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The Ninth Wave

By

AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

New York

R. HAROLD PAGET

1911



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The Ninth Wave

I

A MID-SUMMMER NIGHT

The Vidame paused in the sorting of his cards to look up at his English host. The two men had sat over piquet for several hours already without any marked advantage on either side; since the last few deals, however, gamester's fortune had a smile full of promise for the French guest; and on this winning tide the polished young gentleman saw an opportunity of quitting the green table not ungracefully, and of broaching at last a certain matter uppermost in his mind.

Sir Hugh Courtney, his partner, had been silent and still for a noticeable length of time. He was now lost in frowning contemplation of the shaft of morning rays which, between the folds of the window curtains, peirced, exquisite blue, into the yellow candlelight of the room.

Outside a southerly gale was sweeping the land from the roaring seaward, charging the massive house, cliff perched, ivy-grown; breaking itself with shrieks and hisses on its walls, to pursue its way bellowing through the landward pines. But within all seemed placid enough. In the well-

closed chamber — the library, lined with brown books — the four candle flames of the card table scarcely swayed. Two more, burning low on a sideboard, shed their quiet light upon an array of bottles, cold viands, fruit, and cakes temptingly displayed, and glinted back from cut glass and silver. A few portraits, half-length or kitkat, gazed down with smug sympathy upon the scene. This was in the year of glorious George, 1751. France and England had actually been at peace some three years, and it was possible for a Frenchman to visit an English friend without risk of molestation.

The two gentlemen, albeit with wigs and ruffles doffed — the night was warm and, but for the turmoil of the outer air, the windows should have been wide open — sat in decorous ease. There was nothing to suggest about the game aught more soul-stirring than an elegant, gentleman-like pastime.

But the Vidame, looking up, knew that his last words, spoken with well-assumed carelessness, had been as the stone dropped on the unruffled, light-frozen pool: the even surface was rent with swiftly darting fissures, and stirred were the sleeping waters beneath. What the Vidame de Rocourt had said was this:

“Truly, a wind to tear the horns off a bullock, as we say in Brittany. It blows straight from Cape la Hogue. M. de Courtenay, your brother will find the first night of his wedded life — tempestuous, over yonder!”

Sir Hugh, on meeting his guest's look, slowly dropped his cards on the table, rose, walked to the

window, and dragged the curtain back with a movement of subdued fierceness. A flood of white light filled the room, and on the instant the candle flames dwindled to the semblance of so many crocus flowers.

The sun was not yet above the horizon; but at two of the morning in mid-June the day was already bright enough to reveal the world in beauty. But the man beheld naught of things visible to the eye; he peered out as though, below the curves of the southern horizon, he could descry that distant shore where sat, on a rocky spur of cliff even as his own, the house of his hatred.

The Vidame silently turned round on his chair, watching with acute interest.

This Monsieur de Rocourt, a small-built but shapely youth with a delicately cut face, had a peculiar gaze in his blue eyes, which it required all his high-bred courtesy of gesture and suavity of voice to save from being offensively inquisitive.

The Englishman, on the other hand, whom he was so scrutinizing at his ease, might unreservedly have been accepted by the world as the best type of his race and class. Tall and clean limbed he was, with a fine leg and broad shoulders, head boldly set, strong, sharp-chiselled features, clear skin, straight brows, and gray eyes wide apart. On his mouth there was now a bitter compression, which seemed to darken his whole countenance.

“So, yonder he lies!” was the thought that circled, threatening, relentless like a hawk’s flight, through his mind. And M. de Rocourt, enabled by the crude light of morning to take stock of his

host's looks, in a manner which had been denied him since his arrival last night, was struck with renewed amazement.

Never could he have believed in the possibility of such complete likeness. True, he had, in Paris, heard of the notable resemblance of "*les beaux Courtenays*," the handsomest men, as it was on all hands admitted, in the whole body of the *Maison du Roy*. But, had it not been for the undeniable fact of his crossing in front of the gale which was now raging at its full, and landing from St. Malo at Brixham on the previous day, he might well have believed that he was still gazing at Monsieur de Courtenay in his Chateau de Brioux yonder, on Cape la Hogue, not at Sir Hugh Courtney, at Anstiss Hall, on the Devonshire coast. Ay, even so had M. de Courtenay stood staring, in frowning meditation, upon the north horizon, when he had heard, but some thirty-six hours before, of his guest's destination,

"Faith!" thought the Vidame, the only difference noticeable between the two was the *gorge-de-pigeon* coat and the silver brocade vest of the bridegroom waiting for the call of French church bells, and the dark-blue silk of this bachelor in his lonely English house. And, turning his mind back to the delicate nature of his errand: "Faith!" he further thought. "Our friend's countenance is ominous of anything but easy success for me!" He dropped his hand, face upward, even as his partner had done, upon the green cloth. And at the movement Sir Hugh turned round. With a forced smile which did not light up his eyes he came back to the table.

“Upon honour, Vidame,” he said haltingly, “I am ashamed of my boorishness!” *Rustanderie* was the word he used: they conversed in French. M. de Rocourt’s English was of a rudimentary nature, grudgingly acquired some years before in the suite of the French Ambassador to St. James’s. Sir Hugh, on the other hand, who had lived the best part of his life, from his teens until his late retirement, at the Court of Louis le Bien-Aime, spoke French with a patrician neatness barely tinged with English intonation. “Forgive it for this once,” he went on. “The suddenness of the news ——”

The Vidame raised his eyebrows in affected polite surprise.

“News? M. de Courtenay, your brother ——”

“My stepbrother!”

“Your stepbrother, to be precise. Yet it had not occurred to me that you could ignore ——”

“I would not have ignored long! So he is married?” There was a suppressed exultation in the tones which accorded strangely with the words, “He has done it — he has taken the step!”

The host sat down as he spoke; then, meeting again his guest’s eye, which had assumed an obtrusive expression of interest, he made a fresh effort to resume his composure and went on, with a slight laugh:

“I feel, Vidame, I owe you some explanation. Perhaps” — with a note of inquiry — “it may prove better entertainment than a pursuance of this game.” He glanced at the cards. “I see I should have lost this *manche* also.” Picking up

a number of the pieces at his side, he pushed them, with a slight bow, toward his partner's stake. "Unless," he went on, "you should prefer to seek your room? This fatiguing journey ——"

"Faith, no, I never was wider awake, Sir Hugh! And if, as I now incline to think, these news are of a kind that touch you closely, it is fitting that I should first discharge myself of my embassy."

As the last word dropped, Sir Hugh, who had begun to blow out the candles, stood still for an instant, looking fixedly into space; then he turned his head and shot a swift glance upon his guest, which again, by a return of the old French courtly habit, passed into a smile.

"Indeed, my dear Vidame, it is an embassy, then? An embassy — to me, which procured me the advantage of your visit in my wilderness?"

He concluded his task among the candles, pushed the card table aside, dragged the beaufet forward in its stead, and sat down, once more facing his companion.

"We cannot call it supper in this white light of day," he continued; "but will you not make it a *dejeuner*? As you observe, on the stout and coarse tree-stump of my English home life I have grafted some of the gayer branches that blossom in your fair France. It has, truth to say, taken some time to make this old place habitable again, after lying so many years under a factor's care. This had been a *nuit blanche*: it recalls, across the water, does it not, something of our habits at that Versailles I am never to see again?"

"Which, Sir Hugh," retorted the Vidame, with

an air of ingenuous confidence, as he unfolded a napkin, "you will surely see and adorn again, if I am as fortunate as I trust to be on my errand."

Without a word, but with a thoughtful countenance, the Englishman detached the wing of a fowl, displaying in the operation that dexterity of a French *viveur* which was so much at odds with his all-English personality. He passed the plate across the table, and filled two beakers.

"Volnay — of the comet year," he said then, as the guest smilingly raised the deep ruby to the light. "The wine of the happy in love, in the words, you may remember, of the Well-Beloved himself. M. de Courtenay shared my admiration for Volnay," he went on with a sardonic smile. "Now should be his time to finish the year!"

The Vidame drank, with deliberate appreciation, and marked that Sir Hugh had absently put down his glass untouched. Sir Hugh, indeed his eyes once more turned to the distant skyline, seemed to have fallen into depths of musing.

"I am grateful." said the Frenchman gayly, addressing himself to his plate. "But your hospitality is, in sooth, a thing to admire. Were it not so fine and French it might best be described as Biblical. . . . I alight from a post-chaise at your gates, no doubt the most unexpected of all conceivable apparitions. I have the good fortune to find you in residence. Will Sir Hugh Courtenay receive the Vidame de Rocourt at this utterly undue hour of the night? Monsieur le Vidame (comes your answer), what welcome wind has blown you to this coast? *Service du Roy*, answered the

Vidame, as though he were still in his master's dominions. And behold, your great silent house is forthwith illumined for the wayfarer; trotting upon his attendance go valets and butler. Dinner warm. Wine uncorked. Cards spread. Coverlet turned down. In short, but for the thunder of the sea under the windows, M. le Vidame might fancy himself once more in the *Gentilhommes Anglais's* mansion of the Reservoir at Versailles. And another sun has risen before he finds an opening to state the purpose of his wayfaring!"

"An embassy, I believe that was the word you used, M. de Rocourt?" said Sir Hugh, starting from his reverie when the loquacious Frenchman paused in his encomium. "Indeed, I did surmise from the first that only an embassy — King's service, as you said — could send the gay Vidame de Rocourt so far from the precincts of Versailles. Hence this very natural discretion which you are so good as to praise. But this embassy, it now appears, is to me. I may therefore inquire." He spoke with an assumed carelessness. "Your starting point, I gather, was yonder," he went on, "where, as you say, the gale is blowing straight from, and I conclude that he who sends you ——"

"Is M. de Courtenay, your brother."

"My stepbrother."

"Your pardon again! Your conclusion, sir, is no doubt natural, but nevertheless erroneous. In fact, to plunge into the heart of things, I do actually convey a message from his Majesty's own mouth. Nothing less, on my honour!" assured the speaker, in answer to his host's look of amazement.

“From the King?”

“From the King. Faith! I own that such a mission to a private gentleman justifies the marveling I mark upon your face. But you, my dear Sir Hugh, whom your former service brought so close to his Majesty, know that a lady’s whim, when that lady is the Queen of the Moment, the more than Queen, and has name, say de Mailleville ——”

“Ah, it was the duchess!” A smile fleeting between bitterness and amusement passed over Sir Hugh’s lips. He once more threw himself into his role of lightly interested listener, and sipping his wine — “*Peste!* My dear Vidame,” he went on, “marvels will never cease. So, after a whole year’s absence, there is in France at least one lady who has not forgotten my existence?”

“As you see — so it would seem. Indeed, the loss of both the handsome Courtenays was apparently more than could be borne. Now that deplorable event was consummated when Monsieur, your stepbrother, with his Majesty’s leave, retired upon his estates, to take unto himself the spouse I alluded to just now, in connection with this gale of mighty voice.”

“Of a truth! It was my — it was this man’s departure which recalled my existence to mind! Upon my soul, I should be gratified!”

The Vidame had a little dry laugh.

“Why, yes. On the whole you should. Any cause — mark me, I do not profess to understand further in this matter — but any cause, I say, which may restore a man of your calibre to the joys of the French court should be gratifying. Faith,

you have here a handsome estate — an admirable house. But the solitude — save us! The precise provincial dame and the rustic wench! . . . What the devil! A man of your stamp, a man of the Beau Courtenay's fortune and spirit, to grow old in such surroundings! Not to be thought of! Nightmare, sir — nightmare! Ancestral estates? Ancestral estates were created to make revenue. Revenue is bestowed on a gentleman to be spent in the court. Therefore, say I, any cause is good enough."

"You are a diplomat, M. de Rocourt. You introduce your case with persuasion. Well, let us admit, in these pourparlers at least, that the cause is good enough. I listen. You come with a request which, were I still in his French Majesty's service, would be an order. But I am here in my own land, and, so long as I remain in this land, my own master. When you come, therefore, with a proposal, as I take it, that I should return to the country from which it has pleased the King to banish me, you come surely with conditions. And as I said, I listen."

The Vidame now complacently felt in his element.

"Upon honour, my dear Sir Hugh," he began, with a winning smile, "you give me a fairer opening for the preambles than I dared to expect. But you were always the most courteous of fencers! Well, let us review the situation. Let us consider the strange perversity of events which ended in your relegation to this outlandish place, which, moreover (and stranger still), sent me, the Vidame de Rocourt, twelve months later, to seek you hither!

The King my master, had — I wish I could still say, has — in his favoured company of *Gens d'Armes Anglais*, two gentlemen in whom, for many years, he was pleased to take an especial interest. There have been few posts of honour near his sacred person at court or in camp to which at most times he did not prefer one or the other.”

“One — or the other,” echoed Sir Hugh musingly.

“One or the other, or both. It pleased the royal fancy to have riding right and left of his coach in the town or on a campaign the two handsomest cavaliers of his household — gentlemen of oft-proved valour — which goes without saying — but also, what is much rarer, in my country at least, gentlemen of discretion. These two were brothers.”

“Half-brothers, Vidame!”

The words were interjected between lips parted on a sardonic smile.

“Granted, my dear sir; but men so convincingly the sons of the same father, that, under the uniform, not the most intimate friend could tell at one glance the elder from the cadet! The heavenly twins! That was the sobriquet among the ladies, unless it was *les beaux Anglais du Roy!*”

Sir Hugh made a gesture of suppressed impatience and the Vidame exclaimed, in the tones of one struggling with exasperating perversity:

“You English are an ever-renewed enigma, with your spleen! Now, true Frenchmen would have understood their good fortune and relished every hour of it. But not so you gentlemen from overseas, who ever appear to have a warp of some kind in

your soul. What the name of the devil may be who took possession of yours I know not; but under his guidance you must needs poison these lavish gifts of Providence by an insane, unconquerable — let me be eloquent — by a Cain-like hatred ——”

On these last words the listener had taken breath as though about to exclaim, but closed his mouth upon the unspoken words. He rose and paced the length of the room. When he came back to his guest it was with an easy gesture and an even voice that he begged him to proceed.

“Let me not interrupt you. It is correct that you should develop your message on your own chosen lines.”

The Vidame made a slight inclination of the head. Then, crossing one neat leg over the other, and negligently playing with a fruit-knife, went on suavely:

“I, believe me, do not presume to pass a judgment. I merely refer to what has become common talk at Versailles. When the sons of the same father have been known to meet twice in one year, for no reason discovered, on the duelling ground — none of our courtly encounters to first blood, but being, each in turn incapacitated for months from performing their duties in the company by some furiously inflicted wound — the verdict of the world is bound to be adverse. If you will bring your memory back for a moment to that singularly disagreeable episode of the Cour des Marechaux — ‘Cain-like’ was the expression used by his Majesty himself. So, at least, it was reported at court.”

“I do not forget it. But what matters the word?

The thing is what matters — no words of the King can alter that.”

“His Majesty’s word can alter many things,” returned the Vidame, with an ironical raising of his tone, soon repressed, however. “But, as I am to convey some further royal words, let me recall certain details touching this same court of Marshals ——”

“My dear Vidame, assuredly you do not imagine that the smallest of that day’s proceedings could already have slipped my memory? Shall we not come to the present embassy?”

“I will not, trust me, tax your patience longer than necessary. But there are one or two facts connected with that disastrous interview which you most probably ignore, which may explain my extraordinary mission. For you will admit that such a one as this, from a King to a dismissed and exiled officer, is altogether without a precedent.”

Sir Hugh sat down with a look of resignation.

“The King, then,” resumed the Vidame, in self-complacent tones, “as the fountain of honour, never sets his face against affairs of honour between his gentlemen. When you and M. de Courtenay, at the cross-alleys behind Trianon, just at the moment when you were drawing the fratricidal blade for the third time, were arrested by the Marechaussee in the King’s name, the officer who took possession of your swords might, with more truth, and but for etiquette, have said: ‘In the name of the Duchesse de Mailleville.’”

The Englishman raised a glance in which a shade of surprise could be discerned, but no other emotion.

“Her Grace,” the Vidame proceeded, after a slight pause, “had lately ascended to her position *en pied*, and his Majesty had nothing to refuse her. What Madame de Mailleville’s motive spring may have been, you perhaps know. No one else, at least, has ever understood it exactly. The lieutenant of police, as we are aware, rarely fails to hear of intended rencounters, and his Majesty is made acquainted with them in the briefest time. The report concerning the Messieurs de Courtenay reached him at supper. It was Madame de Mailleville who — in an outburst of sensibility which, they say, caused the King to laugh consumedly — demanded that some means should be devised to quell, once for all, this unnatural inveteracy against each other of the two most admired gentlemen in the court. Thus it came to pass that, after forty-eight hours’ close arrest, *ces Messieurs de Courtenay* of the *Gens d’Armes Anglais*, were brought before the Marshals. As a signal mark of royal interest, the proceedings were attended by the King himself — a singularly solemn tribunal, in sooth! But what you may not know, my dear sir,” insisted the Vidame in deprecation of his hearer’s repressed impatience, “is that the duchess herself, unseen but seeing, behind a door screen, was present at this secret ceremonial, it being the King’s pleasure to please her in all matters.”

Sir Hugh gave a short laugh.

“Secret ceremonial!” he muttered, with bitter irony. “And yet you ——”

The Vidame echoed the laugh in self-satisfaction.

“As the ancient Seigneur Pierre de Montaigne

has it somewhere," he went on lightly, "sooner or later everything is known. And at Versailles, as you are aware, it is generally sooner. It was the court's desire honourably to assuage the feud, but from the outset all efforts failed. To their inquiries you, it appears, refused to divulge any reason; and M. de Courtenay asseverated an utter ignorance of any cause for your unquenchable animosity. Judgment was passed against you. Now I'll wager you never knew precisely why and ——"

"Oh, simple enough!" The interruption broke out with a sneer. "The all too welcome submission of a craven ——"

"In Heaven's name sir! A man of your own blood! An esteemed officer of his Majesty! But, pardon me, I must come to the point ——"

Sir Hugh had risen.

"I can spare you the trouble, Vidame," he said in a voice of restrained anger. "Judgment, as you say, was passed against me. In that fleur-de-lys room, in the presence of the King, whom it is admitted I have served well; in the presence of six of the greatest gentlemen of the land, not one of whom but would have repudiated with indignation any interference with his rights in matters of honourable quarrel; within the hearing (as, happily, I did not know then) of that woman la Mailleville, I was given the choice between two issues, either of which was intended top lace, as it was hoped, this — this man beyond the reach of my sword! I was to quit France forthwith, without exchanging another word with my adversary, and, further, to stake my honour never to set foot, on any pretence whatso-

ever, upon French soil without the written sanction of the King. Failing this oath — the Bastille during the King's pleasure! Well, Vidame," the Englishman sat down again, and, squaring his arms on the table, looked at his guest with a bitter smile, "what would you have chosen?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"I trust, my dear Sir Hugh, that I should have shown as much good sense as you, at least in this. The Bastille is in Paris; that is its only good point. But the diet, even on the higher scale, is hum, hum!" He smiled affectedly and pushed his glass toward his host. "As for the air one breathes there, even at walking hours on the battlements, it cannot (I will be frank) compare with that of your falaise. No, decidedly, you chose the better part."

"And above all," added Sir Hugh, as he filled the glass mechanically, "your embastilled man is, to all purposes, dead. He is, at least, like the dead — forgotten. Whereas —" he spoke now in a lower tone and slowly, as one following out an inner idea — "whereas a free man, even from a distant shore, may at times recall his existence to his — friends! It is to be noted that though the oath exacted of me by the Marechaux was binding as bands of steel — an oath from which there is no escape — no similar undertaking was exacted from M. de Courtenay. This has since occurred to me as strange."

"It is less strange than would appear at first flush," said the Vidame, anxious to take back the guidance of the discussion. "Your cause, I must tell you, was really prejudged. I will expound how.

It appears (or so at least it was reported to the lieutenant of police) that, as you surrendered your sword to the officer, you, in your anger, pointing to the guards, threw out a bitter taunt at your adversary: 'I congratulate you on your . . . prudence, M. de Courtenay,' said you. The taunt, you will allow me to say, was undeserved. Indeed, it was to convince you of this that I related the part Madame de Mailleville played in the drama: she it was who spoilt your pretty *rencontre*. Further, your scathing words having come to the King's knowledge, your cause, as I said, was hopelessly prejudged. It showed, in his Majesty's opinion, that you alone were bent on protracting an enmity which should, in all honour, have been washed out in the blood already drawn. It was, therefore, not necessary to demand an oath from Monsieur your brother."

"It was not done, at any rate. And, I suppose, with you, the precaution would have been superfluous. M. de Courtenay, who is as free as air, has not shown any willingness to seek me here. It would be too much to hope," went on Sir Hugh mockingly, "that you have come all this way to say that the embargo upon my movements is recalled by the King."

"Yes, and no. I hope it may be yes. Though, to be frank, I must add that the King had well nigh forgotten the affair, and that it was the duchess——"

"The duchess again!"

"Truly, my dear sir, it is plain that you have been an eternity away from court. Surely you know that,

in France, it is always the duchess — unless it happens to be the comtesse or the marquise! And now that you are in possession of the facts, I come to the kernel of my embassy: I had the honour to be of the King's *dejeuner* — it is just ten days ago. As fortune would have it, there was on duty in the salon a gentleman of the English *Gens d'Armes*, one Monsieur de Walden, newly joined. A singularly ill-favoured person, for an exception. The duchess, who appeared that day wondrous light-hearted, whispered into the royal ear some jest about the unfortunate officer, which made his Majesty smile. 'And yet he takes the place of our beau Courtenay,' said the King. 'What!' cries the duchess, 'the beau Courtenay gone! Killed?' 'M. de Courtenay,' says the King, with his mocking smile, 'is about to take unto himself a spouse, and has retired upon his land in Normandy.' 'Sire, Sire!' cries her Grace, with that petulant gayety that you no doubt remember, 'your court is incomplete without your beaux Courtenay! La, there's no living without one of them at least! Married and buried? Where's the other? Send for him, Sire . . . and, pray, oh pray! let us look no more upon snout-nosed, stony-eyed *Gens d'Armes* such as yonder monster! It would positively shorten life! One Courtenay, Sire, one Courtenay at least, or I die!' And she went on with these follies, amid those peals of argentine laughter which seem particularly to delight the King. The King is above jealousy, as we all know. At last he kissed the beautiful shoulder nearest to him and said: 'You shall not die, *morbleu!* Means

shall be found. But if my memory is not treacherous, there was a parole. If we relieve our other Courtenay from it, the first thing we will do will be to run down to the Cotentin, and there will be a fresh cutting of throats. Then we'll be more completely bereaved of Courtenays than ever!' But her Grace was not to be denied. 'Bah, bah!' she cried; 'then there must be a reconciliation! . . . There shall be a reconciliation!'"

Sir Hugh started from his resting attitude, to sit bolt upright. The Vidame looked at him searchingly, but went on with apparent nonchalance:

"The King, it must be said, shook his head doubtfully, seeing which, some one cried out that a reconciliation between the Messieurs de Courtenay would be a miracle indeed, and thus gave me the keynote for the paying of my court both to my King and to the influential favourite. 'That miracle,' I said, 'would take place on the simple command of his Majesty.' And the duchess cast a look in my direction that augured favours to come. 'Well, M. le Vidame,' says the King, 'you shall take horse this very day and effect this miracle for me; or, rather, for the *beaux yeux* of madame.' And thus, my dear Sir Hugh," concluded M. de Rocourt, rising as though such a message must be delivered standing, "your lieutenancy in the Gentlemen at Arms awaits you; the return of the King's favour and with it all the delights of the court, from the day when you have embraced your brother before my eyes and passed your word that all animosity is buried between you."

Sir Hugh, who had listened to these last words

with eyes musingly cast to the ceiling, now rose also and looked at his guest with sombre irony.

“And my — brother, as you call him?”

“I have already seen M. de Courtenay. I took the Chateau de Brioux on my way, to save time and so as to meet you, fully commissioned. Half the miracle, my dear Sir Hugh, is effected. I found him in a melting mood. I told you, did I not, that, even as I arrived, he was waiting for his bride?”

“And he, high-souled man, agrees? A miracle truly!” So bitter was the sneer that M. de Rocourt fell back, disconcerted.

The master of Anstiss Hall went to the window, but paused an instant meditatively before opening it.

“M. le Vidame,” he said enigmatically at last, “strange! It was but yesterday, before I knew anything of the new order of things over there at Brioux, that I was reading, in one of those books, a singularly pregnant phrase of an English author, by name Francis Bacon: ‘The man who marries hath given hostages to fortune.’”

So saying, the Englishman pulled open the casement. In gushed a flood of life-giving salt wind, clearing at one sweep the air of the room; and with it all the hot-scented atmosphere of Versailles superficialities, of fevered self-seeking, intrigue, and heart-burning, of artificial lusts and barren ambitions, which seemed to have gathered round these two courtiers. Once more it was England: England of the seacoast, at the rise of a clear summer’s day. The gale, albeit it abated fast, was still choir-ing amid crags and trees, to the time-beating of the

breakers and the undertones of dashing and falling waters. The Vidame had now lost his bearing completely, and in the midst of this noble turmoil of the world without was unable to seek it again.

II

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

The Vidame, still pondering through his mortification over the means of renewing the discussion so abruptly checked, was drawing near the window, when Sir Hugh, leaning out, suddenly called, in English, and evidently to some one passing outside: "Hallo, there! Why, Martin, whither so fast?"

The Vidame looked over his host's shoulder. A man in labourer's dress was running past the house. At the sound of his master's voice he paused, rather guiltily, and doffed his cap.

"Wreck, Sir Hugh! There be good ware cast ashore."

"Where from?"

"They say she must have struck on Baron Stone, please your honour. The lads are already at work."

And without waiting for leave the man took up his run again. Sir Hugh turned in, and, resuming the French tongue:

"Vidame," he said, "you must yearn for rest. Allow me now to escort you to your chamber. As for myself, I would ask permission to seek my own bed, but there has been a ship broken on our rocks, and wreckage, it appears, is cast on the shore. This, although the rascals who are hastening to the

plunder never sent word to the Hall, requires my presence."

He spoke once more in his even, courtly tones; the vital subject appeared to have been dismissed, a thing disposed of. The Vidame was too shrewd a watcher to accept this dismissal as final; for the present, however, he fell in gracefully enough with the new venue. He assumed an air of strong interest:

"A wreck, in verity! But I must see that! How easily it might have been my own case had I but started a day later! Would it be trespassing too long upon your patience to beg that I might accompany you?" And inwardly: "No, I do not leave you by a footstep's breadth. Oh, my mysterious gentleman of the *Gens d'Armes*, I shall yet reach at what is at the back of your thoughts, in some moment unaware."

The two men, passing by the butler fast asleep in his armchair in the anteroom, let themselves out of the house and plunged into the tide of wind. Battling with the blast, they crossed the gardens and presently, leaving the green land, engaged upon a narrow path that wound its way on the face of the red crags down to the shore.

After a descent, fraught with peril to the inexperienced foot of the French gentleman, they reached the flooring of a deep cove, right in front of which, barely more than a furlong away, rose sheer to a height of some two hundred feet a noble mass of rock which, like the rest of that side of the Devonian coast, showed deep red under a coping of greenest turf. The top of this islet has been weathered

by wind, frost, and rain into a fantastic semblance of ruined towers; its foot plunges without a shelf into the sea — the place as inabordable as the dungeon that it simulates. Between this reef and the mainland, when the wind sits anywhere in the south, the waters race, in overpowering sweeps, to break themselves, a little farther north, upon the jutting of Hope's Nose. Sealed is the fate of the craft that in stormy hours is drawn to the landward of Tower Stone. Beyond the Nose, however, is a wider bight with a gently shelving beach, upon which the sea has an unexplained predilection for the casting of its relicts. There, upon the sandy strand, the surf deals leniently with flotsam cargo and timber, which upon the rasps, the saws, the grindstones of Hope's Nose would have been splintered and shredded to annihilation. It is there that upon news of any wreck — and such news travels fast — the sparse population of the coast foregathers to reap the fitful harvest of wind and water.

Sir Hugh stepped rapidly, without a word, from rock to rock, close followed, but with labourious steps, by the Vidame, and made for a projecting ledge that advanced, pier-like, boldly over the tumbled waters. It was high enough for tolerable safety, although swept by the lashing spray. From that point a clear view is obtained north and south of Tower Stone. He rested his back for support against the crag, and signed to his companion to imitate him; then, screening his eyes with his hands from the salty darts, scanned the surroundings.

The restless waters, charging the reef in rhythmic onslaughts like succeeding squadrons, rose against

the red walls with never-daunted inveteracy, but ever thrown back in white and green cataracts to pursue their course, hissing and roaring up the boiling channel. Tower Stone was unconquered and impassive; but, to the right, half a mile or so farther out, a smaller sister islet which in fair weather stands placidly just out of the highest tide, had disappeared under the leaping foam, its place only marked to the eye by high spouting columns of spray. The sun had breasted the clear horizon, and under its level rays that leaping sparkled like snow.

After gazing some time, Sir Hugh pointed to the place, and, turning to his companion, said close to his ear:

“Yonder is where the ship — whatever she be — broke.” Then, pointing again, this time to some remnants that drifted, black amid the foam, tossed and tortured by the swirl: “And here comes some of the wreckage; but yonder” — with a sweep of the arm to the north, indicating the beach beyond the Nose, where sundry groups, small to the eye as ants, could be seen moving to and fro along the red sand through the edge of the surf — “but yonder will most of it be cast. Are you for accompanying me so far?”

The Vidame had lost his hat, snatched in spite of all care by a vicious gust; he was already drenched to the skin; an unlucky slip had resulted in the tearing of long strips out of the nattily drawn glossy black silk stockings; he was half choked by the wind and more than half blinded by the stinging drift. In fact, he was about to declare for a retreat inland and a belated preference for the bedroom,

when a change in his companion's countenance arrested his words. Sir Hugh had suddenly grown still; and, under his shading hand, was gazing intently at a something that was floating by, fifty yards, or perhaps even less, beyond the line of breakers. It was a long piece of timber that heaved and fell, now rising to full view on the crest of an unbroken wave, now sinking in the trough, to reappear, dismally spinning, hopelessly drifting. But upon this inertness something else could be descried that was not quite inert — a man it was, tied or clinging to the spar. Once, twice, he distinctly, if feebly, moved, shifting his hold as the wood rolled upon itself. Suddenly, lifted upon a higher swell, the man seemed to perceive the human figures watching upon that hard, deserted rock; and, slowly, as by a fearful effort, he raised an arm aloft — voiceless appeal — for, if he cried, the wind tore and scattered the sound from his mouth.

Once more Sir Hugh pointed, and this was toward the jags of Hope's Nose, where almost every one of those disjointed morsels of what had once been a ship was doomed to be dashed and harrowed, slashed and shivered, before passing on to the shore beyond.

“That man,” said Sir Hugh, “unless by a miracle, is doomed. Better for him to have been drowned outright at the foundering than to be torn up alive, as he will be yonder within the half-hour.”

Even in the forced pitch of the voice, as it contended with the blast, there could be felt a ring of emotion. But the Vidame had, pre-eminently, the French national cynicism of callousness:

“Poor devil!” he roared back. “I was about to request permission to retire. But since there is tragedy to be watched to a close, why, I will see this out. Poor devil!” he repeated, looking out now with some zest; “what a prospect! Faith, there is nothing that he may have in him to give that he would not promise, at this moment, in exchange for succour! And yet you say ——”

“That there is no succour — unless he pass clear of yonder rocks.”

The words were spoken with a solemnity in dire contrast with the light tones that succeeded them in the Vidame’s mouth:

“Why, then, let us to yonder rock and see if the miracle is vouchsafed.”

But Sir Hugh remained still and silent, sombrely gazing at the flotsam life that had now so slender a chance of duration. In another moment, again, as the waif was lifted to view on a more monstrous wave, the arm was upraised in appeal, lamentably, despairingly. And then a prodigy took place, at least in the Vidame’s eyes, wide open with cruel interest.

The Englishman doffed his coat and vest — it was as if in answer and in promise; for on the high ledge he was in full view of the dying wretch — and, without another word, ran down toward the beach of the cove.

When the Vidame, after dire difficulties and by many devious ways, had rejoined him upon the shingle, he found him, already nude to the waist and knee-deep in the surf, absorbed in watching the rollers, counting and checking on his fingers each

thunderous cataract as it followed in regular succession.

“My man is mad,” thought the envoy, prudently skipping out of touch of a hissing sheet.

As the measuring index pressed back the fourth finger of the left hand, and as a roller more majestic than the rest reared its terrifying height, glaucous at base, delicate green and white-tufted at the crest; just as it was about to break, Sir Hugh dived under the tottering mass, with a suddenness and a determination that startled the watcher well-nigh to terror.

The back-rush of this appalling cataract carried the swimmer as in a mill-race far out before the gathering of the next; and he could be seen rising upon its olive crest, to disappear in safety behind it, many seconds before the breaking point was reached.

The Vidame was not acquainted with the tradition of the ninth wave — the rush held among the toilers of the seaboard to gather, after successive attempts, its maximum of violence. Then, as if spent by the accumulated effort, the surge seems to take breath for awhile and once again by degrees increase its strength up to the following ninth onrush. Whether there be anything to justify the special attributes of the ninth wave, certain it is that the more mountainous the roller, the farther back will its baffled charge roll and with it carry any floating object. And thus it was that, in less than a minute, the daring swimmer was well out in the open and able, away from the boiling foam, to strike for his goal.

To the Vidame, upon the level of the strand, he

was of course soon out of sight. The burden of the watcher's thoughts changed now to: "My man is dead." And he pondered, with vague dismay, upon the early cutting down of the royal mission which was to have built up the hope of so much credit to himself. There was, however, some faint consolation to be found in the foretaste of the tale he would anon have to tell of his own fantastic experiences in the mad Englishman's company, and of their tragic end.

Filled with these new thoughts, he made his way to that northward promontory which had been pointed out by Sir Hugh himself, a few moments ago, as the probable place of doom. The interest had grown twofold. On that rocky point would Fate now overtake not only the unknown common creature that clung to his spar, but also the demented man of quality who had plunged into yonder seething cauldron, and for no reason conceivable to the Frenchman's mind.

As the Vidame, in his red-heeled shoes, his drenched brocades, toiled through the shingle of the cove toward his chosen post of observation, Sir Hugh breasted the angry waters with all the mastery of one who has been familiar with the salt wave from early boyhood; with all the vigour and self-confidence of the man intent on the single purpose of his task, not upon its fears and difficulties.

After striking for some time in the direction he estimated as that of the drifting beam, he caught sight of what he was seeking. It was from the ridge of another rushing green mountain — the

ninth again, he dimly thought, as he raised himself still farther out of the water.

In the clear light the man seemed close; he could see the pale head turned. Ay, and see the piteous cry sent forth unheard in the universal roar. But, in a dishevelled sea, progress is slow — slow and wearing. It was a mortal length of time before, both drifting with the gale and drawing ever nearer to that death-swirl around the Nose, the swimmer from the shore and the castaway from the ship met at last.

The man's long hair clung across his face, like seaweed on a rock. Between the strands his eyes were gleaming. Clutching the spar with one hand, he extended the other to the rescuer, and drew him up to the support.

“Heaven save you!” he gasped. “Save you — and me!” he added in a fervour of fear and love of life.

Sir Hugh grasped the spar, without a word, for a few seconds of rest; then, dragging himself close to the man's ear:

“Can you swim?” he asked. And then, on the man's affirming nod: “You must swim away, outward. Leave this, at once, or die. There is death — certain — on the left. Strike for the right. Safety on the beach, beyond the rocks.”

On these breathless words, the man rolled a terrified glance toward the mad leaping sheets in front of them: they had drawn menacingly near during the last minutes.

“Follow me, close as you can!”

Shouting the order, Sir Hugh had left the spar.

After a moment's awful hesitation, the man relinquished likewise the support, and braced out to the best of his strength.

Thus it came to pass that the Vidame, perched upon a pinnacle of Hope's Nose, saw the spar dash in among the reefs, to be drawn back writhing like a live thing, cast up and withdrawn endlessly, like a toy in a great game of destruction. Thus it also came to pass that he next beheld, a cable's length farther out, a black dot or two, that were human heads; ever and anon a gleam or two in the sun's rays, that were human backs or breasts, slowly drifting past and nearer the long line of furling rollers on the wide beach beyond.

The sight filled him with amazement. In another man the feeling would have glowed with enthusiasm; and in a Vidame, a feudatory of Holy Church, it should, in propriety, have elicited a thought more reverent than, "The devil's in it!" It might, at least, easily have evoked a warmer comment than the jubilant one now arising: "Eh, eh! But it would look, in truth, as if, after all, my mission was not absolutely at an end — yet!"

Once more he scrambled down from his rock, with caution, and made his way to the beach farther north, along the yielding sands. A numerous concourse of wreckers, among them not a few women, were already busy dragging in such relicts as, between the inrush of the flood, were left visible upon the sands.

Some distance away a denser group had gathered round a man who, mounted on a cask set on end,

was peering out to sea, occasionally turning round and bending as one who reports upon what he is spying. By the time the Vidame reached the spot there rose a simultaneous shout from the watchers:

“There they be!” cried one whom the Vidame recognized as the man whom the Squire had hailed that morning.

All eyes were strained seaward. Upon the flank of a monstrous advancing roller the figures of two human beings rose awfully into view, to be lost once more in the roaring foam.

Among the onlookers there was tense excitement; but — and the fact struck the Vidame with astonishment — nothing more. Not one of those, who were so obviously familiar with the surf and fearless of it who were provided, too, some with ropes, others with gaffs and grapplings — made the slightest attempt to help their fellow-creatures in their peril.

Twice again could the two be descried, nearer; one of them altogether helpless, the other struggling with a double task, maintaining himself and his comrade against the buffeting waters, and fighting their jealous backrush after each cataract. As he watched, the Vidame well-nigh felt as if he also were suffocating, even as those whom the sea furies were strangling but a few yards away from him. He gasped as, at length, the bodies, interlaced and helpless, were flung upon the shore. But hardly had that breath of relief expanded his lungs when his heart stood still once more. The sea had caught them again. They were being drawn back into its ravening maw; one reared himself, struggled,

clutched. It was le Beau Courtenay! The Frenchman must cover his eyes. Nay, what a tale for the court!

Best of all, if such a tale could end in a rescue!

The Vidame turned fiercely on the rough fisherman next him and with outflung hand gesticulated, ordered. The other, however, shook him off as fiercely. The Vidame's brain reeled. Dementia held this world of England: the fellow was counting, even as Courtenay a while before! "Four," he called. Fascinated by the horror and the strangeness, the Frenchman's eyes followed the universal gaze. "Five," Ay, Dieu! There they were again! "Six." Nearer. "Seven." Nearer yet!

It broke upon the Vidame's brain that his friend might yet save himself if he would but relinquish his clutch upon yonder unknown wretch. That was Courtenay all over! What he gripped he held. Something stirred in the Frenchman's petty soul that it had never known before.

"Eight — nine!"

Thundering came that ninth breaker; it bore the human burden upon its mighty crest; cast it as if in anger, once more upon the strand. Yet among the bystanders not one foot stirred forward.

And now, for the first time in his life perhaps, the Vidame forgot himself. He would race the sea for its prey. If British blood ran so craven for its kin, in his veins ran the quick, the generous spirit of France! He would show that *canaille*, that vileness! As he thought he ran. In a moment he had reached the prostrate figures. His hand was upon one inert, ice-clammy arm. Instantly he was

knocked down by the returning rush, deafened by the roar, blinded with brine and sand; but the weight of the three human bodies, interlaced and half buried in the yielding sand, overcame the back-race. The grasp of the warm hand seemed to have revived Sir Hugh's energies. He struggled to his feet, dragging the Frenchman up with him.

"The fellow is of iron," thought the bewildered Vidame. A few seconds of that sea seemed to have dashed the soul out of his own slight frame. He had an impulse toward a rabbit-like scuttle back into safety, but now it was Courtenay who held him. Courtenay made a gesture toward the prostrate body at their feet — green-hued as death it lay — a gesture with that grip of chilled fingers not to be gainsaid. The Vidame understood.

He bent to the corpse. What could it be but a corpse? Stumbling, staggering, with the weight between them, the two fought forward, the *gentilhomme Anglais du Roy* and Rocourt the elegant! If Versailles could see them! For the last time the surge boiled about them, but in vain, and with a final effort they reached a point of safety. And there all three lay, for a while, within a semicircle of silent and sullen onlookers — the Vidame on his knees, spluttering and bewildered; the unknown seafarer with eyes closed, apparently lifeless; Sir Hugh Courtenay reclining exhausted on his elbow, with head prone, striving for breath, fighting the faintness as he had fought the waves.

After a while he raised his head and cast a sombre look about him. And now a new cry, of wonder and suppressed excitement passed from mouth to mouth.

“The Squire! Sir Hugh! Why, ’tis the Squire!” The Squire, whom Martin the gardener had seen not an hour before at the window in the Hall! Sir Hugh among the castaways of the wreck! The astonishment was blasting. Instinctively every one drew back a pace or more as from something uncanny and sinister.

A few minutes elapsed. Sir Hugh, gathering his strength again, drew closer to the unknown, peered keenly into the face, lifted the closed eyelids, then applied his ear to the chest and listened for a long while. Then, looking up again, he beckoned to the bystanders. Two or three with the instinctive habit of obedience advanced nearer. He spoke with still feeble but imperious voice:

“Hark ye! fellows. The man’s alive, but you have had no hand in the rescue. So you may rest content: it is my work, mine alone, you hear? You may lend a hand now.” And as once more there was a movement of recoil, the master’s voice rang louder, menacing: “Take heed, you fools! The man’s on land, and if he’s living it is through none of your helping. As for the villain who hesitates now to do my bidding, let him expect trouble. You, Ben Cockington, and you, Bick Penhall, fetch a thwart from the boats, and carry this find of mine to the Hall. He is all I claim,” he called out contemptuously to the gathered crowd; “all the rest of the wreckage upon my beach I leave to you. It shall be divided in due course among ye all. Meanwhile, attend to me, to this gentleman, and to him” — pointing to the still insensible man.

There was some consultation; many shook their

heads dubiously, but eventually it reached a satisfactory conclusion. Most of the wreckers dispersed in search of fresh gleanings; others busied themselves as they were bidden. Coats were thrown over the bare shoulders of the two whom the sea had cast up. A small sail was wrapped round the dripping and sand-stained garments of the French gentleman, and certain rags bound round his feet in lieu of the silver-buckled shoes which he had lost in his struggle with the claiming waters.

While this was being done, Sir Hugh, who sat watching the process meditatively, addressed his shivering guest:

“Vidame,” he said gravely in French, “I stated just now that I alone had saved yonder fellow. I owe you an apology there, as well as my thanks. But for you, I have little doubt, we should still be tossing in that cauldron and by this time we should have yielded our ghosts.”

The bearers were already moving with their burden in the direction of the high-perched house outlined on the cliff against the blue sky. Sir Hugh, flinging an arm about the neck of the surly fisherman who bent to help him, and lurching to his feet, continued to address the Vidame:

“It was indeed a lucky thing for me that you were present amid these boors!”

“In the name of Heaven, my dear sir!” cried the French gentleman, in a tone of pettish resentment, as he hobbled along upon swaddled feet. “Can you tell me how it is that these *canaille*, who advanced so boldly into the surf to secure some trashy piece of wood, never thought of forming a

chain to go to your aid — you their lord? By the name of ten thousand devils, they stood and watched a man of quality floundering, without lifting a finger! Poah! The smell of that foam! It will never leave my nostrils. Is there enough green wood in your copses to break across the dogs shoulders?”

Sir Hugh turned his head and looked at his companion.

“Of a truth, Vidame, I and my unknown friend yonder ——”

“Oh, devil fly with him!” muttered the Frenchman peevishly, hugging himself in his sheet and thrown out of all courteous balance by the irritating sense of his own grotesque appearance.

“Of a truth,” pursued Sir Hugh, unheeding, “I should, as I said, have fared badly at the very moment of success but for the fortunate presence of a gentleman amid these rascals — of one whose gallantry defies superstition.”

The Vidame now shot a look of curiosity at his host.

• “Superstition? Is there a superstition attached to an early sea bath?”

He tried to laugh, but his teeth were chattering. The laughter came out as a rattle.

“Not to the sea bath,” answered Sir Hugh, “but to the rescue of a drowning man.” He paused a moment reflectively; then, with a short laugh: “In this country,” he said, “men believe that any one baffling the sea of its living prey inevitably brings evil upon his own head, death within the year, and brought about by the very man he has saved! Not

one of these fellows but would have stood by me stoutly in fight, or in any danger but that of the sea. Even if they had known me I doubt if a single lout among them would have thrown out a helping hand!"

The Vidame's curiosity had been transient. As he picked his way cautiously among the stones in his insufficient footgear, his attention was already flagging. His thought reverted to the royal *dejeuner* at Versailles, and he almost cursed the high honour of that day, the result of which had been an errand so precarious, fraught with experiences savouring so much of madness on all sides.

III

A FLOTSAM LIFE

The unknown traveller from the sea had recovered consciousness on the application of due restoratives, suggested and applied by Mistress Simnel, the Squire's ancient and most benevolent housekeeper. In the warmth of a bed, in the shadow and silence of a secluded room, he had fallen into profound slumber which the frequent visits of the solicitous dame could not disturb.

The Vidame, on his side, consigned to the butler's care as a most honoured guest, comforted with a hot wine-posset, had slept a round of the clock, as the phrase goes, with not more than a turn or two upon his couch.

Sir Hugh had also spent the day in the solitude of a darkened room; but with little rest. When the sun had been for some time on the downward course, he finally gave up the attempt to find repose. He summoned Lorimer, had the shutters flung back, allowed himself mechanically to be clothed in the suit selected by this worthy — the blue silk coat the vest, the laced shirt were still clinging to the crags above the cove — and thereafter was shaved, still in abstracted silence. Dismissing his servant, he sank into an armchair and became lost in a reverie. He was weary, aching from many bruises.

A certain old sword wound stabbed with recurrent sharpness. The trend of his thoughts was bitter, but it was absorbing, to the exclusion presently of all physical sensation. Sir Hugh sat like a man in a trance, motionless, with half-closed eyes; sat thus a long while.

A faint smile of satisfaction came at last upon the pressed lips; he roused himself from his reclining position to bend forward, resting his arms on his knees, and contemplated, as it were, with an air of triumphant irony, some scene displayed in front of him. Then, upon a sudden return of energy, he hoisted himself from the chair. He passed into the library, and, halting before a large map of the western counties of England, which showed upon its southern border a portion of the opposite coast-line of France with its fringe of English-Norman islands, once more lost himself in contemplation. With the edge of his handkerchief he compared distances with the scale of English miles. Brixham to St. Malo, ninety odd; Hope's Nose to Cape la Hogue — why, much the same. And the Hogue to Cherbourg? Not above twenty. . .

He pondered again; and the conclusions he came to were acceptable. He gave a final look and walked out, humming a stave from a pert little song that had had a vogue last year among the *roues de Versailles*:

“*Messieurs, messieurs, consolons-nous.*

La femme de Colin revient chez-nous!”

The lilt of it had a flippancy which sat oddly

upon the lips of so grave-looking a man as Sir Hugh Courtenay. In the passage he met the housekeeper, who carried a covered bowl.

“Whither, Mrs. Simnel? For the French gentleman?”

“No, Sir Hugh. For the man you brought in, Sir Hugh. The young monseer is still asleep, poor young gentleman! We have heard what he did, Sir Hugh; it was Providence sent him here last night.”

“Providence, no doubt, Mrs. Simnel,” said Sir Hugh piously.

“And you, sir? Why, praise Heaven, you seem quite recovered! You will be wanting dinner, sir. This has been a fearful day’s work to be sure. They say there are three bodies washed ashore now.”

“Fearful day, Mrs. Simnel? Why, this will have been the best day’s work I have ever done, if all goes as I expect! But, since our man is awake, proceed: I follow you.”

The housekeeper glanced at her master with a puzzled air; his words were plain enough, but there was something indefinably strange in his voice and manner that struck even her unsophisticated mind. She obeyed, however, and, in her wake, Sir Hugh entered the seafarer’s room.

The young man was lying on his back; his eyes were open. On the Squire’s entrance he made an effort to rise, but desisted on the forbidding gesture of his visitor, and fell back. The housekeeper deposited her burden and, at a sign from the master, silently withdrew.

The room was still half darkened. Sir Hugh went to the window and let in a full light upon the bed; then, dragging a chair forward, sat down mutely. Under the ensuing scrutiny the young man grew restless and flushed slightly. His was a face of plebeian but pleasant good looks and cast in a vigorous mould; his eyes were bright and wide open, and the mouth firm. Even drawn with exhaustion as his features now were, the countenance still displayed an air of strong vitality.

“Sir ——” he began in a husky voice; but the other cut him short.

“Who are you?” The question was asked with the quiet imperiousness of the undoubted superior.

“Vincent Norton, sir, your servant . . . of Exeter. Oh, sir, how can I ——”

“Thank me?” again interrupted the Squire. “We will discuss that afterward. Do you feel strong enough to talk?”

“Talk? Why, sir, yes. I would have got up but that I have no clothes.”

“No clothes? Of course, you have lost all you had on board. Was it much?”

Pain overcast the young face — a shadow creeping under the cloud of a distressing recollection.

“Much? Oh, my God, sir, yes! A fortune! Not a fortune,” he corrected himself with deference, “for a gentleman like your worship’s honour. but for one like me . . . Lord, Lord! Oh, my poor Jessie!”

The fellow had raised himself on his elbow. He sank back, and for a moment hid his head on

the pillow, with a suppressed sob. Sir Hugh waited a moment, then coldly:

“Who is Jessie?” he asked.

“Jessie, my wife. Poor, poor girl! She had built so high, too high, sir, upon this stroke of fortune. It was happiness — ah, it was too good to come to pass! We’re so poor, sir, I could not give her much comfort — poor girl — and she was ailing. The news of the bit of money coming to us had raised her strength — she looked like a young maid again; we were going to be safe at last, so she thought, poor girl!”

Sir Hugh had grown more sombrely thoughtful as he listened, his eyes fixed on the young man’s face.

“I see, my lad, it is of her you think first. Why?”

“My wife, your honour.” The words came out simply — an apology for his grief.

“I see — I see,” said the other sardonically, but yet with a kind of satisfaction in his tone. “I am not a married man: I don’t know. So a married man’s first thought is for his wife? Good! Good. But drink that stuff my housekeeper has left for you. Afterward we will on.”

The young man obeyed, with a vague sense of astonishment at his rescuer’s manner — a manner compound of cold haughtiness and a masterful benevolence, which from the first moment cast a spell over him. Sir Hugh waited; took back the cup, replaced it on the table, then went on:

“So you are married, and you are poor? What is your trade in life?”

“An engraver, sir. I had an uncle, a silversmith

in Dublin, your honour. I was apprenticed to him. But when I married and he turned me away, I came over with her to England, and I found work to do in Exeter for the gentry and the cathedral people. But, with a long day's work, it is but poor gain, your honour."

"But you, engraver — what made you on board that sinking ship?"

"My uncle died, sir, and we heard he had, after all, left me a portion of his stock, so that I might set up on my own; but not, said the will, in Dublin, where another nephew takes up the old silver house."

"And you were coming back with the goods, and your ship broke, within sight of home almost?"

"Ay, sir." Vincent Norton paused, struggling with his distress. Upon a sign of impatience from Sir Hugh, he went on, manfully enough: "Yesterday we met a coming gale; the wind had veered back to the east — the worst sign, so the master said. At close of night he gave up the attempt to enter the Exe, and turned the brig's head for Dartmouth, which he thought of making by first light. At midnight we lost a mast, and drifted, drifted; and at rise of day we struck and began to break. The men took the boat. God knows what's become of them! The master stuck to the brig, and I with him, thinking, you see, your honour, of the cases in the hold — and safer myself, I believed, even in a broken ship than in a rowboat on a sea like that! At daylight the master started to swim ashore. I could not find heart to go then. It must have been an hour later when all went to pieces. I

clung to a spar and trusted to drift away to land somewhere . . . though if 'tis to see my Jessie want, I'd as fain ——”

“Bah, my lad, your silver is lost. But what of that? Nothing is lost so long as there is life.”

Norton reared himself on his pillow eagerly.

“Ay, sir. Indeed and indeed I'm not forgetting what we owe to your honour! Oh, when I tell her what a stranger, a great gentleman — to risk your honour's life! And to think that such as we can do nothing, nothing to show our gratitude! We are only simple folk, and poor.”

“Do not futher distress yourself, my friend, on account of your poverty,” said Sir Hugh with an enigmatic smile. “There are many things a man may do if he really wishes to make a return for benefits received; many things which neither poverty nor humble station need interfere with.”

The flush deepened on the young man's face.

“Is there, truly, any work I can do — oh, not in return, that would be impossible, your honour! — but to prove my thanks? There is nothing I would not attempt ——”

But Sir Hugh, without answering, went on solemnly:

“Do you quite understand, Norton, that but for what I chose to risk this day you would, as sure as we two are here, be at this moment a livid corpse?”

“I do indeed, sir,” the youth said in a low voice.

“Your wife,” went on the Squire, “now a widow, delicate, I understand, without resources.” He paused, but Norton's lips only quivered upon the words he could not pronounce. “What, perhaps,

you do not know," proceeded Sir Hugh, "is that no one else on this coast could have been found to help you out of the sea. You are not of these parts, or you would understand."

The other began to feel bewildered. It did not seem to him, who was so ready with whole-hearted thankfulness, that it should be necessary to insist so sternly on the facts.

"Indeed, your honour," he stammered, "I feel it — I feel it! Your honour did stake your life . . . and if ever I could stake mine. . . for your worship's service ——"

"You would do so. Well, Mr. Norton" — Sir Hugh rose and stood towering at the foot of the bed — "yours was a flotsam life, I may say — if you know what that means. Flotsam is what has been cast out of a ship into the sea, in despair of bringing it safely to harbour. If it is thrown up upon the shore, flotsam belongs to whomsoever secures it. At least, if it is not law, it is the custom on these shores. And another custom in these parts is to let drowning men in the sea remain in the sea; it is held to be more wholesome for those on the shore! Your life, therefore, my lad, in a way belongs to me. I could fairly claim it. I prefer, however, to accept your free offer to service. What would you do for the man who saved you from the reefs — nay, never mind that — I will say for the man to whom your Jessie owes it to be still a wife? Tell me that."

Something very close to terror had taken hold of the listener. His nerve, weakened by his recent appalling experience, was not proof against a

creeping, superstitious fear. His noble recuer, to whom his heart had from the first leaped, in whose house, up to this moment, he had found nothing but charity, spoke and looked in such singular fashion—nay, seemed to be driving him toward some dread compact. Drawing instinctively back in the bed, wide-eyed, and a little breathless, he answered:

“Do, sir? Why — anything you desired. Anything in my power.”

Sir Hugh perceived that, for his purpose, he was perhaps proceeding on faulty lines. He forced himself into something like geniality.

“Come, come, my man,” he resumed, sitting down again, “there is no call to look so scared. I will ask nothing absolutely terrible of you. Though there may be a risk, it is trifling — a mere nothing to what I accepted this morning on behalf of a stranger. The fact is, Norton, that I am in need of service — service within a very few days. And what I demand in exchange for the life I have given you—a long one may it be, Norton! and, further, for a prosperous start on it if you act faithfully and are successful—is but a week or two out of that life. Perhaps much less I ask you, therefore, are you prepared to devote to my service that small slice of existence during which you will carry out implicitly, without questioning, everything and anything that I may order?”

He had bent forward, laying a claiming hand upon the bed, peering keenly. There was a silence. The young man had grown pale; in a low, husky voice, he faltered:

“I cannot do murder, sir.”

The Squire echoed the word with so quivering a frown that the room seemed to grow dark. Then he gave a harsh laugh:

“Murder,” he repeated to himself. “That would truly be disaster to my purpose!” Then, fixing the poor engraver with a gaze of immeasurable haughtiness: “Look at me, fellow!” he said. “Am I likely, think you, to deal with hired murderers? There is no question of murder, Mr. Norton. You have my word for that as a gentleman. Let it suffice.” Sir Hugh resumed his discourse with an air of quiet dignity. “There is a question only of obedience, of intelligent zeal, and some courage. I believe you have the intelligence and the courage. If I have your devotion I have all I need and all you can give me.”

The young man wiped his damp forehead.

“Oh, sir, I ask your pardon! Your honour must forgive me. I am but a fellow. I only wish I could do more!”

“What I will ask of you will suffice,” said the Squire, raising his hand to stop further asseveration. “Are you a religious man, Mr. Norton?”

“Faith, I am sir. I never missed my duties all through my life, if I could help it.”

This was said with an alacrity which carried conviction. The master of Anstiss Hall smiled.

“Vastly well,” he said. “Then you understand the nature of an oath over the Book?” So saying he rose, turned over some volumes on a shelf, and came back to the bed with one in his hand. “Here is a Testament, my lad. What you swear upon such a book to do faithfully can never bring aught

but benefits. Swear without reservation that you will work in my service until I dismiss you; truly, ungrudgingly, unquestioningly, to the best of your courage and ability — and so help you God, as He has already done this day!”

With full earnestness the young man repeated the oath, put his lips to the Book. He brought all the more alacrity to his obedience that every moment the shame of his extraordinary suspicion of his rescuer increased upon him.

“Whenever you command me, sir, I am ready. I would ask but leave to go and kiss my poor Jessie, and tell her ——”

“Kissing your poor Jessie again, my man, will be part of your reward; you have to earn it first. Never look so crestfallen; you will not have long to wait, if all goes as I desire. You may write — to-day — now, in fact. I shall dispatch a messenger at once.”

In the young husband’s eye a dimness had arisen, but he answered, firmly enough:

“Very well, your honour.”

Sir Hugh went on:

“And, to soften her disappointment, as well as to give you an earnest of what I mean to do, that is, as I said, to start you in life (if you succeed on my errand by and by), you will send her a small parcel of guineas, which I shall confide to the messenger.” As he spoke, he had brought forward an excritoire. “Shall I say fifty? I see you think fifty would be acceptable.” This with a glance at the hearer’s suffused countenance. “Vastly well. Then write.” He tried the nib of a quill

on his thumb-nail, and handed it: "No date, or place, or time. Stay — I shall dictate. Write:

"My dear Jessie, (or whatever may be the the way of addressing between yourselves), 'I may not be able to return to you for some time. I do not now how long. Perhaps it will be only a few days. The ship has gone down, and all our goods in it. But, by Heaven's help, I have scaped unhurt. For reasons which I shall relate only when we meet again, dear Jessie, (is that right? Yes? Go on:) 'I may not tell you where I am; but be assured that I am safe and sound, and (think of it, Jessie!) that I am like to get back the value of what we have lost in the wreck. But I have work to do for this same boon. To help you till my return (God willing) I send you by the hand of the messenger who brings you this, fifty guineas, in token of what we may yet receive for my work. Your loving husband."

"You may write," added the Squire, "any other endearment, but of course I must read over the screed before it goes."

When the letter — in the young engraver's copperplate hand, so strangely composed, yet not so unlike in the reading to anything which he would have penned from his own head — was completed, signed, and sealed with one of Sir Hugh's French seals, the latter took it up and rang a bell. On the servant's appearance, he gave the order:

“Warn ostler Jack that I am sending him to Exeter. Let him saddle Sunshine and attend me below as soon as he is ready.”

When they were once more alone, he turned to the bed, and, with a solemnity that again seemed to cast a spell over the young artisan:

“Your service, Norton, has begun. See that you carry it throughout faithfully; I have your oath warrant for your obedience. By this time to-morrow you will, I trust, receive news that your wife has had your letter. But you are, on no pretence whatsoever, to make any attempt to communicate further with her. Indeed, I enjoin upon you not to speak one word of what has passed between us in this room to any one in this house or out of it. And now your business is to get your strength back. In a couple of days I may have to send you travelling again.” He was turning to leave, when he stopped and wheeled round. “Hold! I was forgetting. I made you mention a certain promise in writing, just now. That stock of silverware which is rolling at the bottom of the sea, where you were so like to remain yourself, what was it worth? Speak truth, man.”

The colour mounted to Norton’s cheek. The magnitude of the sum, in his eyes, seemed to make truth sound like some opportune exaggeration. But truth he spoke:

“It was estimated in the will at eight hundred pounds.”

Sir Hugh gave a slight start, but it was with perfect indifference that he went on:

“Well, Norton, so be it. I have passed my word

in your letter. It is a fair sum for one in your station, but you may yet earn it."

On these words, he left the room. Norton, tired out and giddy with the twirl of events about him, sank back, but the prospect in the near future was too golden not to prove soothing, even in the midst of so much that was doubtful and mysterious. He thought, too, of all that the fifty guineas would procure for Jessie. Sleep came upon him pleasantly.

As Sir Hugh walked down the stairs, he stopped for a reflective moment.

"Eight hundred pounds, gadzooks!" But, presently, with a dry laugh and shrugging his shoulders in right French style: "Bah!" he said to himself. "I have gained or lost two thousand pistoles, and with less interest in the game, at the King's table in Versailles! Ah, Monsier de Courtenay — *nous allons bien voir!* We shall see, this time — we shall see!"

In this satisfactory mood he went on his way, balancing Norton's letter in his hand, to prepare in secure fashion the parcel of guineas for Jessie in Exeter; to write a brief note of his own which was to be left at a certain address in Teignmouth on the way; and to deliver in person exact instructions to ostler Jack.

IV.

HATE AT FIRST SIGHT.

M. de Rocourt appeared at dinner-time refreshed in body (although showing some symptoms of a cold in the head), point device in attire in spite of the early morning catastrophes. The two gentlemen met at table with much the same easy courtliness and diplomatic affability as on the previous night. The conversation during the meal, and later on, over the resumed game of piquet, glided gracefully upon every topic except that one which was closest not only to the Frenchman's mind, but now also in an equal degree to that of his English host.

The talk ran desultorily, while each was waiting for an opening to resume the interrupted discussion of the previous night. The neighbourhood was passed in review. There were one or two gentlemen, "of the right cockade," who must be informed on the morrow of their rare good fortune in having at hand some one to speak to them of Versailles and the things of gay France. Guests, these, who would pledge him in delicate claret. None of your Whiggish wines of Portugal for them! The excellence of French vintages introduced another topic, that of the regular smuggling traffic between the two coasts — a traffic, it was pointed out, which the

French King's officers actually encouraged and which, since the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, was now carried out almost without repression on the English side, though still, of course, with some secrecy.

They had adjourned to the card table in the library. Sir Hugh glanced at the clock; his messenger must by this time have executed his commission at Exeter.

And indeed, at that very moment, ostler Jack was dismounting in a side street within the cathedral precincts, in front of a small, neat house with overhanging upper story, and knocking at the door between those windows where, by day, samples of the engraver's art were attractively displayed. A young woman appeared on the threshold, with wide blue eyes of inquiry and a shadow of anxiety on her pale face. She took the letter, recognized the hand with a little cry of joy, then received the parcel, which was singularly heavy for its diminutive size, and examined the unknown seals with a puzzled air. When she looked up again to ask her questions, ostler Jack, a man who could be trusted to carry out orders to the smallest detail, was already back in the saddle. He saluted the pretty woman with an engaging grin, turned his horse round, and trotted away down the narrow street and out of sight without having spoken a single word.

“And, by the way, Vidame,” went on Sir Hugh, “I may very likely have the visit, this very night, of one of these same free-trading gentry. My man

left a message to-day at Teignmouth, where dwells a certain boat-builder, a prosperous personage, excellent citizen, highly respected in the town—withal one of the most sagacious master smugglers on the coast. A man of trust, when he knows with whom he is dealing. I have business of my own with him. But you, too, it occurs to me, might care to see him."

"What — not to deal for claret?" said the Vidame, laughing.

"No, but for comfort in travel. When the day comes — which I trust may be a long way off yet — that you can no longer endure this exile, he could provide a passage for you in a swift, well-found schooner, and take you toward Paris by way of Cherbourg; 'tis a shorter route than by St. Malo."

The Vidame shot a quick look over the edge of his cards. It seemed to him that his host had had a singular intonation; something in his voice almost like a sigh as he had spoken the word "Paris."

"*Parbleu* — is it possible," he thought, "that we are back at last at the point where we broke off yesternight? Let us see." He heaved a sigh himself; deep, unconcealed, full of feeling. "Alas! my dear Sir Hugh, that day must of necessity be near. In verity, it ought to be to-morrow! The King, or, rather, Madame de Mailleville, expects a prompt return on my part. Ah! that journey back, which, in my simplicity, I had pictured to myself as performed in your agreeable company, it will be dismal indeed! Signal failure in a task which I believed was to be a mere matter of form . . . Madame

de Mailleville displeased . . . the King affronted and unforgiving — most naturally! And all laid to my charge! For how explain, to any sane person—forgive me, my dear host, but I must insist — how explain to any sane person that there can persist between any two men, leaving the question of brotherhood alone, such an unquenchable hatred that even a King's desire, and a King's favour, weigh not as much as a feather in the balance?"

While listening to this new, if disguised, appeal, the Englishman had gradually assumed a look of mental hesitation and embarrassment; the look a man might wear who is anxious to retire from a false position.

"I fear," he began, with less than his natural assurance of manner, "I gave way last night to a fit of humour. I believe it was caused by hearing so unexpectedly of M. de Courtenay's marriage — or was it a realization that he had left the court, and that by a little pliancy on my part, by mere waiting, I might in a short time have found myself without a company obnoxious to me? I don't know. Certain, it was a splenetic fit — which this morning's hard work seems to have dissipated. But, in any case, it seems to have created an erroneous impression in your mind — one which, to say the truth, I am anxious to remove. Hatred? Dear Vidame, I do assure you, as I look into my feelings now, I find no hatred. A dislike — a very particular dislike — to a double, to a very copy, of myself always confronting me and making me feel positively ridiculous in my own eyes! There is no need

to tell one of your court experience that, when a gentleman dislikes another of his own station, he can but relieve his feelings by help of his blade. Now, if people had not always insisted on that other exasperating fact that this man I happened to dislike was my brother, as they called him, this accusation of hatred *a propos* of mere affairs of delicacy between men of honour would not have been raised. I for one do not recognize M. de Courtenay as a brother. I look upon him as a person whom I have ever found inconveniently in my way. Nothing more."

As Sir Hugh made these statements he avoided looking at his guest, and toyed with his cards, in a manner singularly at variance with his usual easy or masterful bearing. His face was flushed. The extraordinary fatigue of the day had warranted, well warranted, that extra bottle of claret. But the Vidame shrewdly observed that his host had never been in less good case to bear this deepening of his potations.

"Not hatred!" The Vidame remembered full well the countenance that had faced him the previous night. Then were real feelings heralded on hard lips and sombre eyes. But to-night other sentiments were evidently at work. Self-interest can be as strong a passion as hatred. The Vidame understood that. "Paris was well worth a Mass," had said Henri Quatre. Versailles would be worth a reconciliation, Sir Hugh was doubtless thinking now, though it were as hollow and perfunctory a reconciliation as two enemies had ever been forced to seal. And Sir Hugh was just a little off his bal-

ance, just a trifle out of his usual iron self-control. A man in this mood will be loquacious. The Vidame was inquisitive, but he was wily; he scarcely dared breathe a word lest he arrest the desired confidences. After a moment, Sir Hugh went on:

“I believe, Vidame, that no one knows the circumstances that brought Sir Hugh Courtenay, of Anstiss Hall, in the County of Devon, and M. de Courtenay, Seigneur de Brioux, in the Cotentin, on the opposite coast, to do service together by the King’s person. We are, as you made a point of insisting, the sons of the same father — and that father, Sir Percy, a thoroughbred Englishman. Yet M. de Courtenay is nothing, as you know, if not a gallant countryman of yours. (You see, sir, I heartily take back my ill-mannered impeachment of last night!) I, on the other hand . . . well, much as I yearn for the life of your fair France, I belong, all said and done, essentially to this soil.”

“A curious situation,” said Rocourt politely. “But all about you beaux Courtenays was ever a point of interest. This marvellous likeness in body, and with it the well-known difference of temper ——”

“Perhaps may be explained. Sir Percy married twice. My mother, a rich heiress of this county (all this property in Devon came from her — my father’s family is from the North), died soon after I was born. That was some thirty-four years or more ago. In that year, the ’15 as we are in the habit of calling it in this country — a bad time for the Tory gentry — there was an unfortunate political affair, which resulted in wholesale proscription and confiscation. My father was among

those who passed abroad. Most of his property was forfeited. My mother's estates, happily for me, remained untouched: her family was not implicated. And so, my father being abroad, I was brought up by aunts and uncles as guardians, inured to country and sea life, familiar with the rocks and waters as any seal. Six months after his expatriation my father married again; and again an heiress, but French this time. From that union came the present M. de Courtenay. The Courtenays are a strong race, it would seem," said Sir Hugh with a laugh — "or, at least, my father must have been a man of forceful personality, for both these sons of his, by women so different, grew as like him as it is possible for youth to be like middle years — and more closely like each other than I would believe any twins in history! Thereby hung the mischief."

"An ordinary man might think that it should have drawn them together," put in the Vidame insinuatingly. "But, well?"

"Well, it did not," rejoined Sir Hugh dryly. "But to finish with this subject: the situation was, as you have said, curious. Until I was fifteen years old my father had never seen me. Through his French marriage and the amity of some high personages he had become, as you say over there, *tres bien en cour*. From the first days of his exile he had claimed the old Norman form of the family name — that is Courtenay; and later the King, who held him in esteem, revived for him the old title. Both the name and the title devolved naturally to his French son, Andre. One fine day, there

being at the time what seemed likely to be lasting peace between the countries, my father bethought himself to send for his English son. I was to be put to school at the *College Noble de Beauvais*. And my father set eyes on his eldest boy the first time since he had beheld him in long clothes! His first greeting was a loud burst of laughter! He declared the joke phenomenal. I also found the matter phenomenal, when, a few days later, I was brought face to face with my — with my father's other son, who had been sent for posthaste from distant Cotentin. But I, certes, saw no jest in it. Account for the case as you will, my dear Vidame, it was like a blow. I felt it like one. I resented it like one. Think of it! There stood, the same in every line and colour, the image I was accustomed to watch daily in my mirror, the living copy of myself in other flesh and blood! The sensation was incredible, and it was odious! The boy greeted me in French, a language I did not yet know, but in my own voice. And I, voicelessly, cursed him! He braced me heartily. I could feel the vigour of a strong young frame even as mine; and in my sudden anger I could have strangled him even as he kissed my cheek!

“My father laughed more than ever when he saw us side by side. There was pride and delight in his laugh — especially pride, I now conceive. But, in me, his laughter raised a sort of dumb rage. My strange behaviour on that day was put down to English awkwardness, to outlandish bringing up; to anything but the truth. And indeed, how could any one guess at such a feeling? How could

I myself ever explain it? It became the main effort of my life to conceal so inexplicable a repulsion. When we were still youths, my father had obtained for us both to serve a spell among the Blue Pages. The two pretty boys had given rise to a proverb, and that proverb maddened me! My choked-down fury was like some haunting disease which a man must keep secret for very life and bear with a serene face. But I will not dilate . . . My father died. Life had suddenly assumed an aspect of unexpected brilliancy, for, young as I was, the King offered me the vacancy in the *Gens d'Armes*. It was a great mark of favour to the name of Courtenay. Conceive my feelings when scarce had I had time to taste my triumph ere his Majesty conceived the idea of extending the favour to my father's other son! The day when I heard, as a felicitation, forsooth, that there were to be two Courtenays *aux Gens d'Armes*, I would have resigned my honours were it not that to cast away the King's preferment would have spelt ruin for all my prospects. And life was good . . . in those years!

“My stepbrother returned to court; my double, the other beau Courtenay, the sore in my flesh, the thorn in my side! Surely it is needless to explain. Those things cannot well be put in words. I had lost my personality. We were interchangeable in people's thoughts; with this difference, perhaps, that he ever seemed to be reaping what I had sown!

“I would, as I said, have craved his Majesty's leave to return to my English estate. But something meanwhile had begun to wrap itself close

round my life which would have made departure more than I could face. And in this great thing something quite new to me, who up to then had been but a man *a bonnes fortunes*, a *roue* if you will among lesser rips — in this supreme matter, I say, the curse of Fate would make it that this living shadow of me, this solid reflection of myself, must, even as he had hitherto in trifles, rise between me and the light, and again seem like to reap where I ——”

All pretence at playing out the game of piquet had, by tacit accord, been abandoned. The Vidame reclined back in his chair, a smile full of amenity on his lips. Sir Hugh had his elbow on the table, resting his square jaw on his hand. As he delivered himself of his recital, he had by degrees lost his easily assumed lightness of manner. There had risen something like a suppressed roar at the back of his voice. He suddenly became aware of it and made a snatch at his self-possession.

“But, my friend,” he resumed with a laugh, “I cannot, in loyalty, give any private person like yourself the details of an affair which I have felt bound to refuse to your sovereign — it would scarce be fitting!”

The Vidame had more than a shrewd guess as to the nature of the affair, but he contented himself with making a grave bow, in courtly acquiescence with so essentially correct a procedure.

“You will observe,” the speaker went on, “that a clash was inevitable. A real injury, whatever it might be, supervening after so long a spell of antipathy and pent up irritation, was bound to pro-

voke an open rupture. It came, as you know, and it has resulted in my exile."

"But not necessarily in a permanent one, my dear host," said the Vidame, passing through the offered loophole with prompt decision. "Let me present you a much altered aspect of the situation. And let me not, I entreat," he went on, meltingly, "return to the King, my master, empty-handed! Think of your reception at the *petit lever* of Madame de Mailleville, when you come back (as she knows) to her desire! Think — but why think of anything but this: except for the brief interview which I trust I may have to report to royal ears, think only that you, in all probability, will never set eyes a second time upon M. de Courtenay. He is wedded not only to a wife but to a quiet existence on his estate. From what I heard from his own mouth, he has little desire to return to the court."

There was a pause, during which Sir Hugh appeared to struggle with some elusive thought; to hesitate between the new allurements and the old bitterness. At last he allowed himself to break into a smile:

"You have a persuasive tongue, Vidame. A better courier could not have been found. To the devils with the cards!" he suddenly exclaimed. "To-night — let us drink!"

He rose, and filled glasses. Then, with more emphasis perhaps than was called for, he called out the toast:

"Let us drink to Paris, to Versailles! To beauty and joyousness, and light hearts! I have been a fool. I will not be one again. A new spirit is in

me: spirit of reason. There is nothing true in life but pleasure — pleasure and honour! But as you said, honour should be satisfied between brothers, by two meetings — the game and the revanche. Where has been my head all this while? . . . Conceive it, Vidame, last night, the uppermost thought in me actually was to induce you to carry back yet another challenge to — to my brother!”

“Trust me,” put in the Vidame, laughing, “for once in my life I should have declined the honour. That would, *palsambleu*, indeed have ended M. de Rocourt’s career!”

“Your errand shall be more suitable to your merits, Vidame. You told me the text of the King’s order, and the conditions, last night. As for the rest, I trust your tact and sagaciousness to devise means of making this submission easy.” And then, as on a sudden thought: “I could not do it within sight of hearing of Madame de Courtenay . . . I could not! Understand, the only thing that could take place under the lady’s eyes would be a duel. She therefore must not be there. . . . You will insist on that.”

The Vidame was not full of elation. The hardships of his sea travel, the misadventures of the morning, had not, then, been wasted! But who could have foreseen so sudden a reversal of sentiment? “Self-interest is indeed a powerful ally,” thought the Frenchman, with a mocking mind. But he struck the hot iron.

“It shall, of course, be as you elect. Where, how, and when you choose. M. de Courtenay, I must say, when I expressed my hopes of what

— Heaven be praised!— is, after all, going to take place, he did not seem to put much faith in their realization. But he assured me that no obstacle would ever be raised on his side.”

“It cannot be here,” said Sir Hugh, pondering. “Twice since my return (I may as well own it) have I sent him written word that, if I was debarred from seeking him in France, he at least knew where to find me: and as I pointed out, in these peace days, nothing easier. To ask him again to cross the water might seem something of a renewed if covert challenge. Besides, my dear sir, it would cause you to undertake two extra sea passages, which, certes, ought to be spared you!” He broke off with a jerk of the head. “Hark! And here, it would seem, comes our man!”

“Our man?” asked the Vidame, with a start.

“I mean, Vidame, I only mean our mariner that is to be: the master smuggler I was telling of.”

From the outside night a prolonged whistle had penetrated into the room. It was now repeated, nearer; a lengthened, undulating sound that seemed to be passing round the house.

“Yes,” said Sir Hugh, “that is our fellow. A customary arrangement,” he explained, “with these gentry when business is forward, to ascertain whether the coast is clear. I must let him know that there is nought to fear.” He threw open the window and answered the signal with three claps of the hand. Instantly the whistling ceased. “On these discreet occasions,” added Sir Hugh, “I make it a practice to let in the visitors myself and by a side door. Give me your leave for a few moments.”

The Vidame, left alone, sank into a state of musing. This Englishman's changeable moods were puzzling. There seemed, however, to be no doubt that counsels of sanity, on the whole, were now to prevail: and that, before many days, the formal repudiation of the feud would in all probability take place; after which all M. de Rocourt's interest in the matter, save that of curiosity, would lapse.

In a short while Sir Hugh returned, accompanied by the nocturnal visitor.

This was a short, broad-shouldered man, whose red and wrinkled face proclaimed nothing sooner than a genial temper and a happy taste for conviviality. His dress of decent, sober-hued broadcloth, his manner and fair, smooth speech, suggested the prosperous tradesman, the probable church warden. There was indeed little about him, except the keen eye and the weather-beaten skin, to herald a seafaring life; and nothing to point in any way to the smuggler — a generation associated in the popular mind with a ruthless, hard, uncompromising, and often sanguinary disposition.

On entering he made a bow, and displayed an ingratiating countenance to the Vidame; accepted the glass of Nantes which the Squire filled for him, and tossed it appreciatively down his throat.

“As I was telling you, Mr. Purkiss,” said Sir Hugh, seating himself and continuing apparently a conversation begun at the garden door, “this is not the usual business.”

“I am sorry for that, Sir Hugh; I am about to deal with some special barrels of Anjou wines, and

also a rare little lot of brandy kegs from Armagnac. But perhaps you will think it over; or, again, speak of it to the gentlemen."

"No doubt, Mr. Purkiss. Meanwhile, I have at hand something more pressing, which you will, I am sure, find in the end as good business. This French gentleman requires to be landed at Cape la Hogue. You know that coast, I believe?"

"Oh, yes, I may say that I know that coast, Sir Hugh." The man seemed to see some humour in the statement, and smiled agreeably as he made a leg in the direction of the Vidame. "I may say I know that coast," he repeated.

"Then, when you have carried him there, I, in my turn, may require to be taken to Cherbourg and brought back here. Now it would be a special convenience, should the weather permit it, to embark from and return straight to Anstiss Cove, and not by way of Teignmouth or Dartmouth."

"Well, Sir Hugh, I believe it is possible to land in Anstiss Cove," returned the free-trading master, with a merry look in his eyes that again proclaimed a humorous inner thought. "I really believe it is possible to do it, even on a moonless night, given that the sea's not up."

"Very well, then, Mr. Purkiss, what would you say now to my chartering your fastest boat? The *Phoebe*, I believe she is called. Is she on this side?"

"*Phoebe* is her name, Sir Hugh, and she lies at Teignmouth. As to the chartering, why ——"

"Listen! It will only be for a few days; two or three journeys across. No risk, no trouble; only

passengers who are in haste. As for the price, you shall fix it yourself, for each crossing, at the figure of the profit you look to make on the best cargo landed. But sit down, Mr. Purkiss; pray fill your glass again and make out the sum, while I explain matters to this gentleman."

Sir Hugh now turned to the Vidame, who, for all his attentive listening, had obviously been unable to take in more than the bare meaning of an occasional word.

"My dear M. de Rocurt, with your assentiment, I would propose some such course of procedure as the following: This excellent seaman can take you straight from this shore to the very beach below the Chateau de Brieux. Thus you can be spared some useless and fatiguing travel. You would then convey to M. de Courtenay a message from me which no doubt may astonish him considerably, but (I have your warrant for it) will not displease him. It would be a proposal that he and I should meet, in your presence, at some convenient place. And, in my opinion, the most convenient place would undoubtedly be Cherbourg, which is within easy reach of La Hogue and on your way back to Paris. Then, if M. de Courtenay agrees, my dear ambassador, I would beg you to do me the good office to send back word by the returning vessel of the date which it would please him to appoint for the little ceremonial in obedience to the orders of the King. I should entreat him, however, to make the date as early as possible, in respect of the fact that I must until then keep this worthy free-trader's vessel in attendance, and that each day's delay

means of necessity considerable expense. But, before I close the compact with yonder master, I must hear from you (with a sadness, be it said!) the day which you have been pleased to decide upon for your return journey."

"My dear host," said the Vidame, with his engaging simper, "this is, as I said on my arrival at your hospitable door, King's service. Therefore the briefest delay."

"I appreciate the motive," returned the Squire, with some alacrity. "Shall we say the morning after to-morrow, then, at an early hour?"

He turned once more to the master of the *Phoebe*, who was smacking his lips complacently over a second cup of the amber spirit.

"Ah," remarked the latter, "I think I could almost tell when you had this particular stuff, Sir Hugh! I don't believe the King — God bless him! — has any better, if as good; I don't, indeed, believe it."

With a benevolent, almost paternal, smile, he handed a slip of paper upon which, during the French intercourse, he had jotted down certain figures. The Squire glanced at it, nodded in acquiescence, and negligently pocketed the document. "This gentleman," he said in English, "wishes to leave the day after next. I look, therefore, to your bringing the *Phoebe* round to wait for him in the offing of Tower Stone at sunrise. And it is understood I have your best service, Mr. Purkiss, on your own terms, from day to day, until further notice. Ah! One word more," he went on, as the master rose to take his departure. "You have whole day before you. Pray see that the cabin be fitted,

if possible, with all such comforts as may be required by persons of quality. The gentlemen of the French court," he explained, with a smiling nod toward the listening but uncomprehending Vidame, "as much as any fine lady, love neatness and cleanliness, and seclusion from prying eyes. I believe you take my meaning?"

The master smuggler had a pleasant and indulgent smile.

"I take your meaning, Sir Hugh. I shall see to it myself sir," he said; and, escorted by the Squire, departed by the way of his entrance.

"M. de Rocourt," said Sir Hugh, with great show of satisfaction, as he re-entered the library a few minutes later, "everything is arranged. We may now, for the too short time when it will be my privilege to have you under my roof, dismiss a subject — and I feel the guilt of it — which must have been a weariness to your patience. We have, so to speak, settled between us the protocol of this delicate affair, and I, on my side, have shaped its course in all material details — and the issue of it is on the lap of Fate. Meanwhile, there is — what say you? — nothing more for us to do than to resume this much interrupted game of piquet."

As the Vidame took up the cards again he was marvelling at the manner in which his host seemed to have got rid all at once of the fumes of his wine and of the passion it had engendered.

V

“ALEA JACTA,”

“Norton,” said Sir Hugh genially, as the young man stood before him the next morning in the library, “I have sent for you to tell you pleasant news. It may be even a shorter time than I thought before you be free to fly back to the arms of your Jessie. Four days, perhaps three. Admit, my friend, that it will not be too high a price to pay for a new lease of life! What say you? By the way, it seems that all is well with her; my messenger has returned. She has your letter and your little present.”

Norton advanced a step nearer, his face illumined. He was a pleasant-looking youth. And, dressed as he now was in a travelling suit of plain dark cloth, from Sir Hugh's cast-off wardrobe, albeit it fitted him somewhat loosely, with fine shirt, black thread stockings, and buckle shoes, he showed a comely figure enough.

“Oh, your honour! And has she sent any message?”

“She was not given the opportunity, my lad.” There was a return of hardness on the Squire's features. “Do you forget our compact already? You have yet to earn the reward of a free intercourse with Jessie. But now listen! Luckily for you, since you desire so ardently to see Exeter soon again, the

gale has dropped. The sea is going down; by all token it will be fair to-morrow and you will be able to make your first journey. I am sending you across to France as a courier, and you will no doubt be back here before noon the next day. Make your preparations. One word more: I have enjoined that you keep your mouth close, but you may give it out that you are engaged as my travelling attendant and secretary. 'Twill more than suffice to explain your movement and your residence here."

Norton left the room, more completely under the spell than ever. The look in the stern gray eyes, the manners, singularly compound of imperiousness and benevolence, of the great gentleman who was now his master, could not but have impressed the simple fellow in any case; but when he remembered at the same time that here was one who had drawn him from the valley of the shadow of death, it was little wonder that he should feel himself enslaved, body and soul. Withal, what hopes sprang from this very servitude!

The Vidame's third night at Anstiss Hall, like the first, was *nuit blanche*. It had been Sir Hugh's purpose to show a new attitude of mind to his French visitor: to send him forth in a convinced mood. Three neighbours of most excellent company had been convened. Mrs. Simnel had been requested to surpass herself in ingenuity, and Lorimer to ransack the secret corners of the cellar.

There was much talk of French days on the part of the guests; many allusions, all of intended private meaning, on that of the Squire, to more good hours

in reserve. Peep of day, then sunrise, found the company still in the best of humours with itself. And when Lorimer at last brought word that the dinghy was waiting on the beach, and that the traveller's chest was already shipped, a rousing toast was drunk to the Vidame, before the neighbours “of the proper colour” sought their horses in the stables for the homeward trot.

The Squire escorted his guest to the lip of the cliff; and presently saw Norton, who was waiting in attendance on the strand, take his place in the stern-sheets by the side of that gentleman. As they pushed off, the young artisan gravely raised his hat.

The schooner, in charge of Mr. Purkiss in person, was running short tacks half a mile off. Sir Hugh waited on the edge of the crags until the travellers were aboard and the *Phoebe* on her fairway across the clear northeast breeze; then, pensively, he returned to the Hall.

Under favourable sailing conditions it is but a ten hours' run from Torbay to Cape la Hogue. A fast sailer, the *Phoebe* did the course under the time; before noon she was in sight of the high coastline of the Cotentin, and by two o'clock the dinghy's keel was grating on the shingle below the sheer cliffs of Brieux. The Vidame had slept luxuriously, in a cabin fit indeed (in accordance with the Squire's request) “for any fine lady.” He had risen in time to prink and prune himself as beseems a French gentleman about to visit a chateau wherein dwelt not only the lord of the soil but also the fair chate-laine thereof.

With Norton, owing to linguistic disabilities, he could have little or no intercourse. This latter, on his side, kept discreetly to himself: his mind far away, somewhere round an ancient cathedral, in company with a young wife.

The new secretary and the Vidame, under the guidance of a fisherman whom they found drying nets on the high strand, reached the plateau where, a quarter of a mile or less inland, rose the Chateau de Brioux, once a strong-house of some warlike note, now altered to a plasuance of the more modern French type, with pointed slate roofs, high windows, and balconies of curvetting ironwork, balustered stone terraces, all within high-walled gardens of formal device.

The Vidame was admitted by liveried servants, who could not repress staring astonishment at his appearance on foot. Norton was unceremoniously left to pace the length of the terrace; and it must have been fully an hour before he was summoned into the house. He was introduced into an apartment of singular grandeur combined with absolute discomfort. The Chateau de Brioux, in its renovated condition, belonged to the days of the Grand Roy.

The Vidame was seated near a long tapestry covered table, on a high-backed chair, between a lady of gracious beauty and a gentleman in crimson riding attire, at sight of whom the English youth remained as one blasted with astonishment.

“My God! . . . Sir Hugh!” he cried; then stopped, and a deep colour mounted to his face. There was an amused smile on M. de Rocourt’s

lips, a look of cold curiosity in the blue eyes of the lady, one of keen scrutiny in those of M. de Courtenay.

“I am not Sir Hugh,” said the latter at last, in fair English, though with a pronounced accent. “Ah! I see you have already realized as much! I am the Comte de Courtenay, his brother. Have you also a message for me?”

“A message, sir, my lord? No. My instructions are only to bring back one from your worship.”

The lord of Breuix pondered for a moment. Then to his lady, in French:

“Of course, this man would know nothing.”

Again turning to Norton, he asked him, with distant interest, to narrate the extraordinary story of his rescue at the hands of Sir Hugh. And when the engraver had gone through his tale, in tones that every moment grew warmer with enthusiasm, M. de Courtenay looked at his wife with wondering eyes:

“Upon my soul, Isabelle, I never would have believed that Hugh had so much Christian devotion in him! It is prodigious. Well,” he added with a smile that brought an increase of amazement to the young man’s soul, so absolutely was it even as had been the stern look of inquiry a few moments ago, what he had learned to associate with the Squire’s face yonder on the opposite coast, “well your confessor, no doubt, would say that grace has at last touched him! And that would fit in better than anything I have ever known of my borther, with M. de Rocourt’s message from England. It is of good augury, at any rate. So be it.”

With these words he turned his chair to the table, on which was the usual huge silver standish of French noble houses, and began writing on an armored sheet. The letter took a long time, for he seemed to weigh every word. At last it was sanded, folded, elaborately sealed, and thrown to the messenger.

“Here is the answer. Take it back — with all speed.”

Bowing profoundly, Norton departed, not a trifle bewildered by what he had seen, comparing, perhaps, with some English prejudice, the reception he had found on the white cliffs of La Hogue with that of the red crags of Anstiss.

Sir Hugh, sunk in an armchair, by the side of a table on which stood glass and decanters and a couple of candles nearly expiring in the sockets, a book on his knee, had fallen from a sombre and bitter reverie into the oblivion of slumber. The clock marked the half after two; and already, through the uncurtained window, the early light was pouring, gray and cold. A knock at the door, discreet enough though it was, woke the sleeper with a start.

On his sharp call, “Come in!” Norton appeared on the threshold. He made his bow and, advancing, presented M. de Courtenay’s letter.

The Squire took it up, held it closer to the dancing lights, gazed at the handwriting and the seals, then with a brusque movement that fitted with the tenor of his haunting thoughts, tore it open and read. His lips were compressed; but presently a sar-

castic smile parted them. He read once more. Then:

“Where is the master of the schooner?” he asked.

“He waits below for further orders, your honour.”

“Very good. These are the orders: We start, you and I, on precisely the same journey — that is to La Hogue — in two hours’ time. Meanwhile you will see, with Lorimer, that suitable provisions be taken on board, and wine and fruit. Ah! and tea! See to it — enough for two days. Norton, this is but the dawn of your second days’ service — yet it looks as if it might come to an end, luck helping, before to-morrow night! Go, and attend on me when all is ready.”

The smile had broadened grimly on the Squire’s lips as he signed to his new famulus to hasten away. When the door was closed, he read the epistle for a third time. It ran, in French, in these terms:

From the Chataeu de Brioux en Cotentin this 21st day of June, 1751:

MONSIEUR MY BROTHER: — I thank Heaven which has permitted that I should receive such a message as that which M. le Vidame de Rocourt has, in this hour, brought to me from you. I not only am willing, but I ardently desire, to forget and forego any sentiment of animosity between us. I may say, Monsieur my brother, that although, as circumstances would have it, we have met seemingly as enemies, no feeling of enmity has ever arisen spontaneously in my heart similar to that which you have of late years expressed for me.

I understand that you desire the interview to take place within the briefest delay. In accordance with this wish, I shall wait at the town mansion of M. le Comte de Faville, now Marechal de Camp, at Cherbourg, for the honour of your visit, from to-morrow, that is to say, Thursday, the 22nd. I expect to be there about noon, and shall hope for your arrival during the course of that day or the following.

At the discreet but very instant suggestion of M. de Rocourt, I beg to assure you that there can be no occasion of your meeting Madame de Courtenay, who will not accompany me. She remains at Brioux, and no doubt will welcome on my return the news of a happy reconciliation between estranged relations.

I beg, Monsieur my brother, that you will truly believe in the high esteem in which I hold you.

ANDRE COMTE DE COURTENAY.

“The die is cast,” said Sir Hugh. “Now, Monsieur my brother, we shall ere long know the result of the throw!”

Although still in a favourable quarter, the breeze had somewhat slackened, and it was past the fourth hour after noon when the Phœbe lowered her dinghy about a mile off the strand of Brioux, to land Norton, alone and now bent on an errand vastly different from the simple office of fetch and carry he had had to perform on the previous day.

The office liked him not. There was no use in his attempting to blink the fact. He loathed it. Every element of his nature revolted against it. Certes it was not murder — the one deed he had been careful to eliminate from his compact — it was not even a petty crime like theft; but it seemed to his frank soul as sordid, almost as repulsive. It was lying. It was to be a lie pushed to the direst degree; a continued lie, a pathetic — nay, a cruel, lie! Yet he was going to carry it through to the last jot of the letter, to the faintest essence of the spirit.

In the long conversation he had held with his new servant — after he had allowed him (with that sedulous care for details which is the stamp of mastery in all scheming) to have a restful spell of sleep and an invigorating meal — in that carefully prepared explanation of the duty he expected in exchange for the “flotsam life,” Sir Hugh had had powerful arguments: There was an oath voluntarily taken; there was Jessie, her happiness, her future; there was the “fair start in life”; there was also the assurance on the word of a gentleman that no violence, not the smallest indignity, to a lady was contemplated. And Norton, under the gray eyes, felt the word of a gentleman as irrevocable as Fate.

But there was lying, consummate hypocrisy, a ruthless deception to be practised. And that was only the first part of the service he had entered upon. Well, he was going to perform it swiftly, as a thing abhorred; fully and well, like a man who, at least, will not jeopardize the reward of his deed! And Sir Hugh knew it. His last word, as Norton

saluted to take his leave before lowering himself into the boat, had been — drawing a large and heavily sealed letter from his pocket.

“Here, Norton, is your charter of freedom and of a restored fortune. When you land at Anstiss, in company with them I wish to see there, this will pass into your hands.”

Madame de Courtenay, a great fan of peacock’s feathers in her hand, was just descending the steps of the terrace, in company with her duegne and her greyhound, for a walk among the formal flower-beds after the great heat of the day. The greyhound suddenly gave a warning growl, and stood by his mistress with trembling lip of menace.

“Whom have we here?” inquired the great lady. “Peace, Roland!” And she stroked the hound with perfumed glove.

A man was seen approaching from the gateway at a rapid stride up the long avenue. He was bare-headed, with attire disordered like one who has run at greatest haste. When he drew near it was seen in the sunshine that his face was shining with sweat and that he was panting for breath. And suddenly Madame de Courtenay lost her languid air, and cried out:

“But in Heaven’s name, this is the man who was here yesterday!” For no reason that could in sober thought be urged, a sense of dread fell like an icy hand on the bride of a few days. “And he bears bad news, I know it!” she went on, in a fainter voice. “Look at his face!”

She took some rapid steps toward him, and Norton

stopped short, staring at her with strained and fearful eyes.

“Speak! What have you to tell me?”

Madame de Courtenay had no English — Norton, or course, never a word of French.

“Madame — my lady —” he began with a trembling in his voice.

“Mercy — wretch, cannot you speak the language? What is it? M. de Courtenay ——”

The young man dropped his eyes, and murmured: “Yes.”

“But what is it? What has happened?” She wrung her hands. “Run, Berthe, fetch Nichols! He will question this miserable, and tell us. Go! Ah, I know!” she suddenly cried, with a shriek. “They have met — they have fought again! I felt it! Say it out! M. de Courtenay is hurt! Where is he?”

Although unable to seize any word, Norton took in the question from tone and gestures.

“In the schooner,” he answered. He pointed seaward, then made a gesture as though to draw her on. “He sends for you at once — at once!” he stammered. And again through the unknown speech she took the meaning.

Without another word she began running toward the gate, closely followed by the young man, whose head was in a whirl, partly from his efforts to carry out a task so repulsive, partly from the astonishment at the fantastic manner in which the wife had leaped at the very thing he was about to make her believe.

By the time they were nearing the cliff, escorted

by the hound, they were overtaken by an old man, much out of breath and very red in the face. This was Nichols, a servant of the late Sir Percy, who, as a young man, had ridden with him in the Rebellion, passed with him over to France, and remained in the family's service ever since.

The schooner could be seen, as close inshore as she could run.

"He is there!" panted the young wife.

She stopped a moment, clinging to the old servant's arm to take breath. The tears welled up at last, and she fell on the scrubby grass, sobbing miserably.

A new terror seized Norton. Was he to lose his prize after all this horrible comedy? The woman must be got on board. Poor thing — poor thing! . . . Even so Jessie would have sobbed. Ah! but Jessie was not to sob over a lost husband, thanks to Sir Hugh. And Sir Hugh was waiting!

"Tell her ladyship," he whispered to Nichols, "she must hasten — he may live — and yet, again, there may not be a moment to lose. And he must see her."

"Who must see her la'ship?" growled Nichols, uncomprehending.

"Mounseer Courtenay — quick!"

"Thunder!" said the old trooper, and bent down to lift his mistress, at the same time translating his compatriot's words.

Supported by the two men, she began the descent. For all three it was like a bewildering dream — a nightmare, indeed, for her. In the haste, in the glare, the heat, the difficulty of the descent by

a path cut on the very face of the cliff, there was no room for connected questions and answers. And Norton, prepared as he had been with a plausible account, was spared the misery of telling it. There was, indeed, no need to urge speed; the wife's soul was already on the vessel. She was hurling herself toward it. The dinghy was waiting, two oarsmen in attendance. She was carried on board by four brawny English arms, tender to a woman. Norton jumped in. Nichols was about to follow, but there was a cry of “No room for you, lad!” from one of the sailors; and the boat shoved off, leaving the old servant with the dog on the strand dark-visaged, and suddenly suspicious.

Mr. Purkiss, blandly paternal and humorous, lifted the lady on board; and immediately, on his awaited order, the *Phoebe* set her course eastward, heading for Cherbourg.

Madame de Courtenay looked round in an agony of expectation. The master, in his most propitiating voice, answered the mute inquiry:

“This way, my lady.”

She was introduced into the cabin, and heard the door discreetly closed behind her. Sir Hugh was sitting, his elbow on his knee, his chin upon his hand, facing her. On her entrance he rose slowly, and his tall form nearly reached to the roof. In the reduced light, after the sun glare, she was for a second deceived, and rushed forward with a ringing cry:

Andre! Mon Andre!” She would have fallen into his arms but for the sudden horrible recognition, which jerked her back, staring wildly.

“Heaven be merciful!” she said, in a husky, agonized voice. “You! What have you done with him?”

Sir Hugh was ashy pale, but his eyes burned as he gazed once more, after so long a span of loneliness, at the woman who had passed him by for his double.

“Madame,” he answered, in a wilfully level voice, “let me comfort you, for the instant, in one word. M. de Courtenay is safe and sound. At least, I know nothing to the contrary, for I have not seen him since the day when we were brought together before Messieurs les Marechaux.”

There was a silence, broken only by the creaking of mast and rigging, and the swish of water by the *Phoebe's* sides. Madame de Courtenay, struggling, in the revulsion of her feelings, with the amazement and indignation that for a moment overpowered her, at length recovered some hard-won composure.

“Then, sir, I will ask the meaning of this outrageous trick ——”

She spoke the words with haughty disdain, but her lips were still twitching. Sir Hugh considered her for a while with darkling admiration.

“Madame,” he answered, at last, “there is a saying that all is fair in love and war. It has not been your pleasure that it should remain love between us. Ever since, it has been mine that it should, therefore, be war with M. de Courtenay. Up to now, the fortune of war has been so hard on me, and M. de Courtenay has been so obliviously happy in love, that he no doubt thought the war was over; thought that I was thoroughly encompassed by his refusal to come and meet me! Well,

shackled as I was by my parole, I have been forced to devise means that will induce him to take up arms again, and I cannot conceive that he will refuse to do so now! Within a few hours he will have received word of the place where you can be found, and, therefore, madame, your estrangement from monsieur my brother will, I feel sure, be of very short duration. As for the interview which I desire with him,” went on Sir Hugh, with his sardonic smile, “it need not last more than a very few minutes!”

Madame de Courtenay had grown white to the lips, but, with a brave effort, retained all her haughty bearing.

“I see, sir. And where, if I may know, do you propose to take me as a prisoner?”

“Oh, madame, not a prisoner! An honoured hostage, a respectfully guarded guest in my poor house, and, in all likelihood, but for a very few hours. This vessel will remain in attendance to take you back, you and your husband. Yes, I may say, whatever the issue of our interview, take you back, you and your husband . . . As soon as the hostage has been redeemed. Meanwhile, you have undisturbed possession of this cabin, which I have striven to make, as far as possible, fit to receive so exalted a visitor. We can hardly be off the English coast before next sunrise, but you will find a couch and, I hope, acceptable refreshment. Have I your leave to retire?”

She had opened her lips for a bitter retort, but closed them again upon silence. In answer to an angry sign from her, he left the cabin.

Beating against the wind, it took the schooner close upon three hours to reach Cherbourg roads. The skies were already assuming the gorgeous hues of the sundown of a brilliant hot day, when the dinghy was again lowered.

Norton, who for some time had been closely listening to precise instructions from Sir Hugh, received a sealed note from the latter's hands, placed it carefully into a breast-pocket, ascended with grave mien into the boat, and was rowed away toward the harbour.

"The address upon this letter," had said Sir Hugh, "will be your passport. Show it, without parting with it, to any one who may stop you, and you will be guided to the house. As for your return, make it your business that it be in company of the gentleman whom it is my desire to receive at Anstiss."

Half an hour later the boat returned, without its passenger; and the schooner, bearing away the fair hostage, trimmed her sails for the Devon coast.

The Hotel de Faville, the residence of the military commander at Cherbourg, stood in the Place d'Armes, at a corner of a row of handsome, cold buildings of greystone, adorned with much black and gilt ironwork. Before the double stairway leading to the great door, a white-coated sentry rested his hands wearily upon the bend of his bayonet.

At one of the balconied windows, from which a fair view could be had of the harbour and the roadstead beyond, and from which, indeed, by the aid

of a telescope, the movements of a schooner in the offing had been observed that could hardly be any other than the one he was expecting, M. de Courtenay sat, impatiently waiting, and but little enlivened by the converse either of his friend, M. de Faville, or of that royal messenger, Le Vidame de Rocourt.

The Lord of Brioux's mind, even like that of the humble engraver of silverwares was away in his home, by the side of his young wife. The coming interview would be disagreeable, and he longed to have it well over — though, certes, longed for that not more ardently than Norton, who was at that moment slowly drawing near.

Sir Hugh's emissary at last stopped at the door, and hesitatingly showed his letter to the sentry. M. de Courtenay suddenly recognized him from above.

“Why, Vidame,” he cried, “here is your black-vested attendant of yesterday! What is in the wind now?” Then, bending over the rail to the sentry, who was shaking his head in token of an inability to read: “Send that man up!” he called. Norton entered the room, blanched by anxiety, but beyond doubt with a less distraught heart than that which he had carried to the cliffs of Brioux a few hours before. He presented the letter. M. de Courtenay took it up impatiently and read — read with a look of petrifying astonishment which promptly passed to one of such fury that the two other Frenchmen exchanged a glance of dismay, and Norton involuntarily took a step back. This movement drew the attention of the reader, who suddenly made a savage clutch at the engraver's throat.

“It is impossible! And thou, miserable, what knowest thou? Tell me before I strangle thy dog’s life out!”

In his frenzy he spoke the words in French. Norton’s choking answer in English partially brought him back to reason:

“Please you, sir, I am but a messenger.” Then, having drawn breath once more, he went on with a new firmness: “And please, your lordship, I am a free-born Englishman, and not to be used this wise.”

“We shall see to that anon, fellow!” came the answer. “Meanwhile . . . but no, the bare idea is mad — impossible — grotesque!”

He grasped his forehead in his palm; then, with a wild gesture, handed the paper to the Vidame.

“M. de Rocourt, what make you of that? Read — read it aloud, that I may believe my ears, if I cannot believe my eyes!”

The Vidame, himself roused to the highest pitch of excitement, read. M. de aville listened with the round eyes of complete bewilderment:

“M. de Courtenay,” ran the letter, in French, “twice before have I had the honour of inviting you to pay me a visit upon my English estate — courtesies to which you have not thought fit even to vouchsafe a reply. I am pertinacious, M. de Courtenay. You should have remembered that; and also that there are some requests to which a gentleman should never refuse himself. Having, thro’g^t M. de Rocourt, heard of the consummation of your

espousals, I have bethought myself of seeking a persuasive auxiliary in the person of Madame de Courtenay herself. This help (which, in truth, should not have been required) has graciously been granted to me. Madame de Courtenay is now on her way to England, where she confidently expects your prompt appearance.

“You will, no doubt, the more readily forgive my not keeping the appointment recently made with you when you conceive that my first duty, in the circumstances, is to escort the lady across the water, and to attend in person to her safety as well as to her suitable entertainment in the house where she honours me by waiting your arrival. The messenger whom I am now sending to you has my stringent order not to reveal, while still on French territory, where this particular house stands; and I know he will not transgress it. But he will guide you to the place faithfully. And, believe it, to see you approach it in his company is just now the keenest desire I know.

“HUGH COURTENAY.

“Written at sea, this 22nd day of June, 1751.

M. de Courtenay was ragingly pacing the room, tearing his handkerchief to strips, ever and anon mopping his forehead with the rag.

“It is true, then! He does say that Isabelle is with him . . . *Sang Dieu!* How has it been done? . . . *Mort d’ Dieu!* If I could believe that he . . .”

His eyes fell once more on the still and silent messenger, and he stopped with fearful threat in his eyes.

“Thou shalt speak, hound!” he suddenly snarled. “If I have to force each word out of thy throat with my sword! Where is the lady?”

“On board Sir Hugh’s vessel, my lord.”

“Where is he taking her?”

Norton shook his head.

“I shall take you there, my lord, if you will provide ship. You cannot find the place without me. More than that I may not say.”

“We shall see!”

M. de Courtenay bounded to the table, where he had laid his sword, and drew it from the scabbard. Then, quick as thought, he menaced the young man’s throat.

“Wilt thou speak?”

Sir Hugh had said well when he assured M. de Courtenay that the messenger would not flinch. Norton was white as his own shirt; nevertheless he looked his assailant bravely in the eyes.

“If you murder me, my lord,” he said, “who will guide you to-morrow?”

“To-morrow! Thinkest thou I shall wait till to-morrow? Speak! Where has she been taken?” He pressed the point, and drove the youth to the wall; pressed again, and a few drops of blood appeared between the blue of the steel and the white of the neck. “Speak!” he repeated, stamping his foot.

The Vidame approached and laid his hand gently on M. de Courtenay’s arm.

“My dear Comte,” he urged, in his suave voice, “permit me to entreat. I cannot help believing that we are on a false track. If this fellow speaks from mere fright, he will have to invent a lie; for I strongly opine that this story of the Comtesse, whom we left at the chateau this morning, being on her way to Eng’and now, is a sheer impossibility — an obvious fable to try and lure you to England.”

No doubt Norton owed his life then to the Vidame’s indifferent intervention, as he had, two days before, owed it to Sir Hugh’s courage and vigour. M. de Courtenay, struck by this new aspect of the case, lowered his sword and listened frowningly.

“Sir Hugh,” went on the Vidame, with a transient tone of harshness, “has duped me. And for that impertinence, for his sending me on a bootless errand, I shall even, if you yourself do not, return to England and demand a close account. He never intended, that is now patent, to carry out the benevolent project of his Majesty; but he devised this inept story to bring you, and with tearing sail, to England. Truly the scheme is crude! Believe me, if you return to Brioux presently you will be in time for supper with Madame de Courtenay and have a good laugh at your brother’s expense!”

M. de Courtenay, but too anxious to believe so welcome an explanation, had already lost all thought of Norton, who silently stanchèd with his kerchief the blood at his throat.

“Yes, of course,” he murmured, “the thing is impossible! Why, it was only yesterday that ——”

He stopped, and now hearkened to a clatter of

hoofs that had been coming up the street, and that presently stopped beneath the window.

“Monsieur de Faville?”

The loud inquiry was made to the sentry in unmistakably English accents. The Comte de Courtenay ran to the window.

“Nichols!” he cried, blasted with fresh apprehension. Then: “Come up instantly!” he called out.

The old English servant burst into the room.

“Heaven be praised, it was not true!” he cried. But the first ring of joy in his voice was instantly lost in lament. “Her ladyship, my lord! Her ladyship!”

“She is not at Brioux, then?” gasped M. de Courtenay.

“No, my lord. The last I saw of my lady was as she hurried to the schooner — to rejoin you — wounded, in danger, they said, my lord! I was left behind. The schooner set Chebourg way. I knew not which way to turn. If my lord lies at Cherbourg, I thought — knowing indeed that your honour went thither in the morning — I’ll be wanted.” He turned, saw Norton’s ashen countenance, and thundered: “Ho! here stands the messenger!”

The engraver found himself once more the focus of four pairs of menacing eyes. There came a silence charged with fury. M. de Faville, after a while, as Marechal de Camp, began to speak coldly of prison, of the thumbscrew, and the ultimate prospect of the scaffold: men, in France, were broken on the wheel for lesser outrage than the kidnapping of a person of quality! And M. de Courtenay

found cruel satisfaction in translating the words for the youth's benefit, and in seeing, as he thought, the hair rise on his head. Certain it is that Norton looked sick unto fainting.

At last the Vidame spoke; and once again his words of reason saved Norton from a far harsher fate than that of being torn upon the reefs of Hope's Nose.

The matter, said M. de Rocourt, seemed graver than he had held at first. Sir Hugh's scheme was not, after all, the futile one he had thought: the plan had been accurately laid, and, indeed, it forced M. de Courtenay's hand. Was it not the only possible way left open to them to accept the challenge on the terms in which it had been sent, and follow the guidance of Sir Hugh's messenger? In M. de Courtenay's anguished state of mind, the smallest gain of time surely would be worth any amount of idle revenge on a mere tool.

The counsel prevailed. Norton was consigned for the nonce to the charge of the sentry; and a feverish search was started for a suitable vessel. It was some hours, however, before one could be discovered sufficiently swift and able to start forthwith.

The Englishman, under the jealous guard of M. de Courtenay, the Vidame, and old Nichols, was conveyed on board. But only when the lugger was clear out, some miles at sea, could he be induced to give any definite direction: up to that time the course had been vaguely north, toward the English coast.

“Let her head be set for Teignmouth,” he said

at last in response to furiously impatient demands. "When you make it in the morning, then I shall be able to direct you to the landing place."

During the 'ours of his waiting in the sentry's hostile keeping Norton had had leisure to realize all the sagacity and the completeness of Sir Hugh's scheme, and, at the same time, his forethought for his messenger. Had the letter been more explicit, not only would the Squire have remained uncertain of the quarter from which he was to expect the raid upon his house, but, in all probability, his devoted instrument in this plot would have been left on the other side to rot in a French prison, or even to perish amid the horrors of a French scaffold.

VI

A BOLT FROM STORMY SKIES

Between the garden walls of Anstiss Hall and the edge of the red cliff there ran a level grass path, shorn smooth by grazing sheep — the highest point on that part of the coast. From thence you could see clear of Berry Head, on the southern horizon; and, to the north, past the mouth of the Exe.

Ever since the return of the *Phoebe*, Mr. Purkiss, under Sir Hugh's stringent injunctions, had kept watch from this vantage ground: the Squire's main preoccupation now was to receive timely warning of the expected visit. Periodically sweeping, with experienced thoroughness, the semi-circle of horizon, boundary between the deep blue sea and the transparent azure of sunlit sky; smoking an occasional pipe of very special Louisiana; refreshing himself, when he thought it opportune, with a snack or a pull at the bottle; enlivened now and then by a short visit from Sir Hugh himself, the hours had glided pleasantly enough for one of his habit and cheerful disposition.

Since mid-day the heat had grown intense, and the air even on this high point oppressive. On the sea level the wind had dropped to a mere fanning breeze, greatly to the Squire's vexation, who foresaw, with burning impatience, unwelcome delay.

A storm, however, was obviously brewing, as Mr. Purkiss pointed out. "And that," he remarked cheerfully, "means the raising of the wind somewhat, Sir Hugh!"

The sun was half-way down on his course. It suddenly disappeared behind a rising cloudbank. The master lifted his spyglass once more, with unerring precision, toward a sail that had for some time attracted his attention in the northeast.

"Here comes something, Sir Hugh, which might possibly be what you expect. Lugger rigged, French shape. She seemed to be making Exmouth, but now she is heading this way. Ah, she has already picked up the wind! In half an hour we shall know for sure."

A change had come over Sir Hugh's face. The look of obsession it had worn all day had given place to one of exultation. Gone was the "black dog" from his shoulders; and to use another term of the North, he seemed to have grown "fey." He knew now — though he could not have said how — that this distant vessel was bringing his prize, and that his hour was drawing near. A growl of thunder reached the cliff. He looked at the darkening skies with a smile, and once again at the speck.

"Come on the wing of the storm — so but you come quick!" he muttered, to the puzzling of Mr. Purkiss. "You will let me know when she is within a mile," he said briefly to the master, and walked back into the house.

For about an hour he busied himself in his own

room harkening to the thunder that drew every moment nearer; ever and anon humming a cheerful air. He sorted papers; attended to his dress; made a serious selection among his swords. He was in the act of buckling a favourite Königsmarck to his hip, when, upon a shattering flash of lightning, Mr. Purkiss presented himself at the door.

“The lugger is making for the Stone, there is little doubt about that, Sir Hugh. You can almost tell the faces on board, by the glass. I think I make out the French gentleman and also your young man, Sir Hugh. At least, there are two in black dress. There is also one in red.”

“They have come!” This was said decisively. “Go you down by the beach and help them to land. Tell Norton that I shall be awaiting him at the top of the path on the cliff. See that he comes first. You will guide the strangers up.”

Purkiss departed; and Sir Hugh walked straight to the apartment which once had been his mother’s at Anstiss Hall, and which had been allotted that morning to Madame de Courtenay. He knocked, and was confronted by Mrs. Simnel.

“Announce me to her ladyship,” he ordered.

When he was admitted, he bowed low, but avoided to rest his eyes upon her face. One glance had sufficed to show what havoc had already been made upon the radiant beauty of it by the fatigues, the emotions, the mortifications of the day, and above all by the coming anxiety of the moment.

“Madame,” he said, with a detached air, “M. de Courtenay is, I believe, even now about to land.

Will you not honour me by your presence at the head of the cliff, where I propose to await his arrival in my humble estate?"

The lady made no reply. But she rose and, neglecting his proffered wrist, passed by and proceeded downstairs, then into the garden. She knew the way, for she had walked it that very morning. He followed, keeping courteously half a step behind. The brilliant sunshine of an hour ago had given place to the livid hues of low, scurrying thunder clouds.

When they had reached the edge of the cliff a rowboat could be seen vigorously rounding the corner of Tower Stone. There came another flash. Madame de Courtenay, gazing eagerly over the edge, recognized the crimson coat; and instinctively she held out her hands with an appealing gesture. Her figure was clearly visible, drawn against the lurid skyline; there came an answer to her gesture: the flutter of a handkerchief from the boat.

Sir Hugh turned sharply toward her, frowning. He strove at first to keep his voice courteously low.

"Madame de Courtenay," he said, "within the coming few minutes my fate, and yours, will probably be decided. Within the next quarter of an hour, I say, M. de Courtenay, or myself, will be stretched upon this patch of grass, never to rise more. Leave matters to the working of Fate. M. de Courtenay is valiant: he may again be victorious, but do you not spoil his last chance! I will not be balked of my hour — the hour I have so long dreamed of, for which I have so long yearned, waited, toiled! I tell you it shall,

this day, be mine! Let me entreat you, therefore, to stand apart and make not the slightest movement to draw near M. de Courtenay before our swords have put an end to our hatred. If you attempt to screen him, I swear to you, madame, that it shall be murder if it is not to be fight, and that I shall run him up to the hilts even in your very arms!”

Gradually his voice had gathered a raucous sound, and his eyes blazed with a fierceness that made the terrified woman step back from him, blanched to the lips.

At that moment Norton appeared at the head of the path, breathless with his running ascent. “Sir Hugh!” he panted. “They come! And in Heaven’s name, guard yourself!”

“Brave lad! Brave lad!” cried the Squire, his eyes madly dancing. “Hast done it! Hast done it well! Take, and hurry away — this place is now deadly for you. Take, and hurry to thy Jessie, to thy reward! You have given me mine!”

He tossed the sealed packet at his messenger’s feet. Norton, after a moment’s hesitating debate, took it up; then, a prey to the long-combated fear, fairly took to his heels and fled. A new crash of thunder covered his departure. The sound of it had not died away ere M. de Courtenay, hatless and disordered, appeared in his turn breathlessly at the top of the crag, followed a moment later by the panting Vidame, the master smugler, and old Nichols. He had his sword already drawn, as one taking a place by assault.

At sight of him Sir Hugh gave a great laugh of triumph:

“Aha, ha, ha! M. de Courtenay, do I indeed see you here at last!”

Quick as fury he whipped out his own blade, and, with a magnificent gesture of swordsman's challenge, held it exultantly aloft a second before falling on guard.

On the instant the world about him seemed to become one flash of dazzling light, one encompassing roar of crash, and tearing. Then all was still.

When, some moments later, power to see and hear, and think, had returned, the fearsome thunderbolt drawn by the brandished sword seemed to have left every one unscathed. Sir Hugh was still erect, dominating in his attitude of challenge and exultation. The bystanders looked at each other with bewildered faces, then drew nearer. Then it was noticed that his clothes were rent in numberless slits through which the seared flesh could be seen. Still he moved not. All of a sudden M. de Courtenay sheathed his weapon; he advanced with quick strides, stopped close, and gently touched him. And then, rigid as a log, Sir Hugh fell, first upon his brother's shoulder, then to the ground, face downward, his arm still extended and clutching the sword.

“Old friend,” whispered Purkiss to Nichols, as they prepared to carry the body into the house, “our Sir Hugh is gone, and yours, it seems, has come pat to replace him!” He looked from the dead to the living Courtenay, who was tenderly

supporting his fainting wife, whilst the Vidame fanned her face with his hat. "But, look you here," he went on, "let him take advice and leave drowning men alone. That lad in black, that's come and gone, has brought our Sir Hugh his death: we all knew he would, that had heard the tale!"

The "lad in black," that night, telling his incredible story to the young wife at his knee, even as he showed her the undeniable draft on the local banker which had formed the contents of the packet, felt an unaccountable thread of sorrow mingle with the web of his joy. Sir Hugh, killed by Heaven's fire, for all his ruthlessness, was he not a man that could have commanded a man's devotion?

THE END

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