CHAPTER V

THE HAVEN

"MOTHER," called out Aunt Susie, pushing open the kitchen door. "Have you heard the news? Old Martha's gone dead. She was took quite sudden. She went out into the wash'us, and no one did seem to take no notice as her hadn't come back. And, there now, they've found her a-sitting on a hamper with her poor old head all amongst the trammels."

Tears gathered in Aunt Susie's big grey eyes, gathered and overflowed.

Her mother paused in the act of drawing a saffron cake from the oven.

"Old Martha not been an' died?" she exclaimed, "an' me going down to see her every day this week and one thing and another hindering. Well! I never!"

She drew out the cake and looked at it as critically as though no rude thrusting in of man's mortality had interrupted her action. Then, taking off her apron, she said:

"I must go straight down along, her cousin being my mother's aunt, no less."

Susan's eyes widened with interest. She knew her mother's father had been a "Cover," sometime cox'en, or it might be vice-cox'en, of the life-boat. But in remote parts of Cornwall intermarriages are so frequent, and as a consequence relationships so complicated, that all but the nearest are ignored excepting at times of bereavement. Then the bond of Death proves stronger than that of Life, and the remotest connections are eagerly unravelled that a brief importance may be gained by the claim of relationship to the corpse.

"I never did know before," Aunt Susie hastily tugged off her tam-o'-shanter, "that old Martha belonged to be related to we."

"She does though," answered Granma Penrose, solemnly nodding her head.

"Then I best be going, too," answered Susie.

Whereupon the two women hastened upstairs, whence came loud bumpings, strugglings with refractory drawers, and callings to one another across the few feet of landing. Before long, they descended, decently clad, not in their best—that must be reserved for the funeral—but, as they, themselves, would have expressed it, "tidy." Notable items. Aunt Susie's hair had been loosed from its curlers, and Granma's short broad hands were enveloped in green thread gloves. She had, besides, elastic-sided boots which creaked as she walked.

Susan was not crying now, her face expressed a certain elated anxiety. Nor was she too upset to pause and fill the kettle from the earthenware water-jar that stood just inside the the door.

Tea would be wanted immediately on their return.

Old Martha lived—as yet they had not realised she was dead—old Martha lived, then, down in the Cove, across the fields and by the cliff path, a rough uneven way and barred by many stiles.

It was an afternoon common enough in Cornwall, when a big billowy wind races past, bringing with it an endless cloud, blotting out the surroundings, half lifting, then sullenly closing down. Not exactly mist in the sense of wet, rather a clammy breath that monotonously flows on and on.

As the two women reached the cliff edge this cloud lifted momentarily; showing far below a cluster of cottages and a line of sullen white and gleam of sullen green that were the sea.

Then it closed again.

At intervals came slowly, muffled, ominous—the *boom*, *boom* of the Longship's fog-gun.

The women heeded neither that nor the weather; as they went they talked of old Martha.

"Her was old so long as I remember."

"Always a tidy, decent body."

"Her must have been more'n eighty."

"More'n ninety, you be sure."

"Her didn't get no pension."

"'Cos her had parish money."

"So her ought, being lone."

"And so good a worker as any."

"I don't hold with they pensions."

"Not lest such as she should have it."

And so on. A ripple of talk broken at intervals by expressions of sorrow on the part of the older woman, as her conscience pricked her concerning that visit that she "did ought" to have paid to old Martha, alive; and that would avail little now to old Martha, dead.

As the two women passed along the little one-sided village street, they noted which cottages had blinded windows. In every case Granma Penrose picked out the more or less complicated relationship to old Martha's family. Aunt Susie stumped along, listening eagerly. Though she would have considered it indecorous to acknowledge the fact, she was thoroughly enjoying the occasion.

Old Martha's cottage was one of the smallest and oldest in the Cove. It stood just at the top of the "slips"; and, more than once, when a "ground sea" and a "spring tide" had joined their forces, old Martha's doorstep had been swept by the ocean itself. Now that ocean murmured sullenly behind the drifting veil of cloud. And old Martha would never more tuck back her short tidy petticoat, and wash that doorstep clean.

In accordance with mourning etiquette the door, which in an ordinary way stood open all day long, was fast closed.

Two or three jerseyed men who were hanging about the winch at the top of the "slips" watched the shut door with lowered heads, turned to spit, then stood at watch again. Their rough, simple lives held little of mystery. Death, the great mystery, was here in their midst. Their blood was quickened.

In answer to Aunt Susie's gentle knock, the door was opened by Martha's daughter-in-law. For some years the old body had lived with the family of her youngest son. Eight strong sons and five prolific daughters had old Martha given to that State whose discerning Government had denied her the paltry five shillings a week that would have meant a little more tea, a few infinitesimal comforts for the last months of her busy, uncomplaining life.

Bessie George had taken out her curl-pins and wore the clean apron of decorous idleness. Her eyes were red with weeping. Old Martha was genuinely mourned.

"Come in, Mrs. Penrose. Come in, Susan." The occasion was a stately one and Bessie rose to it. She set out two chairs with ceremony. With interested, but not aggressive scrutiny, the visitors satisfied themselves that the bird-cage in the blinded window and the flower-pots on the sill had been decorously swathed in crêpe.

A man, who in the dim light could barely be seen seated close to the fire, rose hastily, and with a muttered "'day," shuffled out.

"Matty takes it hard," said Bessie with a sob. "Her's been a good mother to him and to all of we."

She sat down herself and proceeded to give—as was expected of her—full particulars of her mother-in-law's death; dwelling on the suddenness of the same and still more on the fact that old Martha had missed her cup of tea to her dinner.

"—There being none in the house, and me going to get some, and she said it was no matter—her was always like that when it was herself—and to think that was her last cup on earth and she not to have it!"

Bessie broke down.

A little child who, with a lovely wondering face upturned, had been listening to the recital, clinging fast to her mother's apron, now broke into a loud wail, clamouring imperiously to "go wif Grannie."

"Hark to her," said Bessie, clasping the child in her arms, "it's all Grannie with her. They was always together, them two. And that wise, the two of them. And there was me trying to tell Elsie as how her Granma had gone to Heaven—and then, when my back was turned, she'd out with the little red cloak and hood she wears when I puts her to town—'Put 'em on, Mammie, put 'em on,' she says, 'Elsie go to Heaven, too.' It was like to break my heart, hearing of her."

Her tears were falling fast now on to the curly head of the little child, who still looked up, a solemn wonder in her baby eyes.

The other women were crying, too, in ready sympathy.

Presently they climbed the narrow stairs and went into a tiny chamber, where, close under the slanting roof, old Martha slept her last sleep. Very yellow and pinched looked the little old face in its clean frilled night-cap, so shrunken was the little old body that it scarce lifted the covering sheet. On a table near the bed-head a candle was burning; its dim light fell on old Martha's worn Bible. Never one word of it had she been able to read. In the days of her far-off youth there had been no time for book-learning. But for many a long year old Martha had carried it, folded in a clean handkerchief to and from the church at the top of the hill. It was fit that it should keep her company in her last quiet sleep.

Old Martha had slipped through life in so humble, so obscure a fashion that it might be legitimate to hope that she was in some way conscious of her funeral honours. The day was still and sunny. From far and near approaching specks and little masses of black told of neighbours coming to pay their last respects.

The trestles stood ready, their shadows clear on the sunlit dust of the road. The coffin was carried out. Such a tiny coffin, it might have been a child's. The bearers gathered on either side.

Long and far, painfully often, wearily always, old Martha's feet had trudged through life. Now their journeying was ended, and in reverent state she was to be carried to the churchyard on the hill.

The light burden was raised. The mourners fell in behind. Such a long train of black winding past the cottages, all decently blinded to-day. Old Martha would have wiped a tear from her eyes with her blue checked apron could she have known she had so many friends.

Tramp, tramp, so many feet passing the pump whence little Martha's aching arms had carried, times without number, her brimming water-jars. Passing the log where she and her favourite grandchild had rested so often on their way from the shore. Passing the old inn, where her husband——

Ah! old Martha had known bitter sorrow in her long day!

Past all the cottages and away up the rugged hill,

the long black train crept slowly, brokenly. No toil for old Martha now. The waves of meadow-grass bowed before her. The sea-birds called from the blue overhead.

In that long train, with the rest, went the two girls, Cassin and Maggie. The latter assumed a decorous solemnity, but had an eye, now and again, for the lads. Cassin wept silently. She had never known the old woman ; but she thought of her father's funeral and was suddenly homesick for her father's land.

Andrew was one of the bearers. He was asked, and to decline the honour would have been a breach of courtesy impossible to contemplate. So he took his turn with the rest.

But the hand that touched the coffin felt deadly cold, and a sense of physical sickness assailed him. The life that was so strong in him mutely rebelled against death.

Why should this thing be ?

To leave the sunlight and the swelling sea and the strong ways of men ! To be shut into a coffin, hidden under the dank churchyard mould !

Old Martha was nearing her last resting-place in tranquil peace. When the long journey is over, then is the time for sleep.

But life was strong in Andrew and he could not understand.

CHAPTER VI

FOR LUCK

CASSIN shared a bedroom with Maggie ; but it was Maggie's bedroom, not Cassin's. Maggie's things littered the chest of drawers that served also as dressing-table. Maggie's hat-boxes were under both beds, and piled high in one corner. The door was heavy with Maggie's skirts and petticoats. Cassin had to keep her possessions in her shiny-topped tin trunk—an inconvenient arrangement often involving the removal of everything before she could lay her hands on the one thing wanted at the moment.

She was kneeling one day beside her trunk. Scattered on the floor about her were odds and ends of clothing, books, photographs, picture postcards, and a few pieces of old Welsh china wrapped in tissue paper.

Her Sunday hat was not visible. In a momentary burst of generosity Maggie had made room for it in a battered cardboard box.

The window was open to the wide heather country. The breeze from the sea stirred the curtains, and lifted Cassin's soft dark hair about her brow. There was a suggestion of prayer, or, at all events, of reverence, about her kneeling figure. From the bottom of her trunk she had drawn her treasured horseshoe. Her head drooped over it held tenderly in both her hands.

Her eyes were misty, and they saw, not the rusted shoe itself, but her Welsh home, slate-built, rose-covered, amongst its tree-fuchsias and many-hued hydrangeas. She saw old Mary Llewellyn outside her cottage at the bend of the road. Jennie, too, and Katrine Vaughan, who were her schoolfellows. And David Lloyd, who dragged one leg, and could not romp as did the other boys, but who read books—books by the score—poetry some of them, poetry which David understood, for it was he, himself, that was writing the poetry, too !

Cassin's cheeks flushed, her eyes grew bright.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said a sudden voice over her shoulder. "I did think to get a sight of your young man's picture. I stole in that careful, and pep over your shoulder, and all for a dirty old horseshoe——"

In an instant Cassin had thrust her treasure deep down amongst the clothing in her box, and had turned burning cheeks and flashing eyes towards the intruder.

"You are mean—mean—" she cried, "to—to spy——" In her anger her words tripped over one another on her lips.

Maggie was plainly amused. She plumped down heavily on the bed—Cassin's bed—and sat nursing her plump arms, swinging her legs, and regarding her cousin with a pleased grin.

"A proper taking," she said at last, when Cassin had exhausted her vocabulary, or at all events her breath, "an' all about nothing, too! If I hasn't a right to my own room, I dunno' who has. You might so well be a baby, making such a 'shallal' about nothing as I can see."

Cassin turned away in sullen silence. Secretly, she was rather ashamed of her outburst. With lowered head and listless fingers she began to refill her trunk with her possessions.

Maggie scrutinised them with the bright eyes of a watching bird.

Suddenly she made a pounce. Something had slipped from its wrappings.

Too late Cassin saw the movement, too late she sprang swiftly forward. Maggie already held the something in her big strong hand.

"Ho, ho!" she cried lustily. "This tells a pretty tale! So Miss Morris is not such a saint then! Or is it your sweetheart you've been robbing?"

She held the something behind her back, tantalisingly out of her cousin's reach. It was a briar pipe, darkened with use. The bowl was filled with unsmoked tobacco.

Cassin was not flushed now; she breathed quickly, but her cheeks were white.

"Give it back, Maggie," she demanded.

"Not me!" laughed the other, "not lest you tell me whose it is."

She held it above her head.

"It isn't a fisherman's, the mouthpiece be too long; and it isn't a farmer's, bowl isn't big enough; and it don't look quite like a gentleman's neither."

Cassin winced.

The pipe had been her father's, the mouthpiece bore the print of his teeth.

"Give it back," she said faintly.

"Maybe I will," answered Maggie.

For some reason she did not at all understand, the zest of her joke was, as she would have expressed it, "rather off."

"Maybe I'll give it you. Only first I'll have out this bit of baccy." She took a hairpin from her tumbled head. "It'll make me a nice little smoke, only you mustn't let on to Granma."

"Don't touch it!" Cassin cried. She had found the pipe just so after her father's death. His fingers had pressed the tobacco into the bowl.

"Maggie! If you dare!"

"Who says I dursn't?"

The hairpin was, however, suspended above the pipe. Something in Cassin's face caused Maggie to stay her hand.

"Here, baby," she cried, "take your old pipe."

She tossed it carelessly across the room. It missed its mark, caught on the box lid, and bounded to the floor.

The mouthpiece was broken, the tobacco scattered.

"Father! father!" sobbed Cassin, down upon her knees.

In an instant Maggie was beside her, her warm heart full of remorse.

"You silly little beast!" she said. "Why didn't you speak sooner? I'd have cut off my hand sooner than done it. I thought it was only some silly sweetheartin' nonsense, and the horseshoe too! Look here——"

For Cassin made no response to her addresses, but only sobbed and sobbed.

"I'll give you the big red rose out of my Sunday hat.

I'd just as soon as not. You can stick it in that black thing of yours."

Then, as this glorious offer apparently had no charm to assuage the other's grief, "I tell you what," she said, with an impressive pause. "I'll give you them blue beads Lorry Grainger bought me at St. Just Feast."

No answer.

"You know you said they was pretty," urged Maggie.

Then, as Cassin's shoulders were still shaken by her sobs, Maggie rose to her feet, and, after a noisy struggle with a refractory drawer, she returned, holding out a string of gaudy blue beads.

"Here you are," she said.

Her face was not ignoble at the moment.

In spite of her woe, Cassin was touched. She turned and shook her head; but her expression had softened.

"Well, then, kiss and be friends," suggested Maggie, quick to take her advantage.

Then, when her moist full lips had met the other's hot and tremulous, "You aren't a bad little thing," she said, letting the shining beads run from one broad palm to the other. "And I tell you what: so long as I gets Lorry Grainger—I has a sort of feeling as how I shall—you may have Andrew Thomas, and welcome."

Cassin was too exhausted by recent passion to utter any protest; nor, indeed, to display any fresh anger when Maggie, rising to restore her own treasures to their resting-place, set her foot on a piece of the Welsh china.

"Well now! there's something else broke," she cried with vexation, as an ominous crack sounded below her heavy foot.

"That's two for me," she went on dejectedly. "I'd best go straight away and break a flower-pot or something that don't matter. Break two, sure it is there'll be a third."

"We say so, too," said Cassin, brightening a little under the link of a common superstition.

"Of course you do," returned Maggie. "You're not really a foreigner, but Cornish, same as we."

"But I mean at home. They say it there."

"Who'd 'a thought it," returned Maggie. To keep

out of reach of further breakages, she planted herself on a bed—her own bed this time. Then, bending forward, her hands clasped round her knees, she went on : "I didn't think they was so sensible over there" ; adding hastily, lest the newly arranged truce should be broken, "I should say, so—I can't think of the word—it means believing, but not proper sort of believing——"

"Superstitious," Cassin suggested.

"That's it. My ! but you are a good one at long words."

Cassin generously waived this point.

"But the Welsh are superstitious," she said. "Old Mary Llewellyn, who lived in a white cottage near us"—she caught her breath with a sobbing sound—"she used to tell me all kinds of queer things about omens."

She was sitting back upon her heels amongst the remains of her property. There was a bright spot of colour on each cheek, and her long lashes were matted with moisture ; otherwise her recent storm of passion had left but little trace.

"Omens," said Maggie quickly, "us has omens too. A loaf upside down means a drowning, or some says—a change."

"We say drop a piece of bread and you'll have a disappointment. Then it's unlucky to find money."

"I wouldn't mind running the risk," returned Maggie prosaically. "I've heard tell if your right hand itches you'll get money, and if your left, you'll pay it——"

Cassin nodded her head.

"And if your nose itches——"

"You'll be kissed, cursed, vexed, or shake hands with a fool," cried both girls together.

"There must be something in it," reflected Maggie, "or how should them and us have it the same ?"

"Father was telling me," put in Cassin softly, "that Welsh and Cornish are really one people—ancient British, I think he said."

"I don't know about that," said Maggie, shying from the suggestion of school-learning. "Tell me some more of those super-things."

"Superstitions ? I can't remember them all at the moment."

"Have you any about lovers?" asked Maggie.

Cassin looked out of the window at the white clouds racing over the blue sky. Her face looked dreamy. Then she said:

"There are some I know about putting leaves and things under your pillow to make you dream. Oh! I know! Pull your fingers, and every crack means a lover."

Maggie's eyes danced.

"That's a proper one," she said, and immediately set to work to put the superstition to the test. Her big coarse hands registered a resounding crack to every joint.

"Enough to last me over a couple of Sundays," she cried, with gratified laughter, "and then I'll try again. Now you!"

Cassin's slim fingers yielded but two, and one of those was doubtful.

"Never mind," consoled the other, assured of her own wealth of lovers, and therefore magnanimous; "you're a bit of a stranger yet; you'll get more by and by. "Lor'" —as a smell of peculiar and pungent nature rose from the kitchen below—"I'm blest if it isn't tea-time." She snuffed the rank odour as though it were incense. "Niflen,"* she said. "I'm properly hungry, too. Shall I help you tumble them things back? Though p'r'aps I'd best not, seeing I've started to break."

For a few minutes she watched her cousin's movements in silence; then she said:

"Have you any super—that thing, you know—about the horseshoe?"

"Not exactly. I keep that—just for—luck."

"And for love," she added softly.

Maggie's ears were sharp and caught the last word.

"Luck in love," she said to herself, and nodded.

She went downstairs rather soberly. There might be more than people were inclined to think in this—super-thing.

* Sun-dried and salted fish.

CHAPTER VII

"WHIFFIN"

THE sky was a clear, intense blue; black against it was a row of cormorants, sunning themselves on one of the Cowloe rocks. Andrew whistled and thumped his oars in the rowlocks. The birds stretched their snake-like necks, but were too lazy to move.

The fringe of seaweed dripped, sparkled, rose and fell. The boat rose and fell, too, slowly as the big glassy swells came rolling in towards the land.

Cassin hung over the side, gazing down and down until through the clear green water she could see the ripples in the sand below. Ten fathoms down it was, so Andrew told her. Then, when he saw her wrinkling her brow to grasp his meaning, he translated the nautical measure into feet. Andrew was like that. He seemed to know just what you wanted. And he was not a bit shy when you got him alone.

They were "whiffin" for pollack. Cassin thought it splendid to hold the long line, feeling the rhythmic spinning of the bait, whilst Andrew's strong arms forced the boat through the rippling water. It was tremendously exciting when a smart double jerk told of a fish at the end of the line. Then came a breathless hauling in hand over hand, as Andrew had shown her; and the silvery swirl and flash as the captive came in sight. Once heaved into the boat, however, with a shower of sunlit drops and a sharp flapping on the bottom boards, Cassin was almost sorry the fish had not after all eluded the skill of which but a moment before she had been so proud.

But Andrew, tender-hearted as regards cats and dogs, and, indeed, all land creatures, was absolutely callous as regards the possible sufferings of fish. His private philosophy, indeed, held them to be created for the express purpose of being hooked or netted. Yet, in his quick way, he gathered the difference between his point of view

and Cassin's ; and he delicately hid from view the coarser and blood-stained side of the sport.

Cassin would have laughed had any one called Andrew a gentleman. He wore coarse, weathered clothes, the sun had blistered his collarless neck, his hands were roughened with work ; his speech, too, though often vivid, even poetical, was far from grammatical. No one would think of calling Andrew a gentleman ; yet already Cassin had come to accept, even to expect, from him that tactful deference which instinctively places others before self and is inferred by the old chivalrous term of " gentle " man.

" Isn't it all splendid ! " she cried delightedly.

With an answering smile Andrew owned that it was " proper."

He had no intention of using the word in a Grundyish sense. To his simple mind male and female were never meant to be fenced apart as sheep and goats. Yet, so far, though he rejoiced at the pinkness and delicacy of the girl's little fingers, no thrill ran through his veins when he chanced to touch them in the passing of a line.

They were happy boy and girl together. They exchanged the innocent confidences of youth and matched their foolish little jests, and laughed aloud in the sunshine.

The air was so still and the water so quiet that their laughter carried as far as the shore.

Maggie heard it, and her black brows lowered over her black eyes. She had fully meant to go fishing with the others ; but that part of Maggie which in the matter of cream and cake gave her so much solid satisfaction possessed an unfortunate aversion to the lightest tossing of the sea. And even as she waited on the rocks whilst Andrew was getting ready the gear, the sight of the boat rising and falling as the swell lapped into the little harbour caused the aforesaid portion of Maggie's anatomy to experience such qualms that, brusquely remarking, " I ain't a-going to waste my dinner for nobody," she retraced her steps over the weed-covered rocks.

The fishermen, busy gutting fish and cutting up bait, looked at one another and grinned. The aversion of landsmen—or in their language farm-people—to the movement of the sea was to the Cove-dwellers a never-failing source of delicious humour.

But Maggie, not to be beaten, set her strong arms akimbo, and launched at the men a series of jests, which made up in coarseness what they lacked in wit. Thus, having forced them to laugh with rather than at her, she turned to see whether Andrew had appreciated her sally.

Andrew was pulling quickly; the boat was already some lengths from the landing-stage; his face was turned over his shoulder, seaward. He was not laughing.

He had not laughed *then*. But he could laugh *now*, out there with Cassin on the water. Maggie, sitting on the edge of a tilted boat, drew down her black brows with a scowl.

Andrew never had a word to say for hisself, never hardly. And Cassin was no good at larking—not her! Yet they seemed lively enough together, out there.

Maggie tilted the boat up and down. It creaked with her weight.

The sea looked smooth enough now.

"It just got up nasty a' purpose to spite of I, so it did," she said morosely.

One of the men had thrown aside a fish that was too small for bait. Now and again it made a convulsive flap, gasped, and then flapped again. Each of such movements carried it a little farther down the slips, a little nearer to the water that held for it the sweetness of life.

The quivering, straining thing caught Maggie's eyes.

"No you don't," she said aloud. She lifted the defenceless thing in her hand and flung it towards a pile of crab-pots, stacked and blistering in the hot sun. It fell and was lost to sight.

Maggie felt distinctly more cheerful.

She drummed her heels upon the stones and began to whistle tunelessly. She left off to raise her head, suddenly alert.

The men, their work finished, had gathered, as was usual, round the windlass at the top of the slips. Some one had joined them there. Lorry Grainger. His waistcoat flamed, his polished gaiters shone, in the afternoon sun. Maggie sniffed the scent of his cigar, then she turned her face resolutely out to sea. She could hear Grainger laughing and joking with the men. He certainly had a pleasant way with him.

Maggie's face was all a-grin.

"It isn't for the like o' them as Lorry's found his way to the Cove," she muttered. Still she did not look round; not even when she heard his feet slithering down the polished stones.

"Hullo, Maggie," said his voice at her elbow.

"Hullo!" she answered back.

"What are you doing here?" the young man went on. He carried a riding-crop, and with it he rapped his polished gaiters as he spoke.

"What are *you* doing here?" retorted Maggie. "Learning farming, I s'pose. What do you call this, herding stock? or sowing seed?"

"Whichever you like," Lorry laughed back. "Let's call it sowing seed!"

"Sowing seed that like enough'll never come to the reaping," she returned, with a glance of her big black eyes that added point to the words of her big moist lips.

"Come, now." The young man put up a gaitered leg on the gunwale of the boat. The sense of nearness was like wine in Maggie's veins, her body drew a little towards him.

"Come, now," he said, throwing away the end of his cigar and stroking his moustache from his red lips, "farmers never sow without a fair prospect of harvest."

"You'll never make a farmer," cried Maggie.

Grainger raised his brows.

"You *are* unkind to say so," he protested.

"That I ain't," she tittered, "I'll tell you what it is. Farmers ain't cut your way, and they don't wear weskits like that of yours."

"I thought it was rather neat," he said, looking at the maligned article of apparel.

"Tasty enough for me," she replied. "It do put me in mind of ripe raspberries; or is it pickled cabbage?" She gave her mind to the question, resting her rounded chin in both her hands. Then she turned her thoughts back with a jerk to the subject on which they had started.

"No," she said, "farmers isn't gentlemen, and gentlemen isn't farmers. They're a different breed, that's how it is."

"Then is there no hope for me?" His voice expressed regret, but secretly he was flattered.

A devil of a dog with the women, this !

Maggie looked up at him below her lashes, cunningly.

The hot sun lapped about them both. The fishermen had drifted away homewards for their tea. The boat which held her cousin and Andrew was but a black speck in the gold of the water. Maggie wanted—wanted more than anything else at that moment—that Lorry should stoop and kiss her.

But he only looked at her and laughed a little mockingly.

" Is there no hope for me ? " he repeated.

Maggie had an inspiration.

" Not unlest you takes a farm girl to wife." She said it firmly, although the words caught a little in her throat. She felt a queer sensation, too, as though the boat on which she sat were heaving to the movements of the sea. She spread out her hands and clutched the gunwale on either side.

It seemed to her ages before Lorry spoke. He removed his foot from its place on the boat beside her; then he said :

" What a desperate remedy ! " And he laughed.

She turned on him fiercely.

He had just rolled a cigarette, and was touching the paper with his tongue. The blood hammered in Maggie's temples. She had no very clear idea as to what his words might mean—only she felt that, in some way, they set a gulf between the two of them.

She shivered.

" You have been sitting too long," he remarked carelessly ; " better walk about a bit. Hullo ! they are coming to land. I wonder whether they have any fish ? "

" I wonder—have they ? " Maggie returned dully, as she rose clumsily to her feet.

She was not going to let this Englishman see that he had hurt her. For he had hurt her. She knew it now, and, somehow, vaguely, she felt it was her cousin, Cassin's, fault.

CHAPTER VIII

PILCHARDS !

THE highway ran between Mayon House and the farm-buildings.

Cassin was crossing it with a "gathering" of eggs. The breeze flicked her lilac cotton about her slight figure, made her shadow dance upon the white road, and lifted the flap of her sun-bonnet, showing her white little neck.

Lorry Grainger naturally hastened his steps.

He overtook her just as she was passing though the faded garden gate.

"Good-morning, Miss Morris."

Off came his hat, a smart Panama. Lorry was in light flannels to-day. Farming, in his case, was evidently not of the practical nature expressed by the words "back to the soil."

The morning was so bright and breezy and the larks overhead were singing so gaily that sympathy with nature's jocund mood obliged Cassin not only to pause in the act of passing through the gate, but also to turn and smile.

Grainger was at the gate now, his hand beside hers on the top bar. Hers, he noticed, was slim and pink; the little forefinger was roughened by work, but the nails were clean. A small, confiding hand, clearly meant to be fondled. Yet Lorry Grainger, devil of a dog though he was, did not dare to touch it, as yet. Instead he raised his eyes and sent what he flattered himself was an ardent message beneath her dark lashes.

"Those fish you gave me the other day"—he fondly hoped the tenderness of the tone redeemed the poor commonplace of the words—"those fish—I never tasted anything so delicious."

There was no consciousness of sex in Cassin's laugh.

"They were Andrew's fish, not mine," she said.

"You caught them."

"The bait was Andrew's."

He tried to look into her eyes, but the lashes baffled even while they attracted him.

Never any eyes—so he deduced from his extensive study of the charm feminine—could boast such lashes as these Cornish ones, as long and thick on the lower as on the upper lid.

"If I had the luck to catch anything," he said, "I should not trouble as to whether the bait were mine or another's."

Something told Cassin he was speaking with a double meaning, and, though she could not gauge his intention, she sheered away from it as a bird from a trap.

"They were Andrew's fish," she repeated.

"Lucky Andrew!"

"He did not think much to them," she answered carelessly. "He can catch bigger than those any day."

"Not lucky with the fish—but in the fishing."

"I don't think I see the difference," she said gravely. She mistrusted any one who talked down to her. She had by now moved her hand from the gate, and was, unthinkingly, caressing the eggs, pink, white, and warm brown, in the battered baking-tin under her arm.

"Lucky eggs!" sighed Lorry.

His meaning now was so plain that even Cassin could not miss it. Her hand fell to her side and a quick blush dyed her cheeks.

"Aunt Susie will be wanting them," she said, turning away.

Her steps, however, were arrested on the instant by a strange sound that rose from somewhere along the cliffs—a long, low, mournful bellow. Again and again it rose, echoing from rock to rock and dying away, only to rise again with renewed vibrations.

"Whatever is it?" cried Cassin, something of her first dread of this remote land shining in her wide-open eyes.

"It's the Heva, of course." Lorry was delighted with the chance that had fallen to his hands. "Have you never heard the Heva?"

"No! What sort of a creature is it?"

Lorry laughed boyishly.

"A creature with legs and arms; common or garden name, a man."

"A man! Why ever does he do it?"

"To let the others know the fish are in the bay. Have you never heard of pilchards?"

Of course Cassin had; though Aunt Susie, Granma, and the rest called them *pilshurds*. For the last week or two, in the intervals of work-planning and between the tit-bits of neighbourly scandal, all the talk had been of pilchards. Would they come? Had they come? When they came? If they failed to come?

So these most momentous fish had, then, actually arrived!

"You ought to come and see the sport," suggested Lorry.

"Oh, could I? I would like."

Cassin's feet plainly hesitated.

"Clap down those eggs and come along," was the young man's ready suggestion.

"I'd best ask Aunt Susie."

At this very moment Aunt Susie herself came flying round the corner of the house.

"Did you hear the Heva?" she cried. "Now you, Cassin, come along and see a sight such as you never did see before. Wait a moment. If they've shot, we may just as well have fish to supper."

She trotted into the house, returning in a moment with a capacious zinc pail.

"Shot!" The word surprised Cassin, and she turned to Grainger for an explanation. "I never heard of shooting fish."

"Nor I," he laughed back. "It is the net they shoot, not the fish."

"I see," Cassin answered rather dubiously.

"You'll see right enough before long, if they have any luck. Hullo! Auntie, let me carry the bucket," he said it in so cheery a fashion that neither of his companions for a moment guessed that to his mind homely Susie, with her jerky trot, represented the "three" of the time-honoured saying.

He comforted himself with the thought of the many

awkward stiles they would meet upon the way, which would give him chance of lingering pressures on Cassin's little hand. But even this hope was doomed to disappointment, for Aunt Susie decreed that across the "green" was the best way to the "look-out." The "green" was a grassy cliff-top; there were no stiles that way.

Before long, dark against the sky, they could see the signalman with muscular emphasis brandishing two pieces of furze.

"They've shot, sure enough," said Aunt Susie, pausing to shade her eyes and read the movements aright. "We'd best go down to Cove after all."

To the Cove they accordingly went, where all was now excitement.

Men were launching boats in reckless haste. Others, to the rhythm of monotonous cries, were moving long tarred hulls, which had become grass-embedded by the roadside since last year's pilchard season. Crouching with their backs beneath the towering sides, all together they sang, straightened their muscles, and set the great mastless, rudderless boats like lethargic monsters moving.

Amid the general bustle and life it seemed odd to note some of the men, hands in pockets, hanging about the windlass, or leaning against the lifeboat-house doors in idleness.

"Why don't they work?" Cassin questioned.

"Because no man has hired them." So Lorry hazarded.

But Aunt Susie answered readily.

"It isn't their Company. It's the Old Men has shot, and they goes shares with the Success. The Unity has next 'stem,' them that has just launched their boat. They comes fourth—the Speedy—and isn't any good to-day. That's Andrew's company, too."

With a little troubled feeling Cassin had noticed Andrew amongst the idlers; now she brightened again and watched the various proceedings with undivided interest.

The big seine-net had been shot. The fish in their thousands were already enclosed; and, whilst some of the men were anchoring the net, and others "tucking" it, or reducing its size by passing the floating corks one

above the other, the rest were pulling in haste to the shore to fetch the "tuck-net," a smaller one that would be let down within the larger one to bring the fish to the surface.

"You ought to see the tucking," Lorry said to Cassin. "Is the sea too rough for you, do you think?"

Cassin shook her head. Little spots of excitement showed like rose-petals on her cheeks.

"Hullo, Andrew Thomas," called Grainger, "just row us out to the seine, will you?"

Andrew turned an independent shoulder, clearly meant to show he was at the bidding of no "landsman." Grainger might have commanded or bribed in vain had not Cassin cried out:

"Oh! do please take us, Andrew, if you can spare the time!"

Whereat Andrew took his hands from his pockets and immediately set to work launching his punt.

At first Aunt Susie "dursn't" go; then she was not sure, the sea was "none so bad," and she didn't know whenever she'd seen the tucking. Finally, her pail between her knees, she was seated in the stern of the boat, with a rigid figure and an anxious face.

Andrew had accepted a cigarette from Grainger, and the two were pulling amicably together.

By now boats innumerable were clustered round the anchored net. Cassin could hardly keep her seat from excitement. Never had she seen, never had she imagined such vast quantities of fish, darting, dazzling, splashing; one continuous movement as of gleaming metal and dissolving rainbows. Over all hung a cloud of sunlit spray, above which crowded the seagulls, screaming, quarrelsome, eager, darting and rising, with now and again something that twisted and glittered in a strong, cruel bill. Close about the silver-filled nets the boats rose and fell, and the screaming of the birds was rivalled by the shouting of the men, as they scooped up the living fish in dripping baskets and emptied them into the wide black hulls that little by little were settling down into the water, until their silver freight should rise level with the gunwale.

Cassin could have stayed for hours, lost in the excite-

ment of the noise and ferment, the novelty, the vividness, the intensely coloured movement of the whole. But Aunt Susie, having passed her bucket to one of the men, and received it again full of live fish that slipped and squirmed one under the other in a desperate attempt to escape, stated they must be getting back or Granma would be anxious.

One glance at the tallowy whiteness of her usually ruddy face was sufficient to force acquiescence. So they went back, pulling shoreward amongst a host of other boats going and coming, whilst the shouts of the men, the splash of oars, and the cries of the devouring birds became less and less in their ears.

Once safely on land, Aunt Susie's daughterly misgivings apparently vanished. For it was she who suggested they should wait for the first "tub" to come to land, that Cassin might see the fish shovelled into buckets and carried on the backs of bending men to the packing-houses.

Cassin was more than willing. Lorry stayed, of course, and made himself agreeable, launching nimble little jests at the carriers, who were struggling up the polished slips, the fading fish piled up to their necks, their clothes, their very hair, all a-glitter with the loosened scales.

Cassin laughed merrily at his sallies. But all her interest was centred on the facts Andrew was telling about the tanks, the pressing, sorting, and packing of the fish.

"Where do they go ?" asked Cassin.

"To Italy, mostly, for Friday's 'meat.' Then there's the oil; they do say that's worth more than the fish themselves. It is used for making colours, and dressing leather, and lots of things like that."

Suddenly Andrew became conscious of his own voice talking fluently.

He dropped into silence.

Lorry put in a funny remark about a fallen fish.

Cassin laughed out merrily.

Andrew moved away. For some reason he could not explain there was a feeling of discomfort at his heart.