

CHAPTER I

A "RIDING"

THE evening sky burned red above the brown sweep of heatherland that jutted out into the molten gold of the Cornish sea.

A young girl rested her bare elbows on the top of a "hedge" of lichen-stained granite. Her face was turned towards the west. The ruddy sunset dyed it and the white blouse she wore the hue of violence or of shame. The girl's lips were parted, her eyes shone. But there was nothing of admiration expressed in her features, rather a sense of awe, perhaps a tinge of fear; or, it might be a dull anger against that which made her afraid.

With a sudden movement she drew her elbows from the wall, and, grasping the harsh stones with both hands, she turned towards the house that was behind her back.

The house stood square and grey. A house built long ago by men who had all to fear, little to hope; men who had built for the years that should follow. The years had followed. The builders had been laid one by one beneath the shallow churchyard mould; their sons, too, and their sons and grandsons after them. Still the house stood firm and square. No hospitable porch, varied ornament, or even homely creeper had been added as the years passed by. The stark grey front bore ever the brunt of the wild west wind, hail-laden, rain-drenched, salt with the breath that came straight from the great Atlantic.

The house had been built to stand. It had fulfilled its purpose.

When Cassin Morris had seen it first in the hard bright sunshine of the earlier day, it had repelled her with its greyness; now, as she turned, every window answered back the western sky with a blaze of vivid red. The house had lost its look of cold reserve; but, the girl shuddered, it was a cruel house now and seemed to mock

her loneliness, her increasing realisation that she was a stranger in a strange land.

Cassin's mother had been Cornish bred and born, but it had come to pass that a certain Welshman, who had "travelled" for a drapery firm, carrying his samples from farm to farm, had halted ever longer and longer when his round brought him to the old grey house, where a pair of dark-lashed Cornish eyes had played havoc with his hot Celtic blood.

Cassin's mother had not lived long in her distant Welsh home, and, now, her father, too, was dead and she had come to Cornwall to her grandmother's care.

Cassin's home had been in the borderlands, where the rough Welsh mountains give place to full-breasted hills; where farmhouses sun themselves in pleasant valleys; valleys that were all a-smother with primroses and a-shimmer with bursting green when Cassin, only yesterday, bade them good-bye. Here in Cornwall, though it was already May, all seemed as yet hard-folded in winter sleep. The wayside bushes, scanty and wind-whipt, were bare and dry. As for trees—the last stragglers had been left miles behind seemingly unending granite walls and rolling pastureland, before Uncle John had pointed with his whip to an upstanding church-tower and a few roofs grey against the hard bright sky.

"It be in sight to last," he said, "St. Clee; now we do belong to have a fair run home."

Uncle John had struck her as being very big and rough and Cassin had hardly spoken to him during all that long drive. She was longing all the while to be by herself alone; where it would not matter whether she cried.

Now she was alone she resented her loneliness and her heart felt hard and far from tears.

The light on the house had quickly faded. Once more it was dull, grey, secretive. There were no flowers in the ground the granite wall enclosed. Such, once upon a time, may have been planted; but, long since, the cruel salt-laden winds had beaten the life out of them. There were none now; only some straggling veronica bushes crouched below the sea-ward wall, with gnarled and twisted stems and patches of greyish-brown, where they had been cropped by the donkeys which, now and again,

were turned into the enclosure to eat down the grass. The donkeys preferred the veronica; as Cassin crossed the patch her feet sank deeply into the tangled and moss-encumbered turf.

Something had drawn her attention. Above the plain square lintel of the door was fixed a rusty horseshoe.

The girl's eyes filled. Just such a horseshoe had been above the door at home.

Father had laughed at it. Father was superior in every way, almost a gentleman. His hands were always clean and his collar generally so; he had many books; he read them too; they were not only to look at and to create work for busy dusting fingers. Father laughed at the horseshoe. He gave Cassin little lectures, besides, on the folly of superstition and how vastly superior were these later days of educational enlightenment.

He had laughed at the horseshoe, calling it an "old wives' fancy." Yet once, when the nails had loosened, he had gone softly, after dusk, and made the "old wives' fancy" secure once more.

Something had told Cassin, though she had never liked to ask, that it had been her mother who had hung the horseshoe there; or, perhaps, the newly-wedded husband, himself; laughingly protesting, yet yielding to his young wife's wish.

That horseshoe, wrapped in paper filched from Cassin's Sunday hat, was now at the bottom of her new tin trunk, upstairs.

Looking at this other horseshoe, her eyes filled. She could barely remember her mother, had never felt the want of her in her own home; but here, where that mother had lived the greater part of her short life, her absence seemed to leave an immeasurable void. The tears that had risen to Cassin's eyes brimmed and fell.

"Mother!" she sobbed.

The house door opened abruptly and out came Maggie Penrose.

Maggie was a girl of about the same age as Cassin, but there the resemblance ended. Cassin was slight and small-boned, Maggie sturdy and full-breasted. Cassin's small features wore a reserved expression that strangers imputed to pride. Maggie's white teeth were constantly

displayed in a broad smile, and her dark eyes flashed invitation to the whole world. Cassin at this stage was like a hedgerow flower, sweet but unnoticeable; Maggie was already a fruit, ripe and appealing to the senses.

Maggie's position at Mayon Farm seemed well established. She called Mrs. Penrose "Granma" and Susan Penrose "Auntie"; her relationship to Cassin had been taken for granted.

She passed her now with a cheery grin; and, running hastily to the gate, stood there a moment in silence.

The sunset, apparently, had no interest for her. The sky, indeed, had already faded to a remote pallor. She seemed to listen rather than to look.

Before many minutes another figure came through the open door, a sturdy small person, who trod heavily along the flagged path; her dress was covered by a print pinafore, a faded tam-o'-shanter was pulled down over every vestige of hair. A cow had been calving, Auntie Susie had been too busy to remove the Hinde's curlers from her abundant fringe. Aunt Susie's features were such as might have been cut by an unskilful carver from a knotty piece of wood; in marked contrast, her long-lashed eyes were the pure grey of the gods' and beautiful exceedingly. A fact, nevertheless, of which Aunt Susie had not, and never would have, the slightest consciousness.

"I wonder, are they coming?" she asked eagerly as she joined her niece at the gate. Then, with a quick turn of the head—there was something about her that suggested a roughly-made mechanical bird—she called out: "Come, Cassin!"

Urged by the hospitable invitation in her aunt's voice, her hands clasped behind her back, languidly as one without interest or speculation, Cassin moved towards the other two. Meanwhile another figure emerged from the house so briskly as to take precedence at the gate which apparently had assumed value as a point of vantage for some coming event, an event towards which, so far, the stranger's interest was only faintly aroused.

This last comer was Mrs. Penrose, Granma Penrose as she was more familiarly called. A tidy little body, as spare and active as her daughter Susan. Her eyes looked

out, dark and shrewd from beneath her flapping sun-bonnet; she wore the simple print bodice and short stuff petticoat still affected by the older generation of Cornish women; and, as she stood expectant, she rolled her apron round her hands, seamed, scarred and discoloured by long years of toil.

The dusk was falling quickly now. Overhead, on a wavering course, a bat passed and repassed. The sky had darkened to a dull green. A single star shone in the west. All was so still that the sea could be heard beneath the granite cliffs half a mile away, murmuring and lapping about the rocks; so still that the voice of a cricket within the house sounded shrill, insistent.

Cassin had joined the others at the gate. Her languor had given place to a mild thrill of expectation, yet she did not ask: "Why do we wait? Who is it that comes?" She had lived much alone. Those that live alone do not question, they wait. So she waited with the rest, whilst the sky grew more and more luminous and the land massed together into a sombre shadow against which Maggie's blouse, Aunt Susie's pinafore and the apron of the old woman were defined, cold and light.

The house was by now in darkness, no ray was visible even from the kitchen fire, before which the cricket still chirped persistently.

Of a sudden Maggie threw back her head and laughed. Her white teeth gleamed momentarily.

Aunt Susie unlatched the gate, half passed through, then paused irresolute. The old woman, her hands still tucked inside her apron, remained immovable, her face turned to where the grey road lost itself in shadows, eastward.

"Hush!" said Aunt Susie.

There was no need of the injunction, unless, indeed, it was addressed to the unheeding cricket within the house. Its voice was drowned temporarily by the striking of the kitchen clock; and, before that had died away, the silence without had given place to sound. A confused sound, faint at first, but momentarily gathering strength; the sound of voices and a din as of barbaric instruments.

At last Cassin spoke.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Hush!” said Aunt Susie in the solemn tone of one who wishes to lose nothing of some expected melody.

Again Maggie laughed.

And now to the eastward a light shone, faint and diffused at first, but every moment growing brighter; every moment, too, the noise increased, voices shouting or singing it might be some rough untuneful song. Momentarily, too, the clang and clatter and resounding din of unmelodious instruments drew nearer. Suddenly a turned corner revealed the procession, if procession it were—brandished torches, swinging lanterns, dark moving figures and, in the midst, something or some one carried high upon a chair. The lights circled, swang, darted here and there, dazzled in the eyes; the shouts and clangour increased in violence, brutish, inhuman they seemed, devouring as they came the sanctity of the quiet night.

Cassin shrank back. The others pressed forward, Aunt Susie bobbing up and down with excitement, whilst Maggie laughed more loudly than before.

On came the disorderly crew, demon-like in the harsh light and shade, with their wild inhuman cries. Trembling, Cassin saw them draw near. What fearful land was this to which she had come? Of what awful, unholy rite was she an unwilling spectator?

On came the shuffling feet, the raucous voices, the banging of trays and clatter of sticks and pans. And that figure—held high—girt about with lights—surely—surely—it was that of a woman!

They were passing now. The noise was maddening. Cassin suppressed an inclination to cover her eyes and ears and, instead, she seized her grandmother by the shoulder with the intention of making at least some protest. Then suddenly she realised that the carried figure, coated and skirted and with a feathered hat upon its grotesquely bobbing head, was no woman after all, only an attempt—not even a very realistic attempt—to portray one in effigy.

Cassin dropped her hand from her grandmother—the old woman had taken not the faintest notice of her hold—and, with a sudden anger at her own wasted emotion, she stamped her foot.

"What is the meaning of it—this rubbish?" she asked brusquely.

No one made any reply. The heads of the others were turned to westward now, where lights and din, shouting voices and trampling feet were growing less and less in the distance.

When all had died away the night seemed darker and more quiet than before.

The sea still sobbed far below, but the cricket was silent.

The star in the west trembled.

CHAPTER II

“ UP TO ”

MRS. PENROSE was the first to speak.

“ It is well she be in her grave, her mother,” she said.

Once more Cassin seized the old woman's arm.

“ Whose mother ? ” she asked. There was a restless irritation at her heart, the purity of the night, her own purity alike felt tainted.

“ Whose mother ? ”

“ Jenifer George's.”

“ Jenifer George ? ”

“ Her effigy it was,” said Aunt Susie, as she led the way with clacking shoes to the house.

“ But—but—what has she done ? ” faltered the girl.

They were in the kitchen now.

With a sudden flare of a match Aunt Susie could be seen lighting the glass-reservoired lamp, that stood on a round table in the window. Perhaps it was the sudden glare of the lamp, combined with the harsh line of the tam-o'-shanter across her brow, that made her face so hard.

“ You may ask,” she said, “ but if you'm known Cornish ways better, you'm no need to.”

Maggie was leaning back against the other table, the square one that stood near the fire, her face was in shadow, but there was a laugh in her voice as she cried :

“ You were lucky, Cassin, to be here in time. It isn't often we gets a 'riding' now.”

Then she added, a certain satisfaction in her voice belying her words. “ I do pity William Henry George, this night.”

“ He should 'a kept a quieter tongue in his head,” asserted Aunt Susie, as she moved the lamp to the other table, on which the old woman had spread a coarse white cloth for supper.

“ ‘ Did ’ is seldom ‘ should ! ’ ” her mother threw over her shoulder, as she reached down plates from the dresser.

They were of old willow pattern, chipped here and there, but the surface shone like lustre in the fire light, as she set them in the fender to warm.

The light and warmth and homeliness of the kitchen were a pleasing contrast to the wild scene of the night without. Cassin's spirits revived, and her curiosity rose.

“ But what has he done? What did *she* do? ” she demanded, jerking her head, to indicate the outer darkness, which somewhere enfolded that wild, unholy procession, and the carried figure, with its wagging head.

Granma had set a pan upon the fire by now. Its contents began to fizzle cheerfully, whilst a homely odour of onions rose on the air.

“ It's scarcely talk for young girls, ” she said, “ and yet, them that knows is safer every way than them as doesn't. ”

“ Jenifer never was that particular about herself, ” put in Aunt Susie.

The old woman shook her pan. The contents broke into a loud hiss.

“ Before marriage is one thing, after marriage another. ” Her tone was virtuously reproofing.

“ Well, I wouldn't get myself talked about like 'a she, ” stated Maggie. The most charitable ear could not have been deaf to the satisfied enjoyment in her tone.

“ Why, there's them as says her first child—— ”

“ There's always them as says, ” interrupted her grandmother.

“ But not always as much cause for saying, ” crowed Maggie.

Cassin turned to her aunt.

“ I don't know what you are all talking about, ” she protested.

Aunt Susie was busy rattling loaf sugar from a blue bag into a heavy glass basin, in preparation for the tea that in Cornwall accompanies every meal. She looked across at her mother.

“ You tell her, ” she said.

The old woman turned from the fire. She had not removed her sun-bonnet, but the table was low, and the lamplight caught her spare features, and the brightness of her clear dark eyes.

“ Listen,” she said, “ and take ’un as a lesson. You an’ Maggie, too.”

At this Maggie laughed again.

Then, in language almost Biblical in its naked simplicity, Granma told the sordid little tale. A handsome young wife—never very steady—a lodger—the husband’s unexpected return——

Cassin’s ears tingled. The hot blood dyed her shoulders and neck.

And Maggie had laughed !

The old woman, having finished her story, returned to the potatoes that she, in Cornish fashion, was frying with onions and fat.

There was a momentary silence, then Cassin jerked out : “ What will he—the husband—do now ? ”

“ Do,” answered Aunt Susie, complacently filling the teapot, “ what should he do ? ”

“ Won’t he—send her away ? ”

“ Send her away ? ” Aunt Susie’s face, as well as her tone, expressed distinct surprise. “ Why for should he send her away ? She’s a good wife to him.”

“ Ay ! ” put in the old woman, as she shook her pan. “ He’s as clean a place, and meat well cooked, as any in parish. Let’s hope this will be a lesson to she.”

Whereupon, with much fizzling and spurtling of steam, and rich escaping odours, she turned the contents of her pan, bit by bit, into the hot plates.

“ Us won’t wait for the boys,” she said.

“ They’ll be too busy with the ‘ riding ’ to think of their meat,” answered her daughter, as she drew a chair noisily across the stone floor.

The others followed her example.

The food, though homely, was appetising enough ; nevertheless, Cassin toyed with her portion. She felt unable to swallow. She would have given anything, at that moment, to be back at her Welsh home, where the hills, tree-clad and luxuriant, seemed to shelter and protect. She felt a growing hatred for this land of coarse violence and openly acknowledged sin.

No one noticed her distaste for her food. They were, perhaps, too simply good-mannered to draw attention to the fact, or it might be too occupied each with her own

portion, for they ate and drank busily, with scarcely a word.

The meal was nearly finished when there came a knock at the door.

“ Come in,” cried Aunt Susie, above her teacup. Then, as the latch lifted and fell impotently, “ why, mother, you been and shot the bolt ! ”

She rose from her chair.

“ You, Andrew,” she said pleasantly, as she opened the door.

A tall young fellow, in a blue jersey and thick boots, stood blinking on the threshold. In his hand were two or three flat fish, strung together by the gills ; one, still alive, gave a spasmodic flap.

“ I had a good take, to-day, on my spiller,” said the young man.

Granma Penrose, her finger still through the handle of her blue teacup, looked across the table, her face bright with pleasure.

“ A bit o’ fish,” she said, “ it isn’t often the chance comes to we, lest it be mullets.”

Aunt Susie took the fish from the young man’s hand, and clattered with it into the back regions, murmuring something about the cat.

No formal offer of the fish had been made, no formal thanks given.

The young man remained just inside the door, doubtful, it seemed, whether to go or stay.

“ You’ve missed all the fun,” said Maggie, glancing at him with bold dark eyes. “ How be it you’m not at the ‘ riding ’ ? ”

Andrew looked, not at her, but at the toe of his boot, as he replied rather gruffly, “ It’s no business of mine.”

“ Business ! ” retorted Maggie, with a toss of the head. “ Don’t you take no pleasure, once in a way ? ”

The young man straightened himself, and raised his eyes, not to the girl’s face, but to the model of a full-rigged ship, under a dim glass case on the high mantelshelf. He seemed to be struggling with some idea hard to express, only to abandon it and repeat, but in a softer tone, “ It isn’t no business of mine.”

Cassin glanced up at the stranger shyly. For all he was

big and roughly clad, he seemed to be more human, this Andrew, than the rest. She glanced up, met his eyes and glanced down hastily, a swift colour rushing to her cheeks.

Andrew pulled off his cap and twisted it in his hands, as he said, "Well, I'd best be going. Good-night to you all."

The door had already shut behind him, when Aunt Susie came bustling back.

"Andrew gone?" she said. "Why, mother, you did ought to have asked him to take a dish of tea."

"So I did," reflected Mrs. Pénrose, as she replenished her own cup. "But there—Andrew, he comes and he goes, and don't expect company manners, not he."

"He might have stayed without asking," commented Maggie. Then, pushing back her chair, she rose, and, taking a small shawl from a hook behind the door, she slipped it round her shoulders.

"I'm going out," she said.

"Don't you be late," her grandmother remarked, a momentary anxiety, or vexation, crossing her features.

"I wonder, is Andrew waiting?" said Aunt Susie, a minute later, as she went to fasten the door, which Maggie had carelessly left unlatched. "Andrew has half share now in all old Billie's gear, and net and body-share for mullet——"

"'Sides pilshurds," put in her mother.

"It's time he took a wife."

"I wouldn't 'a liked one of my girls to take up with a fisherman," said the old woman, beginning to gather up the cups, two at a time, by inserting her fingers inside them. "But Maggie, her's different."

Cassin wondered wherein Maggie's difference lay; but she did not like to ask for fear of what the answer might be in this strange new land of wild ways and free speech, that made her feel an alien, in spite of her half share of Cornish blood. One must remember that her father had been "almost a gentleman." Perhaps *quite* a gentleman, in the matter of what his womenkind should know and hear.

Cassin lay awake far into the night, staring at the dim square of the window space, recalling the events of the day. Again and again that procession, weird, almost unearthly to sight and sound, marched across her senses.

What was the woman feeling now ? she wondered.

The shame of it all—the intolerable shame !

“ Oh ! I should have died ! ” she cried.

Her cheeks were burning and her hands clenched.

And Maggie had laughed ! That seemed the worst of all, that Maggie, a girl, young like herself, should have laughed !

CHAPTER III

“ DOWN ALONG ”

OLD Billie Thomas sat on a weed-embedded log on the cliff edge, opposite his cottage. He was baiting a “ spiller.” His hands were bent and gnarled with the rough work of many years, and two, at least, of his finger-tips were lacking; yet, apparently without effort, he picked up silvery strips of sand-lance from a battered tin can between his legs, fixed the bait upon hook after hook of the series on his lengthy line, and passed the same neatly and methodically into the box on his right hand.

The old man wore his working canvas jumper over his blue jersey; thanks to his wife’s busy hands, it was spotlessly white, and in marked contrast to the rest of his personality. Old Billie evidently did not consider cleanliness a very important virtue. His greyish locks straggled out beneath his weather-stained felt in a matted bunch; his face was almost lost in a tangle of beard and moustache. It was a kindly face, all that could be seen of it; and his dark eyes twinkled merrily amongst their dirt-filled wrinkles, as ever and again he raised them to the translucent green of the sea, on which the crab-boats rode at anchor, the reflections of their masts pointing shoreward tremulously.

In old Billie’s mouth was a short clay pipe, the stem so worn that the bowl was close under his hair-filled nostrils. Near him, a tortoiseshell cat, having eaten her fill of bait, was contentedly washing her fur. Once, as the old man glanced up, he noted that she drew her paw round and above her ear.

“ Sou’-west,” he muttered, alluding to the direction in which the animal’s head was turned.

“ Sou’-west. It don’t look like wind, but her’ll know.”

He paused in his work to stroke the cat with a fishy hand. She allowed the caress; then, with dignity, resumed her toilet.

As quietly and methodically the old man went on with his work. Below him, the sea lapped gently on the rippled sand; the heat-haze danced above the dusty road. Yesterday, it was still winter, to-day it was already summer, to-morrow it might be winter again, for it was May month in Cornwall.

Presently, the old man raised his head. To the sound of oars, this time.

“ He’s got no wind,” he said.

Round the rocky headland a black-hulled boat was coming. The lug-sail, ochre-hued, hung limply from the mast; but the boat came quickly through the jewel-green water, impelled by two long “sweeps.”

“ It’s the *Seashell*, right enough,” said the old man, continuing his seemingly endless task. The dog at his feet, a half-bred retriever, whose black coat glistened in the brilliant sunshine, lifted his dozing head, rose, stretched this way and that, shook himself, and finally, resting his fore-paws on the log at the old man’s side, followed the incoming boat with his intelligent brown eyes, his tongue lolling, and his erect tail sweeping gently from side to side.

“ It’s Andrew’s boat, right enough,” said the old man, almost as though the animal had asked a question or made a statement to that effect.

Before long the dog bounded away down the road, soon to return, fawning and circling about his master, Andrew, who came clumping along in his heavy sea-boots, a bundle of yellow oilskins under his arm. These he let fall upon the log. The old man, his father, glanced up at the tall figure, straight and strong against the shimmer of the sea.

“ Had to pull all the way ? ” he asked.

“ Since Longships.”

“ Fish any good ? ”

“ Three score.”

Old Billie nodded in a satisfied way.

“ Frenchies be here soon ? ”

The young man scanned the horizon as he answered. “ Day after to-morrow, he’s due.” He took off his cap, drew a cigarette from the lining, lit it, and sat down with the heaviness of fatigue at his father’s side. The old man all the while went on with his work.

The sea began to glitter under the sun, which was drawing to westward.

Andrew took the dog between his knees, playing with its ears, whilst the gratified animal turned its head this way and that, trying to lick its master's face.

The old man baited the last hook, laid it with careful precision on the rest, then gathered together the remains of his bait, and flung them over the rocks below. Immediately, the sea-birds, which had been passing high above with quickly-turning heads and watching eyes, swooped down with thrusting beaks and flapping wings, filling the air with loud disputing cries.

"They's more'n a bit like we," the old man said, with a smile. "Always eager to get the best to we-selves."

The young man took his cigarette from his mouth, looked at it, and put it back in silence.

As though he had expected no reply, the old man went on, with a chuckle.

"It isn't much us wants. On'y the biggest take of fish, and the biggest fish, the tidiest bit of a cottage"—he glanced towards his own, freshly whitewashed and neatly thatched, on the other side of the road—"and," he continued impressively, "the prettiest little *wummun* in the Cove. No, it isn't so much us wants all to we-selves."

"Talking of *wummun*," he went on, "you took them fish last night?"

Andrew nodded his head.

"Not," said the old man, apparently following some train of thought, "that I hold much with taking up wi' farm-folk. They'se a rough lot, mostly. Why! here be Maggie Penrose, herself. And who's she going with now?"

Two young girls were coming in sight, their shadows moved darkly on the dusty road beside them.

Andrew did but glance over his shoulder, then away again to sea. The dog between his knees moved restlessly.

The old man drew out a screw of tobacco, and began to fill his pipe.

"It'll be her from Wales," he said, answering his own question, "her that did belong to Granma Penrose's daughter Catherine, her that died and was buried out

yonder. They tell't me the little one was coming home, but I did never think to see her grown—me as has taken her mother, little Cathie, on my knee.”

He stood, pipe in hand, staring at the girls as they drew near. They came on slowly, pausing to coax a baby donkey from its mother's side, to pluck a fuchsia spray that overhung a garden wall.

The novelty of her surroundings had brought a flush of colour to Cassin's cheeks ; the eerieness and horror of yesterday had fled ; it was a world of sunshine to-day, a pleasant world, full, doubtless, of friends.

“There's no much of her ”—so said the old man critically. To his eyes the newcomer, in her thin black and white, looked hardly worthy of notice. Maggie was far more attractive, with the scarlet tam-o'-shanter, that she had twisted into a coquettish shape on the top of her abundant black hair.

As they drew nearer, she called a lively greeting to the old man and his son. The former answered with a laugh, and a twinkle of his bright eyes, the latter rose shyly to his feet.

“Now, Billie Thomas,” cried Maggie, “I've brought my cousin to see you. It's only fair you should have first look. Not but what Andrew was before you, only he was too shy-like to use his eyes.”

At this, Andrew looked annoyed, flushing redly beneath his tan.

“Look at him !” scoffed Maggie. “We all know who he comes to Mayon after. M' Aunt Susie, no less. Though there be them as says, it's m' Granma, herself, he's wanting to go with. Lor'! these men !”

Cassin, standing a little behind her florid companion, had flushed when Andrew flushed. Then, drawn towards him by a common annoyance, she sought a subject for conversation, and found it in the dog.

“What a beauty !” she ventured, rather shyly. “Is he yours ? What is his name ?”

Andrew bent to fondle the dog.

“We calls him Nero.”

“Nero ? But—” with a vague recollection of bygone history lessons, “wasn't he wicked ? didn't he kill Christians ?”

Andrew laughed softly.

“I don’t think this Nero would do that,” he said, “but he’s a good ’un for foxes.”

“Foxes? Don’t they hunt, then, here?”

“Ay, on a Sunday morning. All the dogs of the place, and half the boys over the cliffs. Nero’s a proper one for foxes.”

Whereat, Cassin, who had been brought up in a country where a fox was almost as divine an institution, and certainly as untouchable, as the king, wondered greatly; but finding no words to express her wonder, she lapsed into silence.

A silence of which Maggie was quick to take advantage, opening fire upon the young man with words and looks.

“You was in a proper hurry, An’rew, last night, so you was. I stepped out so soon as ever you was gone, but never a sight of you did I see.”

“I came right away home,” he answered shortly.

“There’s some as would have lingered,” she threw at him boldly.

Whereat the old man, who could never keep silent for long, broke in.

“Ah! m’ dear. The boys to-day isn’t like the boys in my time. Go home? Not till us had snatched some kisses!”

Which intended compliment, Maggie, though thoroughly gratified, elegantly repelled with:

“You go on!”

Meanwhile, as she and the old man held, as it were, the stage, Andrew and Cassin, still silent, fell to fondling the dog. This they did with mutual satisfaction, till their hands touched accidentally, when both drew back, the girl with lowered lashes, the young man with burning ears. Whereupon, he took refuge in the selection and lighting of another cigarette, and she looked out to sea.

And now old Billie, with the naïve good manners of a child, started to do the honours of the place to the stranger.

“You’ll not be used to all this up country, m’ dear. You’ve no sea there.”

“Not at my home. I’ve been to the seaside, though. Only it wasn’t like this. This is much more beautiful.”

“Beautiful!” The old man spat out, “Wicked—that’s

the name for 'un here. Her's right enough on a day like this. Wait till her begins to growl, wi' a ground sea running, and wind fit to blow the eyes out of your head. Beautiful ! ”

The last word expressed such angry scorn, that Cassin hesitated before making any reply, and so lost her chance, had she willed to take it. For now old Billie laid a grimy and strong-smelling hand upon her shoulder.

“ See them rocks, there along.” He pointed to a dark ridge, separated from the shore by a narrow arm of the sea. “ Them's what us calls Cowloe. Now, look-ee,” he pulled down the brim of his battered hat over his eyes, to shut out the glare of the westering sun. His face was nothing but a mop of rumpled hair now. “ Day's calm enough, yet see her showing of her teeth ? ”

Following the directing line of a stump-ended finger, Cassin saw plainly the jagged points of white that, all about the rocks, edged the glass-like smoothness of the sea.

“ If it warn't for them rocks,” old Billie went on, “ come a proper gale, and there'd be no harbour, and no village, and no nothing. God A'mighty, He did put Cowloe there for that purpose, and for no other.”

So he philosophised, pointing out objects of interest on sea and shore.

The gulls had, by now, ceased to quarrel over the vanished garbage, and rested on the rocks, like flowers, smooth and white, their heads all one way.

It was all very pretty, Cassin thought, pretty as a picture in a book, quite another world from the vivid, flare-lit world of last night, or even that of rushing wind and stormy sea, about which the old man talked in his gruff, complaining tones.

Meanwhile, Maggie, nothing loath, was trying her bold coquetries on the younger man.

He seemed ill at ease, his hands thrust into the pockets of his coarse sea-going trousers, the toe of one of his heavy boots kicking restlessly at a point of rock, out-cropping from the dusty road. Which point the dog, Nero, with down-drooped head, watched attentively from this side and from that. To his mind, his master sought to loosen it for purposes of play. Once, in turning, his curly body

brushed against Maggie's dress. She pushed him angrily with her foot.

Master and dog, both alike, she classed in her mind as stupid. Nevertheless, there was something about Andrew's dark-lashed eyes that stirred a pleasant feeling in Maggie's breast. Also, she did not forget that old Billie was well-to-do, and Andrew his only son.

Little, however, beyond "yes" and "no" could she drag from the young man; and she was on the whole, not sorry, when out of the low open door of the thatched cottage, and across the road, came a short, plump figure, in a clean print blouse and a black skirt—Andrew's mother. Her face was round, and rosy as an apple, her smooth grey hair was dragged into a tight knot behind her head, her blue eyes beamed with kindness.

"If it isn't Catherine Morris's girl!" she cried; "I was saying——"

Gracie Thomas continually emphasised her far from brilliant utterances, by a constant use of repetition—"I was saying— if it isn't Catherine Morris's girl! And me knowing her before ever she was born, so to speak."

She laid both hands upon the newcomer's shoulders, peering into her face with blue, rather short-sighted eyes. Unlike her husband, she was spotless as a newly scalded cream jar, and as sweet.

Cassin's grey eyes met her scrutiny gladly.

"I am glad you knew my mother," she said.

She was not altogether an alien, then, in this Cornish land!

After a long look, the little old body put her head on one side critically, as she said:

"They haven't done well by she—I'm saying, they haven't done well by she. A Penrose belongs to be a sight heavier nor that."

Old Billie turned with a searching gaze, which considerably embarrassed the newcomer.

"Her hasn't much to spare," he granted, judicially. "But there—I never was for a big wummun, myself, they's that uncommon awkward about the house."

At which his wife rippled with laughter, like an overflowing pitcher beneath a spring.

"Hear him talk," so she adjured the world in general.

Then, to Cassin in particular. “ I hear’d you’d come from Andrew. He was ‘frightened’* when he saw you ‘up to.’ And what do you think of my pretty boy ? ”

The embarrassing directness of this question was emphasised by the good Gracie’s habit of repetition.

For all answer Cassin blushed and laughed self-consciously.

But Maggie sang out : “ He be just a man, Mrs. Thomas, same as rest. They’s none of them pretty to look at. They leaves that to we.”

The bold glance she threw in Andrew’s direction was quite wasted. He had already picked up his oilskins, and was bending his head under the lintel of the open door. Nero, after one regretful look at that immovable stone, followed at his master’s heels.

“ Come on, Cassin,” Maggie cried, “ you mustn’t judge all our manners by his,” with a toss of the head towards the thatched cottage. “ Let’s go to the ‘slips.’ ”

She passed her arm round the other’s waist.

“ They’ll be ready for a bit o’ fun down there,” she giggled.

So the two went off.

Behind them floated a final remark from Gracie Thomas, prefaced by the inevitable—“ I was saying——”

Within the cottage, Andrew, having rid himself of his sea-boots, was submitting his smooth young face to a “ clean shave,” preparatory to casting aside his working things for second-best jersey and coat.

In the matter of cleanliness Andrew “favoured” his mother.

* Cornish = surprised.

CHAPTER IV

GORSE GOLD

MAY had passed into June. Without any dalliance with fickle spring, winter had straightway given place to summer. The early morning dews were heavy and, under the hot noonday sun, the heat haze danced over the meadow-lands, that were turning already a pinkish brown, spangled with meadow flowers. The farmers casting a look at the sky, were busy clearing last year's cobwebs and dust from their mowers and tossing-machines. The cliff tops were ablaze with gorse, miles of it, glowing against the dark blue sea, tossed up against the softer blue of the sky.

The lusty Cornish sun had brought some colour into Cassin's cheeks, the merry summer weather had flooded with the joy of life her once shrinking heart. It was no longer a stern wild land to her, a land of granite cliffs and hungry seas. The gold of the gorse had its call for her. She was amongst friends ; her Welsh home and even her dead father were growing faint to her, like things of a dream. She took her share in the lighter work of the farm, her increasing health and muscular strength added to life's reality. She was half-pleased, half-annoyed, when it became necessary to lengthen her Sunday frock.

Of the work that fell to her share, she liked best the spreading of the household linen to dry.

Maggie liked this, too, but that was because the drying ground was the furze border that lined the highway, and there was always a chance that some one might go by. "Some one" to Maggie's mind was necessarily of the opposite sex.

Cassin took an æsthetic pleasure—though she would not have known it by that name—in spreading the white linen on the hot crisp gold of the furze ; in the heavy scent of the blossom ; the hum of bees above it ; the light breeze that billowed and danced below the linen ;

the larks that sang loudly overhead ; the crisp stiffness of the clothes when dry.

For sheer lightness of heart she was singing at her work, one of the hymns set in a minor key, of her father's people. Maggie, hidden by a clump of furze, answered with the catchy refrain of a song that two seasons before had been the favourite of the Halls, and that had just cast its spell over the far West.

"Safe into the harbour guide," rose in the low tuneful voice of one girl.

"Get your coats and jackets on——" shouted, rather than sang, the other.

Then came the ring of hoofs along the road, and, worldly and unworldly, each girl broke off her song to listen.

Maggie thrust a ruddy face amongst the golden bloom.

"It's that Grainger. You see if it isn't," she cried excitedly.

"Grainger ? Who is Grainger ? "

"Lorry Grainger, silly. Him I telled you about. The gentleman what's to Trezelah, learning to farm. He's been home for his holidays. Now he's back we'll have some fun. Bet you anything it's him."

Clop, clop, clop. On came the hoofs at a steady pace.

"They goes different when our men's riding—Grainger, he's a saddle. Let's hide and have a bit of fun."

Before she had fully gathered Maggie's intention, Cassin found herself forced into a crouching position amongst the furze.

Overhead the blossom appeared to palpitate with excess of colour against the blue of the sky.

Maggie giggled delightedly.

"Don't you move till I tell you," she whispered, "then up us comes, together."

"Won't we frighten the horse ? "

For answer Maggie giggled again.

"Mightn't the gentleman be thrown ? "

"I'd like to see him," responded Maggie. That she did not mean her words to be taken literally was shown by the scornful addition of "*Him* thrown ! "

Nearer and nearer came the beat of hoofs. But, just as Maggie, wriggling with excitement, was about to give

the signal for a spring, the steady clop, clop, stopped abruptly, and a voice cried out :

“ Five bob to a brass farthing, it’s Maggie Penrose.” Then, with a laugh, “ Folks that want to hide shouldn’t put a scarlet pancake on their heads.”

“ Who says us wanted to hide ? ” was Maggie’s ready retort, as she struggled to her feet dragging Cassin into a standing position. The latter, conscious that her sun-bonnet was awry and her hair full of furze-prickles, felt a fool and disliked her cousin accordingly.

Maggie was quite cool.

“ We was looking for birds’ eggs,” she asserted, mendaciously.

The young man from his big brown horse looked down and laughed.

“ Birds’ eggs ? What would you do with them ? ”

“ Teach our grandmother to suck ’em, of course.”

“ I’d like to see her,” returned the young man, lazily. But he was not looking at Maggie Penrose.

“ I did not know you had a sister,” he stated, abruptly.

“ Sister ? She’s my cousin, Cassin Morris. Her father was Welsh. He’s dead now, and she’s come to live with us,” she explained carelessly. In the presence of one of the opposite sex, only herself and the man were of any interest to Maggie.

“ Very pleased to meet you, Miss Morris,” said the young man, raising his cap. Before speaking to Maggie Penrose the courtesy had, apparently, not occurred to him.

Cassin acknowledged it with a grave nod.

Lorry Grainger was, in his own eyes, “ the very devil of a fellow.” In those of his mother he was “ my poor boy,” with a sigh and a dimming of the eyes. In reality he was quite an ordinary young man, somewhat undisciplined, terribly vain, lazy not a little, with no particular aim in life but the attainment of pleasure ; but good-natured, open-handed and nothing of a snob.

To Cassin, seeing more than might have been thought beneath her shrouding lashes, Lorry Grainger was not quite a gentleman. Perhaps there was too much display of a rather flashy tie, and a waistcoat too “ fancy ” for her quiet taste, or it might be the too openly expressed

admiration in his roving dark eyes that prejudiced her against him. Cassin did not like Mr. Grainger, she was quite sure of that.

To the other girl Lorry was a gentleman, and that meant everything to her. He was neither tall nor strong, but he sat his horse well, drawing in the big, white-blazed head with a firm hand. His hair was curly, his lips showed red beneath his small dark moustache; his clothes were fine, his appointments of whip and spur spoke the gentleman.

To one of Maggie's type every man is, as a man, seductive, but as diamond is to paste, so is a gentleman to a mere man.

So she gazed up at Lorry Grainger, open admiration in her big bold eyes. She was plainly his for the plucking.

For the moment the young man gave her but scant attention, talking in easy fashion to the other girl. How did she like Cornwall? Was she staying long? &c. He addressed her in the same manner in which he would have spoken to friends of his sisters at home. Still, to the critical faculty that lay at the back of Cassin's mind he was not *quite* a gentleman.

She was relieved when, with another lifting of his cap, he set heels to his big brown horse and was rapidly out of sight.

"Lor'!" cried Maggie, "Lorry *was* riding the high horse to-day. You did ought to feel honoured, *Miss* Morris. You mustn't think, though, he's always like that. You wait till you get him in a quiet lane, with his arm round your waist——"

"I wouldn't let him," Cassin flashed back, angrily.

"Oh! when I say 'you,' I don't mean you, really. Only how you says 'you' when you means 'me.'"

"I see," replied Cassin, stating a formula, and not a fact.

"Lorry's a good sort," Maggie went on contentedly, "not a bit proud, and free-handed—you never did. But I may as well tell you, Cassin, he's mine, so to speak, already. I don't want you shoving of yourself in there."

"You need not be afraid."

Cassin's small mouth was disdainful.

"You needn't be so set up," retorted the other. "I

can tell you Lorry Grainger's considered a fair catch. Gentlemen isn't so thick as blackberries hereabouts."

With that, somewhat huffed, she returned to the collecting of the linen. She felt as one who displays some treasure and, instead of envy or at least admiration, evokes but indifference. There were times when Maggie, easygoing as she was, felt a vague dissatisfaction with her cousin.