot of these stairs, made her tremble. Her heart beat as if it would burst. . . .

. . . And to think that, at any moment, the door below might open—with the little creaking noise she knew so well—to give him passage!

No, decidedly no, she would never dare; rather would she pine in waiting and die of grief than attempt such a thing. And already she had taken some steps to return to the seclusion of her room, to sit there and work.

But she stopped again, hesitating, bewildered, remembering that to-morrow was the day of departure for Iceland, and that this opportunity of seeing him was unique. It would be necessary, if she let it pass, to begin over again those months of solitude and waiting, to languish for his return, to lose another whole summer of her life. . . .

Below, the door opened! Yann came out! Suddenly resolved, she ran down the staircase and reaching the bottom planted herself trembling before him.

'Monsieur Yann, I want to speak to you, if you please.'

'To me! Mademoiselle Gaud?' he said, lowering his voice, his hat in his hand.

He looked at her in a shy sort of way, his eyes questioning, his head thrown back, stern in expression, looking even as if he were wondering whether he would so much as stop. With one foot forward, in readiness for escape, he leaned his broad shoulders against the wall, as if to increase his distance from her in this narrow passage in which he found himself caught.

Nonplussed at this, she remembered nothing of what she had prepared to say to him; she had not foreseen that he might put this affront upon her of leaving without having heard her.

He averted his eyes and looked out into the street. His cheeks had become very red, a rush of blood made his face burn, and his mobile nostrils dilated at each respiration, following the movements of his heart, like those of bulls.

She continued with an effort:

'On the night of the ball, when we were together you said good-bye to me in a way one does not say it to people to whom one is indifferent. . . . Monsieur Yann, have you forgotten? . . . What have I done to you? . . .'

. . . The blustering west wind, coming from the street, rushed into the passage, stirring Yann's hair, and the wings of Gaud's coif, and making a door bang furiously behind them. It was not a comfortable place in which to talk of grave matters. After the first sentences, strangled in her throat, Gaud remained silent, her head swimming, unable any more to think. They had moved towards the street door, he seeking always to escape.

Outside, the wind was blowing with a great roar, and the sky was dark. Through the open door a lurid and mournful light fell full on their faces. A neighbour opposite watched them: 'What can they have to say to each other, those two, in the passage there, with airs so troubled? What is happening at the Mévels?'

'No, Mademoiselle Gaud,' said he at last, breaking away with the facility of a wild beast. 'Already I have heard that people in the neighbourhood are talking about us. . . . No, Mademoiselle Gaud. . . . You are rich, we are not people of the same class. I am not the kind of man you want coming to your house. . . .'

And he went away. . . .

And so all was over, over for ever. And she had not said anything of what she wanted to say, in this interview which had only succeeded in making her appear in his eyes as a brazen-faced minx. . . . What sort of a man was he, this Yann, with his contempt for women, his contempt for money, his contempt for everything! . . .

She remained rooted to the spot, seeing things swim about her in a sort of vertigo.

And then an idea, more intolerable than all, came to her in a flash: some comrades of Yann's, Icelanders were walking up and down outside waiting for him! If he should tell them what had happened, make a jest of it, how utterly odious this affront would be! She ran up quickly to her room to watch them through the curtains. . . .

In front of the house she saw, indeed, the group of men; but they were simply looking at the sky, which was becoming darker and darker, and making forecasts of the rain which was threatening:

'It 's only a shower; let us go in and drink until it 's over.'

And then they made merry, out loud, about Jeannie Caroff and other frail beauties; but none of them turned to look at her window.

They were all in high spirits, except Yann, who did not speak or smile, but remained serious and saddened. He did not go in to drink with the others, and without taking any more notice of them or of the rain which was now falling, walking slowly through the downpour in the manner of one absorbed in thought, he crossed the Square, in the direction of Ploubazlanec. . . .

Then she forgave him everything, and a feeling of

hopeless tenderness took the place of the bitter contempt which at first had filled her heart.

She sat down, her head in her hands. What was she to do now?

Oh! if he had but listened to her only for a minute; or, better, if he could come to her there, alone with her in this room, where they might talk in peace, all might perhaps come right yet.

She loved him enough to dare to avow it to him to his face. She would say to him: 'You came to me when I had not sought you: now I am yours with all my heart, if you want me. You see I do not fear to become the wife of a fisherman, although, among the young men of Paimpol, I would only have to choose if I wanted one of them for a husband; but I love you, because, in spite of all, I think you better than all the others: I am fairly well provided for, I know I am good-looking; although I have lived in cities I swear to you that I am a sensible girl, and have never done anything of which I am ashamed; then, since I love you so much, why will you not take me?'

. . . But all this would never be expressed, never spoken except in dream: it was too late. Yann would never hear it. To attempt to speak to him a second time. . . . Oh, no! What kind of creature would he take her for then! . . . She would rather die.

And to-morrow they would all depart for Iceland!

Alone, in her pretty room, where the wan daylight of February entered, cold, seated at hazard on one of the chairs ranged along the wall, it seemed to her that the world was tumbling, with things present and things to come, into a mournful, awful void, which had just opened everywhere about her.

She would fain have been released from life, have been lying peacefully in her grave, so that she might suffer no more. . . . But, in her heart, she forgave him, and no hatred was mixed with the despairing love she had for him. . . .

CHAPTER XII

. . . . .

THE sea, the grey sea.

On the unmarked highway which leads the fishermen, every summer, to Iceland, Yann had been running now for a day.

The preceding day, when they had set out to the singing of the old canticles, a south wind was blowing and all the boats, covered with sails, had been dispersed like sea-gulls.

Then the wind had become softer, and their progress slackened; banks of mist travelled level with the waters.

Yann was perhaps more silent than usual. He grumbled at the calm weather, and seemed to have need of movement, to drive from his mind some obsession; there was nothing to be done, however, except to glide tranquilly in the midst of tranquil things; except to breathe and go on living. Looking round one saw only grey depths; listening, one heard only silence. . . . Suddenly a dull noise, scarcely perceptible, but unusual, which came from below with a sensation of scraping, as in a carriage when the brakes are applied to the wheels! And the *Marie*, ceasing her progress, remained motionless. . . .

Stranded! Where, and on what? Some bank off the English coast probably. For they had seen nothing since the evening before, with these curtaining mists.

The men bestirred themselves and rushed about, and their excited movements contrasted with this sudden fixed tranquillity of their ship. But the *Marie* had stopped and would not budge. In the midst of this immensity of fluid things, which, in this sluggish weather, seemed not even to have consistency, she had been seized by I know not what resistant and immovable thing which was concealed beneath the waters; she was held fast there, and was in danger perhaps of perishing.

Who has not seen an unfortunate bird, a luckless fly, caught in birdlime?

At first one notices scarcely any difference; their aspect is not changed. It is necessary to know that they are held fast from below and in danger of never extricating themselves.

It is when they struggle afterwards that the sticky substance begins to soil their wings, their head, and that, little by little, they assume the pitiful air of a beast in distress which is about to die.

So it was with the *Marie*; at first nothing much seemed to have happened; she stood firm, leaning over a little, perhaps, but it was broad daylight and the weather was fine and calm; only those who knew would have been anxious, would have understood that the position was serious.

The captain almost moved one to pity: it was his fault for not paying sufficient attention to the position of the boat. He waved his hands in the air, saying: 'My God! My God!' in a tone of despair.

Quite near them, in a break in the mist, appeared a promontory of land which they did not recognize; but it was hidden again almost immediately, and they saw it no more.

There was not a sail in sight, not a sign of smoke.

And, for the moment, they almost preferred it so; they had no desire to see the English rescuers who come forcibly to get you out of your difficulties in their own fashion, and against whom you have to defend yourself as against pirates.

They strove hard, all of them, changing, overturning the stowage. Turk, their dog, although he did not fear the movements of the sea, was very distressed also by the incident: these noises beneath them, these heavy jars when the swell passed, and then these immobilities, he understood very well that all this was not natural and cowered in corners, his tail between his legs.

Afterwards they lowered boats to drop the anchors, and tried to haul off, uniting all their forces on ropes —a rude manœuvre which endured for ten solid hours —and, when evening came, the poor boat, which in the morning had been so neat and trim, was already cutting a melancholy figure, drenched, dirty, in complete disarray. It had struggled, shaken itself in every possible way, and still it remained where it was, rooted like a dead boat.

. . . . .

Night came on, the wind rose, and the swell grew higher; things were looking ill when, suddenly, at about six o'clock, the boat extricated itself and moved off, breaking the ropes which they had left to keep her steady. . . . Then one saw the men running like madmen from fore to aft crying:

'We are floating!'

And they were indeed floating; but how can one express the joy that this mere fact of floating gave them, to feel that they were moving, that they had become once more a thing light and living, instead

of the beginning of a wreck, which just now they had been! . . .

And, by this same token, the melancholy of Yann had disappeared too. Buoyed up like his boat, cured by the healthy weariness of his arms, he had recovered his careless air, shaken off his memories.

The following morning, when they had finished hauling in the anchors, he continued his way to his cold Iceland, his heart to all appearance as free as in his boyhood's days.

CHAPTER XIII

. . . . .

THE post from France was being distributed on board the *Circe*, in the roadstead of Ha-Long, at the other side of the earth. In the midst of a packed group of sailors the postman was calling out in a loud voice the names of the fortunate ones for whom there were letters. It was in the evening, in the gun-room, with all jostling one another round a lantern.

'Moan, Sylvestre!' There was one for him, one which bore indeed the Paimpol date-stamp—but which was not in Gaud's handwriting. What did that mean? And from whom could it be?

Having turned it over and over he opened it in trepidation:

Ploubazlanec,
5th March, 1884.

MY DEAR GRANDSON,

. . . . .

It was from his dear old grannie right enough, and he breathed more freely. She had even added at the foot her large signature learnt by heart and all tremulous and scholarlike: 'Widow Moan.'

Widow Moan. He pressed the letter to his lips, with an impulsive movement, and kissed the poor name as if it had been some holy amulet. For the letter arrived at a supreme moment of his life: to-morrow morning, as soon as daylight came, he was to depart for the seat of war.

It was in the middle of April; Bac-Ninh and Hong-Hoa had just been taken. No operations on a large scale were imminent in this Tonkin—the reinforcements which were arriving were, however, insufficient—and they were mustering from the ships, therefore, all the men that could be spared in order to complete the companies of marines already landed. And Sylvestre, who had for long languished in cruisings and the monotony of the blockade, had just been nominated with a number of others to fill the gaps in the ranks.

It was true that at this time there was talk of peace; but something told them, nevertheless, that they would be landed in time to see a little fighting. Having packed their kit-bags, completed their preparations, and bidden their adieux, they had aired themselves all the evening among their colleagues who were remaining behind, feeling very important and proud before these latter; each in his own fashion manifested his feelings on departure, some of them grave, and rather thoughtful; others expanding in fulsome words.

Sylvestre was rather silent and kept to himself his impatience of waiting; only, when any one caught his eye, his satisfied little smile said clearly: 'Yes, I am one of them, and it 's to-morrow morning.' War, battle, he had yet but an incomplete idea of what they meant, but they fascinated him, nevertheless, for he came of a valiant race.

Uneasy about Gaud on account of this unfamiliar handwriting, he tried to get near a lantern in order that he might be able to read. And it was difficult in the midst of these half-naked men who crowded there, to read also, in the suffocating heat of the gun-room.

Right at the beginning of the letter, as he had anticipated, Grandmother Yvonne explained why she had been obliged to have recourse to the unpractised hand of an old neighbour:

MY DEAR GRANDSON,

I have not asked your cousin to write for me this time because she is in great distress. Her father died suddenly two days ago. And it seems that all his fortune has been eaten up in some unfortunate speculations he had made this winter in Paris. The house and the furniture are going to be sold. It is a great surprise to every one in the country. I think, my dear boy, that this will greatly grieve you, as it has me.

The boy Gaos asks to be remembered to you. He has renewed his engagement with Captain Guermeur, still on the *Marie*, and the departure for Iceland took place rather early this year. They set sail on the 1st of this month, two days before the great misfortune happened to poor Gaud, and they do not yet know of it.

But I am afraid, my dear boy, that now it is all over, and that we shall never see them married; for, as things are, she will have to work to gain a living. . . .

. . . He was thunderstruck; this bad news had spoilt for him all the joy of going into battle. . . .

PART III

CHAPTER I

. . . . .

IN the air, the whistling of a bullet! . . . Sylvestre stops short, and listens. . . .

It is on a limitless plain, green with the tender velvety greenness of spring. The sky is overcast, throwing a weight on the shoulders.

There are six of them, six armed sailors reconnoitring amid the growing rice fields, in a muddy lane.

Again! . . . That same noise in the silence of the air! . . . A shrill, high-pitched noise, a kind of prolonged *zipp*, giving a very good impression of the cruel devilish little thing passing there, very straight, very swift, carrying with it the menace of imminent death.

It was the first time in his life that Sylvestre had heard this particular kind of music. These bullets that travel towards you have a different sound from those you dispatch yourself: the noise of the report, coming from a distance, is attenuated so that you scarcely hear it, and you can distinguish better this thin humming of metal, which passes in a rapid trail, grazing your ears. . . .

And *zipp* again, and *zipp !* It was raining bullets now. Quite near the sailors, who had stopped short, they buried themselves in the sodden soil of the rice field, each with a little click as of hail, dry and rapid, and a slight splashing of water.

They looked at one another, smiling as at a comically played farce, and said:

'Chinamen!' (Annamites, Tonkinese, Black-flags, for these sailors, were all of the same Chinese family.)

But it is impossible to describe the contempt, the old mocking rancour, the zest for battle, which they contrived to put in their manner of announcing them: 'The Chinamen!'

Two or three more bullets whistled, lower in flight, these; they saw them ricochet, like grasshoppers in the grass. It had lasted less than a minute, this rain of lead, and now it had stopped. Over the wide, green plain, absolute silence reigned again, and nowhere was there any sign of living thing.

They were all still standing, eyes alert, scenting the wind, trying to find out whence the bullets had come.

From beyond, doubtless, from that cluster of bamboos, which made in the plain a little isle of plumes, and behind which appeared, half-hidden, some horned roofs. They advanced towards it running; in the sodden earth of the rice field, their feet sank and slithered; Sylvestre, thanks to his longer and more nimble legs, was foremost in the race.

Nothing whistled any longer; it seemed that they must have been dreaming. . . .

And as in every country of the world certain things are always and eternally the same—the grey of overcast skies, the tender colour of meadows in spring—you might have imagined yourself in the fields of France, and that these stout youths were running gaily there in some quite other game than that of death.

But, as they drew near, these bamboos revealed more clearly the exotic fineness of their foliage, these

village roofs accentuated the strangeness of their curves, and some yellow men, who had been in ambush behind, advanced to take stock of them, their flat faces contracted with malice and fear. . . . Then suddenly they rushed forward with a cry, spreading out in a long line, irregular, but determined enough and dangerous.

'The Chinamen!' said the sailors again, and their smile had the same valiancy as before.

But, none the less, they realized now that the enemy was in force, in too great force. And one of them, looking round, discovered others coming from behind, emerging from among the foliage. . . .

. . . . . .

In this hour, on this day, little Sylvestre bore himself very gallantly; his old grandmother would have been proud to see him!

His appearance had changed in these last few days. His face was bronzed; his voice had taken on a new note; and he was now as if in his proper element. In a moment of supreme indecision the sailors, raked by bullets, had almost begun a movement of retreat which would have meant death for all of them, but Sylvestre had continued to advance; holding his rifle by the muzzle he had confronted a whole group, laying about him to right and left, with sweeping blows, which knocked out several of his foes. And, thanks to him, the encounter took a new turn: the panic, the bewilderment, that indescribable moral thing, which is the deciding factor in these little battles of outposts, had passed to the side of the Chinese: it was they who began to fall back.

. . . It was over now, they were fleeing. And the six sailors, having recharged their quick-firing rifles,

slaughtered them at their ease; there were red puddles in the grass, foundered bodies, heads which oozed out their brains in the water of the rice field.

They fled cowering, keeping close to the ground, flattening themselves like leopards. And Sylvestre pursued them, already twice wounded—a spear thrust in his thigh, and a deep gash in his arm—but feeling nothing but the intoxication of the fight, that unreasoned intoxication which comes from vigorous blood, which gives a superb courage to the ordinary man, which made the heroes of old.

One, whom he was pursuing, turned and faced him in an impulse of desperate terror. Sylvestre stopped, smiling, contemptuous, sublime, to let him fire, and then, seeing the direction of his aim, threw himself a little to the left. But in the movement of pulling the trigger the barrel of the rifle deviated by accident in the same direction. Sylvestre felt a commotion in his chest, and realizing what it was, in a moment of thought, although yet he had suffered no pain, he turned round to the other sailors who were following, and tried to say to them, in the consecrated phrase of the old soldier: 'I think I 've got my ticket!' In the deep breaths he took, as a result of his running, to fill his lungs with air, he felt the air enter also by a hole in his right breast, with a horrible little noise, as in a wheezy bellows. At the same time his mouth became full of blood, while a sharp pain smote him in the side, a pain which increased very, very quickly, until it became a thing atrocious, unspeakable.

He swung round two or three times, his head swimming with vertigo, in an effort to get his breath in the midst of this red liquid, the flood of which choked him —and then, heavily, he sank down in the mud.

CHAPTER II

. . . . .

ABOUT fifteen days afterwards, when the sky had already become more overcast at the approach of the rainy season, and the heat pressed more heavily on this yellow Tonkin, Sylvestre, who had been brought back to Hanoi, was conveyed to the roadstead of Ha-Long, and put on board a hospital ship which was returning to France.

For many days he had been borne on divers stretchers, with short periods of waiting in ambulances. They had done what they could for him; but in the unfavourable conditions to which he was subjected his chest had become filled with water, on the wounded side, and the air entered still, gurgling, by the hole which had not yet closed.

He had been awarded the military medal, and this had given him a moment's joy.

But he was no longer the warrior of old, quick and decided in movement, curt and vibrant in speech. All that had fallen from him in the course of his long suffering, in the weakness resulting from fever. He had become a child again, and was very homesick. He scarcely spoke, answering only in a weak voice that had scarcely any sound at all. To feel so ill, and to be so far, so very far away; to think that so many days, so many weary days, must pass before he could reach home—would he ever live so long, with his well-nigh exhausted strength? . . . This notion of terrifying remoteness was a thing which obsessed him unceasingly; which oppressed him on awakening—when, after a few hours of appeasement, he came

back once more to the horrible smarting of his wounds, to the morning fever, and the little wheezing noise of his punctured chest. And so he had begged to be put on board, whatever the risk might be.

He was very heavy to carry in his stretcher, and, without meaning it, they gave him some cruel jars in getting him on board.

On the transport, which was about to depart, they put him in one of the little iron beds, aligned in hospital fashion, and he began again in the opposite direction his long voyage across the seas. But, this time, instead of living like a bird in the wind of the tops, he was in the closeness of below decks, amid the exhalations of medicines, of wounds, and of illness.

During the first few days the joy of being on his way home had made him a little brighter. He was able to raise himself on the bed with the help of pillows, and now and then he asked for his box. His sailor's box was the little deal casket, bought at Paimpol, in which he kept his treasures; in it were the letters from his Grandmother Yvonne, those from Yann, and those from Gaud, a copybook, in which he had transcribed some sailors' songs, and a volume of Confucius in Chinese, picked up by chance in a pillage, in which, on the blank side of the leaves, he had written the simple journal of his campaign.

Nevertheless, his condition did not improve, and after the first week the doctors began to fear that he would not pull through.

. . . Near the Equator now, in the excessive heat of a time of storm. The transport sped on, shaking the beds, the wounded, and the sick; sped on without slackening speed, through a sea rough and tormented as at the change of the monsoons.

Since the departure from Ha-Long more than one

of them had died and had been cast into the deep water on this highway to France; many of the little beds were rid already of their poor contents.

And on this particular day, in the moving hospital, the weather was very bad; it had been necessary, on account of the swell, to close the iron lids of the port-holes, and this rendered more horrible the suffocating sickroom.

He was growing worse; the end was near. Lying always on his punctured side he compressed it with both hands, with all the strength that remained to him, in order to immobilize the water, the liquid decomposition in his right lung, and to try to breathe only with the other. But this other, also, had gradually become affected by contact, and the last agony had begun.

All sorts of visions of his homeland haunted his dying brain; in the hot darkness faces loved and faces loathed came and leant over him; he was in a perpetual state of hallucination, in which the scene changed from Brittany to Iceland, from Iceland to Brittany.

In the morning he had asked for the priest, and the priest, who was an old man used to seeing sailors die, had been surprised to find, under this envelope so virile, the purity of a little child.

He craved air and more air; but there was none anywhere; the wind-sails no longer gave any; the sick-berth attendant, who fanned him continuously with a flowered Chinese fan, did no more than waft on him an unwholesome reek, dead air which had been breathed already a hundred times and which the lungs did not want.

Sometimes he was seized with a desperate rage to get out of his bed, where he felt so surely the approach

of death; to seek the pure air outside, to try to win back life. . . . Oh, the others, who moved about the shrouds, who lived in the tops! . . . But all the effort he made to get up ended in nothing more than a feeble raising of his head and neck—something like those incomplete movements that one makes in sleep. Alas! he could not; he fell back into the same hollows of his disordered bed, held fast there now by death; and each time, after the fatigue of his effort, he lost consciousness for a time of everything.

To humour him they opened a porthole at last, although it was still dangerous, for the sea was not yet calm enough. It was in the evening, at about six o'clock. And when the iron shutter was raised there entered only light, dazzling red light. The setting sun appeared on the horizon with an extreme splendour, in a break in the overcast sky; its blinding light moved about with the rolling of the ship, illumining this hospital in a vacillating way, as if someone were swinging a torch.

A last vision distressed him greatly; his old grandmother, passing along a road, very quickly, with an expression of heartbreaking anxiety; the rain fell on her from dark and funereal clouds; she was on her way to Paimpol, summoned to the office of the naval authority to be informed that he was dead.

He was struggling now in his death agony. They sponged from the corners of his mouth the water and blood which came up from his chest in gushes, during his contortions of suffering. And the magnificent sun was shining still; at its setting one might have thought that a whole world was on fire and that the clouds were charged with blood; through the open porthole a broad shaft of red fire entered and fell on Sylvestre's bed, making a nimbus round him.

. . . And at this same moment this same sun showed itself in far-off Brittany, where midday was about to sound. Identically the same sun and at precisely the same moment of its endless duration; riding higher in a bluish sky, it illumined with a soft white light old Grand'mère Yvonne, who was sitting sewing at her door.

In Iceland, where it was still morning, it appeared also, at this same moment of death. Paler still, it might have seemed that it came to show itself there only by some *tour de force* of obliqueness. It shone mournfully in a fiord where the *Marie* drifted, and its sky was this time of that hyperborean purity which awakens ideas of cooled planets which have no longer an atmosphere. With its frozen clearness, it accentuated the details of that chaos of stones which is Iceland: this whole country, seen from the *Marie*, seemed a patchwork in one same plane standing somehow upright. Yann, who was there, illumined rather strangely, he also, was fishing in his usual way, in the midst of these lunar aspects.

. . . At the moment when this trail of red fire, which had entered by the ship's porthole, was extinguished, when the equatorial sun disappeared totally in the golden waters, the eyes of the dying grandson flickered, turned up towards his forehead as if about to disappear into his head. And then they lowered over them the long-lashed eyelids—and Sylvestre became very calm and beautiful, like a recumbent marble. . . .

CHAPTER III

. . . I CANNOT forbear also from telling of the burial of Sylvestre, of which I myself had charge, in the island of Singapore. We had thrown overboard many others in the China Sea during the first days of the voyage; but as this unwholesome land was quite near us, it was decided to keep him a few hours longer and bury him there.

It was in the morning, very early, on account of the terrible sun. In the launch on which he was carried ashore his body was covered with the French flag. The great strange town was still asleep when we drew alongside. A little wagon, sent by the Consul, was waiting on the quay; we put Sylvestre on it, with the wooden cross which had been made for him on board: the paint on it was still wet, for it had been necessary to make haste, and the white letters of his name ran on the dark background.

We passed through this Babel as the sun was rising. And it was passing strange to find there, scarcely two paces from the unclean Chinese swarming, the calm of a French church. Under this high, white nave, where I was alone with my sailors, the *Dies Iræ* sung by a missionary priest resounded like a sweet magical incantation. Through the open doors we saw things which resembled enchanted gardens, verdure most admirable, palms immense; the wind shook the tall blossoming trees; and there was a rain of petals, carmine red, which fell almost in the church.

Afterwards, we proceeded to the cemetery which was some distance away. Our little escort of sailors was a very modest one; the coffin was covered still with the flag of France. We had to pass through a Chinese quarter, a teeming yellow population; then through unhealthy Indian suburbs, where every type of Asiatic face gazed at us with wondering eyes as we passed.

And then the open country, already burning; shady roads where fluttered admirable butterflies with wings of blue velvet. A great abundance of flowers, of palm-trees; all the splendours of equatorial luxuriance. At last, the cemetery: mandarin tombs, with multi-coloured inscriptions, dragons and monsters; astonishing foliage, strange and unknown plants. The spot where we laid him resembled a corner of an Indian garden.

On his grave we placed the little wooden cross which had been hastily made during the night:

SYLVESTRE MOAN
Aged Nineteen Years

And we left him there, in haste to get away on account of the sun which was gradually climbing, turning round for a last look at him, under his wonderful trees, under his wealth of blossom.

CHAPTER IV

THE transport continued its voyage across the Indian Ocean. Below, in the floating hospital, there were still cooped-up miseries. On deck one saw only carelessness, health, and youth. Around, on the sea, a veritable festival of pure air and sunshine.

In this fine weather of the trade winds the sailors, lying in the shade of the sails, amused themselves with their parrakeets, in teaching them to fly. (In this Singapore, which they had just left, all kinds of tame beasts are sold to the passing sailor.)

They had all chosen baby parrakeets, with little infantine airs on their bird's faces, still without a tail, but already green, admirably green. Their papas and their mamas had been green; and they, too, therefore, quite small as they were, had inherited unconsciously this same colour; placed on the spotless deck of the ship, they resembled very fresh leaves fallen from a tropical tree.

Sometimes they made a little muster of them, and then they observed one another drolly; they would turn their necks in every direction, as if to examine one another under different aspects. They walked in halting fashion, with comical little flutterings, suddenly setting off at a great rate, as if hastening for I know not what fatherland; and there were many of them that came a cropper.

And the monkeys, too, learnt to do tricks, and that was another source of amusement. There were some

of these little beasts of whom the owners were very fond, who were embraced with rapture, and who cuddled themselves against the hard chests of their masters with the doting eyes of women, half grotesque, half touching.

On the stroke of three o'clock the quartermasters brought on deck two canvas sacks, sealed with large seals of red wax, and marked with Sylvestre's name; and they proceeded to sell by auction—as the regulations require in the case of the dead—all his clothes, all his worldly possessions. And the sailors, with alacrity, grouped themselves round; on board a hospital ship these sales of kit are common enough, and there is little or no sentiment about them. And, moreover, in this boat Sylvestre was comparatively unknown. His oilskin-slops, his shirts, his blue-striped vests, were handled, turned over, and finally purchased for any sort of price, the buyers amusing themselves in outbidding one another.

Came the turn of the little sacred box, which was valued at fifty sous. The letters and the military medal had been taken out for transmission to the dead man's family; but there remained the copybook of songs, the book of Confucius, and the thread, the buttons, the needles, all the little things placed there by the foresight of his grand'mère Yvonne for mending and sewing.

Afterwards, the quartermasters who exhibited the articles for sale brought out two little Buddhas, picked up in a pagoda and intended for Gaud; they were of so comical a shape that a great laugh went up when they were shown as the last lot. But if these sailor-men laughed, it was not from want of heart, but rather out of mere thoughtlessness.

Finally, the sacks themselves were sold, and the

purchaser at once set to work to erase the name inscribed on them and to substitute his own.

Afterwards the spotless deck was carefully swept in order to remove the dust and odds and ends of thread left from the unpacking.

And the sailors went back gaily to amuse themselves with their parrakeets and monkeys.

CHAPTER V

• • • • •

ONE day, in the first half of June, as old Yvonne was re-entering her home, her neighbours told her that someone had been inquiring for her on behalf of the superintendent of the Naval Record Office.

It was something concerning her grandson, no doubt; but that did not cause her any uneasiness. In the families of sailors there is often business to do at the Record Office, and she, who was a sailor's daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother, had known this office for nearly sixty years.

It was probably about her allotment; perhaps there was a little allowance from the *Circe* to be drawn, on presentation of her authority card. Knowing what is due to a superintendent, she smartened herself up, put on her best dress and a white coif, and set off as the clock was striking two.

Trotting along the cliff paths, with rather quick little steps, she made her way towards Paimpol, a little anxious now, on reflection, because it was two months since she had had a letter.

She passed her old admirer, sitting at his door, much enfeebled by the cold of the past winter:

'Hallo? . . . When you like, you know; you must not hesitate, my dear! . . .' (He had still in mind that wooden robe about which it pleased him to tease her.)

The gay June weather smiled everywhere about

her. On the stony hills there was still only the low-growing, yellow-flowered furze; but as one descended into the valleys sheltered from the wind of the sea, one found immediately beautiful new verdure, hedges of blossoming thorn, full-growing, sweet-smelling grass. But she scarcely saw all this, she, so old, on whom the fugitive seasons, short now as days, had so accumulated. . . .

Around crumbling, dark-walled hamlets, there were rose-trees, carnations, gillyflowers, and, even on the high roofs of thatch and moss, a thousand little flowers which attracted the first white butterflies.

This spring was almost loveless in this country of the Icelanders. The handsome proud-bred girls, whom one saw dreaming at the doors, seemed to be seeing, with their eyes blue and their eyes brown, things a great distance off, far beyond all visible objects. The young men, to whom their melancholies and their desires went out, were at their fishing in Iceland, on the hyperborean sea. . . .

But it was spring-time, none the less, warm, suave, troubling, with light dronings of flies, perfumes of growing plants.

And all this, which has no heart, continued to smile at this old grandmother who was walking as fast as she could on her way to learn of the death of her last grandson. She was drawing near to the terrible moment when this thing, which had happened so far away on the China Sea, was going to be announced to her; she was making the sinister journey which Sylvestre, at the moment of dying, had foreseen, and which had wrung from him the last tears of his agony: his kind old grand'mère, summoned to the Record Office at Paimpol to be told that he was dead! He had seen her very clearly, passing along this road,

going very quickly, very straight, in her little brown shawl, with her umbrella and her large coif. And this apparition had made him raise himself, had made him writhe in excruciating anguish, while the enormous red sun of the equator, which was setting magnificently, entered by the porthole of the hospital to watch him die.

Only, in his last vision, he had pictured this tramp of the poor old woman under a rainy sky, whereas, on the contrary, it was in the mocking brightness of a spring day. . . .

As she drew near Paimpol she became more uneasy, and began to walk more quickly even than before.

And now she is in the grey town, in the little granite streets on which the sunlight pours, giving goodday to other old women, her contemporaries, sitting at their windows. Puzzled at seeing her, they said:

'Where is she going like that so quickly, in her Sunday clothes, on a weekday?'

The superintendent of the Record Office was out. A very ugly little being, about fifteen years of age, who was his clerk, was sitting in the office. Being too misshapen to make a fisherman, he had been given some schooling, and now passed his days on this same chair, in false black sleeves, driving his pen.

With an air of importance, when she had told him her name, he got up and took a number of stamped documents out of a pigeon-hole.

There were many of them, many documents. . . . What did that mean? Certificates, papers bearing seals, a sailor's pay-book yellowed by the sea, all these having, as it were, an odour of death. . . .

He spread them out before the poor old woman, who began to tremble and to see dimly. For she

had recognized two of the letters which Gaud had written to her grandson, and which were there unopened. . . . And this same thing had happened twenty years before, when her son Pierre died: his letters had been returned from China to the office of the superintendent who had remitted them to her. . .

He read out now, in an important voice: 'Moan, Jean-Marie Sylvestre, enrolled at Paimpol, folio 213, registered number 2091, deceased on board the *Bien-Hoa*, the 14th. . . .'

'What? What has happened to him, my good sir?'

'Deceased! . . . He is deceased,' he replied.

No doubt, he was not intentionally cruel, this little clerk; if he said this thing in this brutal way it was rather through want of judgment, through the unintelligence of an incomplete and stunted being. And, seeing that she did not understand the fine phrase he used, he repeated it in Breton:

'Marw éo! . . .'

Marw éo! . . . (He is dead. . . .)

She repeated it after him, with the tremulousness of old age, like a poor cracked echo giving back an indifferent phrase.

It was what she had half guessed, but the confirmation only made her tremble; now that it was certain it scarcely seemed to affect her. In the first place her faculty of suffering was really a little blunted, by reason of age, especially since this last winter. She no longer reacted at once to grief. And, secondly, something, for the moment, turned topsy-turvy in her head, and she confused this death with others that had gone before; she had lost so many, so many sons! . . . It needed a moment for her to realize that this was her last, so fondly cherished, he to whom

all her prayers related, in whom were centred all her life, all her expectation, all her thoughts, all those poor thoughts already blurred by the sombre approach of second childhood. . . .

She felt ashamed also to show her despair before this little gentleman, whom she regarded with a kind of horror: was that the way in which to announce to a grandmother the death of her grandson! . . . She remained standing before his desk, rigid, twisting the fringe of her brown shawl with her poor old hands, chapped from washing.

And how far away her home seemed to her! . . . Just Heaven! What a journey she had to make, and to make decently, before she could reach the little thatched shelter where she longed to take refuge—like a wounded beast which hides itself in its hole to die. And that was another reason why she forced herself not to think, not yet to realize, scared above all by the length of the road that lay before her.

She was given a money order to enable her to draw, as next of kin, the thirty francs realized by the sale of Sylvestre's kit, and also the letters, the certificates, and the box containing the military medal.

Clumsily she took these things with fingers which remained open, passing them from one hand to the other, not seeming to think of putting them in her pocket.

She passed out of Paimpol like an automaton, looking at no one, her body bowed a little as if she were about to fall, a throbbing of blood in her ears, and hastening, straining, like some poor machine already worn-out, which one would have driven at full speed for the last time, heedless whether the springs would break or not.

At the end of the second mile she was bent nearly double, utterly exhausted; every now and then her sabot struck against a stone which sent a sharp pain through her head. And she pressed on to hide herself in her home, in fear of falling and having to be carried. . . .

CHAPTER VI

'Look at old Yvonne! She 's tipsy!' She had fallen and the little urchins of the street were following her. It happened just as she was entering the commune of Ploubazlanec, where there is a number of houses along the road. Nevertheless, she had had strength enough to pick herself up, and, limpingly, with the help of her stick, she was pressing on.

'Look at old Yvonne! She 's tipsy!'

And the brazen-faced little people came and peered into her face, laughing. Her coif was all askew.

There were some of these children who were not evil at heart—and when they had seen her close, seen her grimace of senile despair, they turned away saddened and silent, not daring to say another word.

Once in her home, with the door closed, she uttered a cry of despair which almost choked her, and sank down in a corner, her head against the wall. Her coif had fallen over her eyes; she threw it on the ground—her poor white coif of which hitherto she had taken such care. Her Sunday dress, her only presentable one, was all soiled, and a slim wisp of hair, of a yellow white, issued from her headband, completing a picture of tragic poverty. . . .

CHAPTER VII

GAUD, coming to inquire after her, found her so, uncoifed, her arms hanging limp, her head against the wall, with a grimace and a plaintive '*hi, hi, hi!*' as of a small child. She was scarcely able to weep; grand'mères, when they grow too old, have no more tears in their dried-up eyes.

'My grandson is dead!'

And she threw on Gaud's knees the letters, the papers, the medal.

Gaud, glancing hastily at these things, saw that it was true, and knelt down to pray.

They remained there together, almost mute, these two women, as long as the June twilight lasted—and it lasts long in Brittany, and in Iceland it does not end. In the fireplace the cricket, little herald of happiness, made, all heedless, his shrill music. And the yellow light of the evening entered by the skylight, into this cottage of the Moans, all of whom the sea had taken, who were now an extinct family. . . .

At last Gaud said:

'I will come, my dear grand'mère, and live with you; I will bring my bed which they have left me, and I will nurse you and look after you; you shall not be all alone. . . .'

She wept for her little friend, Sylvestre, but in her grief she was distracted by the thought of another—of him who had departed for the fishing.

They would have to let Yann know that Sylvestre was dead; in fact, the *Chasers* must soon be leaving.

Would he so much as weep for him? . . . Perhaps he would, for he loved him well. . . . And in the midst of her own tears she thought much of that. Sometimes waxing indignant against his hardness, sometimes softening at her recollection of him, on account of this grief which he was about to suffer too, and which was, as it were, a bond between them—in sum, he filled her heart. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

. . . On a pale evening of August the letter which announced to Yann the death of his brother arrived at last on board the *Marie* in the Iceland sea. It was after a hard day's toil, at a moment of excessive fatigue, when he was about to go below for supper and sleep. His eyes heavy with slumber, he read it below, in the gloomy cabin, by the yellow light of the little lamp; and, in the first minute, he also remained insensible, stupefied, like someone who does not properly understand. Very reserved, out of pride, in regard to all which concerned his heart, he hid the letter in his blue jersey, against his chest, as sailors do, without saying a word.

But he felt he had not the courage to sit down to supper with the others; and so, disdaining even to tell them why, he flung himself on his bed, and immediately went to sleep.

Presently he dreamt of Sylvestre dead, that he was present at his burial. . . .

As midnight drew near—being then in that state peculiar to sailors who are conscious of the hour in their sleep, and feel the approach of the moment when they will be awakened for their watch—he was still watching this burial. And he said to himself:

'I am dreaming; fortunately they are coming to awaken me, and all this will vanish.'

But when a rude hand was placed on him and a voice said: 'Gaos! Get up! It 's your turn!' he heard on his chest a light rustle of paper—a sinister

little sound, affirming the reality of the death—'Ah! yes, the letter! . . . It was true, then!' And the impression now was more poignant, more cruel, and, as he sat up quickly in his sudden awakening, he struck his broad forehead against the beams.

Then he dressed himself, and opened the hatchway to go and take his post above for the fishing. . . .

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Yann came on deck he looked all round him, with eyes newly awakened from sleep, at the great familiar circle of the sea.

And on this particular night what he saw was immensity presented in its most astonishingly simple aspects, neutral in tint, giving an impression only of depth.

This horizon, which marked no precise region of the earth, nor even any particular geological period, must have had this same appearance so many times since the beginning of time, that in looking at it one seemed verily to be seeing nothing—nothing but the eternity of things which *are*, and have no choice but to continue *to be*.

It was not absolutely dark. There was a feeble illumination, a kind of residue of light, which came from nowhere. There was noise, a kind of habitual murmur, an aimless plaint. There was greyness, a hazy kind of greyness, which disappeared as one looked more closely. The sea during its mysterious repose and slumber disguised itself under subtle tints which are without a name.

Above were diffuse clouds. They had assumed shapes of sorts, since things can scarcely be without; in the darkness they were merged one with another so as almost to form merely one immense veil.

But at one point of the sky, very low, near the water, they made a kind of marbling more distinct, although very distant; a loose sort of design, as if

traced by a distracted hand; at once fortuitous, not intended to be seen, and fugitive, about to die. And this alone, in all this ensemble, seemed to signify something; one would have said that all the melancholy, unseizable meaning of this nothingness was inscribed there; and the eyes ended by fixing themselves upon it involuntarily.

Yann, as gradually his mobile pupils became accustomed to the darkness outside, looked more and more at this unique marbling in the sky; it had the shape of someone sinking down with outstretched arms. And now that he had once detected this resemblance it seemed to him that it was really a human shade, magnified, made gigantic by force of distance.

And then, in his imagination, where inexpressible dreams and primitive beliefs floated together, this mournful shade, foundered on the edge of this tenebrous sky, mingled little by little with the memory of his dead brother, as if it had been a last manifestation of him.

He was used to these strange associations of images, such as are formed especially at the beginning of life in the heads of children. . . . But words, vague though they be, are yet too precise to express these things; it needs that uncertain language which is spoken sometimes in dreams, and of which on awakening one retains only enigmatical fragments which have no longer any meaning.

As he contemplated this cloud he felt himself seized by a sadness, profound, agonized, full of the unknown and of mystery, which chilled his soul; much better than before, he understood now that his poor little brother would never be seen again, never, never; grief which had been long in penetrating the

robust and hard envelope of his heart entered now until it overflowed. He saw once more the kindly face of Sylvestre, his honest boyish eyes; at the thought of embracing him something like a veil fell suddenly from beneath his eyelids, in spite of himself —and for a moment he did not realize what it was, never having wept since manhood came to him. But tears began to flow, big, streaming tears, down his cheeks; and sobs shook his deep chest.

He continued to fish very busily, losing no time and speaking no word, and the other two who heard him in the silence feigned not to notice, lest they might irritate him, knowing how reserved and proud he was.

. . . To his way of thinking death was the end of everything. . . .

He was wont, out of respect, to associate himself with the prayers which are said in the family circle for those deceased; but he did not believe in the immortality of the soul.

In the talks these sailors had together this view of his was the one commonly accepted; the thought was echoed, in a brief, assured way, as if it were beyond argument; but this did not prevent them from being vaguely apprehensive of ghosts, vaguely fearful of graveyards, completely confident in the efficacy of the statues and pictures which protected them, and, above all, innately respectful towards the sanctified ground which lies around the churches.

And so Yann dreaded for himself a grave in the wide ocean, as if that represented a more complete annihilation—and the thought that Sylvestre was buried yonder, in that distant land on the other side of the earth, made his grief more hopeless, more gloomy.

With his disdain of others he wept without any constraint or shame, as if he had been alone.

. . . Outside, the emptiness was slowly whitening, although it was scarcely two o'clock; and as it whitened it seemed to expand, expand, to become more limitless, to hollow itself out in a more dismaying manner. With this kind of dawn that was breaking, eyes opened wider and the awakened spirit conceived better the immensity of the distances: the limits of visible space receded more and more in an unending perspective.

The light was very pale, but it was growing: it seemed that it came in little spurts, in light pulsings; these eternal things seemed as if they were illumined by transparency, as if white-flamed lamps had been raised one by one behind the shapeless grey clouds—raised discreetly, with mysterious precautions, for fear of disturbing the mournful repose of the sea.

Below the horizon the great white lamp which was the sun was dragging itself feebly along before making above the waters its slow and cold promenade, commenced in the earliest hour of the morning. . . .

On this day there were nowhere the rosy tones of dawn; all remained pale and sad. And on board the *Marie* was a man who wept, the tall, broad-shouldered Yann. . . .

These tears of his wayward brother, and this more than melancholy of the world without, were the mourning apparel used for the poor little humble hero in these seas of Iceland where he had spent the half of his life. . . .

When broad day came Yann wiped his eyes brusquely with the sleeve of his woollen jersey, and wept no more. That was over. He seemed completely absorbed by the labour of the fishing, by the

monotonous succession of things real and present, as if he had no longer any other thought.

And, as it happened, the lines were very fruitful, and arms had almost more than they could do.

Around the fishermen, in the immense distances, the scene had changed. The great unfolding of infinity, the great spectacle of the morning was over, and now the distances seemed, on the contrary, to draw in, to close upon them. How came they to think but an hour or so ago that the sea was so limitless? The horizon now was quite near, and it seemed even that there was a want of space. The void became filled with tenuous floating veils, some vaguer than mist, others with contours almost visible and, as it were, fringed. They fell softly in a great silence, like white muslins having no weight; but they descended from all sides at once, imprisonment within them was completed very quickly, and it produced a sense of oppression to see the air they breathed thus encumbered.

It was the beginning of the first fog of August. In a few minutes the shroud was uniformly dense, impenetrable; about the *Marie* one could now distinguish nothing but a damp paleness diffused with light, in which even the masting of the ship seemed to lose itself.

'This is it, right enough; the vile fog!' said the men.

They had known for long this inevitable companion of the second period of the fishing; but it was also the beginning of the end of the Iceland season, the time when one turned homewards to Brittany.

It was deposited in fine glistening drops in their beards; it made their browned skin shine with moisture. Those who looked at one another from end to end of the boat saw one another dimly, like phantoms;

by way of contrast, objects very near showed up more crudely under this pale, whitish light. One took care not to breathe with the mouth open; a sensation of cold and damp penetrated the lungs.

At the same time the fishing proceeded with ever-increasing rapidity, and they no longer spoke, so busy were they with the lines; at every moment came the sound of heavy fish falling on the ship, striking the planks with the noise of a whip; they writhed furiously, beating their tails against the wood of the deck; everything was bespattered with sea-water, and the fine silvery scales which they scattered in their struggles. The sailor who was gutting them with his huge knife, in his precipitation, cut his fingers, and his red blood mingled with the brine.

CHAPTER X

THEY remained, this time, ten days on end, caught in the thick fog, without seeing anything. The fishing continued to be good and, with so much activity, they were not bored. From time to time, at regular intervals, one of them blew a horn which gave out a sound like the bellowing of a wild beast.

Sometimes, from without, from the depth of the white fog, another bellowing replied from a distance to their call. Then the look-out became sharper. If the cry came nearer, every ear on board was strained in the direction of this unknown neighbour, whom, no doubt, they would never see, and whose presence there was nevertheless a danger. They questioned who it might be; it became an occupation, an association and, in their curiosity, eyes strove to pierce the impalpable white muslins which remained stretched everywhere in the air.

Then it would sheer off, the bellowings of the horn would die away in the dull distance; and they would be alone once more in the silence, in the midst of this infinity of immobile vapours.

Everything was impregnated with water; everything streamed with salt and brine. The cold became more penetrating; the sun loitered in its slow crawl below the horizon; there were now real nights of one or two hours, the grey fall of which was sinister and glacial.

Every morning they took soundings to ascertain the depth of the water, in fear lest the *Marie* should have

drifted too close to the island of Iceland. But all the lines of the ship, threaded end to end, did not reach to the bottom of the sea; they were, therefore, still in the open sea and in good deep waters.

The life was rude and healthy; this keener cold augmented the comfort of the evening, the impression of snug shelter which they experienced in the cabin of massive oak when they descended to sup or sleep.

During the day these men, who were more cloistered than monks, spoke little among themselves. Each, holding his line, would remain for hours and hours at his same invariable post, the arms alone occupied in the incessant labour of the fishing. They were separated from one another by only three or four yards, and they ended by no longer seeing one another.

This colour of the fog, this white obscurity, threw a spell over the spirit. As they fished they sang to themselves some native air, but very softly for fear of scaring the fish. Thoughts took shape more slowly and less often; they seemed to be distended, to be prolonged in duration in order to fill the time without leaving voids, without leaving intervals of non-being. There was no longer any idea of women, because it was already cold; but they dreamed of incoherent or marvellous things, as in sleep, and the weft of these dreams was as little solid as a mist.

This foggy month of August usually closed thus each year, in a sad and tranquil manner, the Iceland season. Otherwise there was always the same plenitude of physical life, swelling the lungs and hardening the muscles of the sailors.

Yann had quickly recovered his habitual demeanour, as if his great grief had not persisted: vigilant and alert, prompt in seamanship and in the fishing, easy in movement as one who has no care; for the rest,

communicative in his hours only—which were rare—and carrying his head as high as ever with his air at once indifferent and dominating.

In the evening at supper, in the defaced room protected by the faïence Virgin, when they were sitting round the table, their large knives in their hands, before a plateful of good, hot food, it would happen that he would laugh, as formerly, at the droll things which the others said.

In himself, perhaps, he thought a little of this Gaud, whom Sylvestre, no doubt, had given him for wife in the last poor thoughts of his agony—and who now was become a penniless girl, without a friend in the world. . . .

And perhaps, also, nay, almost surely, his grief for this brother remained still in the depth of his heart. . . .

But this heart of Yann was an untrodden region, difficult to govern, little known, where things happened which did not show themselves on the outside.

CHAPTER XI

ONE morning, at about three o'clock, while they were dreaming peacefully beneath their shroud of fog, they heard what seemed the sound of voices the tone of which struck them as strange and unfamiliar. They looked at one another, those who were on deck, with an interrogating glance:

'Who was that who spoke?'

Nobody; nobody had said a word.

And, as a matter of fact, the sounds had seemed to come from the exterior void.

Thereupon, he who had charge of the horn and had neglected to use it since the evening before hurriedly seized it, and blew with all his might, sending out the long bellow of alarm.

That alone was enough to cause a thrill of fear in this silence. And then, as if out of contrariness an apparition had been evoked by this vibrant bagpipe sound, a huge unexpected thing outlined itself in grey, loomed up menacing, very tall and very close to them: masts and yards and cordage, the outline of a ship which had taken shape in the air, everywhere at once and altogether like those fearsome phantasmagorias which, by a single shaft of light, are created on an outspread sheet. And other men appeared on it, almost touching them, leaning over the rail, looking at them, with straining eyes, in an awakening of surprise and horror. . . .

They threw themselves on to oars, on to reserve masts, on to gaff-hooks—on to anything they could find in the booms which was long and solid—and

thrust them out in order to keep at a distance this thing and these visitors that were approaching them. And the others, too, scared in turn, pushed out towards them enormous poles to keep them off.

But there was only a very light creaking in the yards above their heads, and the rigging, for a moment caught, disengaged itself at once without any damage; the shock, very slight in this calm, was scarcely noticeable; it had been so feeble even that really it seemed that this other ship had no solidity, that it was a thing soft, almost without weight.

And then the tension relaxed; the men began to laugh; there was mutual recognition.

'Ho, there! The *Marie*!'

'Hi! Gaos, Laumec, Guermeur!'

The apparition was the *Reine-Berthe*, Captain Larvoër, also of Paimpol; these sailors were from villages in the neighbourhood; that tall fellow there, with the black beard, showing his teeth as he laughed, was Kerjegou, a native of Ploudaniel; and the others came from Plounès or Plounérin.

'Say, there, why didn't you sound your horn, you band of savages?' asked Larvoër of the *Reine-Berthe*.

'What 's that? And why didn't you, band of pirates and sea-scum, poisonous fish of the sea? . . .'

'Oh! us. . . . That 's different; *we are forbidden to make a noise.*' (He made this answer with an air of suggesting some dark mystery; with a droll smile, which, later on, often recurred to the minds of those on the *Marie*, and gave them seriously to think.)

And then, as if he had said too much, he finished by this pleasantry:

'This fellow here has broken our horn by blowing it so hard.'

And he pointed to a sailor with a Triton-like face,

who was all neck and chest, over-broad, short in the legs, with I know not what of grotesque and disquieting in his misshapen strength.

And while they were looking at one another, waiting until some breeze or some current in the water beneath should choose to move one of them more quickly than the other, to separate the boats, they engaged in conversation. All leaning to port, keeping one another at a respectful distance with their long wooden poles, as besieged men might with their pikes, they spoke of the affairs of their homeland, of the last letters received by the *Chasers*, of their old parents, and of their wives.

'Mine,' said Kerjégou, 'mine tells me she has just had the little one we were expecting; that means that we have a dozen now.'

Another had had twins; and a third announced the marriage of the fair Jeannie Caroff—a girl well known to the Icelanders—with a certain rich old invalid of the commune of Plourivo.

They saw one another as through white gauze, and it seemed also that their voices were changed; they sounded somehow smothered and distant.

But Yann was not able to remove his eyes from one of these fishermen, a little man already old whom he was sure he had never seen anywhere before, and who, nevertheless, had greeted him at once with: 'Hallo! Yann, my fine fellow!' as if he had known him intimately: he had the irritating ugliness of a monkey, with a monkey's malicious blinking of his piercing eyes.

'They tell me also,' said again Larvoër of the *Reine-Berthe*, 'they tell me also that the grandson of old Yvonne Moan, of Ploubazlanec, is dead; he was serving his term in the Navy, as you know, in the China squadron; a very great pity!'

Hearing this the others of the *Marie* turned towards Yann to see if he already knew of this misfortune.

'Yes,' he said, in a low voice, his air indifferent and aloof, 'it was in the last letter I had from my father.'

They all looked at him, in the curiosity they had of his grief, and this irritated him.

The conversation passed hastily, through the pale mist, while the minutes of their strange interview sped quickly by.

'My wife tells me at the same time,' continued Larvoër, 'that the daughter of M. Mével has left the town to live at Ploubazlanec, and look after old Grand'mère Moan, her great aunt; she has started to work now, for people by the day, in order to make a living. For that matter, I have always thought she was a brave and high-hearted girl, in spite of her lady-like airs and her finery.'

Then, once more, they looked at Yann, thus completing his displeasure, and a red flush mounted to his cheeks beneath the golden tan.

With this appreciation of Gaud came to an end the interview with these men of the *Reine-Berthe*, whom no living soul was ever to see again. For the last minute or so their faces had seemed already to be more shadowy, for the ships were drifting apart, and, all at once, those of the *Marie* found that there was no longer anything to push, no longer anything at the end of their long wooden poles; all their spars, oars, or masts, or yard-arms, moved gropingly about the void, and then fell heavily, one after another, into the sea like long dead arms. They hauled in, therefore, these useless defences; the *Reine-Berthe*, plunged again in the deep fog, had disappeared suddenly all at once, as disappears the picture on a transparent film behind which the lamp has been blown out. They tried to

hail her, but no answer came to their calls—only a kind of mocking clamour from many voices, ending in a groan which made them look at one another with surprise. . . .

This *Reine-Berthe* did not return with the other Icelanders and, as those on the *Samuel-Azénide* had encountered in a fiord what was indubitably wreckage (her stern crowning and a portion of her keel), she was given up as lost; in October the names of all her crew were inscribed in the church on dark slabs.

Moreover, from the time of this last apparition, the date of which had been noted by the crew of the *Marie*, until the period of the return, there had been no dangerously bad weather on the Iceland sea, while, on the contrary, three weeks before, a westerly gale had carried away many sailors, and two ships. They remembered then the smile of Larvoër, and, in putting all these things together, they made many conjectures. Yann, more than once, at night, saw again the sailor with the monkey-like blink, and some of the crew of the *Marie* asked themselves fearfully whether, on that morning, they had not spoken with ghosts.

CHAPTER XII

THE summer advanced and, at the end of August, at the same time as the first morning mists, the Icelanders returned.

For three months now the two abandoned ones had lived together at Ploubazlanec, in the cottage of the Moans; Gaud had taken the place of a daughter in this poor nest of dead sailors. She had brought thither all that had been left to her after the sale of her father's house; her pretty modern bed, her pretty frocks of divers colours. She had made for herself a new black dress of a more simple fashion, and wore, like old Yvonne, a mourning coif of thick muslin ornamented only with tucks. Every day she did needlework in the homes of the rich people of the town, and returned at night, not concerning herself on the road with any lover, remaining still a little proud, and still surrounded with the respect due to a little lady: as they wished her good evening, the lads, as formerly, raised their hand to their caps.

In the long twilight of the summer evenings she used to return from Paimpol, following the long cliff road, breathing the fresh sea air which brings repose. Her work with the needle had not had time to deform her—as others who live for ever bent to one side over their work—and, as she looked at the sea, she straightened the slim supple figure that was hers by right of race; as she looked at the sea, as she looked at the wide ocean, in the far background of which was Yann. . . .

This same road led to his home. . . . Continuing it a little, towards a certain region more stony and more swept by the wind, one would reach the hamlet of Pors-Even, where the trees, covered with grey moss, grow quite small among the rocks and bend down in the direction of the west wind. She would never go there again, no doubt, to this Pors-Even, although it was less than a league away; but once in her life she had been there, and that had sufficed to leave a charm on all the road; Yann, too, must often pass along it, and, from her door, she would be able to follow him going and coming over the bare plain, through the short furze. And so she loved all this region of Ploubazlanec; she was almost happy that fate had stranded her there; in any other part of the country she would not have been able to continue to live.

In this season of late August there comes a kind of listlessness as of a warmer clime which spreads northwards from the south; the evenings are luminous, there are reflections of the potent sun of other parts which succeed in penetrating as far as the Breton Sea. Very often the air is clear and calm, without sign of a cloud.

In the hours when Gaud was used to make her way home things were already beginning to become confused in the gathering dusk, to merge and form silhouettes. Here and there a cluster of furze, standing on a hill between two rocks, would show like a ruffled plume; a group of twisted trees would form a dark mass in a valley, or may be, elsewhere, some straw-thatched hamlet would upraise above the plain a little hunchbacked outline. At the crossways the old Christs, which kept guard over the countryside, spread out their dark arms on the calvaries, like real

men crucified, and in the distance the Channel stood out clearly as a great yellow mirror under a sky which was already obscured in its lower part, already tenebrous towards the horizon. And in this country even this calm, even this fine weather was melancholy; there remained, in spite of all, a sense of disquiet brooding over things; an anxiety borne in from the sea, to which so many existences had been entrusted, and of which the eternal menace was only slumbering.

To Gaud, dreaming on her way, the long homeward walk in the wide, free air never seemed long enough. She loved the salty savour of the sandy shore, the sweet perfume of certain flowers which grew on the cliffs among the meagre thorn. Had it not been for the old Yvonne who was awaiting her at home, she would willingly have loitered in these furze-bordered paths, in the manner of those fair damsels who like to dream, on summer evenings, in the parks.

As she traversed this country there came to her also recollections of her early childhood; but how effaced they were now, how remote, how diminished by her love! In spite of all it still pleased her to consider this Yann as a sort of fiancé—an elusive, disdainful, unmannerly fiancé, who would never really be hers; but one to whom she persisted in remaining faithful in spirit, without confiding her secret to any one. For the moment she was glad to know that he was in Iceland; there, at least, the sea held him in its deep cloisters, and he could not give himself to another. . . .

It is true that one of these days he would return; but this return also she envisaged now with more calm than formerly. Instinctively she knew that her poverty would not serve as cause to increase his disdain—for he was not as other men. And, more-

over, the death of little Sylvestre was a thing that must clearly bring them together. On his arrival he could not fail to come to see the grandmother of his friend; and she had decided that she would be present at this visit, for it seemed to her that this would show no want of dignity; without appearing to remember anything, she would talk to him as to someone whom she had known for a long time; she would speak to him affectionately, even as to a brother of Sylvestre, striving always to preserve a natural air. And who knows? It was, perhaps, not impossible that he should come to regard her as a sister, now that she was going to be so lonely in the world; that she should be able to count on his friendship; nay, even she might ask that much of him, if she did it in such a way that he would not think there was any suggestion of marriage. She judged him unmannerly only, obstinate in his ideas of independence, but kind, frank, and capable of understanding well the good things which come straight from the heart.

How would he feel when he found her there, poor, in this cottage almost in ruin? . . . Poor, indeed! For old Grand'mère Moan, not being strong enough now to go out to her daily washing, had nothing more than her widow's pension; it is true she ate very little now, and that both were able to manage to live without asking help from any one. . . .

Darkness had always fallen by the time she got home; before entering, it was necessary to descend a little, on worn rocks, the cottage being situated below the Ploubazlanec road, in the portion of the ground which slopes downward to the shore. It was almost hidden under its thick, warped roof of brown straw, which resembled the back of some enormous dead beast weighed down by its heavy coat. Its walls

had the dull colour and the ruggedness of rocks, with mosses and scurvy-grass forming little green tufts. One ascended the three warped steps of the threshold, and opened the interior latch of the door by means of a piece of thick cord which issued from a hole. Facing you, as you entered, was the little window, pierced as if in the thickness of a rampart and opening on the sea from which came a last pale yellow light. In the wide fireplace burnt some odorous twigs of pine and beech which old Yvonne had gathered in her walks along the roads. She herself was sitting there, superintending their little supper; in the cottage she wore a headband only, in order to save her coifs; her profile, pretty still, was outlined against the red light of the fire. She raised towards Gaud eyes which had once been brown, but now had taken on a faded colour, turning to blue, and which were troubled, wavering, bewildered from old age. Every time she said the self-same thing:

'Goodness me, my girl, how late you are to-night.'

'But no, grand'mère,' Gaud, who was used to her, would reply gently. 'It is the same time as usual.'

'Ah! . . . It seems to me, my girl, it seems to me that it is later than usual.'

They supped on a table which had become almost shapeless from long use, but was still as thick as the trunk of an oak. And the cricket never failed to recommence for them his little silvery-noted song.

One side of the cottage was occupied by roughly carved woodwork, which now was all worm-eaten; opened, it gave access to sets of shelves on which many generations of fishermen had been conceived, had slept, and on which the aged mothers of them all had died.

From the blackened beams of the roof hung very

old household utensils, bunches of herbs, wooden spoons, smoked bacon; also old nets which had slept there since the shipwreck of the last of the Moan sons, and the meshes of which the rats used to gnaw in the night.

Gaud's bed, installed in a corner with its white muslin curtains, seemed a thing elegant and new, garnishing a Celtic hut.

There was a photograph of Sylvestre in sailor's clothes, in a frame, hung on the granite of the wall. His grandmother had attached to it his military medal, with one of those pairs of anchors in red cloth which sailors wear on the right sleeve, and which had been his; Gaud had bought also at Paimpol one of those memorial crowns, in black and white beads, with which in Brittany people encircle the portraits of the dead. It was his little mausoleum, all that he had to consecrate his memory, in his native Breton land. . . .

On these summer evenings they used not to stay up late, in order to economize light; but when the weather was fine they would sit for a while on a stone bench in front of the house, and watch the people who passed along the road a little above their heads.

Afterwards old Yvonne would retire to her little press-bed, and Gaud to her pretty modern one; there, she would soon fall asleep, tired by her hard work and her long walk, and dreaming of the return of the Icelanders as a sensible girl might, resolute, without worrying overmuch. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

BUT one day, at Paimpol, hearing it said that the *Marie* had just arrived, she felt herself seized with a kind of fever. All her calm of waiting had deserted her; hurriedly finishing her work, without knowing why, she started for home earlier than usual—and, on the road, as she was hastening, she saw him in the distance coming towards her.

Her legs trembled so that she feared they might give way under her. He was already quite near, outlined scarcely twenty paces from her, with his superb figure, his hair curling under his fisherman's bonnet. She was taken so unawares by this meeting that really she was afraid of faltering and afraid that he might see it; she would have died of shame now if that should happen. . . . And then she imagined that her coif was untidy, that she looked tired from having completed her work too quickly; she would have given she knew not what to be hidden in the clumps of furze, to disappear into some weasel's burrow. For that matter, he too had made a movement of recoil, as if in the idea of changing his route. But it was too late; they met in the narrow lane.

He, so as not to touch her, stood back against the bank, stepping aside, like a skittish horse which swerves, and looking at her in a shy and furtive manner.

She also, for half a second, had raised her eyes, throwing out to him in spite of herself a prayer and a yearning. And in this moment when their gaze

met, more rapidly than a rifle shot, her gridelin pupils had seemed to grow larger, to become bright with some great flame of thought, to launch a real bluish light, while her face had grown red to her temples, to the roots of her fair hair.

He had said as he touched his bonnet:

'How do you do, Mademoiselle Gaud!'

'How do you do, Monsieur Yann,' she replied.

And that was all; he had passed.

She continued on her way, trembling still, but feeling, little by little, as the distance between them increased, her blood resuming its normal course and her strength returning. . . .

In the cottage she found old Yvonne sitting in a corner, her head between her hands, weeping, and uttering her little infantine '*Hi, hi, hi!*', all dishevelled, a tail of hair falling from her headband like a thin skein of grey hemp.

'Ah, my dear Gaud! I met the boy Gaos on the road to Plouherzel, as I was returning from gathering wood—and we talked of my poor little one, as you may guess. They arrived this morning from Iceland, and in the afternoon, while I was out, he had been to visit me. Poor lad, there were tears in his eyes, too. . . . He insisted on returning with me to my door, to carry my little faggot. . . .'

She heard this, standing, and her heart gradually contracted: so, then, this visit of Yann, on which she had counted so much in order to say to him so many things, had taken place already, and no doubt would not again be repeated: it was over. . . .

Then the cottage seemed to her more desolate, her poverty harder, the world more empty—and she bowed her head with a desire for death.

CHAPTER XIV

WINTER gradually came, extending like a winding sheet which one should let fall very gently. Grey days followed grey days, but Yann did not appear again—and the two women lived on very lonely.

With the cold weather their existence became more expensive and more arduous.

And old Yvonne, too, was becoming difficult to look after. Her poor mind wandered; she was querulous now, and said unkind things and mocking things; once or twice a week the fit took her, as with children, without apparent cause.

Poor old woman! . . . She was still so kindly on her lucid days, that Gaud did not cease to respect her, and to cherish her. To have always been good, and to end by being evil; to disclose, as the end was drawing near, a whole depth of malice, which had lain dormant during life, a whole lore of coarse words which had been concealed, what a mockery of the soul, what a mysterious irony!

She began to sing also, and that was even worse to bear than her choler; whatever came into her head she would sing, the *oremus* of the mass, and even the vile couplets she had heard formerly in the harbour, repeated by the sailors. Sometimes she would intone the *Fillettes de Paimpol*; at other times, nodding her old head and beating time with her foot, she would begin:

My husband has departed,
To Iceland he has gone,
My husband has departed,
And left me ne'er a sou.
But . . . trala, trala la lou . . .
I 'll make some!
I 'll make some! . . .

And every time she would stop abruptly, opening her eyes wide, in a blank, lifeless stare—like a flame on the point of extinction which flares up suddenly before it goes out. And, afterwards, she would bow her head, remain for long inert, her lower jaw dropped in the manner of those dead.

She was no longer very clean, either, and that was another kind of trial on which Gaud had not counted.

One day it came about that she no longer remembered her grandson.

'Sylvestre? Sylvestre?' she said to Gaud, with an air of trying to think who he might be; 'Ah! goodness, girl, you understand I had so many when I was young, so many sons, so many daughters, so many daughters, so many sons, that now, bless me . . .'

And as she said this she threw her poor wrinkled hands in the air, with a reckless gesture that was almost wanton. . . .

And then, the next day, she would remember him very well; and, citing the hundred and one little things which he had done or which he had said, she wept the livelong day.

Oh, these winter evenings, when there were no faggots to make a fire! To work shivering, to work for her poor livelihood, to stitch and stitch, with neat, small stitches, in order to finish, before going to bed,

the work which she brought each evening from Paimpol.

Old Yvonne, sitting by the fire, remained tranquil, her feet close to the dying embers, her hands tucked under her apron. But in the early part of the evening it was always necessary to maintain a conversation with her.

'You are not saying anything to me, my good girl; why is that? In my time I have known girls of your age who knew how to talk. It seems to me we should not be so dull every evening if you only had something to say.'

Then Gaud would recount the odds and ends of news which she had heard in the town, or tell her the names of the people whom she had met on the way, talking of things which to her were quite indifferent, as, for that matter, everything in the world was now; and then would stop in the middle of her tale when she saw the poor old woman was asleep.

Nothing living, nothing young near her, whose fresh youth called for youth. Her beauty bloomed unknown, solitary, and sterile. . . .

The wind of the sea, coming from all sides, made the lamp flicker and the sound of the waves came to her as in a ship; listening to it, she mingled with it the sad and always pleasant remembrance of Yann, of whom these things were the domain; during the wild nights of terror, when everything was let loose, and the darkness outside was filled with a great hurly-burly, she thought of him with an increased anxiety.

And then, alone as she was, always alone with this grand'mère dying in her chair, she was afraid sometimes, and looked apprehensively into the dark corners, thinking of the mariners, her ancestors, who had lived in these shelved cupboards, who had perished

at sea on just such nights as these, and whose souls might yet return; and she did not feel protected against the visit of these dead by the presence of this old, old woman who was already almost one of them. . . .

Suddenly she would tremble from head to foot, as she heard, proceeding from the corner by the fire a thin broken voice, sounding smothered, as if it came from underground. In a chirping tone which made the blood run cold, the voice sang:

My husband has departed,
To Iceland he has gone;
My husband has departed,
And left me ne'er a sou;
But . . . trala, trala la lou . . .

And, moreover, she suffered that particular kind of fear which comes from the company of imbeciles.

The rain fell, fell, with the little incessant noise of a fountain; one heard it almost without respite streaming down the walls. In the old roof of moss there were leakages which, always in the same places, indefatigable, monotonous, always made the same mournful dripping noise; they soaked here and there the floor of the dwelling which was of rock and beaten earth mixed with gravel and shells.

One felt that there was water everywhere around; it enveloped you with its cold, infinite mass; a tormented water, whipping, powdering in the air, thickening the obscurity, and isolating still more one from another the lonely cottages scattered over this district of Ploubazlanec.

Sunday evenings were for Gaud the most sinister, on account of the gaiety they brought elsewhere: there were merry evenings of sorts, even in these forlorn little hamlets of the coast; there was always,

here or there, some close-shut cottage, beaten by the dark rain, from which came sounds of uncouth song. Inside, tables aligned for the drinkers; sailors drying themselves at smoking fires; old men contented over their glass of brandy; young men courting girls; all on the road to intoxication and singing to forget their cares. And, near them, the sea, their tomb of to-morrow, was singing also, filling the night with its immense voice. . . .

On some Sundays, groups of young men, who came out of these taverns or were returning from Paimpol, passed along the road, close to the door of the Moans; they were those who lived at the extremity of this Breton land, in the direction of Pors-Even. They passed very late, escaping from the arms of the girls, heedless of the rain, used to squalls and downpours. Gaud would strain her ears at sound of their songs and their shouting—very quickly drowned in the noise of the storm and the breakers—striving to distinguish the voice of Yann, and trembling then when she thought she recognized it.

It was not kind on Yann's part not to have come to see them again: and to lead a merry life, so soon after Sylvestre's death—all this was not like him! Clearly she no longer understood him—and in spite of all she could not give him up, or believe that he was heartless.

The fact is that, since his return, his life had been very dissipated.

First of all there had been the usual October journey to the Bay of Gascony—and for these Icelanders that is always a period of pleasure, a time when they carry in their purses a little money to spend without a care (the small advances for amusement which the captains give on the share of the proceeds of the fishing, which is payable only in winter).

They had gone, as every year, to get salt in the islands, and he had fallen in love at Saint Martin-de-Ré with a certain dark-eyed girl, who had been his mistress in the preceding autumn. Together they had wandered in the last light of the warm sun, among the reddening vineyards all filled with the song of larks, all perfumed by the ripe grapes, the marigolds of the sands, and the salty savour of the shore; together they had sung and danced during these evenings of the vintage season, when all the world gets intoxicated, with a lightsome amorous intoxication, from drinking good wine.

Afterwards the *Marie* had pushed on to Bordeaux, and he had found again, in a large café, very much begilt, the fair songstress of the watch, and had good-humouredly allowed himself to be adored for another week.

Returned to Brittany in November he had assisted, as best man, at several marriages of his friends, always in his best holiday clothes, and often drunk after midnight, when the dancing ended. Every week he was mixed up in some new adventure, which the girls eagerly reported to Gaud, not without exaggeration.

Three or four times she had seen him in the distance coming towards her along the Ploubazlanec road, but always in time to avoid him; he, too, for that matter, on these occasions, made off across the barren plain. As by a tacit understanding, they shunned each other now.

CHAPTER XV

At Paimpol there is a large fat woman called Madame Tressoleur. In one of the streets leading to the harbour she keeps a tavern well known among the Icelanders, where captains and shipowners come to engage their crews, to make their choice from among the strongest, as they ply them with liquor.

Good-looking once upon a time, and still on very good terms with the fishermen, she had a moustache now, the shoulders of a man, and an impudent tongue; the air of a camp-follower, under the large white coif of a nun; in her an indefinable something that was religious persisted in spite of all, because she was a Breton. In her head she kept the names of all the sailors of the district as in a register; she knew the good and the bad, knew just what they made, and what they were worth.

One day in January Gaud, having received an order to make her a dress, came to work there, in a room behind the bar.

The entrance to this tavern of Madame Tressoleur is through a door with massive granite pillars, which is set back under the upper storey of the house in the ancient manner; when the door is opened there is nearly always a gust of wind eddying in the street which forces its way in, and customers are wont to make a sudden entry, as if thrown in by an ocean wave. The room is low and long, covered with lime-wash, and ornamented with gilt frames containing pictures of ships, collisions, shipwrecks. In a corner

a faïence Virgin stands on a bracket, between bouquets of artificial flowers.

The old walls have heard many a ringing song of sailors, have seen much expansive merriment, uncouth and primitive enough—since the remote days of Paimpol, from the stormy times of the Corsairs, until these present days of the Icelanders, very little different, really, from their ancestors. And many men's lives have been staked and given in pledge there, with both parties drunk, on these oaken tables.

Gaud, as she sewed the dress, overheard a conversation about Iceland matters, which was being carried on behind the partition between Madame Tressoleur and two pensioners who were sitting drinking.

They were discussing, the old men, a certain fine new boat which was in course of being rigged in the harbour: it would never be ready, this *Léopoldine*, to make the next voyage.

'But yes, it will,' replied the hostess, 'you may bet it will be ready! For I can tell you that the crew was engaged yesterday: all those of the old *Marie*, Guermeur's boat, which is going to be sold and broken up; five young fellows came and signed on here, in my presence—at this table.with my pen—so!—and proper men, I can tell you: Laumec, Tugdual Caroff, Yvon Duff, the younger Karaez, of Tréguier—and the big Yann Gaos, of Pors-Even, who is worth any three!'

The *Léopoldine!* . . . the name, barely heard, of this boat which was going to bear Yann away, fixed itself in a moment in Gaud's memory, as if someone had chiselled it there in order to make it more ineffaceable.

In the evening home at Ploubazlanec again, sitting working in the light of her little lamp, this name, the

mere sound of which had for her a mournful ring, still haunted her mind. The names of persons, the names of ships, have a physiognomy of their own, almost a meaning. And this *Léopoldine*, a new and unusual name, pursued her with a persistence that was not natural, became a kind of sinister oppression. No, she had expected to see Yann sail once more on the *Marie*, which formerly she had visited, which she knew, and which the Virgin had protected in its dangerous vouages for many a long year, and now this change, this *Léopoldine*, augmented her anxiety.

But presently she began to tell herself that after all this no longer concerned her; that nothing of what affected him could any longer touch her. And, in point of fact, what did it matter to her whether he was here or elsewhere, on one ship or on another, at sea or at home? . . . Would she be more unhappy, or less, when he was once more in Iceland? When the summer was come, bringing warmth to the deserted villages, to lonely and anxious wives—or when a new autumn should begin again, bringing back the fishermen once more? . . . All that to her was indifferent, alike, equally without joy and without hope. There was no longer any link between the two of them, nothing to bring them together, since he had even forgotten his poor little friend, Sylvestre—it was necessary, therefore, to realize once and for all that this dream was over; that this sole desire of her life must be put aside; she ought to give up Yann, to forget him, forget everything that was connected with his existence, even this name of Iceland which rang still with so sad a charm on his account; to drive these thoughts out of her mind, to sweep them all away; to tell herself that it was ended, ended for ever. . . .

She looked with tenderness at the poor old woman sleeping there, who still had need of her, but who could have but little longer to live. And then, afterwards, what was the good of living, what was the good of working, and what was there to do? . . .

The west wind had risen outside, and with its distant groaning the leakages of the roof had recommenced their light tranquil noise, as of a child's rattle. And her tears also began to flow, tears of one orphaned and abandoned, passing over her lips with a slight, salt taste, descending silently on her work, like that summer rain which is not brought by the wind, but falls suddenly, thick and fast, from overcharged clouds; then no longer seeing, feeling broken, seized with a kind of vertigo before the emptiness of her life, she folded the ample bodice of this Madame Tressoleur, and prepared to go to bed.

And as she lay down she shivered; every day it became damper and colder—and so, too, did everything in this cottage. Nevertheless, since she was young, even while she went on weeping, she ended by getting warm and going to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

SEVERAL more gloomy weeks had passed, and they were now in the first days of February. The weather was mild and fairly fine.

Yann had come out of the shipowner's house, where he had been to receive his share of last summer's fishing, some fifteen hundred francs, which he was taking home to his mother, in accordance with the family custom. The year had been a good one, and he was returning well satisfied with himself.

Near Ploubazlanec he saw a crowd at the end of the road: an old woman gesticulating with her stick, and around her a number of excited urchins who were laughing. . . . Old Grand'mère Moan! The kind old grandmother whom Sylvestre adored, all tattered and bedraggled, become now one of those poor old imbeciles who attract a crowd in the street! . . . The sight caused him a horrible pain.

These little rogues of Ploubazlanec had killed her cat, and she was threatening them with her stick, in great anger and distress.

'Oh, if he had been here, if my poor boy had been here, you wouldn't have dared! I know you wouldn't, you wicked boys! . . .'

She had fallen, it appeared, in running after them to beat them; her coif was askew, her dress smothered in mud, and they were saying again that she was drunk (as often happens in Brittany to those old women who have greatly suffered).

Yann knew this was not true, and that she was an

entirely respectable old woman who drank nothing but water.

'Aren't you ashamed?' he said to the urchins, very angry himself also, and speaking in a voice and tone which commanded respect.

And in a twinkling of an eye all the little people slunk away, shamefaced and confused, before the big Gaos.

Gaud, who at this moment was returning from Paimpol, bringing home some work for the evening, had seen this from a distance, had recognized her grand'mère in the group. Alarmed, she came running up to find out what the matter was, what had happened, what they had done to her—and seeing their cat, which they had killed, she understood.

She raised her frank eyes to Yann's, and he did not turn his away; they had no thought of avoiding each other this time; they merely became very red both of them, he as quickly as she, and looked at each other, a little as if they were startled to find themselves so near; but without enmity, almost with kindness, united as they were in a common thought of pity and protection.

The school children had for long looked with disfavour on the poor defunct cat, because it had a black face and an air of the evil one; but it was a very good cat and, when you looked at it close, you found, on the contrary, that it had a peaceful and caressing mien. They had killed it with stones, and one of its eyes was hanging out. The poor old woman, still muttering threats, moved away, tottering in her distress, and carrying the dead cat, like a rabbit, by the tail.

'Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy . . . if he was still alive they would not have dared to do this to me, I know they would not. . . .'

Tears of a sort were rolling down her cheeks; and her hands, with large blue veins, trembled.

Gaud had straightened her coif, and tried to console her with soothing words, such as one might use to a child; and Yann was indignant; was it possible that children could be so wicked! To do a thing like that to a poor old woman! Tears almost came into his eyes too—not for the cat, needless to say; young men of his rough sort, while they like well enough to play with animals, have little or no sensibility for them; but his heart melted, as he walked behind this grandmother in her dotage, carrying her poor cat by the tail. He thought of Sylvestre, who had so much loved her; of the dreadful grief he would have felt if any one had foretold him that she would end in this way, in derision and penury.

And Gaud excused herself as being responsible for her appearance:

'She must have fallen to have got so dirty,' she said, quite low; 'her dress is not new, it is true, for we are not rich, Monsieur Yann; but it is only yesterday that I mended it, and this morning when I went out I am sure that it was clean and tidy.'

He gazed at her long then, much more touched perhaps by this simple little explanation than he would have been by clever phrases, by reproaches, or by tears. They continued to walk side by side in the direction of the cottage of the Moans. Pretty she had always been, pretty as a girl could be; he knew that well; but it seemed to him that she was even prettier now in her poverty and mourning.

Her air had become more serious, her grey eyes had a more reserved expression, and yet, in spite of that, they seemed to penetrate you more deeply, to the bottom of your soul. Her figure also had taken on its

full shapeliness. She was nearly twenty-three years old; in the bloom of her beauty.

And, moreover, she had now the appearance of a fisherman's daughter, in her simple black dress and her quite plain coif; her ladylike air came one could no longer tell whence; it was something hidden in herself and involuntary, with which it was not possible to reproach her; perhaps it was only her bodice, a little more carefully fitted than those of others, by habit learned of old, outlining better her rounded bosom and the upper part of her arms. . . . But, no, it lay rather in her even voice and in her gaze.

CHAPTER XVII

It was clear that he was going to accompany them—to their door, no doubt.

The three of them walked on, as if for the burial of the unfortunate cat, and it became almost a little comical now to see them passing thus in a sort of procession; and some of the good folk standing at their doors smiled. The old Yvonne in the middle carrying the cat; Gaud on her right, distressed and still very red; big Yann on her left, very tall and thoughtful.

However, the poor old woman became almost suddenly pacified on the way; of her own accord she had straightened her coif, and without saying anything more she began to observe the two of them alternately, from the corner of her eye, which had become clear again. Gaud did not speak either for fear of giving Yann an excuse for taking leave of them; she wanted to rest on that kindly glance which she had received from him, to walk with eyes closed so that she might no longer see anything else, to walk for long by his side thus, in a dream she was weaving, instead of arriving all too quickly at their empty and gloomy dwelling where the spell must needs be broken.

At the door there was one of those moments of indecision, during which it seems that the heart stops beating. Grand'mère Yvonne entered without turning round; then Gaud, hesitating, and Yann, behind, entered also.

He was in their home for the first time in his life; without intention, probably; what was there he could want? As he crossed the threshold he had touched his hat, and then, his eyes having met first of all the portrait of Sylvestre in its little mortuary crown of black beads, he moved towards it slowly as to a tomb.

Gaud had remained standing, leaning with her hands on the table. He looked now all round him, and she followed him in this sort of silent review which he made of their poverty. It was poor, indeed, despite its clean and ordered air, the lodging of these two forlorn ones who had become united. Perhaps, at least, he would feel for her a little kindly pity, seeing her fallen to this degree of misfortune, to this rough granite and this roof of thatch. There was nothing left of her former riches but the white bed, the pretty modern bed, and involuntarily the eyes of Yann returned to it. . . .

He said nothing. . . . Why did he not go? . . . The old grandmother, who was still so wise in her lucid moments, pretended not to notice him. And so they remained standing, one before the other, mute and anxious, ending by gazing at one another as if for some supreme interrogation.

But the minutes passed, and as each second slipped by the silence between them seemed to become more set. And they looked at each other still more earnestly, as if they were awaiting solemnly some unprecedented thing which was slow in coming.

. . . . . .

'Gaud,' he asked, in a low grave voice, 'if you are still willing. . . .'

What was he going to say? . . . One felt that he had come to some momentous decision, sudden like

all his decisions, taken on the spur of the moment, and that he scarcely dared to formulate it. . . .

'— If you are still willing. . . . The catch has fetched a good price this year, and I have a little money by me. . . .'

If she was still willing! . . . What was he asking her? Had she heard him right? She was bewildered before the immensity of what she thought she understood.

And old Yvonne, from her corner beyond, pricked up her ears, scenting the approach of happiness. . . .

'We should be able to get married, Mademoiselle Gaud, if you were still willing. . . .'

And then he awaited her reply, which did not come. What was it that prevented her from pronouncing this yes? . . . He was surprised, he was afraid, and she perceived it well. Leaning with her two hands on the table, become quite white, with eyes swimming, she was voiceless, she resembled a beautiful woman dying. . . .

'Come now, Gaud, answer!' said the old grandmother, who had risen and come towards them. 'You see, Monsieur Yann, this has taken her by surprise; you must excuse her; she will think it over and answer you very soon. . . . Sit down, Monsieur Yann, and take a glass of cider with us. . . .'

But Gaud was not able to reply; no word came to her in her ecstasy. . . . It was true, then, that he was good, that he had a heart. She had found him again, her true Yann, such as she had never ceased to see him in her dreams, in spite of his rudeness, in spite of his rough refusal, in spite of all. He had long disdained her, now he accepted her, now that she was poor: it was his way, no doubt, he had some motive which she would know later on; at this moment

she had no thought of asking him to explain, or, any more, of reproaching him for her two years' grieving. All that was so forgotten, all that had been swept so far away, in a second, by the delicious whirlwind which was passing over her life! . . . Still silent, she declared her adoration of him only with her eyes, her flooded eyes, which gazed at him with an intense yearning, while a copious rain of tears began to descend along her cheeks. . . .

'Now then, God bless you, my children!' said Grand'mère Moan. 'As for me I owe Him great gratitude, for I am now content to have become so old, in order to have witnessed this before dying.'

They remained, standing there, one before the other, holding each other's hands, and finding no words to say; knowing no word that was sweet enough, no phrase that could express their feelings, none that seemed to them worthy of breaking their exquisite silence.

'Kiss each other, at least, my children. . . . Bless me, they have nothing to say to each other! What a droll pair of grandchildren I have, to be sure! . . . Now then, Gaud, say something to him, my girl. . . . In my time, it seems to me, people used to kiss when they became engaged. . . .'

Yann took off his hat, as if seized suddenly with an unwonted deep respect, before stooping to kiss Gaud —and it seemed to him that it was the first true kiss he had ever given in his life.

She kissed him also, pressing with all her heart her fresh lips, unskilled in the refinement of caresses, on this cheek of her lover which the sea had bronzed. In the stones of the wall the cricket chirped out happiness to them; this time, by chance, his note was in harmony. And the poor little portrait of Sylvestre

seemed to smile at them, from amid its black crowning. And everything appeared suddenly vivified and rejuvenated in the dead cottage. The silence was filled with a wonderful music; even the pale winter's twilight, entering by the little window, had become, as it were, a beautiful enchanted light. . . .

'And when shall it be, my dear children; on the return from Iceland?'

Gaud hung her head. Iceland, the *Léopoldine*—it is true she had forgotten these spectres that waylaid her path. On the return from Iceland! How long it would be, all this summer of anxious waiting! And Yann, tapping the ground with his foot with rapid little beats, become eager in his turn, reckoned up very quickly in his mind, to see whether, if they made all possible haste, they would not have time to marry before the departure: so many days to obtain the necessary papers, so many days to publish the banns at the church, that would take them only to the 20th or 25th of the month, for the wedding and, if nothing hindered them, they would still have a full week to remain together as man and wife.

'I must go now and inform my father,' he said, with as much haste as if the very minutes of their life were measured and precious. . . .

PART IV

CHAPTER I

LOVERS are always very fond of sitting together on the benches, in front of the doors, when night is falling.

Yann and Gaud were no exceptions in this. Every evening, on the old granite bench, at the door of the cottage of the Moans, they did their courting.

Others have the spring, the shade of the trees, warm evenings the flowering rose-trees. They had nothing but the February twilights descending on a seabound country of furze and stones. No green branches overhead or around them, nothing but the immense heavens, over which the wandering mists passed slowly. And for flowers, brown seaweed which the fishermen, coming from the shore, had trailed in the pathway with their nets.

The winters are not severe in this region, warmed by the currents of the sea; but, for all that, these twilights brought often an icy dampness and an imperceptible fine rain which was deposited on their shoulders.

They did not move, however, being very happy where they were. And this bench, which was more than a hundred years old, was not surprised at their love-making, having seen many love-makings before; it had heard, too, the soft words uttered, always the same, from generation to generation, by the lips of the young, and it had become used to seeing the lovers return later on, changed into tottering old men,

and trembling old women, to sit in the same place—but in the daytime then, to breathe still a little air, and to warm themselves in their last sunshine. . . .

From time to time Grand'mère Yvonne put her head out of the door and looked at them. Not that she was uneasy about what they might do together, but out of affection merely, for the pleasure of seeing them, and also to try to make them come in. She said:

'You will get cold, my children, you will make yourselves ill. Why, gracious me! to remain outside so late. I should like to ask you, is there any sense in it?'

Cold! Were they cold? Were they conscious even of anything except the happiness of sitting side by side?

The people who passed in the evening along the road heard a soft murmur of two voices, mingling in the noise the sea made below, at the foot of the cliffs. It was a very harmonious music, the pure voice of Gaud, alternating with that of Yann, the deep note of which had a tender and caressing resonance. One could make out also their two silhouettes standing out against the granite of the wall which was at their backs: first of all the white of Gaud's coif, then all her slim black-robed form, and at her side the square shoulders of her lover. Above them the hunch-backed dome of their thatched roof, and behind all this, the twilit infinitude, the colourless emptiness of the waters and the sky. . . .

But in the end they would come in and sit by the fire, and old Yvonne, falling asleep at once, her head nodding, did not much embarrass the two young people in their love-making. They would resume their conversation in a low voice, having to make up for their two years of silence, having need to

hasten in their courtship since it must needs be so short.

It was arranged that they should make their home with Grand'mère Yvonne who, in her will, had bequeathed to them her cottage; for the moment they would attempt no improvement, for want of time, and would postpone until after the return from Iceland their project of beautifying a little this poor and far too desolate nest.

CHAPTER II

ONE evening he amused himself by recounting to her a thousand little things which she had done or which had happened to her since their first meeting; he told her even the dresses she had worn, the fêtes she had attended.

She heard him with an extreme surprise. How did he know all this? Who would imagine that he had noticed these things, and was capable of remembering them?

He smiled, affecting a mysterious air, and continued to tell her of other little details, even of things which she had almost forgotten.

Now, interrupting him no more, she let him talk on, seized with an unlooked-for ravishment which possessed her wholly; she began to guess, to understand; he had loved her, then, he also, all this time! . . . She had been his constant preoccupation. And this was his simple way of letting her know! . . .

Then, what did it all mean? Why, in Heaven's name, had he so long repulsed her, why had he made her suffer so much?

There remained this mystery, which he had promised to clear up for her, but of which he deferred the explanation from day to day, with an embarrassed air, and the ghost of an incomprehensible smile. . . .

CHAPTER III

ONE fine day they went to Paimpol, with Grand'mère Yvonne, to buy the wedding dress.

Among the pretty modish dresses which remained to her from her affluent days there were some which might very well have been adapted for the ceremony, and there was really no need to buy another. But Yann had wanted to make her this present, and she did not press her objection too strongly: to have a dress given by him, paid for out of the money earned by his labour and his fishing, it seemed to her that that would make her already in some slight measure his wife.

They chose black, for Gaud was still in mourning for her father. But Yann found nothing good enough in the stuffs that were shown them. He was rather haughty with the shopkeepers, and, he who formerly would not for the world have entered any of these Paimpol shops, on this day concerned himself with every detail, even with the way in which the dress was to be made. He insisted that they should trim it with broad bands of velvet in order to make it prettier.

CHAPTER IV

ONE evening, when they were sitting on their stone bench in the solitude of their cliff, as night was falling, their eyes rested by chance on a blackthorn bush—the solitary one round about—which grew among the rocks by the side of the road. In the gloom it seemed to them that they could distinguish on this bush little light tufts of white:

'It looks as if it were in bloom,' said Yann.

And, to make sure, they went up to it.

It was in full bloom. As they could not see very clearly they touched it, verifying with their fingers the presence of these little flowers which were quite damp with mist. And then there came to them a first impression of spring; at the same time they perceived that the days were lengthening; that there was something warmer in the air, something more luminous in the night.

But how forward this blackthorn bush was! Nowhere in the country round by the side of any road would one have found its like. No doubt it had blossomed there expressly for them, to celebrate their love. . . .

'Come, let us gather some!' said Yann.

And, almost gropingly, he made a bouquet in his big hands; with the large fisherman's knife which he carried in his belt, he carefully removed the thorns, and then he put it in Gaud's bodice.

'There, like a bride!' he said, stepping back to see, despite the darkness, if it became her well.

Below them, the sea, very calm, was breaking on the pebbles of the shore, with a little intermittent soughing, regular as the respiration of sleep; it seemed indifferent, and even favourable, to this courting that was going on there quite near it.

The days seemed long to them in their waiting for the evenings, and afterwards, when they separated on the stroke of ten o'clock, there came to them a curious little sense of dissatisfaction with life, because they were over so soon. . . .

There was need for haste, great haste, in order to get the necessary papers, to arrange this and arrange that, with the risk of not being ready in time and of letting their happiness escape them until the autumn, until the uncertain future. . . .

Their courting, done in the evenings in this mournful spot, to the continual murmur of the sea, and with this rather feverish preoccupation with the march of time, took on from all these circumstances a peculiar and almost mournful character. They were lovers different from other lovers, graver, more anxious in their love.

He still would not tell her what it was that for two long years had set him against her, and when he had left her at night this mystery tormented Gaud. And yet she was sure now that he loved her well.

It was true that he had loved her all along, but not as now. His love was growing in his heart and in his soul like a tide which rises, rises, until it overflows. He had never experienced this kind of love before.

From time to time, on the stone bench, he would sprawl, lie down almost, throwing his head on Gaud's knees, in the coaxing manner of a child that wants to be caressed; and then, very quickly, he would sit up again, from a sense of propriety. He would have

loved to lie on the ground at her feet and remain there, his forehead pressed against the hem of her dress. Apart from the brotherly kiss which he gave her on arrival and on departure he did not dare to embrace her. He worshipped an invisible, indefinable something in her, which was her soul, which manifested itself to him in the pure and tranquil sound of her voice, in the expression of her smile, in her brave, clear gaze. . . .

And to think that at the same time she was a woman of flesh and blood, more beautiful and more desirable than any other; that she would soon belong to him in as complete a manner as any of his former mistresses, without ceasing on that account to be *herself*! . . . This idea thrilled him to his very marrow; he did not conceive very clearly the ecstasy of the consummating hour, for he would not let his thought dwell on it, moved by a feeling of respect, asking himself almost whether he would dare to commit this sweet sacrilege. . . .

CHAPTER V

ONE rainy evening they were sitting side by side in the chimney corner, and old Yvonne was nodding opposite them. The flames which leaped among the faggots on the hearth made their magnified shadows dance on the dark ceiling.

They were talking very low, as is the way with lovers. But on this particular evening there were long embarrassed silences in their conversation. He especially said scarcely anything and hung his head with a half smile, seeking to avoid Gaud's gaze.

And the reason was that she had been plying him throughout the evening with questions on this mystery which he found so much difficulty in explaining to her, and this time he saw that he was caught; she was too shrewd and too determined to know; there was no shift now by which he could escape from his predicament.

'Have scandalous tongues been busy on my account? Have wicked things been said about me?' she asked.

He ventured to answer yes. Wicked things, oh! . . . there had been many said in Paimpol and in Ploubazlanec.

She asked him what. He was in difficulties and knew not what to say. And she saw clearly that it must have been something else.

'Was it my clothes, Yann?'

Yes, that, to be sure, had something to do with it: she seemed for a time to be too fond of them to become

the wife of a simple fisherman. But, even so, he was forced to admit that that was not all.

'Was it because, at that time, we were rich? You were afraid of being refused?'

'Oh, no! Not that.'

He made this answer with such a naïve confidence in himself that Gaud was amused. And then a new silence fell between them, during which they heard outside the moaning sound of the wind and the sea.

While she was watching him attentively an idea began to dawn on her, and her expression gradually changed.

'It was none of these things, Yann; then what was it?' she asked, gazing suddenly straight into his eyes with the irresistibly inquiring smile of one who has guessed.

And he turned his head away, bursting out into a laugh.

So that was it. She had discovered the secret: reason he could not give her, because he had none and never had any. Yes, it was simply his waywardness (as Sylvestre had been used to say), and that was all. But there was this also, that folk had pestered him so much about this Gaud! Every one had pressed her upon him, his parents, Sylvestre, his Icelander comrades, and finally Gaud herself. And so he had begun to say no, obstinately no, while all the time cherishing deep in his heart the idea that one day, when no one any longer expected it, it would end surely by being yes.

And it was through this piece of childishness in her beloved Yann that Gaud had languished, abandoned for two long years, and had wished to die. . . .

After the first inclination, which had been to laugh a little, in his confusion at being found out, Yann

looked at Gaud with grave kind eyes which, in their turn, questioned profoundly; would she forgive him at least? His remorse to-day was great for having caused her so much suffering; would she forgive him? . . .

'It is my character, Gaud, which is like that,' he said. 'At home, with my parents, it is just the same. Sometimes, when it comes into my stupid head, I remain for a week on end as if angry with them, speaking scarcely to any one. And, for all that, I love them dearly, you know, and always end by obeying them in everything they wish, as if I were still a little boy of ten. . . . Do you think it was in my mind never to marry? No, that would not have lasted long in any case, Gaud, you may be sure.'

Oh, would she forgive him? She felt tears come softly into her eyes; they were the last of her one-time grief, which vanished utterly at this avowal from her Yann. Besides, without all her previous suffering the present hour would not have been so exquisite; now that it was over she was almost glad she had known this time of proof.

Now everything was cleared up between them; in a manner unexpected, it is true, but complete: there was no longer any veil between their two souls. He took her in his arms and drew her to him, and they remained long with heads close together, cheek pressing against cheek, having no further need of explanation, no further need of words at all. And, in this great moment, their embrace was so chaste that, Grand'mère Yvonne waking up, they continued to stand before her as they were, without any embarrassment.

. . . . . .

CHAPTER VI

It was six days before the departure for Iceland. The wedding party was returning from Ploubazlanec Church, pursued by a furious wind, under a dark and rain-charged sky.

Arm in arm, they made a handsome couple, walking like kings at the head of their long train, walking as in a dream. Calm, thoughtful, serious, they had the air of seeing nothing, of dominating life, of being above everything. Even the wind seemed to respect them, while, behind, the procession was a joyous disorder of laughing couples whom the blustering squalls buffeted. Many young people were among them, in whom also was overflowing life; and others, already grizzled, but smiling still as they recalled the day of their own wedding and their earlier years. Grand'mère Yvonne was there, and followed in the procession, very flustered, but almost happy, on the arm of an old uncle of Yann's, who was paying her old-fashioned compliments; she wore a fine new coif which they had bought for her for the ceremony and, of course, her little shawl, redyed for the third time —black for Sylvestre.

And the wind buffeted all these guests without distinction; one saw skirts uplifted, dresses turned partly inside out, hats and coifs blown off.

At the door of the church, according to custom, the bride and bridegroom had bought bunches of artificial flowers to complete their festive attire. Yann had fixed his at hazard on his broad chest, but he was of

those whom everything and anything becomes. As for Gaud, there was an air of refinement still in the way, in which these poor common flowers were pinned to the upper part of her bodice—a bodice close-fitting, as formerly, to her exquisite figure.

The fiddler, who conducted all these people, bothered by the wind, played anyhow; his airs reached the ear in puffs and, in the noise of the squalls, seemed a comical little music, shriller than the cries of a gull.

All Ploubazlanec had turned out to see them. This marriage had something about it which keenly interested the countryside, and people came from far around; at the crossings of the lanes there were everywhere groups stationed waiting for them. Nearly all the Icelanders of Paimpol, Yann's friends, were there in position. They saluted the newly-married pair as they passed; Gaud replied by bowing slightly like a young lady, with her serious grace, and, all along her route, she was greatly admired.

And the hamlets round about, the most remote, the most benighted, even those in the woods, had sent their beggars, their cripples, their half-witted folk, their idiots on crutches. This tribe was echeloned along the road, with accordions, hurdy-gurdies, and noise-making instruments of divers sorts; they held out their hands, their bowls, their hats to receive the alms which Yann threw to them with his large lordly air and Gaud with her pretty queenly smile. Some of these beggars were very old, and the hair was grey on their empty heads which had never contained anything; squatting in ditches by the side of the road, they were of the same colour as the earth from which they seemed never to have completely emerged, and back to which they would soon return without having had a consecutive thought; their

bewildered eyes were as disturbing as the mystery of their abortive and useless existences. Without comprehending they watched this festival of full and superb life. . . .

They continued their walk beyond the hamlet of Pors-Even and the home of the Gaoses, in order that they might repair, in accordance with the traditional custom of newly-married couples in the district of Ploubazlanec, to the Chapel of the Trinity, which is as it were on the edge of the Breton world.

At the foot of the last farthermost cliff, it stands on a ledge of low rocks, quite near the water, and seems to belong already to the sea. To reach it you have to follow a goat's path among blocks of granite. And the wedding party spread itself over the slope of this isolated cape, amid the rocks, their words of merriment and words of love quite lost in the noise of the wind and the waves.

It was impossible to reach the chapel; in this rough weather the passage to it was not safe, the sea broke thunderously too near it. You could see the white spouts rising very high, and, as they fell, spreading over everything like an inundation.

Yann, who had advanced the farthest, with Gaud leaning on his arm, was the first to draw back before the spray. Behind, his escort stood echeloned on the rocks, as in an amphitheatre, and he seemed to have come there to present his wife to the sea; but the sea showed a very unfriendly face to the new bride.

As they turned back he saw the fiddler, perched on a grey rock, and trying to resume, between two gusts, his jig-like air.

'Pack up your music, my man,' he said to him; 'the sea is playing us another tune, which goes better than yours. . . .'

At the same time a heavy, lashing rain, which had been threatening since the morning, began to fall, and there was a wild stampede with shouting and laughter to climb the cliff and seek shelter in the home of the Gaoses.

CHAPTER VII

THE wedding feast was held in the home of Yann's parents, on account of the poverty of Gaud's dwelling.

It was in the large new room on the upper floor, a group of twenty-five people at table with the new-made man and wife: sisters and brothers; Cousin Gaos, the pilot; Guermeur, Keraez, Yvon Duff, all of the old *Marie*, and now of the *Léopoldine*; four very pretty bridesmaids, their plaited hair wound in coils above the ears in the fashion adopted long ago by the Byzantine empresses, and their white coifs of the new style worn by the young, in the shape of a sea-shell; four groomsmen, all Icelanders, upstanding fellows, with fine proud eyes.

And below, too, needless to say, there was eating and cooking: all the tail-end of the procession had gathered there in disorder, and the working women, hired in Paimpol, were at their wit's end before the assemblage of pots and pans in the fireplace.

Yann's parents, no doubt, would have liked for their son a wife more richly dowered, but Gaud was known now to be a brave and sensible girl; and, moreover, to compensate for her lost fortune, she was the most beautiful in the countryside, and it flattered them to see so well-matched a couple.

The old man, Yann's father, elated after the meal, referring to the marriage said:

'This is going to increase the number of Gaoses, although there 's no shortage of them even now in Ploubazlanec.'

And, reckoning up on his fingers, he explained to an old uncle of the bride how it came about that there were so many of this name: his father, who was the youngest of nine brothers, had had twelve children, who had all married cousins, and that had helped to keep the number up, notwithstanding the lost ones in Iceland.

'For my part,' he said, 'I, too, married a Gaos, a relative, and between us we have added another fourteen to the total.'

And, at the thought of this tribe, he rejoiced and nodded his white head.

The dickens! He had had a struggle to bring up these fourteen little Gaoses; but now they were getting over their difficulties, and, besides, those ten thousand francs got from the derelict had helped greatly to put them in comfort.

Waxing merry also, neighbour Guermeur told of his adventures while in the *service*,[1] stories of China, of the Antilles, of Brazil, making the young people who, later on, would visit these parts, open their eyes wide.

One of his happiest memories was of an occasion when, on board the *Iphigénie*, they were filling the wine vats one evening in the dark, and the leather sleeve, through which the wine is poured had burst. Thereupon, instead of giving warning, one and all had set to work to drink their fill; the feast lasted two hours; and in the end the gun-room ran with wine, and everybody was drunk!

And these old sailors, sitting at table, laughed their honest boyish laugh, which was spiced with just a little malice.

[1] Seafaring men speak thus of their time as sailors in the Navy.

'People decry the service,' they said, 'but how else can one see so much of the world?'

Outside the weather did not improve; on the contrary, the wind and the rain were raging furiously in a thick darkness. In spite of the precautions they had taken some of them became uneasy about their boats moored in the harbour, and talked of going to see that all was well.

Meanwhile, another noise, much more pleasant to hear, came from below, where the young people of the wedding party were feasting together; there were shouts of joy and bursts of merry laughter from the little boy and girl cousins, who were beginning to feel very exhilarated by the cider.

The guests had been served with boiled meats and roast meats, with chickens and several kinds of fish, with omelettes and pancakes.

They had talked of fishing and smuggling, discussed all manner of ways of hoodwinking the good gentlemen of the Customs who are, as every one knows, the enemies of sea-going men.

Above, at the table of honour, they were even beginning to talk of rather doubtful adventures.

This particular vein of conversation was developed with gusto in Breton by these men who all, in their time, had made the round of the world.

'At Hong-Kong, the *houses*, you know, the houses that are there as you go up the little streets. . . .'

'Ah, yes!' from the end of the table replied another who had frequented them—'Yes, turning to the right when you arrive?'

'That 's it; the Chinese ladies, what? Well, we had amused ourselves there, three of us. . . . Ugly women, by Jove, ugly, ugly. . . .'

'Aye, ugly, I believe you,' said Yann carelessly, for

he also, in a misguided moment, after a long voyage, had made the acquaintance of these Chinese ladies.

'Afterwards, when it came to paying, which of us had any money? . . . Feel, feel in your pockets—not I, nor you, nor he—not a sou amongst us all. We made excuses, promising to return'—(here he contorted his rugged bronzed face and simpered like a surprised Chinese woman)—'but the old woman, not trusting us, began to caterwaul, to play the devil, and ended by clawing us with her yellow paws'—(now he mimicked the shrill voices of these ladies and grimaced like the angry old woman, rolling his eyes which he had tilted up at the corners with his fingers)—'and then who should come in but the two Chinamen, the two . . . well, the two proprietors of the show, you understand?—and they locked the door with us inside! Naturally we laid hold of them by their pigtails and prepared to knock their heads against the wall when, hey presto! a number of others came out from holes and corners, at least a dozen, who rolled up their sleeves with the intention of setting upon us—with airs of misgiving, nevertheless. Fortunately I had my packet of sugar-sticks, bought as provender for the journey; and a packet of sugar-sticks is solid, it doesn't break when it is fresh: so you can imagine it was very useful to hammer these monkeys with. . . .'

The wind was blowing furiously now. At this moment the window-panes rattled under a terrible blast, and the storyteller, cutting short the end of his tale, got up to go and look after his boat.

Another began:

'When I was a master gunner, acting as corporal at arms on the *Zénobie*, at Aden, one day some sellers of ostrich feathers came on board'—(imitating the

accent of the country)—'"Good morning, corporal; we are not thieves, we are honest merchants." I sent them down again in double-quick time. "You, honest merchants," I said, "well, then, bring me first of all a bunch of feathers for a present; we 'll see then whether we can let you on board with your trumpery wares." And I might have made a tidy bit of money over it on my return, if I had not been so stupid!'—(sadly)—'but you must remember that in those days I was very young. . . . And a lady friend of mine, at Toulon, who worked at a milliner's. . . .'

But at this moment one of Yann's little brothers, a future Icelander, with a comely red face and two sparkling eyes, was suddenly taken ill from having drunk too much cider. He had to be carried out hurriedly, the little Laumec, and this cut short the recital of the perfidious way in which this little milliner had secured the ostrich feathers.

The wind howled in the chimney like a soul in torment; every now and then, with terrifying force, it shook the whole house on its stone foundations.

'One would think it was angry, because we have begun to enjoy ourselves,' said the pilot cousin.

'No, it 's the sea that is not pleased,' replied Yann, smiling at Gaud, 'because I had made it a promise of marriage.'

As the evening wore on a strange kind of languor came over both of them; they spoke together in a lower voice, hand holding hand, isolated in the midst of the others' gaiety. Yann, knowing the effect of wine on the senses, drank nothing the whole evening. And he reddened now, this great big boy, when one of his Icelander comrades made a sailor's jesting remark on the night which was before them.

At moments, too, he was sad as he thought

suddenly of Sylvestre. . . . It had been agreed that there should be no dancing on account of Gaud's father and on account of him.

They were now at dessert; presently the songs would begin. But, before that, there were prayers to be said for deceased members of the family; at the marriage feasts this duty of religion is never omitted, and when the elder Gaos was seen to stand up and uncover his white head, there was silence everywhere:

'This,' he said, 'is for Guillaume Gaos, my father.'

And, making the sign of the Cross, he began to pray in Latin:

'Pater noster, qui es in coelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum . . .'

A silence as of a church had now spread even to the room below, to the joyous tables of the little ones. All who were in the house repeated in spirit the same eternal words.

'This is for Yves and Jean Gaos, my brothers, lost in the seas of Iceland. . . . This is for Pierre Gaos, my son, shipwrecked on board the *Zélie*. . . .'

Then, when all the Gaoses had had each his prayer, he turned towards Grand'mère Yvonne:

'This,' he said, 'is for Sylvestre Moan.'

And he recited another *pater noster*. Then Yann wept.

. . . Sed libera nos a malo. Amen.

Afterwards the songs began. Songs learnt in the service, in the forecastle, where there are, as every one knows, many fine singers:

Un noble corps, pas moins, que celui des zouaves,
Mais chez nous les braves
Narguent le destin,
Hurrah! hurrah! vive le vrai marin!

The lines were sung by one of the groomsmen, in a very sentimental manner, which went to the heart; and then the chorus was taken up by other deep, resonant voices.

But the newly-married couple seemed to hear all this from the background of a kind of distance; when they looked at each other their eyes shone with a dimmed brightness, like a shaded lamp; they spoke in a more and more subdued way, hand still holding hand, and Gaud often hung her head, seized gradually, before her master, with a greater and more exquisite fear.

Now the pilot cousin went the round of the table to serve a certain wine of his own; he had brought it with many precautions, caressing the recumbent bottle, which must on no account be shaken, he said.

He told them the history of it: one day when they were fishing they saw a cask floating all alone in the sea; they were not able to get it on board—it was too large: so they stove it in in the sea, filling all the pots and mugs they had. Even so it was impossible to empty it. They had made signs to other pilots, other fishermen: all the sails in sight had assembled around the find.

'And I know more than one who was drunk when we got back to Pors-Even that night.'

Still the wind continued its formidable roar.

Below, the children were dancing merrily. Some of them indeed had been put to bed—the quite little Gaoses, these—but the others were playing the very deuce, led by little Fantec and little Laumec, wanting even to go and dance outside, and every now and then opening the door to the furious blasts which blew out the candles.

The pilot cousin continued the story of the wine;

his share had amounted to forty bottles; he begged them not to say a word about it, on account of the superintendent of the Record Office who might have something to say to him about this undeclared booty.

'But,' he said, 'it was necessary to take great care of these bottles: if one had been able to filter it the wine would have been a most excellent one; for there was no doubt that in it there was much more of the juice of the grape than in all the cellars of the wine merchants of Paimpol.'

Who can tell where it may have grown, this shipwrecked vintage? It was strong, rich in colour, with much admixture of sea-water, and retained the bitter taste of salt. It was, nevertheless, voted very good, and many bottles of it were emptied.

Heads began to turn a little. The sound of the voices became less distinct, and the lads began to kiss the girls.

The songs went on gaily, but nevertheless the guests were not altogether easy in their minds, and the men exchanged glances of anxiety on account of the wild weather which grew steadily worse.

Outside, the noise continued, worse than ever. It became, as it were, a single roar, continuous, swelling, threatening, uttered in unison, with full throat and outstretched neck, by thousands of enraged beasts.

And one heard, too, what sounded like the formidable reports of heavy guns firing in the distance; and that was the sea pounding on the coast of Ploubazlanec. It was true, indeed, that the sea did not seem to be pleased, and Gaud's heart was wrung by this terrifying music, which had come unbidden to their wedding feast.

Towards midnight, during a temporary lull, Yann,

who had risen quietly, made a sign to his wife to come and speak to him.

It was to ask her to come home. . . . She blushed out of modesty, in confusion at having got up. . . . Then she said that it would not be civil to go away so soon, and leave the others.

'No,' replied Yann; 'it was the old man who suggested it. We can go.'

And he led her away.

They escaped unseen.

Outside they found themselves in the cold, in the sinister wind, in the dark, tormented night. They started to run, holding each other's hand. High up on this cliff road they divined without seeing them the distances of the furious sea, from which came all this noise. They ran together, the rain beating into their faces, with bodies bent forward against the blasts, obliged, sometimes, to turn round with hands before their mouths, in order to recover the breath which the wind had taken away.

To begin with he took her by the waist and almost carried her, in order that she might not trail her dress, might not wet her pretty shoes, in the water that streamed over the ground; and, then, he lifted her bodily in his arms, and continued to run more quickly still. No, he had not believed he could love her so much! And to think that she was twenty-three; and he nearly twenty-eight; and that, for the last two years, they might have been married and happy as they were to-night.

At last they reached their home, their poor little damp-floored dwelling, their roof of thatch and moss; and they lit a candle which the wind twice blew out for them.

Old Grand'mère Moan, who had been taken home

before the songs began, was there, lying, as she had lain for the past two hours, in her press-bed, the shutters of which she had closed; they approached respectfully and looked at her through the open-work of her door in order to wish her good night if by chance she was not yet asleep. But they saw that her venerable face remained motionless and that her eyes were closed; she was asleep, or else pretending to be so, so as not to disturb them.

And they felt then that they were alone together.

They were both trembling, as they held each other's hands. He bent towards her to kiss her lips; but Gaud turned her lips away in ignorance of this form of kissing, and, as chastely as on the night of their betrothal, pressed them against Yann's cheek, which was cold as ice from the wind.

Very poor, very low, was their little cottage, and it was very cold there. Ah, if Gaud had remained rich, as in the olden days, what joy she would have had in arranging a pretty room, very different from this one with its floor of bare earth. . . . She was scarcely used yet to these walls of rough granite, to these primitive surroundings; but her Yann was there with her; and by his presence everything was changed, transfigured, and she saw only him. . . .

Now their lips had met, and Gaud had not turned hers away. Still standing, clasped in each other's arms, they remained there silent, in the ecstasy of a kiss which did not end. Their panting breaths mingled and they both trembled violently, as in a burning fever. They seemed not to have strength to break their embrace, and were conscious of nothing, wanted nothing, but this long kiss.

She freed herself at last, suddenly troubled:

'No, Yann! . . . Grand'mère Yvonne might see us!'

But he, smiling, sought the lips of his wife again, and took them quickly between his own, like a thirsty man from whom one has taken a cup of cool water.

The movement they had made had broken the spell of their exquisite hesitation. Yann who, in his first moments, had been ready to go down on his knees as before the Holy Virgin, felt himself seized with a kind of savagery; he looked furtively in the direction of the old press-beds, annoyed to be so near this old grandmother, seeking some sure means by which they might not be seen; still without letting go her exquisite lips, he stretched out his arm behind him, and with the back of his hand extinguished the light as the wind had done.

Then, suddenly, he seized her in his arms: in his manner of holding her, his mouth still pressed against hers, he was like a wild beast which had fixed its teeth in its prey. She abandoned her body, her soul, to this rape which was imperious and beyond possible resistance, even while it remained sweet as a long enveloping caress; he carried her in the darkness towards the pretty white bed which was to be their nuptial couch.

Around them for their bridal night the same invisible orchestra played continuously.

Hoohoo! Hoohoo! Sometimes the wind gave full rein to its cavernous noise with a trembling of rage; sometimes it repeated its menace more softly to the ear, as in a refinement of malice, with little, long-drawn-out sounds, taking on the piping voice of a sea-gull.

And the great tomb of the mariners was quite near, restless, devouring, hammering the cliffs with

its heavy blows. One night—sooner or later—it would be his lot to be caught in it, to struggle in it, amid the frenzy of dark and icy things—they knew it.

What did it matter! For the moment they were on shore, sheltered from all this useless and baffled fury. And, in the poor and gloomy lodging about which the wind made riot, they gave themselves to one another, heedless of everything, even of death, enraptured, exquisitely ensnared by the eternal magic of love.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY were husband and wife for six days.

At this time of departure the things of Iceland occupied everybody. The labouring women were busy loading salt for the brine in the store-rooms of the ships: the men were arranging the rigging, and, at Yann's home, the mother and the sisters were occupied from morning until night in the preparation of the sou'-westers, the oilskins, the whole outfit for the voyage. The weather was overcast and the sea, which felt the approach of the equinox, was restless and agitated.

Gaud submitted to these preparations with anguish, counting the fleeting hours of the day, waiting for the evening when, the day's work done, she had her Yann to herself.

Would he depart thus in years to come? She hoped indeed that she might be able to retain him, but she did not dare, at the present time, to speak to him on the subject. . . . Yet he loved her well; with his mistresses of old, he had never known a love like it. It was something new and different; it was a tenderness so trusting and so fresh, that the same kisses, the same embraces, with her were of another order, and each night their twin raptures of love were increased one by the other, and never knew, when the morning came, a sense of satiety.

What surprised and charmed her was to find him so kind and childlike, this Yann whom she had seen sometimes at Paimpol so off-hand and disdainful

with amorous misses. With her, on the contrary, he showed an unvarying courtesy which seemed a thing natural to him, and she adored the ready smile he had for her whenever their eyes met. For, among these simple folk, there is a consciousness of, an innate respect for, the majesty of the wife; a very abysm separates her from the mistress, a thing of pleasure, to whom, in a smile of disdain, one seems to cast back the kisses of the night. Gaud was his wife, and, during the day, he gave no thought to their caresses, which seemed not to count, so much had they two become one flesh, one flesh for ever.

. . . Uneasy, to be sure, she was in her happiness, which seemed to her a thing that passed all hope, a thing unstable as dreams. . . .

Was it possible that with Yann this love should endure? . . . Sometimes she remembered his mistresses, his wildness, his adventures, and then she was afraid; would he retain for her always this infinite tenderness, this gentle respect? . . .

Truly, six days of marriage, for a love like theirs, was nothing; a mere little feverish advance on account of the period of their existence—which they would share for so long together! They had scarcely had time to speak to each other, to see each other, to realize that they belonged to each other. And all their prospects of life together, of tranquil joy, of making a home, had perforce been postponed until his return. . . .

Oh, in future years she must prevent him at all costs from going to Iceland! . . . But how was she to set about it? And how would they manage to live then, seeing they were both so poor? And then he was so fond of his fisherman's calling. . . .

She would try, nevertheless, on future occasions,

to hold him back; she would bend her whole will to it, all her intelligence, all her heart. To be the wife of an Icelander, to see the spring approach with sadness, to pass every summer in grievous anxiety; no, now that she worshipped him beyond anything she had ever imagined, she was seized with dismay at the thought of these years to come. . . .

They had one spring day together, a single one. It was the day before the fishing fleet sailed; the boats were all in readiness, and Yann spent the whole day with her. They rambled arm in arm along the lanes, as lovers do, very close to each other and talking of a thousand things. The good people smiled as they saw them pass.

'It 's Gaud, with big Yann of Pors-Even. They were married the other day.'

A real day of spring, this last day; it was noticeable and strange to see suddenly this great calm and no longer a cloud in this usually stormy sky. The wind had completely dropped. The sea had become very kindly. It was everywhere of a pale blue colour, and remained tranquil. The sun shone with a white brilliance, and the rugged Breton country was impregnated with this light as with a thing fine and rare. It seemed to gladden and revive, even in its farthest distances. The air had taken on a delightful warmth, foretasting of summer, and one would have said that the weather was set fair for ever, that there could be no more gloomy days, no more tempests. The capes, the bays, over which no longer passed the changing shadows of the clouds, were revealed in the sunlight in their broad immutable lines; they, too, seemed to be resting, in a peacefulness which should never have an end. . . . All this as if to render more tranquil and more eternal their holiday of love; and,

already even, there were flowers, the early spring flowers, primroses in the ditches, and violets, frail and without perfume.

When Gaud asked:

'How long will you love me, Yann?'

He replied, astonished, looking straight into her face, with his handsome, frank eyes:

'Why, Gaud, for ever. . . .'

And these words, said very simply by his unsophisticated lips, seemed to have their true meaning of eternity.

She leaned on his arm. In the enchantment of her dream come true she pressed against him, solicitous still—feeling that he was a fugitive thing like some great sea bird . . . that to-morrow would be soaring over the wide ocean! . . . And this first time it was too late, she could do nothing to prevent his going. . . .

From these cliff paths where they were walking they commanded the whole of this sea-bound country, which seemed to be treeless, carpeted with short furze and sown with stones. The fishermen's houses stood here and there on rocky ground with their old granite walls, their roofs of thatch, very high and hunch-backed, and made green with a new growth of moss; and in the far distance the sea, like a great diaphanous vision, described its immense and eternal circle, which seemed to embrace everything.

She took it into her head to tell him of the surprising and marvellous things of Paris, where she used to live; but he, full of scorn, showed little or no interest in them.

'So far from the coast,' he said, 'so far inland . . . it must be very unhealthy. So many houses, so many people. . . . There must be much disease in

these cities; no, I don't want to live there, that's certain.'

And she smiled, surprised to find what a simple child was this great fellow at her side.

Now and then they descended into folds of the ground where real trees were growing, looking as if they were in hiding from the wind of the sea. There the view was shut out; on the ground, heaps of dead leaves and a cold dampness; the sunken lane, bordered with green furze, became gloomy under the branches, and presently squeezed itself between the walls of some dark and lonely hamlet, crumbling from old age, which slumbered in the valley; and there was always a crucifix raised high before them, among the dead branches, with its large wooden Christ eaten away like a corpse, grimacing in endless suffering.

Further on the lane ascended, and once more they dominated the immense horizon. They came back into the vivifying air of the high ground and the sea.

He, in turn, told her of Iceland, of the pale and nightless summers, of the oblique sun which never set. Gaud could not understand this and asked him to explain.

'The sun goes round, goes round,' he said, moving his outstretched arm along the distant circle of the blue waters. 'It stays low always, because, you see, it has not strength to climb; at midnight it dips its rim slightly in the sea, but quickly it rises again and continues its circular promenade. Sometimes the moon also appears at the opposite side of the sky; then they work together, each on its own side, and it is not easy to distinguish one from the other, for they are very much alike in that country.'

To see the sun at midnight! . . .

How far away it must be, this Iceland. And the

fiords? Gaud had read this word inscribed many times amid the names of the dead in the chapel of the shipwrecked; it seemed to her to designate a sinister thing.

'The fiords,' replied Yann; 'they are large bays, such as this bay of Paimpol, for example, only they have around them mountains so high, so high that you can never see the tops, on account of the clouds which rest on them. A mournful country, Gaud, I can tell you. Rocks, rocks, nothing but rocks, and the people of the island don't know what trees are. In the middle of August, when our fishing is over, it is high time to leave, for then the nights begin, and lengthen very quickly; the sun sinks below the earth and cannot raise itself again, and the night lasts then all the winter.'

'And then,' he went on, 'there is also a little cemetery on the coast, in a fiord, just as with us, for those of the Paimpol district who die during the fishing season, or who are lost at sea; it is sanctified ground, even as it is at Pors-Even, and the deceased have wooden crosses, just as here, with their names written on them. The two Goazdious, of Ploubazlanec, are there, and also Guillaume Moan, the grandfather of Sylvestre.'

And she imagined she saw it, this little cemetery, at the foot of a desolate headland, under the pale pink light of these days that had never an end. And then she thought of the dead under the ice, under the dark shroud of these nights that are as long as the winter.

'And do you fish all the time . . . all the time?' she asked, 'without ever resting?'

'All the time. Of course we have also to look after the boat, for the sea is not always smooth out there.

Jove! one is tired at night; one has an appetite for supper and, sometimes, one is ravenous.'

'And you never grow weary?'

'Never!' he said, with an air of conviction which hurt her; 'on board, at sea, the time never seems long to me, never!'

And she hung her head, feeling sadder, vanquished by the sea.

PART V

CHAPTER I

. . . At the end of this day of spring which they had had together the falling night brought back a sensation of winter, and they returned to dine before their blazing brushwood fire.

Their last repast together! . . . But they had still a whole night in which to sleep in each other's arms, and this respite prevented them from being sad already.

After dinner, when they were outside once more on the road to Pors-Even, they had again a soft impression of spring; the air was calm, almost warm, and a remnant of twilight trailed lingeringly over the countryside.

They went to pay a farewell visit to Yann's parents, and returned early to go to bed, for it was in their minds to rise at daybreak.

CHAPTER II

THE quay at Paimpol, on the following morning, was full of people. The departure of the Icelanders had begun two days before and, at every tide, a new group put to sea. On this morning fifteen boats were leaving with the *Léopoldine*, and the wives of the sailors, or the mothers, were all present to see them off. Gaud wondered to find herself mingled with them, become, she too, the wife of an Icelander, and brought thither by the same fatal cause. Her destiny had unfolded so quickly in these last few days that she had scarcely had time to realize what was happening; slipping down an irresistibly steep slope she had arrived at this pass, which was inexorable, and which she must needs suffer, even as the others were doing, those who were used to it.

She had never assisted intimately at these scenes, at these farewells. It was all new and strange to her. Among these women there was none like her and she felt herself isolated, different, and the refinement of her prosperous days, which persisted in spite of all, placed her apart.

The weather had continued fine for this day of separation; but off shore a heavy swell coming from the west was a herald of storm, and in the distance you could see the sea, which was waiting for these people, breaking white.

. . . Around Gaud there were others who, like her, were pretty and very pathetic with their tear-filled eyes; there were some also who were thoughtless,

who were laughing, who had no heart or who, for the moment, had no lover. Old women, feeling the shadow of death upon them, wept as they said good-bye to their sons; lovers embraced with long kisses, lips on lips; and drunken sailors sang to keep themselves in cheer, while others went on board with a thoughtful air, departing as to a calvary.

And brutal things happened, too; unfortunate fellows who had signed their engagement unwittingly, one day in a tavern, and who were being embarked now by force; their own wives helped the gendarmes to drive them. Others, again, whose resistance was feared on account of their great strength, had been made drunk by way of precaution; they were carried on board on stretchers, and taken down like dead men into the ship's hold.

Gaud was horrified to see them pass: with what sort of companions was her Yann going to live? And what was the terrible nature of this Iceland calling, that it should announce itself in this manner and inspire in men this manifest dread? . . .

There were, however, some of these sailors who smiled, who, no doubt, like Yann, loved the life at sea and the fishing. These were the best of them; they had a proud and handsome mien; if they were unmarried they went away care-free, throwing a last glance at the girls; if they were married they embraced their wives or their little ones with a tender sadness, and the fond hope that they would return enriched. Gaud felt a little reassured when she saw that they were all of this type on board the *Léopoldine*, which had, in fact, a picked crew.

The boats went off, two by two, four by four, pulled out of the harbour by tugs. And as soon as they began to move, the sailors, uncovering their heads,

intoned at the top of their voices the hymn of the Virgin, *Hail, Star of the Seal* On the quay the hands of the women were waved in the air for a last adieu, and tears rolled down on the muslin of the coifs.

As soon as the *Léopoldine* had left Gaud made her way as fast as she could to the house of the Gaoses. It was an hour and a half's walk, along the coast, by the familiar footpaths of Ploubazlanec, before she arrived at last, at the kind of land's end where her new family dwelt.

The *Léopoldine* was going to anchor in the open roadstead before Pors-Even, and would not finally set sail until the evening; and it was at Pors-Even, therefore, that they had arranged a last rendezvous. And, surely enough, he came in the ship's gig; he came for three hours to bid her a last good-bye.

On shore, where the swell could no longer be seen, there was still the same fine spring weather, the same tranquil sky. They went out for a short walk, arm in arm. It recalled their ramble of the previous day, only this time the night would not come to reunite them. They walked without purpose, in the direction of Paimpol, and presently found themselves near their home, led thither unconsciously; once again, therefore, for a last time, they entered the cottage of the Moans, where old Grand'mère Yvonne was surprised to see them reappear together.

Yann had many recommendations to make to Gaud about a number of little things he was leaving in their cupboard; especially about his fine wedding-clothes: he wanted them unfolded from time to time and put in the sun. On board the warships sailors learn these little ways of carefulness. And Gaud

smiled to see him giving himself this air of knowledge; he might be quite sure that everything that belonged to him would be lovingly preserved and cared for.

In any case, these preoccupations were secondary for them; they talked of them for talking's sake, and in order to beguile themselves. . . .

Yann told her that on the *Léopoldine* they had just drawn lots for their fishing posts, and that he had been lucky enough to secure one of the best. She asked him to explain what this meant, knowing scarcely anything of the things of Iceland.

'It 's like this, Gaud,' he said, 'on the gunwale of our boats there are openings made at certain places; we call them Mecca-holes: and in them we fix the little pulleys over which the lines are passed. And before we leave we play for these holes with dice or else with numbers shaken up in the shipboy's bonnet. Each of us gets one, and during the whole of the subsequent voyage he has no right to plant his line anywhere else; there is no changing. Well, my post is in the stern of the boat, which is, as you should know, the place where most fish are caught; and, besides, it is close to the main shrouds to which one can always attach a piece of canvas, an oilskin, in short a little shelter of some sort, to protect the face against the snow and the hail. That is some comfort, you know; your skin does not get so burnt, during the dark heavy squalls; and the eyes can see clear far longer.'

They were talking low, low, as if fearful of scaring the moments that remained to them; of making the time fly faster. Their conversation had the peculiar character of everything that draws inexorably to a close; the most insignificant little things they said seemed to become on this day mysterious and supreme.

In the last minute of the departure Yann took his

wife in his arms, and they clung to each other without saying any further word, in a long silent embrace.

He embarked; the grey sails were unfurled and spread themselves to a light wind which rose in the west. He, whom she recognized still, waved his bonnet in the time-honoured manner. And she watched him for long, watched her Yann, in silhouette against the sea, slowly drawing away. It was still he, that little human figure standing there, black against the ashy-blue of the waters—and already indistinct, lost in that distance in which the eyes, if they seek to pierce it, become dim and cease to see. . . .

And as the *Léopoldine* drew away Gaud, as if drawn by a magnet, followed on foot along the cliffs.

She had soon to stop, however, for the land came to an end; she sat down then at the foot of a last tall cross, which stands there amid the furze and the rocks. And as it was an elevated point, the sea seen from there seemed in the distance to slope upwards, so that the *Léopoldine*, as it drew away, appeared to rise gradually, very small, on the slope of an immense circle. The sea had long slow undulations—like the last counterstrokes of some tumult which had raged elsewhere, beyond the horizon; but, in the deep field of vision where Yann was still, all remained peaceful.

Gaud continued to watch, striving to fix in her memory the physiognomy of this boat, the silhouette of its canvas and hull, in order that she might recognize it from afar, when it returned, might look out for it in this same place.

Enormous uprollings of water continued to come in from the west, regularly one after the other, without ceasing, without respite, renewing their futile effort, breaking on the same rocks, sweeping over the same

places to inundate the same strands. And, in the end, it seemed a strange thing, this weighty movement of the waters with this calmness of air and sky; it was as if the bed of the sea, over-filled, was striving to find an outlet and invade the shore.

Meanwhile, the *Léopoldine* became smaller and smaller, distant, lost. No doubt currents were bearing her away, for she was moving rapidly, although the wind, this evening, was light. Become a little grey spot, almost a point, she would soon reach the extreme edge of the circle of visible things, and enter the infinities beyond, where darkness was beginning to reign.

At seven o'clock, when the night had fallen and the boat had disappeared, Gaud returned to her home, brave enough in the main, despite the tears which still filled her eyes. How different it would have been, after all, and how much more empty and gloomy her life would have seemed if he had departed once more as in the two last years, without even a good-bye! Now everything was changed, sweetened; this Yann so much belonged to her, she felt herself so much beloved notwithstanding this departure, that, in returning all alone to her dwelling, she had at least the consolation and the delicious expectancy of that *au revoir* which they had said to each other for the autumn. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE summer passed, melancholy, warm, tranquil ——she waiting for the first yellowing of the leaves, the first gatherings of the swallows, the sprouting of the chrysanthemums.

She had written to him many times, by the Reikiavik packet and by the *Chasers*; but she was not sure that these letters had reached him.

At the end of July she received one from him. He informed her that he was in good health on the 10th of that month, that the prospects for the fishing season were excellent, and that he had already some fifteen hundred fish to his credit. From beginning to end it was written in the simple style and copied from the uniform model of all the letters from these Icelanders to their family. Men brought up as Yann was are absolutely ignorant of how to write of the things they think and feel and dream. Better educated than he, she was able to make allowance for that and to read between the lines the deep tenderness which was not expressed. On many occasions in the course of these four pages he addressed her by the name of wife, as if he took pleasure in repeating it, and, moreover, the address itself: *To Madame Marguerite Gaos, Maison Moan, Ploubazlanec,* was a thing she read over and over again with happiness. She had yet had so little time to be called Madame Marguerite Gaos! . . .

CHAPTER IV

SHE worked hard during these summer months. The ladies of Paimpol, who at first were distrustful of her talent as an improvised worker, saying that her hands were too soft and white, had discovered, on the contrary, that she excelled in making dresses which set off their figures to advantage; so that she had become almost a dressmaker of renown.

What she earned went to embellish the home—for his return. The wardrobe, the old press-beds, were repaired, waxed, and their ironwork shone; she had had the window looking on the sea glazed and had hung it with curtains; bought a new quilt for the winter, a table, and some chairs.

All this, without touching the money which her Yann had left with her on departing, which she kept intact in a little Chinese box, to show him on his arrival.

During the summer evenings, in the fading light, sitting in front of the door with Grand'mère Yvonne, whose head and ideas were sensibly better during the warm weather, she knitted for Yann a handsome fisherman's jersey of blue wool; on the borders of the collar and the cuffs there were marvels of complicated and open-work stitches; Grand'mère Yvonne who, in her day, had been a skilful knitter had recalled little by little the processes of her youth, and had taught them to her. And it was a work which had taken a great deal of wool, for it needed a big jersey for Yann.

And presently, especially in the evening, she began

to be aware of the shortening of the days; certain plants, which had given all their growth in July, had already taken on a yellow, withered look, and the violet scabious, flowering again on the roadside, were smaller, and longer in the stalk; and finally the last days of August came and the first of the Iceland boats appeared one evening, off the headland of Pors-Even. The festival of the return had begun.

A crowd gathered on the cliff to welcome it—which was it?

It was the *Samuel-Azénide*—always the first to return.

'Depend upon it,' said Yann's old father, 'the *Léopoldine* will not be long now; out there, I know it well, when one begins to leave, the others are not long in following.'

CHAPTER V

THEY were coming back, the Icelanders. Two the second day, four the day after, and twelve in the following week. And, in the countryside, happiness came back with them; there was rejoicing among the wives, among the mothers; rejoicing also in the taverns where the fair damsels of Paimpol filled the glasses of the fishermen.

The *Léopoldine* remained one of the tardy ones; there were still ten missing. She could not be much longer, and Gaud, reckoning that in another week at the outside, which she allowed to avoid disappointment, Yann would be home again—Gaud was in a fever of eager expectancy, keeping the house in apple-pie order, very clean and very neat, for his reception. All arranged as it was there was nothing left to do, and, in any case, she was beginning to be too impatient to give much thought to anything.

Three more of the stragglers arrived, and then five. There were now only two missing.

'Well,' they said to her, laughing, 'this year it is the *Léopoldine* or the *Marie-Jeanne* that will bring up the rear of the return.'

And Gaud laughed also, very animated and very pretty, in the joy of her expectancy.

CHAPTER VI

MEANWHILE, the days went by.

She continued to dress herself up, to assume a cheerful air, to go down to the harbour to talk with the others. She said it was quite natural, this delay. Did it not happen every year? And then they were such good sailors, and the boats were two such good boats!

Afterwards, when she was back in her home, there came to her in the evening the first little tremors of fear, of anguish.

Was it really possible that she should begin to fear so soon? Was there any reason for it?

And she became alarmed, she was really afraid. . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE tenth of September! . . . How the days sped!

One morning when there was already a cold mist over the land, a real autumn morning, the rising sun found her sitting very early beneath the porch of the chapel of the shipwrecked, in the place where the bereaved go to pray—sitting with fixed eyes and temples compressed as in a ring of iron.

Two days before, these melancholy morning mists had begun, and on this morning Gaud had awakened with an uneasiness made more poignant by this impression of winter. . . . What was there about this day, this hour, this minute, that made it different from those that had gone before? . . . One often sees boats delayed a fortnight, even a month.

Yet there must, no doubt, have been something special about this morning, since she had come for the first time to sit under this chapel porch, and to read again the names of young men dead.

In memory of
GAOS, YVON, lost at sea,
In the neighbourhood of Norden-Fiord. . . .

. . . . .

With what seemed like a great shudder a gust of wind rose from the sea, and, at the same time, came the sound of something falling, like rain, on the vault above; dead leaves! . . . A flight of them entered the porch; the old beruffled trees of the chapel yard

were defoliating, shaken by the ocean wind. Winter was at hand!

. . . lost at sea,
In the neighbourhood of Norden-Fiord,
in the hurricane of the 4th and 5th of August 1880.

. . . . .

She read mechanically, and, through the ogive of the door, her eyes sought the distant sea; this morning it was very indistinct, under the grey mist, and a suspended shag trailed over the distance like an immense curtain of mourning.

Another gust; more dead leaves which entered in a mad dance. A stronger gust, as if this west wind, which had formerly sown these dead in the sea, wanted still to torment even these inscriptions which recalled their names to the living.

Gaud gazed, with an involuntary persistence, at an empty place on the wall, which seemed to be waiting with a grim obsession; she was pursued by the idea of a new plaque, which it would be necessary perhaps to place there soon, with another name which, even in spirit, she did not dare to read in such a place.

She was cold, and remained sitting on the granite bench, her head leaning back against the wall.

. . . Lost in the neighbourhood of Norden-Fiord,
in the hurricane of the 4th and 5th of August.

Aged 23 years.

May he rest in peace!

Iceland appeared to her, with its little cemetery—distant Iceland, illumined from below by the midnight sun. . . . And, suddenly, always in this same empty space on the wall which seemed to be waiting

—she had, with a horrible clearness, the vision of this new plaque of which she was thinking: a freshly-painted plaque, a skull and crossbones and in the middle, amid flourishes, a name, the adored name, 'Yann Gaos'! And she rose abruptly to her feet, and a hoarse cry came from her throat, as if she had gone mad. . . .

Outside, the grey mist of the morning still hung over the land; and the dead leaves still continued to enter in a whirlwind dance.

Footsteps in the lane! . . . Someone was coming?

Then she rose and stood erect; with a deft touch adjusted her coif, composed her features. The footsteps drew near; whoever it was was going to enter. Quickly she assumed an air of being there by chance, unwilling yet, on any account, to assume the guise of a wife of one lost at sea.

As it happened it was Fante Floury, the wife of the mate in the *Léopoldine*. She understood at once what Gaud was doing there; pretence was useless with her. And at first they remained silent, looking at each other, the two women, their fears augmented, angry at meeting thus in the same sentiment of terror, moved almost to a feeling of hate.

'All those from Tréguier and Saint-Brieuc got back a week ago,' Fante said at last, pitilessly, in a harsh and querulous tone.

She was carrying a candle to make a vow.

Ah! Yes. . . . A vow. . . . Gaud had been unwilling, so far, to think of this recourse of those desolate. But she entered the chapel behind Fante, without speaking, and they knelt down side by side like two sisters.

And ardently they prayed, with all their soul, to the Virgin Star-of-the-Sea. And, presently, there

was no sound but the sound of sobbing, and their urgent tears began to fall to the ground. . . .

They got up more reconciled, more confident. Fante assisted Gaud who staggered and, taking her in her arms, kissed her.

Having dried their tears, smoothed their hair, brushed the saltpetre and dust of the flagstones from their skirts where they had knelt on them, they went their different ways without saying anything more to each other.

CHAPTER VIII

THIS latter part of September resembled another summer, except that it was a little melancholy. The weather indeed was so fine this year, that had it not been for the dead leaves which fell in a sad rain on the roads, one might have thought it was the merry month of June. The husbands, the fiancés, the lovers had returned, and everywhere there was the joy of a second springtime of love. . . .

One day, at last, one of the two tardy Iceland boats was signalled in the offing. Which? . . .

Quickly the groups of women gathered, silent, anxious, on the cliffs.

Gaud, trembling and pale, was there by the side of the father of her Yann.

'I do believe,' said the old fisherman, 'I do believe it 's them! A red sheer-rail, a rolled topsail, that looks very like them; what do you say, Gaud, my girl?'

'And yet no,' he continued, with sudden discouragement; 'no, we are disappointed again, the boom is not like and they have a mizzen-sail. Well, well, not them this time, it 's the *Marie-Jeanne*. But it 's all right, my girl, they 'll not be long now.'

And day followed day; and night came in its turn with an inexorable tranquillity.

She continued to wear her best dress, a little recklessly, impelled still by the fear of resembling the wife of one shipwrecked, getting angry when others assumed towards her an air of compassion and

mystery, turning away her eyes so as not to meet these glances which chilled her.

She had now made it a habit to go in the morning to the furthermost point of the land, along the high cliffs of Pors-Even, passing behind the paternal home of Yann, so as not to be seen by his mother or his little sisters. She went alone to the extreme edge of this district of Ploubazlanec, which stretches out like a reindeer's horn into the Channel, and sat there all day long at the foot of a solitary cross which dominates the immense distances of the water. . . .

These granite crosses rise up everywhere on the advanced cliffs of this mariners' land, as if beseeching mercy; as if seeking to appease the great, moving, mysterious thing, which lures men and does not give them back, keeping by preference the most valiant, the most beautiful.

Around this cross of Pors-Even there were plains eternally green, carpeted with short furze. And, at this height, the sea air was very pure, filled with the delicious perfumes of September, and having but a slight odour of seaweed.

One could see, outlined into the far distance, one beyond the other, all the indentations of the coast; the land of Brittany ended in denticulated points which stretched out into the tranquil emptiness of the waters.

In the foreground rocks riddled its surface; but beyond, nothing disturbed its mirror-like polish; it gave out a scarcely perceptible caressing noise, soft and immense, which ascended from the depth of all the bays. And the distances were so calm, the depths so still! The great blue emptiness, the tomb of the Gaoses, preserved its impenetrable mystery, while the breezes, light as zephyrs, carried with them the

perfume of the broom which had flowered again in the last sunshine of autumn.

At certain regular hours the sea receded and large patches appeared as if the Channel were being slowly emptied; afterwards, with the same slowness, the waters rose, continuing their eternal coming and going, without any thought of the dead.

And Gaud, sitting at the foot of her cross, remained there, in the midst of these tranquillities, watching, watching, until darkness fell, until she could see no more.

CHAPTER IX

SEPTEMBER had come to an end. She no longer took any nourishment, she no longer slept.

She remained now within her home, sitting dejectedly, her hands in her lap, her head thrown back and supported against the wall behind. What was the good of getting up, what was the good of lying down? She threw herself on her bed without undressing when she became too utterly exhausted. Otherwise she remained there, sitting always, benumbed; her teeth chattered with the cold, in her immobility; she still had that impression of a ring of iron compressing her temples. She felt that her cheeks were drooping, her mouth was dry, with a taste of fever, and from time to time she uttered a hoarse groan, repeated spasmodically and continuing for long, while her head beat against the granite of the wall.

And at times she called him by name, very tenderly, in a low voice, as if he had been near her, and murmured to him words of love.

It happened sometimes that she thought of other things than he, of small, insignificant things. She beguiled herself, for example, with watching the shadow of the faïence Virgin and of the holy water font lengthen slowly, in proportion as the light failed, on the high woodwork of her bed. And then her anguish would begin anew, more horrible, and she cried out once more, her head beating against the wall.

And all the hours of the day passed, one after another, and all the hours of the evening, and all those

of the night, and all those of the morning. When she reckoned up how long it was since he should have returned, her terror increased; she wished to know neither the dates nor the names of the days.

Ordinarily there comes news of the shipwrecks of Iceland; those who return have seen the drama from a distance; or perhaps some wreckage has been found, or a body; there is some indication from which the truth may be surmised. But of the *Léopoldine* there was nothing; nothing had been seen, nothing was known. The crew of the *Marie-Jeanne*, the last who had seen her, on the 2nd of August, said that she must have gone to fish farther north; after that all was impenetrable mystery.

To wait and wait, and to know nothing. When would the hour come in which she would finally have to give up hope? She did not know even this, but now she was eager almost that it should be soon.

Oh, if he was dead, would not someone, out of pity, tell her so! . . .

Oh, if she might but see him as he was now—him or what remained of him! . . . If only the Virgin in answer to her prayers, or some other power, would do her the favour, by a kind of second sight, of letting her see her Yann!—see him living, manœuvring to enter the harbour—or else his body rolled about the sea . . . so that she might be sure, so that she might know!

Sometimes the notion suddenly came to her that a sail had appeared, on the edge of the horizon: the *Léopoldine*, approaching, hastening to port! And she made a first unreflecting movement to get up, to run and scan the circle of the waters, to see if it were true. . . .

But she sank back again, hopeless. Alas! Where was she now, this *Léopoldine*? Where could she be? Far away, no doubt, far away, in that awful distance of Iceland, abandoned, crumbling, lost. . . .

And at the end came this haunting vision, always the same: a wreck, broken open and empty; rocked in a silent sea of rosy grey; rocked slowly, noiselessly, with an extreme gentleness, in irony, amid a great calm of dead waters.

CHAPTER X

Two o'clock in the morning.

It was at night especially that she was most attentive to all the footsteps that approached; at the least stir, at the least unaccustomed sound her temples beat violently.

Two o'clock in the morning. On this night, as on others, her hands joined, her eyes open in the darkness, she was listening to the wind making its eternal noise over the barren plain.

A man's footsteps suddenly, hurrying footsteps in the road! At such an hour who could be passing? She got up, stirred to the depths of her being, her heart ceasing to beat. . . .

The sounds stopped before the door; someone was coming up the little stone steps. . . .

Yann! Oh! Heaven be praised. Yann! There came a knock. Was it possible it should be someone else? She was standing, her feet bare; she who had been so weak for so many days had leapt up nimbly like a cat, her arms open to enfold the loved one. The *Léopoldine,* no doubt, had arrived in the night and anchored opposite in the bay of Pors-Even—and her Yann had hastened to her; she had arranged all this in her head with the swiftness of lightning. And now she lacerated her fingers on the nails of the door in her impatience to draw back the bolt which was stiff. . . .

Ah! And then she recoiled slowly, collapsing, her

head falling on her breast. Her beautiful, mad-brained dream was over. It was only Fantec, their neighbour. And as soon as she realized that it was only he, that nothing of her Yann had passed in the air, she felt herself sinking by degrees into her same dark gulf, even to the very bottom of her same hideous despair.

He begged her pardon, poor Fantec: his wife, as they knew, was very ill, and now their child was choking in his cradle, seized with some affection of the throat; and so he had come to ask for assistance, while he went straightaway to fetch the doctor from Paimpol. . . .

What had all that to do with her? Become wild in her grief, she had no longer anything to give to the sufferings of others. Sunk down on a bench, she remained before him with staring eyes, like one dead, without answering him, not listening to him, not even looking at him. What had they to do with her, the things this man was talking about?

He understood then . . . he realized why the door had been opened to him so quickly, and he was sorry for the suffering he had been the means of causing.

He stuttered out an apology.

It was true that he ought not to have disturbed her . . . her! . . .

'Me!' replied Gaud quickly, 'and why not *me*, Fantec?'

Life came back to her suddenly, for she did not want yet to be regarded by others as one bereaved, emphatically she did not want that. And then in her turn she was sorry for him; she dressed herself in order to follow him, and found strength to go and look after his child.

When she returned to throw herself on her bed, sleep came to her for a brief time so great was her weariness.

But that moment of immense joy had left an imprint in her mind which, in spite of all, was persistent. She woke up presently with a shock, and half rose, with a memory of something. . . . There had been some news concerning Yann. . . . Amid the confusion of ideas which came to her she tried to remember, she tried to remember what it was. . . .

'Oh, nothing, alas! . . . Nothing but Fantec.'

And, a second time, she sank to the deep depths of her same abysm. No, in reality, nothing was changed in her mournful, hopeless waiting.

Nevertheless, the fact of having felt that he was so near made it seem as if something emanated from him was hovering about her; it was what is called in Brittany an omen; and she listened more attentively to the footsteps outside, having a presentiment that someone perhaps might enter who would speak of him.

And, in fact, when day came, Yann's father entered. He took off his bonnet, brushed back his handsome white hair, which curled like that of his son, and sat down near Gaud's bed.

He, too, was sore at heart, for his Yann, his handsome Yann, was his eldest, his best-beloved, his glory. But he did not despair, really he did not, he did not despair yet. He began to reassure Gaud very gently; first of all the last arrivals from Iceland had all spoken of the very dense fog which might well have delayed the boat: and secondly, and he laid much stress on this, an idea had come to him: they might have called at the Faroë Islands, which are distant islands on the way, and letters from there take a long time to come; that had happened to him, some forty years ago, and his poor dead mother had even had masses said for

his soul. . . . A fine boat like the *Léopoldine*, with such fine sailors as they all were on board . . .

Old Yvonne hovered round them, shaking her head; the distress of her adopted granddaughter had restored to her something of strength and intelligence. She busied herself about the room, looking from time to time at the little faded portrait of her Sylvestre, hanging on the granite of the wall with his sailor's anchors and his memorial crown of black beads. No, since the calling of the sea had bereft her of her own grandson, she believed no longer in the return of sailors; if she prayed to the Virgin it was out of fear —a lip service rendered by her poor withered old lips; in her heart there was a deep rancour.

But Gaud listened greedily to these consoling things, her large, dark-ringed eyes gazed with a deep tenderness at this old man who was so like her beloved one; merely to have him there was a protection against death, and she felt reassured, nearer to her Yann. Her tears fell, silent and comforting, and she said once more to herself her ardent prayers to the Virgin Star-of-the-Sea.

They had put in to these islands, for repairs, perhaps; it was a thing quite possible. She got up, smoothed her hair, dressed herself, as if he might yet return. No doubt all was not lost, since he, his father, did not despair. And, for some days still, she continued to wait.

It was autumn now, the late autumn, and the night fell mournfully at an early hour, making all dark in the old cottage, all dark also in the old Breton country-side round.

The very days seemed to be only twilights; immense clouds, passing slowly, would suddenly bring obscurity at midday. The wind moaned constantly, with a

noise like the distant sound of a great church organ, playing an angry and disconsolate air; and there were times when it seemed to come close to the door, roaring there like a wild beast.

She had become very pale, and carried herself in a dejected way, as if age had already brushed her with its bald wing. Very frequently she went to Yann's clothes, unfolding and refolding them like a mad-woman—especially one of his blue woollen jerseys which had preserved the shape of his body; when it was laid gently on the table, it outlined of itself, as if automatically, the shape of his shoulders and his chest; so that in the end she had placed it alone, on a shelf of their wardrobe, unwilling to disturb it any more lest it should lose the loved impress.

Every evening now a cold mist rose from the ground; and she looked out from her window on the mournful plain, where here and there little tails of white smoke commenced to issue from the cottages of her neighbours; everywhere the men had come home, wandering birds brought back by the cold. And before many of these fires the evenings must have been very happy; for the renewal of love had begun with the winter in this country of the Icelanders. . . .

Clinging to the idea of the call at those remote islands, hoping still with a kind of hope, she waited, waited. . . .

* * * * *

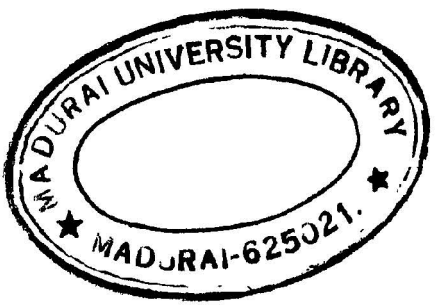
CHAPTER XI

He never returned.

One night in August, in the waters of sombre Iceland, amid a great fury of sound, his wedding with the sea had been celebrated.

With the sea which formerly had also been his nurse; she it was who had rocked him, who had reared him tall and strong—and in the end she had taken him, in the glory of his manhood, for her own. Dark clouds moved overhead, shifting, tormented curtains, spread to conceal the nuptial feast, and the bride roared with a mighty horrible voice to drown his cries. He, mindful of Gaud, his wife of the flesh, had resisted, in a gigantic struggle, this wife of the tomb. Until the moment came when he surrendered, his arms open to receive her, with a great cry like the dying roar of a bull, his mouth already filled with water; his arms open, outspread and rigid for ever.

And at his wedding they were all there, those whom long before he had invited. All, except Sylvestre, who had fallen asleep in an enchanted garden—far away, on the other side of the earth. . . .



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