Penelope Brandling

by Vernon Lee

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PENELOPE BRANDLING

By

VERNON LEE

A TALE OF THE WELSH COAST IN

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

LONDON T. FISHER UNWIN PATERNOSTER SQUARE M CM III TO AUGUSTINE BULTEAU THIS STORY OF NORTHERN WRECKERS, IN RETURN FOR A PIECE OF PARIAN MARBLE PICKED UP IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SURF AT PALO

GRANDFEY, NEAR F., IN SWITZERLAND.

May 15, 1822.

Having reached an age when the morrow is more than uncertain, and knowing how soon all verbal tradition becomes blurred and distorted, I, Sophia Penelope, daughter of Jacques de Morat, a cadet of the Counts of that name, sometime a captain in the service of King Louis XV., and of Sophia Hamilton, his wife; and furthermore, widow of the late Sir Eustace Brandling, ninth baronet, of St. Salvat's Castle, in the county of Glamorgan, have yielded to the wishes of my dear surviving sons, and am preparing to consign to paper, for the benefit of their children and grandchildren, some account of those circumstances in my life which decided that the lot of this family should so long have been cast in foreign parts and remote colonies, instead of in its ancestral and legitimate home.

I can the better fulfil this last duty to my dear ones, living and dead, that I have by me a journal which, as it chanced, I was in the habit of keeping at that period; and require to draw upon my memory only for such details as happen to be missing in that casual record of my daily life some fifty years ago. And first of all let me explain to my children's children that I began to keep this journal two years after my

marriage with their grandfather, with the idea of sending it regularly to my dearest mother, from whom, for the first time in my young life, I was separated by my husband's unexpected succession and our removal from Switzerland to his newly-inherited estates in Wales. Let me also explain that before this event, which took place in the spring of seventeen hundred and seventy-two, Sir Eustace Brandling was merely a young Englishman of handsome person, gentlemanly bearing, an uncommon knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, and a most blameless and amiable temper, but with no expectations of fortune in the future, and only a modest competence in the present. So that it was regarded in our Canton and among our relations as a proof of my dear mother's high-flown and romantic temper, and of the unpractical influence of the writings of Rousseau and other philosophers, that she should have allowed her only child to contract such a marriage. And at the time of its celebration it did indeed appear improbable that we should ever cease residing with my dearest mother on her little domain of Grandfey; still more that our existence of pastoral and philosophic happiness should ever be exchanged for the nightmare of dishonour and misery which followed it.

The beginning of our calamities was, as I said, on the death of Sir Thomas Brandling, my husband's only brother. I have preserved a most vivid recollection of the day which brought us that news, perhaps because, looked back upon ever after, it seemed the definite boundary of a whole part of our life, left so quickly and utterly behind, as the shore is left even with the first few strokes of the oars. My dear mother and I were in the laundry, where the maids were busy putting by the freshly ironed linen. My mother, who was ever more skilful with her hands, as she was nimbler in her thoughts, than I, had put aside all the most delicate pieces and the lace to dress and iron herself; while I, who had made a number of large bundles of lavender (our garden had never produced it in so great profusion), was standing on a chair and placing them in the shelves of the presses, between each bale of sheets and table linen which the maids had lifted up to me. When, looking through the open

glass door, I saw Vincent, the farm servant, hurrying along the lime walk, and across the kitchen garden, and waving a packet at us. He had been to the city to buy sugar, I remember, for the raspberry jam, which my mother, an excellent cook, had decided to sweeten a second time, for fear of its turning.

"He seems very excited," said my mother, looking out. "I declare he has a book or packet, perhaps it is the Journal des Savants for Eustace, or that opera by Monsieur Gluck, which your uncle promised you. I hope he has not forgotten the nutmegs." I write down these childish details because I cherished them for years, as one might cherish a blade of grass or a leaf, carelessly put as a marker in a book, and belonging to a country one will never revisit.

"It is a letter for Eustace," said my mother, "and very heavy too. I am glad Vincent had more money than necessary, for it must have cost a lot at the post." And going under my husband's laboratory window she asked whether he wanted the letter at once, or would wait to open it at dinner time. "I am only cleaning my instruments," he answered, "let me have the letter now." His voice, as I hear it through all those years, sounds so happy and boyish. It was altered, and it seemed at the time naturally enough, when he presently came down to the laundry and said very briefly, "My brother is dead ... it is supposed a stab from a drunken sailor at Bristol. A shocking business. It is my Uncle Hubert who writes." He had sat down by the ironing table and spoke in short, dry sentences.

There was something extraordinary about his voice, not grief, but agitation, which somehow made it utterly impossible for me to do what would have been natural under the circumstances, to put my arms round his neck and tell him I shared his trouble. Instead of which every word he uttered seemed to ward me off as with the sword's point, and to cover himself, as a fencer covers his vitals.

"Get some brandy for him, Penelope. He is feeling faint," said my mother, tossing me her keys. I obeyed, feeling that she understood and I did not, as often happened

between us. I was a few minutes away, for I had to cross the yard to the dwelling house, and then I found that my mother had given me the wrong keys. I filled a glass from a jar of cherries we had just put up, and returned to the laundry. My husband was white, but did not look at all faint. He was leaning his elbow on the deal table covered with blanket, and nervously folding and stretching a ruffle which lay by the bowl of starch. When I came in he suddenly stopped speaking, and my mother saw that I noticed it.

"Eustace was saying, my dear," she said, "that he will have to go—almost immediately—to England, on account of the property. He wanted to go on alone, and fetch you later, when things should be a little to rights. But I was telling him, Penelope, that I felt sure you would recognise it as your duty to go with him from the very first, and help him through any difficulties."

My dear mother had resumed her ironing; and as she said these last words, her voice trembled a little, and she stooped very attentively over the cap she was smoothing.

Eustace was sitting there, so unlike himself suddenly, and muttered nervously, "I really can see no occasion, Maman, for anything of the sort."

I cannot say what possessed me; I verily think a presentiment of the future. But I put down the plate and glass, looked from my mother to my husband, and burst into a childish flood of tears. I heard my husband give a little peevish "Ah!" rise, leave the room, and then bang the door of his laboratory upstairs behind him. And then I felt my dear mother's arms about me, and her kiss on my cheek. I mopped my eyes with my apron, but at first I could not see properly for the tears. When I was able to see again what struck me was the scene through the long window, open down to the ground.

It was a lovely evening, and the air full of the sweetness of lime blossom. The low sunlight made the plaster of our big old house a pale golden, and the old woodwork of its wooden eaves, wide and shaped like an inverted boat, as is the Swiss fashion,

of a beautiful rosy purple. The dogs were lying on the house steps, by the great tubs of hydrangeas and flowering pomegranates; and beyond the sanded yard I could see the bent back of Vincent stooping among the hives in the kitchen garden. The grass beyond was brilliant green, all powdered with hemlock flower; and the sun made a deep track in the avenue, along which the cows were trotting home to be milked. I felt my heart break, as once or twice I had foolishly done as a child, and in a manner in which I have never felt it again despite all my later miseries. I suppose it was that I was only then really ceasing to be a child, though I had been married two years. It was evidently in my mother's thoughts, for she followed my glance with hers, and then said very solemnly, and kissing me again (she had not let go of me all this while), "My poor little Penelope! you must learn to be a woman. You will want all your strength and all your courage to help your husband."

That was really the end, or the beginning. There were some weeks of plan-making and preparations, a bad dream which has faded away from my memory. And then, at the beginning of August of that year—1772—my husband and I started from Grandfey for St. Salvat's.

I

September 29, 1772.

This is my first night in what, henceforward, is going to be my home. The thought should be a happy and a solemn one; but it merely goes on and on in my head like the words of a song in some unknown language. Eustace has gone below to his uncles; and I am alone in this great room, and also, I imagine, in the whole wing of this great house. The wax lights on the dressing-table, and the unsnuffed dip with which the old housekeeper lit us through endless passages, leave all the corners dark. But the moonlight pours in through the vast, cage-like window. The moon is shining on a strip of sea above the tree-tops, and the noise of the sea is quite close; a noise quite unlike that of any running water, and methinks very melancholy and

hopeless in expression. I tried to enjoy it like a play, or a romance which one reads; and indeed, the whole impression of this castle is marvellously romantic.

When Eustace had unstrapped my packages, and in his tender manner placed all my little properties in order, he took me in his arms, meaning thereby to welcome me to my new home and the house of his fathers. We were standing by the window, and I tried, foolishly it seems, to hide my weakness of spirit (for I confess to having felt a great longing to cry) by pointing to that piece of moonlit sea, and repeating a line of Ossian, at the beginning of the description of the pirates crossing the sea to the house of Erved. Foolishly, for although that passage is a favourite with Eustace, indeed one we often read during our courtship, he was annoyed at my thinking of such matters, I suppose, at such a moment; and answered with that kind of irritated deprecation that is so new to me; embracing me indeed once more, but leaving me immediately to go to his uncles.

Foolish Penelope! It is this no doubt which makes me feel lonely just now; and I can hear you, dearest mother, chiding me laughingly, for giving so much weight to such an incident. Eustace will return presently, as gentle and sympathising as ever, and all will be right with me. Meanwhile, I will note down the events of this day, so memorable in my life.

We seemed to ride for innumerable hours, I in the hired chaise, and my husband on the horse he had bought at Bristol. The road wound endlessly up and down, through a green country, with barely a pale patch of reaped field, and all veiled in mist and driving rain. There seemed no villages anywhere, only at distances of miles, a scant cottage or two of grey stone and thatch; and once or twice during all those hours, a desolate square tower among distant trees; and all along rough hedges and grey walls with stones projecting like battlements. Inland mountain lines like cliffs, dim in the rain; and at last, over the pale green fields, the sea—quite pale, almost white. We had to ask our way more than once, losing it again in this vague country without

landmarks, where everything appeared and disappeared in mist. I had begun to feel as if St. Salvat's had no real existence, when Eustace rode up to the chaise window and pointed out the top of a tower, and a piece of battlemented wall, emerging from the misty woods, and a minute after we were at a tall gate tower, with a broken escutcheon and a drawbridge, which clanked up behind us so soon as we were over. We stopped in a great castle yard, with paved paths across a kind of bowling green, and at the steps of the house, built unevenly all round, battlemented and turreted, with huge projecting windows made of little panes.

There were a lot of men upon the steps, who surrounded the postchaise; they were roughly and variously dressed, some like fishermen and keepers, but none as I had hitherto seen the gentlemen of this country. But as we stopped, another came down the steps with a masterful air, pushed them aside, opened the chaise, lifted me out, and made me a very fine bow as I stood quite astonished at the suddenness of his ways. He was dressed entirely in black broadcloth, with a frizzled wig and bands, as clergymen are dressed here, and black cloth gaiters.

"May it please the fair Lady Brandling," he said, with a fine gesture, "to accept the hearty welcome of her old Uncle Hubert, and of her other kinsmen." The others came trooping round awkwardly, with little show of manners. But the one called Hubert, the clergyman, gave me his arm, waived them away, said something about my being tired from the long ride, and swept, nay, almost carried me up the great staircase and through the passages to the room where dinner was spread. Of this he excused himself from partaking, alleging the lateness of the hour and his feeble digestion; but he sat over against my husband and me while we were eating, drank wine with me, and kept up a ceaseless flow of conversation, rather fulsomely affable methought and packed with needless witticisms; but which freed me from the embarrassment produced by the novelty of the situation, by my husband's almost utter silence, and also, I must add, by the man's own scrutinising examination of me. I was heartily glad when, the glasses being removed, he summoned the housekeeper,

and with another very fine bow, committed me to her charge. Eustace begged to be excused for accompanying me to my chamber, and promised to return and drink his wine presently with his kinsmen.

And now, dear mother, I have told you of our arrival at St. Salvat's; and I have confessed to you my childish fear of I know not what. "Mere bodily fatigue!" I hear you briskly exclaiming, and chiding me for such childish feelings. But if you were here, dearest mother, you would take me also in your arms, and I should know that you knew it was not all foolishness and cowardice, that you would know what it is, for the first time in my little life, to be without you.

October 5, 1772.

It has stopped raining at last, and Eustace, who is again the kindest and most considerate of men, has taken me all over the castle and the grounds, or at least a great part. St. Salvat's is even more romantically situated than I had thought; and with its towers and battlements hidden in deep woods, it makes one think of castles, like that of Otranto, which one reads of in novels; nay, I was the more reminded of the latter work of fiction (which Eustace believes to be from the pen of the accomplished Mr. Walpole, whom we knew in Paris), that there are, let into the stonework on either side of the porch, huge heads of warriors, filleted and crowned with laurel, which though purporting to be those of the Emperors Augustus and Trajan, yet look as if they might fit into some gigantic helmet such as we read of in that admirable tale.

From the house, which has been built at various times (Eustace is of opinion mainly in the time of the famous Cardinal Wolsey, as the architecture, it appears, is similar to that of His Majesty's palace at Hampton Court), into the old castle; from the house, as I say, the gardens descend in great terraces and steps into the woods and to the sea. The gardens are indeed very much neglected, and will require no doubt, a considerable expenditure of labour; but I am secretly charmed by their wild

luxuriance: a great vine and a pear tree hang about the mullioned windows almost unpruned, and the box and bay trees have grown into thickets in the extraordinary kindliness of this warm, moist climate. There is in the middle of the terraces, a pond all overgrown with lilies, and with a broken leaden statue of a nymph. Here, when he was a child, Eustace was wont to watch for the transformation into a fairy of a great water snake which was said to have lived in that pond for centuries; but I well remember his awakening my compassion by telling me how, one day, his brother Thomas, wishing to displease him, trapped the poor harmless creature and cruelly skinned it alive. "That is the place of my poor water snake," Eustace said to-day; and it was the first time since our coming, that he has alluded to his own or his family's past. Poor Eustace! I am deeply touched by the evident painful memories awakened by return to St. Salvat's, which have over-clouded his reserved and sensitive nature, in a manner I had not noticed (thank Heaven) since our marriage. But to return to the castle, or rather its grounds. What chiefly delights my romantic temper are the woods in which it is hidden, and its singular position, on an utterly isolated little bay of this wild and dangerous coast. You go down the terraces into a narrow ravine, lined with every manner of fern, and full of venerable trees; past the little church of which our Uncle Hubert is the incumbent, alongside some ruined buildings, once the quarters of the Brandlings' troopers, across a field full of yellow bog flowers, and on to a high wall. And on the other side of that wall, quite unexpected, is the white, misty sea, dashing against a bit of sand and low pale rocks, where our uncles' fishing boats are drawn up, and chafing, further off against the sunken reefs of this murderous coast. And to the right and the left, great clumps of wind-bent trees and sharp cliffs appear and disappear in the faint, misty sunshine.

As we stood on the sea wall, listening to the rustle of the waves, a ship, with three masts and full sail, passed slowly at a great distance, to my very great pleasure.

"Where is she going, do you know?" I asked rather childishly.

"To Bristol," answered Eustace curtly. "It is perhaps, some West Indiaman, laden with sugar, and spirits, and coffee and cotton. All the vessels bound for Bristol sail in front of St. Salvat's."

"And is not the coast very dangerous?" I asked, for the sight of that gallant ship had fascinated me. "Are there not wrecks sometimes along those reefs we see there?"

"Sometimes!" exclaimed Eustace sadly. "Why at seasons, almost daily. All that wood which makes the blue flame you like so much, is the timber of wrecked vessels, picked up along this coast."

My eye rested on the boats drawn up on the sand of the little cove: stout black boats, such as Eustace had pointed out to me at Bristol as pilchard boats.

"And when there is a wreck?" I asked, "do your uncles go out to save the poor people with those boats?"

"Alas, dear Lady Brandling," answered an unexpected voice at my elbow, "it is not given to poor weak mortals like us to contend with the decrees of a just, though wrathful Providence."

I turned round and there stood, leaning on the sea wall, with his big liquorice-coloured eyes fixed on me, and a smile (methought) of polite acquiescence in shipwrecks, our uncle, the Reverend Hubert, in his fine black coat and frizzled white wig.

October 12, 1772.

We have been here over a fortnight now, and although it feels as if I never could grow accustomed to all this strangeness, it seems months; and those years at Grandfey, all my life before my marriage, and before our journey, a vivid dream.

Where shall I begin? During the first week Eustace and I had our meals, as seemed but natural, in the great hall with his uncles and his one cousin. For two days things went decently enough. The uncles—Simon, Edward, Gwyn, David, and the cousin,

Evan, son of David, were evidently under considerable restraint, and fear (methought) of the Reverend Hubert, who seems somehow a creature from another planet. The latter sat by Eustace and me, at the high end of the table; the others, and with them the Bailiff Lloyd, at the lower. The service was rough but clean, and the behaviour, although gloomily constrained, decent and gentlemanly. But little by little a spirit of rebellion seemed to arise. It began by young Evan, a sandy-haired lad of seventeen, coming to dinner with hands unwashed and red from skinning, as he told us, an otter; and on the Reverend Hubert bidding him go wash before appearing in my presence, his father, David, taking his part, forcing the lad into his chair, and saying something in the unintelligible Welsh language, which contained some rudeness towards me, for he plainly nodded in my direction and struck the table with his fist. At this the Reverend Hubert got up, took the boy Evan by the shoulders and led him to the door, without one of the party demurring. "The lovely Lady Brandling," he said, turning to me as he resumed his place, "must forgive this young Caliban, unaccustomed like the one of the play, to beautiful princesses." I notice he loves to lard his speech with literary reminiscences, and is indeed a better read person than one would expect to meet in such a place. This was, however, only the beginning. Uncle David appeared next night undoubtedly in liquor, and was with difficulty constrained to decent behaviour. Simon, a heavy, lubberly creature, arrived all covered with mud, in shirtsleeves, and smelling vilely of stale fish. Then it was the turn of Edward, a great black man, with a scar on his cheek, to light his pipe at table, and pinch the Welsh serving wench as she passed, and whisper to her in Welsh some jest which made the others roar. Eustace and Hubert, between whom I sat at the far end, pretended not to notice, though Eustace reddened visibly, and Hubert took an odd green colour, which seems to be the complexion of his anger. And then while our clergyman uncle and Eustace busily fell to discussing literature, and even (in a manner which, under other circumstances, would have made me laugh) quoting the classics, the conversation at the lower end became loud and

violent in Welsh.

"They are discussing the likelihood of a shoal of pilchards," said Hubert to me with a faint uneasy smile. "My brothers, I grieve to say, dear Lady Brandling, are but country bred, and very rough diamonds; and the Saxon, as they call our Christian language, is a difficulty to their heathenishness."

"So great a difficulty, apparently," I answered, suddenly rising from the table, for I felt indignant with the want of spirit of my two gentlemen, "that methinks I shall in future leave them to their familiar Welsh, and order my meals in my parlour, where you two gentlemen may, if you choose, have them with me." Eustace turned crimson, bit his lip; Uncle Hubert went very green; and I own I myself was astonished at my decision of tone and attitude: it was like an unknown me speaking with my voice.

Contrary to my expectation, neither Eustace nor Hubert manifested any vexation with me. We went upstairs and sat down to cards as if nothing had happened. But the next day Hubert brought me a long message of apology, which I confess sounded very much of his making up, from Uncle David. But added that he quite agreed that it was better that Eustace and I should have our meals above, "and leave the hogs to their wash." "Only," he said, with that politeness which I like so little (though Heaven knows politeness ought to be a welcome drug in this place), "I trust my dear young niece will not cast me out of the paradise I have, after so many years, tasted of; and allow her old rough Uncle Hubert occasionally to breathe the air of refinement she has brought to this castle."

Yet I notice he has but rarely eaten with Eustace and me; coming up, however, to drink wine (or pretend, for he never empties his glass and complains he has but a weak head), or play cards, or hear me sing to the harpsichord, a performance of which he seems inordinately fond.

I cannot help wondering what Eustace and he discuss, besides literature, over their

wine. For Eustace must surely intend, sooner or later, to resume his position of master of St. Salvat's, and dispose, some way, of the crew of Caliban uncles.

October 18, 1772.

I ought to say something to my dear mother (though I am getting doubtful of distressing her with my small and temporary troubles) about the domestic economy of St. Salvat's. This is odd enough, to my thinking. The greater part of the castle is unoccupied, and from what I have seen, quite out of repair; nor should I have deemed it possible that so many fine dwelling-rooms could ever have been filled and choked up, as is here the case, with lumber, and, indeed, litter, of all kinds. The uncles, all except Hubert, are lodged in the great south wing, and I should guess in a manner more suitable to their looks than to their birth, while Eustace and I occupy his mother's apartments, done up in the late reign, in the north wing looking on the sea. The centre of the castle is taken up by the great hall, going from ground to ceiling, so that the two halves are virtually isolated; certainly isolated so far as I am concerned, since the fear of eavesdropping on my uncles' brawling has already stopped my using the gallery which runs under the ceiling of the hall, and connects my apartments with the main staircase. The dairy, still-room, pantry, and even the kitchen are in outhouses, from which the serving men bring in the food often in pouring rain in an incredibly reckless manner. I say "serving men," because one of the peculiarities of St. Salvat's (for I can scarce believe it to be an universal practice in England or even in Wales) is the predominance of the male sex. But let not your fancy construe this as a sign of grandeur, or conjure up bevies of lacqueys in long coats and silver badges! Like master, like man; the men at St. Salvat's have the same unkempt, sea-wolfish look as the masters, are equally foul in their habits and possess even less English. By some strange freak the cook only is not of these parts, indeed, a mulatto, knowing only Spanish. "All good sea-faring folk, able to man the boats on a stormy night," explained Uncle Gwyn, as if it were quite natural that the castle of St. Salvat's should be a headquarters of pilchard fishing! I have only seen the

mulatto at a distance, and at first believed him to be an invention of Uncle Simon's, the wag of the family, who informed me he had him off a notorious pirate ship, where he had learnt to grill d——d French frogs during the late war and serve them up with capers.

The small number of women servants is scarce to be regretted, judging by the few there are. Though whether, indeed, these sluts should be judged at all as serving women I feel inclined to doubt; for no secret is made of the dairymaid and the laundress being the sultanas of Uncles Simon and Gwyn, with whom they often sit to meals; while the little waiting wench at first allotted to me was too obviously courted by the oaf Evan to be kept in my service. Uncle Hubert had indeed thought it needful to explain to me that the gentry of these parts all live worse than heathens, and has attempted (but the subject gave me little satisfaction) to confirm this by the chronique galante of the neighbourhood; 'tis wonderful how quick the man is at taking a hint, and adapting his views to his listeners', at least to mine. To come back to the maids, if such a name can be applied here, I find the only reputable woman in the castle (her age, and something in her manner give her a claim to such an adjective) is Mrs. Davies, the supposed housekeeper, who now attends on my (luckily very simple) wants. She was the foster-mother and nurse of my brother-in-law, the late Baronet; and 'tis plain there was no love lost betwixt Eustace and her. Indeed, I seem to guess she may have helped to make his infancy the sad and solitary one it was. Yet, for all this suspicion, and a confused impression (which I can't account for) that the woman is set over us to spy, I am bound to say that of all people here, not excepting Uncle Hubert here, Mrs. Davies is the one most to my taste. She has been notably beautiful, and despite considerable age, has an uncommon active and erect bearing; and there is about her harsh, dark face, and silent, abrupt manners, something which puts me at ease by its strength and straightforwardness. This seems curious after saying she has been set to spy; but 'tis my impression that in this heathenish country spying, aye, and I can fancy robbing

and murdering, might be done with a clean conscience as a duty towards one's masters; and Hubert, and the memory of Sir Thomas, are the real masters, and not Eustace and I.... Will it always be so? Things look like it; and yet, at the bottom of my soul, I find a hope, almost an expectation, that with God's grace I shall clean out this Augean stable, and burn out these wasp's nests....

October 29.

On my asking about prayers, a practice I had noticed in every family since my arrival in England, Uncle Hubert excused himself by explaining that most of the common folk about here had followed Mr. Wesley's sect, and for the rest few of the household understood English. The same reason methought prevented his fulfilling his clergyman's office in public; and when three Sundays had passed, I got to think that the church in the glen was never opened at all. To my surprise last night, being Saturday, the Reverend Hubert invited us very solemnly to Divine Service the following morning; invited, for his manner was very much that of a man requesting one's company at a concert or theatrical entertainment. I am just returned, and I confess my astonishment. Uncle Hubert, though in a style by no means to my taste, and with no kind of real religious spirit, is undoubtedly a preacher of uncommon genius, nor was there any possibility, methought, that his extempore sermon was learned by heart. The flowing rhetorical style, more like that of Romish divines, was of a piece also with his conversation, and he had the look of enjoyment of one conscious of his own powers. I own the interest of the performance (for such I felt it) was so great that it was only on reflection I perceived the utter and almost indecent inappropriateness thereof. Despite the lack of English, the entire household, save the mulatto, were present, mostly asleep in constrained attitudes; and the other uncles, all except David and Gwyn, lay snoring in their pews.

My own impression was oddly disagreeable; but on the service ending, I brought myself to compliment our uncle. "You should have been a bishop," I said, "at your

age, Uncle Hubert."

He sighed deeply, "A bishop? I ought to have—I might have been—everything, anything—save for this cursed place and my own weakness. But doubtless," he added, hypocritically, "it is a just decree of Providence that has decided thus. But it is hard sometimes. There are two natures in us, occasionally, and the one vanquishes and overwhelms the other. In me," and here he began to laugh, "the fisherman for pilchards has got the better of the fisherman for souls."

"Fishing appears to have wondrous attractions," I answered negligently.

He turned and looked at me scrutinisingly. "We have all had the passion, we Brandlings," he said, "except that superfine gentleman yonder," nodding at Eustace. And added, in a loud, emphatic voice, "And none of us has been a more devoted fisherman, you will admit, dear Eustace, than your lamented father."

Eustace, I thought, turned pale, but it might have been the greenish light through the bottle-glass windows of the little church, on whose damp floor we three were standing before the tombs of the Brandlings of former times, quaint pyramids of kneeling figures, sons and daughters tapering downwards from the kneeling father and mother; and recumbent knights, obliterated by centuries in the ruined roofless chapel, so that the dog at their feet, the sword by their side, let alone their poor washed features, were scarce distinguishable....

"They look like drowned people," I said, and indeed the green light through the trees and the bottle glass, and the greenish damp stains all round, made the church seem like a sea cave, with the sea moaning round it.

"Where have you seen drowned people, Penelope?" asked Eustace, and I felt a little reproved for the horridness of my imaginings.

"Nowhere," I hastily answered; "just a fancy that passed through my head. And you said there are so many wrecks on this coast, you know."

"We are all wrecks on the ocean of Time," remarked the Reverend Hubert,

"overwhelmed by its flood."

"You are the bishop now," I laughed, "not the pilchard fisher," and we went through the damp churchyard of huddled grassy mounds and crooked gravestones under the big trees of the glen.

"Eustace," I said that evening, "I wish I might not be buried down there," and then, considering that all his ancestors were, I felt sorry.

But he clasped my arm very tenderly, and exclaimed with a look of deep pain, "For God's sake do not speak of such things, my love. Even in jest the words make me feel faint and sick."

Poor Eustace! I fear he is not well; and that what he has found at St. Salvat's is eating into his spirits.

November 15, 1772.

I have been feeling doubtful, for some days past, whether to send my diary regularly to my mother, lest she should be distressed (at that great distance) by my account of this place and our life here. Yet I felt as if something had suddenly happened, a window suddenly closed or a door slammed in my face, when Eustace begged me to-day to be very reserved in anything I wrote in my letters.

"These country postmasters," he said, not without hesitation, "are not to be trusted with any secrets; they are known to amuse their leisure and entertain their gossips with the letters which pass through their hands." He laughed, but not very naturally. "Some day," he said, "I will be sending a special messenger to Cardiff, and then your diary—for I know that you are keeping one—shall go to your mother. But for the present I would not say more than needful about ... about our surroundings, my dear Penelope."

I felt childishly vexed.

"'Tis that hateful Uncle Hubert;" I cried, "that reads our letters, Eustace! I feel sure

of it!"

"Nonsense," answered Eustace. "I tell you that it is a well-known habit among postmasters and postmistresses in this country," and he went away a little displeased, as I thought.

My poor journal! And yet I shall continue writing it, and perhaps even more frankly now it will be read only by me; for while I write I seem to be talking to my dearest mother, and to be a little less solitary....

II

December 21, 1772.

Winter has come on: a melancholy, wet and stormy winter, without the glitter of snow and ice; and with the sea moaning or roaring by turns. I think with longing (though I hope poor Eustace does not guess how near I sometimes am to crying for homesickness) of our sledging parties with the dear cheerful neighbours at Grandfey; of the skating on the ponds, and the long walks on the crisp frozen snow, when Eustace and I would snowball or make long slides, laughing like children. At St. Salvat's there are no neighbours; or if there are (but the nearest large house is ten miles off, and belongs to a noble lord who never leaves London) they do not show themselves. I do not even know what there is or is not in the country that lies inland; in fact, since our coming, I have never left the grounds and park of St. Salvat's, nor gone beyond the old fortified walls which encircle them. My very curiosity has gradually faded. I have never pressed Hubert for the saddle horse and the equipage (the coach-house contains only broken-down coaches of the days of King George I.) which he promised rather vaguely to procure for me on our first coming; I have no wish to pass beyond that drawbridge; like a caged bird, I have grown accustomed to my prison. Since the bad weather I have even ceased my rambles in the shrubberies and on the grass-grown terraces: the path to the sea has been slippery with mud; besides I hate that melancholy winter sea, always threatening or complaining.

I stay within doors for days together, without pleasure or profit, reading old plays and novels which I throw aside, or putting a few stitches into useless tambour work; I who could formerly not live a day within doors, nor do whatever I set to do without childish strenuousness!

These two or three days past I have been trying to find diversion in reading the history of these parts, where the Brandlings—kings of this part of Wales in the time of King Arthur, crusaders later, and great barons fighting at Crecy and at Agincourt—once played so great a part, and now they have dwindled into common smugglers, for 'tis my growing persuasion that such is the real trade hidden under the name of pilchard fishing—defrauders of the King's Exchequer, and who knows? for all Hubert's rank as magistrate, no better than thieves and outlawed ruffians.

Hubert has been showing me the family archives. He lays great store by all these deeds and papers, and one is surprised in a house so utterly given over to neglect, to find anything in such good order. He saved the archives himself he tells me, when (as I have always forgotten to note down) the library of the castle was burnt down on the occasion of my late brother-in-law's wake; a barbarous funereal feast habitual in these parts, and during which a drunken guest set fire to the draperies of the coffin. I did not ask whether the body of Sir Thomas, which had been brought by sea from Bristol after his violent end there, had been destroyed in this extraordinary pyre; and I judge that it was from Eustace's silence and Hubert's evident avoidance of the point. Perhaps he is conscious that his efforts were directed to a different object, for it is well nigh miraculous how he should have saved those shelves full of documents and all that number of valuable books bound with the Brandling arms.

"You must have risked your life in the flames!" I exclaimed with admiration at the man's heroism.

He bid me look at his hands, which indeed bear traces of dreadful burning.

"I care about my ancestors," he answered, "perhaps more, to say the truth, than for

my living kinsfolk. Besides," he added, "I ought to say that I had taken the precaution to remove the most valuable books before giving over the library to their drunken rites. As it was, they burnt my poor dead nephew to ashes like the phoenix of the Poets, only that he, poor lad, will not arise from them till the day of judgment!"

January 12, 1773.

A horrid circumstance has just happened, and oddly enough in that same library which had been burnt, all but its ancient walls, at my brother-in-law's funeral, I had persuaded Eustace to turn it into a laboratory, for I think a certain melancholy may be due to the restless idleness in which he has been living ever since we came here. In building one of the furnaces the masons had to make a deep cavity in the wall; and there, what should appear, but a number of skeletons, nine or ten, walled up erect in the thickness of the masonry. I was taking the air on the terrace outside, and hearing the men's exclamations, ran to the spot. It was a ghastly sight. But my uncle Simon, who was smoking his pipe in the great empty room, burst into uncontrollable laughter over my horror; and going up to a little heap of mouldering bones which had fallen out with the plaster, picked up a green and spongy shin and brought it to me. "Here's some material for Eustace ready to hand!" he cried with a vile oath. "Let him try whether he can bring these pretty fellows to life again in his devil's cooking pots," and he thrust the horrid object under my nose.

At this moment Hubert appeared, and, with his wolf's eyes, took in all at a glance.

"Fie, fie," he cried, striking that horrid relic out of his brother's hand, "are these fit sights for a lady, you hog, Simon?" and taking me brusquely by the hand, leads me away, and, in the pantry, tries to make me swallow a dose of brandy, with much petting and cosseting.

"Our ancestors, dear Lady Brandling (for so he affects to call me), were but rough soldiers, though princes of these parts; and the relics of their games scarce fit for

your pretty eyes. But have a sup of brandy, my dear, 'twill set you right."

I loathed the mealy-mouthed black creature, methought, worse than drunken Simon, and worse almost than those horrid dead men.

"No, thank you, uncle," I said, "my stomach is stronger than you think. My ancestors also were soldiers—soldiers on the field of battle—though I never heard of their bricking up their enemies in the house wall."

"Nay, nay," he cried, "but that was an evil habit of those days, dear Lady Brandling, hundreds and thousands of years ago, when we were sovereign princes."

"Hundreds and thousands of years ago?" I answered, for I hated him at that moment, "ah well, I had thought it was scarce so far removed from us as all that."

January 31, 1773.

A curious feeling has been tormenting me of late, of self-reproach for I scarce know what, of lack of helpfulness, almost of disloyalty towards my husband. Since we have been here, indeed I think ever since the first announcement of Sir Thomas's death, Eustace has altered in his manner towards me; a whole side of his life has, I feel, been hidden from me. Have I a right to it? This is what has been debating in my mind. A man may have concerns which it is no duty of his to share with a wife; not because she is only a wife, and he a husband, for my dear Eustace's mind is too enlightened and generous, too thoroughly imbued with the noble doctrines of our days, to admit of such a difference. But there is one of my mother's sayings which has worked very deeply into my mind. It was on the eve of my wedding. "Remember, dear little Penelope," she said, "that no degree of love, however pure, noble, and perfect, can really make two souls into one soul. All appearance to the contrary is a mere delusion and dangerous. Every human soul has its own nature, its necessary laws, and demands liberty and privacy to develop them; and were this not the case, no soul, however loving and courageous, could ever help another, for it would have no strength, no understanding, no life, with which to bring help.

Remember this, my child, till the moment come when you shall understand it, and, I hope, act in the light of its comprehension."

Well, methinks that ever since that day when the letter arrived which changed our destiny, I have not merely remembered, but learned to understand these words. So that I have fought against the soreness of feeling that, on some matters at least, I was excluded from my husband's confidence. After two years of such utter openness of heart as has existed between us three—our mother, Eustace, and, younger and weaker though I felt, myself—such free discussion of all ideas and interests, of his scientific work, even to details which I could not grasp, after this there is undoubtedly something strange in the absolute reserve, indeed the utter silence, he maintains about everything concerning his family, his property, and our position and circumstances, the more so that, at the time of our marriage he often confided to me details connected with it. Thus, in that past which seems already so remote, he has often described to me this very house, these very rooms, told me his childish solitude and terrors, and spoken quite freely of the unhappy life of his mother by the side of his cruel and violent father, and among his father's brutal besotted companions; he had told me of the horrid heartlessness with which his only brother played upon his sensitiveness and abused his weakness, and of the evil habits, the odious scenes of intemperance and violence from which he was screened by his poor mother, and finally saved by her generous decision to part with him and have him educated abroad. He had mentioned the continual brawls of his uncles. But since his succession to the property, never a word has alluded to any of these things, nor to the knowledge he had given me of them. Once or twice, when I have mentioned, quite naturally, his dead brother, his mother (I am actually occupying her apartments, sleeping in her bed, and only yesterday Eustace spent the afternoon mending and tuning her harpsichord for me), he has let the subject drop, or diverted the conversation in an unmistakable manner. Nay, what is more significant, and more puzzling, Eustace has never given me a clue to whether he knew of the

arrangements, the life, we should find here; before our arrival, he had never mentioned that the castle was, to all intents and purposes, in the hands of his kinsmen; nor has he dropped a word in explanation of so extraordinary a circumstance. And I have never asked him whether he knew to what manner of life he was bringing me, whether he intends it to continue, what are his reasons and plans. I have respected his reserve. But have I been perfectly loyal in hiding my wonder, my disappointment, my sorrow?

February 5, 1773.

I cannot make up my mind about Uncle Hubert. Is he our fellow-victim or the ringleader of this usurping gang of ruffians? The more I see, the more I hesitate upon the point. But, as time goes on, I hesitate less and less in my dislike of him, although I own it often seems unreasonable and ungrateful. The man not only tries to make himself agreeable to us, but I almost think he feels kindly. He has a real appreciation of Eustace's genius; and, indeed, it is this, most likely, which sometimes causes me to think well, though I fear never kindly, of him. It is quite wonderful how he lights up whenever he can get Eustace (no easy matter) to speak on philosophic subjects; it is a kind of transfiguration, and all the obliquity and fawningness about the creature vanishes. He has a good knowledge of mathematics, Eustace tells me, is a skilful mechanic, and would evidently enjoy assisting my husband in his experiments if he would let him. Towards myself he has, I do believe, a kind of sentiment, and what is worse, of paternal sentiment! Worse because my whole nature recoils from him. He is most passionately fond of music, plays fairly on the viol, and takes quite a childish pleasure in making me sing and play. I ought indeed to be grateful towards him, for his presence, although distasteful I think to both of us, is a boon, in so far as it relieves the strain of feeling that there is a secret—a something which has come between my husband and me. Alas, alas! that the presence of a third person, of a person such as Hubert, should ever have come to be a boon! But I dare not face this thought. It is worse than any of the bad realities

and bad probabilities of this bad place.

If only Hubert would not make me presents, forcing me thus to feel how hugely I hate having to accept anything from him. It began (almost as a bribe, methought) in the shape of a fine gold watch and equipage the very day after Uncle Edward's misbehaviour. Then, some time after, a cut of handsome Lyons brocade, enough for a gown, though Heaven knows there is no occasion for such finery at St. Salvat's! And this evening, after listening to me through some songs of Monsieur Piccini, and teaching me some of the plaintive airs of the Welsh peasantry, the man drew from his coat a fine shagreen case, which proved to contain a string of large and very regularly shaped and sorted pearls. I felt I could not bear it. "Are they pearls of my mother-in-law's?" I asked without thanking him, and in a tone anything, I fear, but grateful. Instead of being angry and turning green, as I expected, Uncle Hubert looked merely very much hurt and answered:

"Had they been heirlooms it would have been your husband, not your uncle, to hand them you. Eustace is the head of the family, not I."

"The less said about the family and its head," I answered hotly, "the better, Uncle Hubert," and I felt sorry the moment after.

"I do not deny it," he replied very quietly, in a manner which cut me to the quick. "At any rate these pearls are mine, and I hope you will accept them from me as a token of admiration and regard—or," and he fell back into his cringing yet bantering manner which I hate so, "shall we say, as is written on the fairing cups and saucers, 'A present for a good girl from Bristol.'"

How I hate Uncle Hubert!

I had left the pearls on the harpsichord. This morning I found the green shagreen case on the dressing table; Hubert evidently refuses to let me off his present. But I doubt whether I shall ever muster up civility enough to wear them. 'Tis a pity, for lack of wearing makes pearls tarnish.

I have just opened the case to look at them. This is very curious. The case is new, has the smell of new leather; and the diamond clasp looks recently furbished, even to a little chalk about it. But—the man must be oddly ignorant in such matters—the pearls, seen by daylight, have evidently not come from a jeweller's. For they are yellow, tarnished, unworn for years; they have been lying in this house, and, heirlooms or not, there is something wrong about them.

I have been glad of a pretext, however poor, of returning them.

"Uncle Hubert," I said, handing him the case, "you must put these pearls in a box with holes in it, and put them back in the sea."

I never saw so strange a look in a man's face. "Back in the sea! What do you mean, dear Lady Brandling?" he cries. "Why do you suspect these pearls of coming from the sea?"

"All pearls do come from the sea, I thought, and that's why sea water cures them when they have got tarnished from lack of wearing."

He burst into an awkward laugh, "To think," he says, "that I had actually forgotten that pearls were not a kind of stone, that they came out of shell fish."

February 20, 1773.

God help me and forgive my ingratitude for the great, unspeakable blessing He has given me. But this also, it would seem, is to become a source of estrangement between me and Eustace. Ever since this great hope has arisen in my soul, there has come with it the belief also that this child, which he used so greatly to long for (vainly trying to hide his disappointment out of gentleness towards me) would bring us once more together. Perhaps it was wicked graspingness to count upon two happinesses when one had been granted to me. Be this as it may, my ingratitude has been horribly chastened. I told my husband this morning. He was surprised; taken aback; but gave no sign of joy. "Are you quite sure?" he repeated anxiously. And on my reiterating my certainty, he merely ejaculated, "Ah ... 'tis an unfortunate

moment," and added, catching himself up, "the best will be that I send you, when the time approaches, to Bristol or to Bath. I shall be sure of your being well seen to there."

I nearly burst into tears, not at this proposal, but at the evident manner in which the thought of our child suggested only small difficulties and worries to his mind. "To Bristol! to Bath!" I exclaimed, "and you speak as if you intended leaving me there alone! But Eustace, why should not our child be born in your house and mine?" I felt my eyes blaze with long pent up impatience.

"Because, my dear little Penelope," he answered coldly and sharply, "it is the custom of your country and mine that ladies of your condition should have every advantage of medical skill and attendance, and therefore remove to town for such purpose."

"Would it not be worth while to break through such a habit," I asked, "to have a physician here at the proper time? Besides," I added, "I promised, and in your presence, that should this event ever take place, I should send for my mother."

"I shall be delighted," he answered, always in the same tone, "if my mother-in-law finds it worth while to make so great a journey as that from Switzerland to Bath—for Bath is the more suitable place, upon consideration. But seeing that, as I have twice said before, you will have every care you may require, I really think the suggestion would be a mere indiscretion—to all parties."

He was busy arranging the instruments in his laboratory. I should have left him; but I felt my heart swell and overflow, and remained standing by him in silence.

"It is too cold for you here," he said very tenderly after a moment, "had you not better go back to your rooms?"

I could not answer. But after a moment, "Eustace, Eustace!" I cried, "don't you care? Aren't you glad? Why do you talk only of plans and difficulties? Why do you want to send me away, to leave me all alone when our child is born?"

He gave a sigh, partly of impatience. "Do not let us discuss this again, dear

Penelope," he said, "and oblige me by not talking nonsense. Of course I am glad; it goes without saying. And if I send you away—if I deprive myself of the joy of being with you, believe me, it is because I cannot help it. My presence is required here. And now," he added, putting his arm round my waist, but with small genuine tenderness, methought, "now let us have done with this subject, my dear, and do me the kindness to return to your warm room."

O God, O God, take pity on my loneliness! For with the dearest of mothers, and what was once the kindest of husbands, and the joy of this coming child, I am surely the loneliest of women!

February 27, 1773.

God forgive me, I say again, and with greater reason, for I now recognise that my sense of loneliness and of estrangement; all my selfish misery, has been the fruit of my own lack of courage and of loving kindness. This child, though yet unborn, has brought me strength and counsel; the certainty of its existence seems, in a way, to have changed me; and I look back upon myself such as I was but a few weeks ago, as upon some one different, an immature girl, without responsibilities or power to help. And now I feel as if I could help, and as if I must. For I am the stronger of the two. What has befallen Eustace? I can but vaguely guess; yet this I know, that without my help Eustace is a lost man; his happiness, his courage, his honour, going or gone. My mother used to tell us, I remember, the legend of a clan in her own country, where the future chieftain, on coming of age, was put into possession of some secret so terrible that it turned him from a light-hearted boy into a serious and joyless man. St. Salvat's has wrought on Eustace in some similar manner. On arriving here, or, indeed, before arriving, he has learned something which has poisoned his life and sapped his manhood. What that something is, I can in a measure guess, and it seems to me as if I ought to help him either to struggle with or else to bear it, although bearing it seems little to my taste. It is some time since I

have seen through the silly fiction of the pilchard fishery of St. Salvat's; and although I have not been out of my way to manifest this knowledge, I have not hidden it, methinks, from Eustace or even from Uncle Hubert. The rooms and rooms crammed with apparent lumber, the going and coming of carriers' wagons (so that my husband's cases of instruments and my new pianoforte arrived from Bristol as by magic), the amount of money (the very maids gambling for gold in the laundry) in this beggarly house; and the nocturnal and mysterious nature of the fishing expeditions, would open the eyes even of one as foolish and inexperienced as I; nor is any care taken to deceive me. St. Salvat's Castle is simply the headquarters of the smuggling business, presided over by my uncles and doubtless constituting the chief resource of this poor untilled corner of the world. Breaking His Majesty's laws and defrauding his Exchequer are certainly offences; but I confess that they seem to me pardonable ones, when one thinks of the deeds of violence by which our ancestors mostly made their fortunes, let alone the arts of intrigue by which so many of our polished equals increase theirs. Perhaps it was being told the prowess of our Alpine smugglers, carrying their packs through snow-fields and along hidden crevasses, and letting themselves down from immeasurable rocks; perhaps it was these stories told to me in my childhood by the farm servants which have left me thus lax in my notions. This much I know, that the certainty of the uncles being smugglers, even if smuggling involve, as it must, occasional acts of violence against the officers of the Excise, does not increase the loathing which I feel towards the uncles. Nor would this fact, taken in itself, suffice to explain Eustace's melancholy. What preys upon his mind must rather be the disgust and disgrace of finding his house and property put to such uses by such men.

For Eustace is a man of thought, not of action; and I can understand that the problem how to change this order of things must weigh upon him in proportion as he feels himself so little fitted for its solution. With this is doubtless mingled a sense of responsibility towards me, and perhaps (for his dreamer's conscience is most tender)

of exaggerated shame for bringing me here. If this be as I think, it is for me to help my husband to break the bad spell which St. Salvat's has cast over him. And I will and can! The child will help me. For no child of mine shall ever be born into slavery and disgrace such as, I feel, is ours.

III

April 10, 1773.

The spring gales have begun, and with them the "fishing" as it is called, has become constant. Rough weather, I suppose, is favourable to the smuggling operations, as it leaves this terrible coast in the hands of those who know every inch of its reefs and rocks and quicksands, and who possess the only safe landing-place for miles, the little cove beyond the churchyard in the glen.

Be this as it may, these expeditions have left the castle wonderfully peaceful; the sound of brawling no longer rises perpetually from the big hall and the courtyards. The uncles are away for days and nights at a time, taking with them every male creature about the place. Even Hubert, seized, as he says, by a fit of his master passion, has not appeared for days. The sluttish maids and the old rheumatic gardener are lodged in the outhouses, or are taking a holiday in the neighbouring villages; and the house has been, methinks, given over to ourselves and Mrs. Davies, who waits assiduously in her silent manner, and no doubt keeps the uncles informed of all our doings. It is three days that Eustace and I have been alone together. But the knowledge of what he will not confess, and of what I have not the courage to ask, sits between us at meals, makes us constrained during our walks, even like the presence of a living stranger.

April 20, 1773.

The gales have been getting worse and worse; and the sound of the sea, the wind in the trees and chimneys, has been filling the castle with lamentation. This evening, at

the harpsichord, I could no longer hear, or at least no longer listen to, my own voice. I shut the instrument and sat idle by the fire, while every beam and rafter strained and groaned like the timbers of a ship in the storm. My husband also was quite unstrung. He walked up and down, without a word. Suddenly a thought entered my mind; it is extraordinary and inhuman that it should not have done so before.

"I hope Hubert and the uncles are not out to-night," I said.

Eustace stopped in his walking, straight before the fire and stared long into it.

"Perhaps they have returned already," he answered. "I hope so," and with the excuse of some notes to put in order in his study, he bid me good-night and hoped I should go to bed soon.

But shall I be able to sleep on such a night!

April 21st.

I understand now. But, Good God, what new and frightful mysteries and doubts!

It was late when I went to bed last night; and, against all expectation, I fell into a heavy sleep. I was awakened out of dreams of shipwreck by a great light in my eyes. The moon had risen, almost full, and dispelled the clouds. And the storm was over. Indeed, I think it was the stillness, after so many days of raging noise, which had wakened me as much as the moonlight. I was alone; for Eustace, these weeks past, has slept in the closet next door, as he reads deep into the night and says my condition requires unbroken rest. It was so beautiful and peaceful, I seemed drawn into the light. I rose and stood in the big uncurtained window, which, with its black mullions casting their shadows on the floor, looked more than ever like a great glass cage. It was so lovely and mild that I threw back a lattice and looked out: the salt smell and the sea breeze left by the storm rushed up and met me. Beyond the trees the moonlight was striking upon the white of the breakers, for though the gale was over the sea was still pounding furiously upon the reefs. My eyes had sought at first the moon, the moonlit offing; to my amazement, they fell the next instant on a great

ship quite close to shore. She seemed in rapid movement, pitching and rolling with all her might; but after a moment I noticed that she did not move forward, but remained stationary above the same tree tops. She seemed enchanted, or rather she looked like some captive creature struggling desperately to get free. I was too much taken up by the strangeness of the sight to reflect that no sane crew would have anchored in such a spot, and no anchorage have held in the turmoil of such a sea. Moreover, I knew too little of such matters to guess that the ship must have run upon one of the reefs, and that every breaker must lift her up to crash and shiver herself upon its sawlike edge; indeed I had no notion of any danger; and when I saw lights on the ship, and others moving against her hull, my only thought was that I was watching the smugglers at their work. As I did so, a sudden doubt, of which I felt ashamed, leaped into my mind; and, feeling indignant with myself the while, I crept to the door of the dressing-room. Was Eustace there? I noiselessly turned the handle and pushed open the door. I cannot say what were my feelings, whether most of shame or of a kind of terror when, by the light of a lamp, I saw my husband kneeling by the side of his camp bed, with his head buried in the pillow, like a man in agony. He was completely dressed. On hearing the door open he started to his feet and cried in a terrible voice "What do you want with me?"

I was overwhelmed with shame at my evil thoughts.

"O Eustace," I answered foolishly, and without thinking of the bearing of my words, "the ship! I only wanted to call you to look at the ship." He paid no attention to my presence.

"The ship! The ship!" he cries—"is she gone?" and rushes to the window.

The ship, sure enough, was gone. Where she had been her three great masts still projected from the water. Slowly they disappeared, and another sharp black point, which must have been her bowsprit as she heeled over, rose and sank in its turn.

How long we stood, Eustace and I, silently watching, I cannot tell.

"There were lights alongside," I exclaimed, "the uncles' boats must have been there. There has been time to save the crew. O Eustace, let us run down and help!"

But Eustace held me very tight. "Do not be a fool, Penelope. You will catch your death of cold and endanger the child. The people of the ship are saved or drowned by this time."

June 12, 1773.

But a few months ago I wrote in this diary that no child of mine should ever be born into slavery and dishonour. Alas, poor foolish Penelope! What ill-omened words were those! And yet I cannot believe that God would have visited their presumptuousness upon me with such horrid irony. May God, who knows all things, must know that those words were even more justified than I dreamed of at the time: the slavery and dishonour surpassing my most evil apprehensions. Indeed, may it not be that in taking away our child while yet unborn He did so in His mercy to it and to its wretched parents? Surely. And if my husband surprised me, some months back, by his indifference in the face of what we were about to gain, 'tis he, perhaps, who is surprised in his turn at the strange resignation with which I take my loss. For indeed, I am resigned, am acquiescent, and, below the regrets which come shuddering across me, I feel a marvellous peacefulness in the depths of my being. No! no child should ever be born in such a house, into such a life as this....

I am still shattered in body (I understand that for days recovery was given up as hopeless), and my mind seems misty, and like what a ghost's might be, after so many hours of unconsciousness, and of what, had it endured, would have been called death. But little by little shreds of recollection are coming back to me, and I will write them down. Some strangely sweet ones. The sense, even as life was slipping away, that all Eustace's love and tenderness had returned; that it was he (for no physician could be got, or was allowed, in this dreadful place) he himself who wrestled for me with death, and brought me back to life.

Moments return to my memory of surpassing, unspeakable sweetness, which penetrated through all pain: being lifted in his arms, handled like a child; seeing his eyes, which seemed to hold and surround me like his arms; and hearing his words as when he thanked God, over and over again, and almost like one demented, for having caused him to study medicine. I felt I was re-entering life upon the strong, full tide of incomparable love.

Let me not seem ungrateful, for I am not. Most strangely there has mingled in this great flood of life-giving tenderness the sense also of the affection of poor Mrs. Davies. I call her poor, because there is, I know not why, something oddly pathetic in her sudden devotion to me. When I met her wild eyes grown quite tender and heard her crooning exclamations in her unintelligible language, I had, even in the midst of my own weakness, the sort of half pitying gratitude which we feel for the love of an animal, of something strong and naturally savage, grown very gentle towards one.

July 5, 1773.

Is that hideous thing true? Did it ever happen? Or is some shred of nightmare returning ever and again out of the black depths of my sickness? It comes and goes, and every time new doubts—hope it may be a dream, fear it may be reality—come with it.

It was three days after the shipwreck; the weather had calmed, and for the first time I ventured abroad into the park. That much and a little more is real, and bears in my mind the indescribable quality of certainty. I had wandered down the glen and through the churchyard, and I remember pausing before the great stone cross, covered with curious basket work patterns, and wondering whether when it was made—a thousand years ago—women about to be mothers had felt as great perplexity and loneliness as I, and at the same time, as great joy. I crossed the piece of boggy meadow, vivid green in the fitful sunshine, and climbed upon the sea-wall

and sat down. I was tired; and the solitude, the sunshine, the faint silken rustle of the sea on the reefs, the salt smell—all filled me with a languid happiness quite unspeakable. All this I know, I am certain of, as the scratching of my pen; in fact, those moments on the sea-wall are, in a manner, the latest thing of which I have vivid certainty; all that came later—my illness, the news of my miscarriage, my recovery, and even this present moment, seeming comparatively unreal. I do not know how long I may have sat there. I was listening to the sea, to the wind in my hair, and watching the foam running in little feathery balls along the sand, when I heard voices, and saw three men wading among the rocks a little way off, as if in search of something. My eyes followed them lazily, and then I saw close under me, what I had taken at first for a heap of seaweed and sea refuse cast upon the sand, but which, as my eyes fixed it, became—or methought it became—something hideous and terrible; so that for very horror I could not shriek. And then, while my eyes were fixed on it, methought (for as I write it seems a dream) the three men waded over in its direction, and one silently pointed it out to the other. They came round, one turned a moment, and instead of a human face, I saw under his looped-up hat a loosely fitting black mask. Then they gathered round that thing the three of them, and touched it with a boat-hook, muttering to each other. Then one stooped down and did I know not what, stuffing, as he did so, something into the pockets of his coat, and then put out a hand to one of his companions, receiving back something narrow, which caught a glint of sun. They all three stooped together; methought the water against the sands and the pale foam heaps suddenly changed colour, but that must surely be my nightmare.

"Better like that," a voice said in English. Between them they raised the thing up and carried it through the shallow water to a boat moored by the rocks. And then my voice became loosened. I gave a cry, which seemed to echo all round, and I jumped down from the sea-wall, and flew across the meadow and tore up the glen, till I fell full length by the neglected pond with the broken leaden nymph. For as they took it

up, the thing had divided in two, and somehow I had known the one was a mother and the other a child; one was I, and the other I still carried within me. And the voice which had said "Better like that" was Hubert's. But as I write, I know it must have been a vision of my sickness.

"Eustace," I asked, "how did it begin? Did I dream—or did you find me lying by the fountain on the terrace—the fountain of your poor water snake?"

"Forget it, dearest," Eustace said, very quietly and sweetly, and with the old gentle truthfulness in his eyes. "You must have over-walked that hot morning and got a sunstroke or fainted with fatigue. We did find you by the fountain—that is to say, our good Mrs. Davies did." And Davies merely nodded.

July 15, 1773.

Shall I ever know whether it really happened? Methinks that had I certainty I could face, stand up to, it. But to go on sinking and weltering in this hideous doubt!

August 1, 1773.

The certainty has come; and God in Heaven, what undreamed certainties besides! I did not really want it, though I told myself I did. For I felt that Mrs. Davies knew, that she was watching her opportunity to tell me; and I, a coward, evading what I must some day learn. At last it has come.

It was this morning. This morning! It seems weeks and months ago—a whole lifetime passed since! She was brushing my hair, one of the many services required by my weakness, and which she performs with wonderful tenderness. We saw one another's face, but only reflected in the mirror; and I recognised when she was going to speak.

"Lady Brandling," she said in her odd Welsh way—"Lady Brandling fell ill because she saw some things from the sea-wall."

I knew what she meant—for are not my own thoughts for ever going over that same

ground? But the sense of being surrounded by enemies, the whole horrid mystery about this accursed place, have taught me caution and even cunning. Davies has been as a mother to me in my illness; but I remembered my first impression of her unfriendliness towards Eustace and me, and of her being put to spy upon us. So I affected not to understand; and indeed, her singular mixture of English and Welsh, her outlandish modes of address, gave some countenance to the pretence.

"What do you mean, Davies?" I asked, but without looking up in the glass for fear of meeting her eyes there. "What has the sea-wall to do with my illness? It was not there you found me when I fainted. You told me it was by the fountain."

The old woman took a paper from her stays, and out of it a muddy piece of linen which she spread out on the dressing-table in front of me. It was a handkerchief of mine; and I understood that she had found it, treasured it as a sign of what I had witnessed. The place, the moment, might mean my death-warrant; for what I thought I saw had been really seen.

"It was on the sea-wall the morning that Lady Brandling fainted in the shrubbery," she answered. And I felt that her eyes were on my face, asking what I had seen that day.

I made a prodigious effort over myself.

"And why have you kept it in that state instead of washing it? Did you—was it picked up then or only now? I suppose some one else found it?"

Merciful God! how every word of that last sentence beat itself out in my heart and throat!—and yet I heard the words pronounced lightly, indifferently.

"I picked it up myself, my lady," answered Mrs. Davies. "I went down to the sea-wall after I had put Lady Brandling to bed. I thought she might have left something there. I thought I should like to go there before the others came. I thought Lady Brandling had seen something. I want Lady Brandling to tell me truly if she saw something on the sea-wall."

I felt it was a struggle, perhaps a struggle for life and death between her and me. I took a comb in my hand, to press it and steady me; and I looked up in the mirror and faced Davies's eyes, ready, I knew, to fix themselves on mine. "Perhaps I may answer your question later, Davies," I said. "But first you must answer mine: am I right in thinking that you were set to spy upon my husband and me from the moment we first came to St. Salvat's?"

A great change came over Davies's face. Whatever her intentions, she had not expected this, and did not know how to meet it. I felt that, were her intentions evil, I now held her in my hands, powerless for the time being.

But to my infinite surprise, and after only a short silence, she looked into my eyes quite simply and answered without hesitating.

"Lady Brandling is right. I was set to spy on Lady Brandling at the beginning. I did not love Lady Brandling at the beginning; her husband was taking the place of Sir Thomas. But I love Lady Brandling now."

I could have sworn that it was true, for she has shown it throughout my illness. But I kept my counsel and answered very coldly,

"It is not a question whether you love me or not, Davies. You acknowledge that you were the spy of Mr. Hubert and his brothers. And if you were not spying for their benefit, why were you watching me as I came up the glen the day I was taken ill? Why did you go to the sea-wall to see in case I had left anything behind; and why did you treasure this handkerchief as a proof that I had been there?"

Mrs. Davies hesitated; but only, I believe, because she found it difficult to make her situation clear.

"Lady Brandling must try and understand," she answered. "I was not spying for Mr. Hubert. I have not spied for Mr. Hubert for a long while. I kept the handkerchief to show Lady Brandling that I knew what had made her faint that day. Also to show her that others did not know. Lady Brandling is safe. She must know that they do not

yet know. If they know what Lady Brandling perhaps shall have seen, Lady Brandling and her husband are dead people, like the people in the ship; dead like Sir Thomas."

Dead like Sir Thomas! I repeated to myself. But I still kept my eyes fixed on hers in the glass, where she stood behind me, brush in hand.

"Davies," I said, "you must explain if I am to understand. You tell me you love me now though you did not love me at first. You tell me you were placed to spy over me by Mr. Hubert, and you tell me that you were not spying for him when you went to see whether I had left anything on the sea-wall. You have been good and kind beyond words during my sickness, and I desire to believe in you. But I dare not. Why should I believe that you have really changed so completely? Why should I believe that you are with me, and against them?"

Mrs. Davies's face changed strangely. It seemed to me to express deep perplexity and almost agonised helplessness. She twisted her fingers and raised her shoulders. She was wrestling with my unbelief. Suddenly she leaned over the dressing table close to me.

"Listen," she said. "I have learned things since then. Hubert told me lies, but I learned. I am against them because I know they tried to kill my son."

A look of incredulity must have passed over my face, for she added,

"Aye; they only tried to kill one of my sons, Hugh, who I thought had gone overboard, whom they thought they had drowned, but who has come and told me. But—" and she fixed her eyes on mine, "they did kill my other son; I know that now. My other son of the heart, not the belly. And that son, my Lady, was your brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Brandling."

And then Davies made a strange imperious gesture, and I must needs listen to her talk. I have since pieced it together out of her odd enigmatic sentences. My late brother-in-law, after years of passive connivance in their doings, which paid for his

debaucheries in foreign lands, became restive, or was suspected by his uncles, and condemned by them to death as a danger to their evil association. Sir Thomas was decoyed home, and, according to their habit in case of mutiny, taken out, a prisoner, to the deepest part of the channel, and drowned. The report was spread that he had been killed in a drunken brawl at Bristol, a show of legal proceedings was instituted by his uncle in that city (naturally to no effect, there being no murderer there to discover), and a corpse brought back by them for solemn burial at St. Salvat's. But instead of being interred in the family vault, the body of the false Sir Thomas was destroyed by the burning of the Chapel during his wake. The suspicions of Mrs. Davies appeared to have been awakened by this fact, and by the additional one that she was not allowed to see the corpse of her beloved foster-son. Her own son Hugh, Sir Thomas's foster brother, disappeared about this time; and Hubert appears to have made the distracted mother believe that her own boy was the murderer of Sir Thomas, and had met with death at his hands; the whole unlikely story being further garnished for the poor credulous woman with a doubt that the murder of her foster-son had been, in some manner, the result of a conspiracy to bring about the succession of my husband. All this she seems to have believed at the time of our coming, and for this reason to have lent herself most willingly to spy upon my husband and me, in hopes of getting the proofs of his guilt. But her suspicions gradually changed, and her whole attitude in the matter was utterly reversed when, a few days before the wreck of the great Indiaman and my adventure on the sea-wall, her son, whom she believed dead, had stolen back in disguise and told her of an expedition in which the uncles had carried a man to the high seas, gagged and bound, and drowned him: a man who was not one of their crew and whose stature and the colour of whose hair answered to those of the nominal master of St. Salvat's. Her son, in an altercation over some booty, had let out his suspicion to my uncles, and had escaped death only by timely flight masked under accidental drowning from a fishing boat. Since this revelation Davies's devotion to the dead Sir Thomas had

transferred itself to Eustace and me, and her one thought had become revenge against the men who had killed her darling.

Davies told me all this, as I said, in short, enigmatic sentences; and I scarcely know whether her tale seemed to me more inevitably true or more utterly false in its hideous complication of unlikely horrors. When she had done:

"Davies," I ask her solemnly, "you have been a spy, you have, by your saying, been the accomplice of the most horrid criminals that ever disgraced the world. Why should I believe one word of what you tell me?"

Davies hesitated as before, then looked me full in the face "If Lady Brandling cannot believe what it is needful that she should believe, let her ask her husband whether I am telling her a lie. Lady Brandling's husband knows, and he is afraid of telling her because he is afraid of them." Davies had been kneeling by the dressing-table, as if to make herself heard to me without speaking above a whisper.

I mustered all my courage, for these last words touched me closer, filled me with a far more real and nearer horror than all her hideous tales.

"Davies," I said, "kindly finish brushing my hair. When it is brushed I can do it up myself; and you may go and wash that handkerchief."

The old woman rose from her knees without a word, and finished brushing my hair very carefully. Then she handed me the hairpins and combs ceremoniously. As she did so she murmured beneath her breath:

"Lady Brandling is a courageous lady. I love Lady Brandling for her courage." She curtsied and withdrew. When the door was well closed on her I felt I could bear the strain no more; I leaned my head on the dressing table and burst into a flood of silent tears.

At that moment Eustace came in. "Good God!" he said, "what is the matter?" taking my hand and trying to raise me up.

But I hid my face. "Oh, Eustace," I answered, "when I think of our child!"

But what I was saying, God help me, was not true.

October 1, 1773.

What frightful suspicions are these which I have allowed to creep insidiously into my mind! Did he or did he not know? Does he know yet? Every time we meet I feel my eyes seeking his face, scanning his features, and furtively trying to read their meaning, alas! alas! as if he were a stranger. And I spend my days piecing together bits of the past, and every day they make a different and more perplexing pattern. I remember his change of manner on receiving the news of his brother's death, and the gloom which hung over him during our journey and after our arrival here. I thought then that it was the unexpected return to the scenes of his unhappy childhood; and that his constraint and silence with me were due to his difficulty in dealing with the shocking state of things he found awaiting him. It seemed natural enough that Eustace, a thinker, a dreamer even, should feel harassed at his inability to clean out this den of iniquity. But why have remained here? Good God, is my husband a mere pensioner of all this hideousness, as his wretched brother seems to have been? And even for that miserable debauched creature the day came when he turned against his masters, and faced death, perhaps like a gentleman. Death.... How unjust I am grown to Eustace! I ought to try and put myself in his place, and see things as he would see them, not with the horrified eyes of a stranger. Like me, he may have believed at first that St. Salvat's was merely a nest of smugglers.... Or he may have had only vague fears of worse, haunting him like bad dreams of his childhood....

Besides, this frightful trade in drowned men and their goods has, from what Davies tells me, been for centuries the chief employment of this dreadful coast. Whole villages, and several of the first families of the country, practised it turn about with smuggling. Davies was ready with a string of names, she expressed no special horror and her conscience perhaps represents that of these people; an unlawful trade, but

not without its side of peril, commending it to barbarous minds like highway robbery or the exploits of buccaneers, whom popular ballads treat as heroes.

But why have I recourse to such explanations? Men, even men as noble as my husband, are marvellously swayed by all manner of notions of honour, false and barbarous, often causing them to commit crimes in order to screen those of their blood or of their class. Some words of Hubert's keep recurring in my memory, to the effect that all the Brandlings were given up to what the villain called pilchard fishing, and none more devotedly than Eustace's own father. I remember and now understand the tone in which he added "all of us Brandlings except this superfine gentleman here." Those words meant that however great his horror of it all, Eustace could not break loose from that complicity of silence. For to expose the matter would be condemning all his kinsmen to a shameful death, to the public gallows; it would be uncovering the dishonour of his dead brother, of his father, and all his race.... What right have I to ask my husband to do what no other man would do in his place?

But perhaps he does not know, or is not certain yet.... To what a size have I allowed my horrid suspicions to grow! Behold me finding excuses for an offence which very likely has never been committed; and while seemingly condoning, condemning my husband in my mind, without giving him a chance of self-defence! What a confusion of disloyalty and duplicity my fears have bred in my soul! Anything is better than this; I owe it to Eustace to tell him my suspicions, and I will tell him.

November 2, 1773.

I have spoken. O marvellous, most unexpected reward of frankness and loyalty, however tardy! The nightmare has vanished, leaving paradise in my soul. For inconceivable as it seems, this day, on which I learned that we are prisoners, already condemned most likely, and at best doomed to die before very long, this day has been of unmixed, overflowing joy, such as I never knew or dreamed of.

Eustace, beloved, that ever I could have doubted you! And yet that very doubt, that sin against our love is what has brought me such blissful certainty. And even the shameful question, asked with burning cheeks, "Did you know all?" has been redeemed, transfigured, and will remain for ever in my soul like the initial bars of some ineffably tender and triumphant piece of music.

Let me go over it once more, our conversation, Love; feel it all over again, feel it for ever and ever.

When I had spoken those words, Eustace, you took my hand, and looked long into my face.

"My poor Penelope," you said, "what dreadful thoughts my cowardice and want of faith have brought upon you! Why did I not recognise that your soul was strong enough to bear the truth? You ought to have learned it from me, as soon as I myself felt certain of it, instead of my running the risk of your discovering it all alone, you poor, poor little child!"

Were ever those small words spoken so greatly? Has any man been such a man in his gentleness and humility? And then you went on, beloved, and I write down your words in order to feel them once more sinking into my heart.

"But Penelope," you said, "'twas not mere unmanly shirking, though there may have been some of that mixed with it. My fault lies chiefly in not having been able to do without you, dearest, not having left you safe with your mother while I came over to this accursed place; and in putting the suspicions I had behind me in order to bring you here. Nothing can wipe out that, and I am paying the just price of my weakness, and seeing you pay it!... But once here, Penelope, and once certain of the worst, it was impossible for me to tell you the truth. Impossible, because I knew that if you knew what I had learned, it would be far more difficult for me to get you away, to get you to leave me behind in this hideous place. Do you remember when I proposed sending you to Bath for our child's birth? It seemed the last chance of saving you,

and you resisted and thought me cruel and unloving! How could I say 'Go! because your life may any day be forfeited like mine, and go alone! because—well—because I am a hostage, a man condemned to death if he stir, a prisoner as much as if I were chained to the walls of this house.' Had I said that, you would have refused to go, Penelope. But now, my dear...." And you bent down and kissed me very mournfully.

"But now, Eustace," I answered, and I heard that my voice was solemn, "but now I can stay with you, because I know as much as you do, and they will soon know that I do so, even if they do not know yet. I may stay with you, because I am a prisoner like you, and condemned like you. We can live, because we have to die—together."

Eustace, you folded me in your arms and I felt you sob. But I loosened your hands and kissed them one by one, and said, "Nay, Eustace, why should you grieve? Do we not love each other? Are we not together, quite together, and together for always?"

We are standing by the big window in my room, and as we clasped one another, our eyes, following each other's, rested on the sea above the tree tops. It was a silvery band under a misty silver sunset; very sweet and solemn. Our souls, methought, were sailing in its endless peacefulness. For the first time, I was aware of what love is; I seemed to understand what poetry is about and what music means; death, which hung over us, was shrunk to its true paltriness, and the eternity of life somehow revealed all in one moment. I have known happiness. I thank God, and beloved, I thank thee also.

IV

Here ends the diary kept half a century ago by the woman of twenty-two, who was once myself. Those of whom it treats, my mother, my husband, poor faithful Davies and the wretched villains of St. Salvat's, have long since ceased to live, and those for whose benefit I gather together these memories—my sons and daughters, were not yet born at the time this diary deals with.

In order to complete my story I can, therefore, seek only in my own solitary memory; and, standing all alone, look into that far away past which only my own eyes and heart are left to descry.

After the scene with which my diary closes, and when we could compare all that each of us knew of our strange situation, it appeared to my husband and me that we had everything to gain, and at all events nothing to lose (since we knew our lives in jeopardy) by a desperate attempt to escape from what was virtually our prison. Eustace had summed up our position when he had said that we were hostages in the hands of the uncles. For these villains, unconscious of any bonds of family honour, made sure that our escape would infallibly bring about the exposure of their infamous practices.

It appears that after the murder of my brother-in-law, whom the most violent of the gang had put to death on a mere threat of betrayal, the uncles had taken for granted that Eustace would accept some manner of pension as his brother had done, and like him, leave St. Salvat's in their undisputed possession. And they had been considerably nonplussed when my husband declared his intention of returning to Wales. The perception of the blunder they had committed in getting rid of my brother-in-law, made them follow the guidance of Hubert, who had opposed the murder of Sir Thomas, if not from humanity, at all events from prudence. It was Hubert's view that since Eustace refused to stay away, no difficulties should be put in the way of his coming, but on the contrary, that he be taken, so to speak, in a trap, and once at St. Salvat's, persuaded or compelled into becoming a passive, if not an active, accomplice. Hubert had therefore written so pressingly about the need of putting the property to rights, of making a new start at St. Salvat's, and of therefore bringing me and settling at once in the place, that Eustace had judged the rumours concerning the real trade of his kinsmen, and his own childish suspicions, to have been mere exaggeration, and imagined that the uncles, brought to order by so superior a man as Hubert, were perhaps even willing to abandon the dangerous

business of smuggling which had been carried on almost avowedly during the lifetime of his father. Such was the trap laid by Hubert; and Eustace, partly from guilelessness and partly from a sense of duty to St. Salvat's, walked straight in, carrying me with him as an additional pledge to evil fortune. He was scarcely in, when the door, like the drawbridge which had risen after our entry into that frightful place, closed and showed him he was a prisoner. It was Hubert's plan to make use of our presence (which, moreover, put an end to his own isolation among those besotted villains) in order to remove whatever suspicions might exist in the outside world. The presence of a studious and gentlemanly owner, of a young wife and possible children, was to make people believe that a new leaf had been turned over at St. Salvat's, and that the old former pages of its history were not so shocking as evil reports had had it. So, during the first weeks after our arrival, and while the brothers were being coerced into an attempt at decent behaviour, Eustace was being importuned with every kind of plan which should draw him into further complicity, and compromise him along with the rest of the band. Hubert, being a clergyman, had since his elder brother's death, also been the chief magistrate of the district; and, shocking to relate, this wrecker and murderer had sat in judgment on poachers and footpads. Having made use of this position to silence any inclination to blab about St. Salvat's, he was apprehensive of this scandal getting to headquarters, and therefore desirous of putting in his place a man as clear of suspicion and as obviously just as Eustace, yet whom he imagined he could always coerce in all vital matters. But Eustace saw through this fine scheme at once, and resolutely refused to become a magistrate in Hubert's place. This was the first hint Hubert received that it was useless to seek an accomplice in his nephew; and this recognition speedily grew into a fear lest Eustace might become a positive danger, particularly if he ever learned for certain that Sir Thomas had not been murdered at Bristol, but at St. Salvat's. The situation was made more critical by the fact that on discovering what manner of place the castle really was, Eustace had declared with perfect simplicity,

his intention of taking me back to my mother. It was then he had learned in as many words, that both he and I were prisoners, and that he, at all events, would never leave St. Salvat's alive. Thus the terrible months had been spent in gauging the depth of his miserable situation, in making and unmaking plans for my escape, for sending me away without letting me guess the real reason, all of which had been frustrated by my miscarriage and the long illness following upon it. And meanwhile, Eustace had had to endure the constant company of his gaoler Hubert, the wretch's occasional attempts to compromise him in the doings of the gang; and what was horridest of all, Hubert's very sincere pleasure in our presence and conversation, and his ceaseless attempts to strike up some kind of friendship.

Now, the discovery that I was aware of the frightful mysteries of the place, had entirely altered our position: first, because it was probable that the uncles now considered me as much of a danger as my husband, and therefore as an equally indispensable hostage; and secondly, because it was evident that I could no longer be induced to leave St. Salvat's by myself. Our only remaining hope was flight. But how elude the vigilance of our gaolers and overcome the obstacles they had built up around us? Day after day, and night after night, Eustace and I went over and over our possibilities; but they seemed to diminish, and difficulties to increase, the more we discussed them. The house and grounds were guarded, and our actions spied upon. We were cut off from the outer world, for we had long since understood that our letters, even when despatched, were intercepted and read by Hubert. But the worst difficulty almost was the lack of money. For some months past, Hubert had taken to doling it out only in trifling sums and on our asking for it, and he supplied our needs and even fancies with such lavishness, forestalling them in many instances, that a request for any considerable sum would have been tantamount to an intimation of our intended flight. Such were the external obstacles; I found, moreover, that there were other ones in the character and circumstances of my poor fellow prisoner. My husband's natural incapacity for planning active measures and

taking sudden decisions, was not at all diminished, but the reverse, by his fear for my safety. And his indecision was aggravated by all manner of scruples; for he considered it cowardly to leave St. Salvat's in the undisputed possession of the villains who usurped it; and he wavered between a wish to punish the murder of his brother and that prejudice (which I had rightly divined) against exposing his kinsmen and his dead father to public infamy, however well earned by them.

This miserable state of doubt and fear was brought to a sudden close, as I vaguely expected it would, by a new move on the part of our adversaries. It was in the spring of 1774, and we had been at St. Salvat's about eighteen months, which felt much more like as many years. One evening after supper, as I sat in my room idly listening to the sound, now so terrible to me, of the sea on the rocks, I was suddenly aroused by the sound, no less frightful to my ears, of the brawling of the uncles below. I rose in alarm, for my apartments were completely isolated from the part of the house which they occupied, and for months past all the intermediate doors had been kept carefully closed by the tacit consent of both parties. The noise became greater; I could distinguish the drunken voices of Simon and Richard, and a sharp altercation between the other ones, and just as I had stepped, beyond my own door, I heard a horrid yell of curses, a scuffle, and the door opposite, which closed the main staircase, flew open, and what was my astonishment when my husband appeared, pushed forward, or rather hurled along by Hubert. The latter shouted to me to go back, and having thrust Eustace into my room, he disappeared as suddenly as he had come, slamming the doors after him. As he did so I heard the key click; he had locked us in.

My husband was in a shocking condition, his clothes torn half off him, his hair in disorder, and the blood dripping from his arm.

"Do not be frightened," he cried, "'tis merely a comedy of those filthy villains," and he showed me that his wound was merely a long scratch. "They want to frighten us,"

he added, "the drunken brutes wanted to force me through some beastly form of initiation into their gang. Faugh!" and he looked at his arm, which I was washing; "they did it with a broken bottle, the hogs! And as to Hubert, and his fine saving me from their clutches, that, I take it, was mere play-acting too, the most sickening part of the business, and meant only to give you a scare."

Eustace had thrown himself gloomily into a chair, and I had never seen him before with such a look of disgust and indignation. I was by no means as certain as he that no serious mischief had been intended, or that Hubert had not saved him from real danger. But that new look in him awoke a sudden hope in me, and I determined to strike while the iron was hot. "Eustace," I said very gravely as I bound a handkerchief round his arm, "if your impression is correct, this is almost the worst of our misery. Certainly no child of mine shall ever be born into such ignominy as this. It is high time we went. Better to die like decent folk than allow ourselves to be hacked about by these drunken brutes and pushed through doors by a theatrical villain like Hubert."

"You are right, Penelope," he answered, burying his face in his chair. "I have been a miserable coward." And, to my horror, I heard him sob like a child who has been struck for the first time.

That decided me. But what to do? A desperate resolution came to me. As Davies was brushing my hair that night, I looked at her once more in the mirror, and, assuming the most matter-of-fact tone I could muster, "Davies," I said, "Sir Eustace and I have decided on leaving St. Salvat's, and we are taking you with us on our travels; unless you should prefer to betray us to Mr. Hubert, which is the best thing you can do for yourself."

What made me say those last words? Was it a desire to threaten, a stupid, taunting spirit, or the reckless frankness of one who thought herself doomed? Would it might have been the latter. But of all the things which I would give some of my life to

cancel, those words are the foremost; and remorse and shame seize me as I write them.

But instead of answering these, the faithful creature threw herself on her knees and covered my hand with kisses. "All is ready," she said after a moment, "and Lady Brandling will start on Saturday."

She had been watching and planning for weeks, and had already thought out and prepared every detail of our flight with extraordinary ingenuity. She placed the savings of her whole lifetime at our service, a considerable sum, and far beyond our need; and she had contrived to communicate with her son, the one who had every good reason to bear a grudge to the villains of St. Salvat's. My husband and I were to walk on foot, and separately, out of the grounds; horses were to meet us at a given point of the road, and take us, not to Swansea or Bristol, as would be expected, but to Milford, there to embark for Ireland, a country where all trace of us would easily be lost, and whence we could easily re-enter England or take ship for the Continent, as circumstances should dictate at the moment.

The next Saturday had been fixed upon for our flight, because Davies knew that the uncles would be away on an important smuggling expedition in a distant part of the coast. The maids, very few in number, and any of the servants left behind, Davies had undertaken to intoxicate or drug into harmlessness. Only one evil chance remained, and that we none of us dared to mention: what if Hubert, as is sometimes the case, should stay behind?

I do not know how I contrived to live through the three days which separated us from Saturday; there are, apparently, moments in our lives so strangely unlike all others, so unnatural to our whole being, that the memory refuses to register them or even bear their trace. All I know is that Eustace spent all his time in his laboratory, constructing various appliances, an occupation which I explained as imposed upon himself in order to deaden any doubts or scruples, such as were natural to his

character, for the only opposition he had made to our plan of escape was on the score that it meant leaving St. Salvat's in the hands of the uncles.

At last came Friday night. Friday, June 26, 1774, Davies had brought us word that the uncles had gone down to the boats, taking all the available men with them, save an old broken-down ship's carpenter, who lived with the keeper in the gate tower, and the husband of one of the sluttish women, who lay sick of the quinsy in the outhouse containing the offices. Only, only, Hubert remained! Had his suspicion been awakened? Was he detained on business? Was he ailing? Methought it was the first of these possibilities. For on Friday morning he came to my apartments, which was not his wont, early in the day and offered to pay me a visit. But Davies had the presence of mind to answer that I was sick, and lest he should doubt it, to force me to bed at once, and borrow certain medicines from him. After this he sought for Eustace, and finding him busy among his chemical instruments, his suspicions, if he had any, were quieted; and, having dined, he went down to his own small boat, a very fast sailer, and which he managed alone, often outstripping the heavier boats of his brothers and nephew. The ground was now clear. My husband remained, I believe, in his laboratory; Davies went down to supper with the maids, whom she had undertaken to drug; we were to meet again in my room at daybreak. I cannot say for sure, but I believe I spent that night trying to pray and waiting for daylight.

The month was June and day came early;... a dull day, thin rain streamed down continuously, hushing everything, even the sea on the rocks becoming inaudible; only, I remember, a bird sang below my window, and the notes he sang long ran in my ears and tormented me. I had sewn some diamonds and some pieces of gold into my clothes, and those of my husband and of Davies. I stuffed a few valuables, very childishly chosen, for I took my diary, some of Eustace's love-letters, and the little cap I had knitted for the baby who was never born, into my pockets. And I waited. Presently Eustace came; he had a serviceable sword, a large knife, and a pair of pistols in his great coat; he handed me a smaller pistol, showed me that it was

primed, and gave me at the same time a little folded white paper. "You are a brave woman, Penelope," he said, kissing me, "and I know there is no likelihood of your using either of these things rashly or in a moment of panic. But our enterprise is uncertain; we may possibly be parted, and I have no right to let you fall alive into the hands of those villains." Then, he sat down at my work-table and began drawing on a sheet of paper, while I looked out of the window and listened to the unvarying song of that bird. Davies did not come, and it was broad daylight. But neither of us ventured to remark on this fact or to speak our fears. Then, after about half an hour's fruitless waiting Eustace declared that we must have misunderstood Davies's instructions, and insisted, much against my wishes, upon going down to see whether she was not waiting for us below. A secret fear had seized my husband that the old woman, whom I had now got to trust quite absolutely, might after all have remained from first to last a spy of Hubert's. As Eustace left he turned round and said, "Remember what you have in your pocket, Penelope; and if I do not return within ten minutes, come down the main staircase and sing the first bars of 'Phyllis plus avare que tendre' I shall be on the watch for it."

I hated his foolish obstinacy: far better, I thought, have awaited Davies in the appointed place, and together.

I thought so all the more when, after some ten minutes had elapsed, a light rap came on the wainscot door near my bed, the door leading to the back staircase, and opposite to the one by which Eustace had taken his departure.

"Come in, Davies," I said joyfully.

"It is not Davies, dear Lady Brandling," said a voice which made me feel suddenly sick; and in came Hubert, bowing. He was dressed with uncommon neatness, not in his fisherman's clothes, but as a clergyman, and, what was by no means constantly the case with him, he was fresh shaven. In a flash I understood that he had returned overnight, or perhaps not gone away at all.

"It is not Davies," he repeated, "but I have come with her excuses to your ladyship; a sudden ailment, and one from which it is not usual to recover at her, or indeed, any age, prevents her waiting on you. I have been giving her some of the consolations of religion, and hearing her confession, a practice I by no means reject as Popish," and the villain smiled suavely. "And now, as she can no longer benefit by my presence, I thought I would come and make her excuses, and offer myself, though unskilful, to pack your ladyship's portmanteau in her place."

"You have killed Davies!" I exclaimed, springing up from the sofa on which I was seated. Hubert made a deprecatory gesture and forcing me down again seated himself insolently close to me. "Fie, fie!" he said, "those are not words for a pretty young lady to use to her old uncle. Have you not learned your Catechism, my dear? It is said there, 'Thou shalt not kill,' meaning thereby, kill anything save vermin. And, by the way," continues the villain, taking my arm and preventing my rising, "that's just what I want to talk about. I have a prejudice against killing members of my own family, a prejudice not shared by my brothers, worse luck to the sots, or else you would not be Lady Brandling as yet, and that poor, silly coxcomb of a Thomas would still be enjoying his glass and his lass. I hate a scandal, and intend to avoid one; also, I am genuinely attached to you and to your husband, for though a milksop, he is a man of parts and education, and I relish his conversation. Yes, my dear. I know what you are going to ask! The precious Eustace is quite safe, without a scratch in any part of his gentlemanly white body; and no harm shall come to him—on one condition: That you, my pretty vixen, for you are a virago, a warlike lady, my dear niece, that you swear very solemnly that neither you nor he will ever again attempt to leave St. Salvat's."

He had taken my hand and was looking in my eyes with a villainous expression.

"What do you say to that?" he went on. "I know you to be a woman of spirit and of honour, bound by an oath, and capable of making your husband respect it. You have

nothing to gain by refusing. You are alone with me in this house. Your faithful Davies is as dead as a door-nail. Your virtuous spouse is quite safe downstairs, for I have taken the precaution to relieve him of all those dangerous swords and pistols of his, which a learned man might hurt himself with. I give you five minutes to make up your mind. If you accept my terms, you and Sir Eustace Brandling shall live honoured and happy at St. Salvat's among your obliged kinsmen. If you refuse, I shall, very reluctantly, hand over your husband to my brothers' tender mercies when they return home presently; and, as they do not know how to behave to a lady, I shall myself make it a point to act as a man of refinement and a tender heart should act towards a very pretty little shrew," and the creature dared to touch me with his lips upon my neck.

I shrank back upon the sofa half paralysed, and with not strength enough to grow hot and crimson. Hubert rose, locked the doors, and, to my relief, sat down to the harpsichord, on which he began to pick out a tune. It was that very "Phyllis plus avare que tendre," which I had sung to my husband and him some days before. Was it a coincidence; or had he overheard us appoint it as a signal, and was he mocking and torturing Eustace as well as me?

"An elegant little air, egad," he says, "I wish I could remember the second part. Don't let my strumming disturb you. You have still four minutes to think over your answer, dear Lady Brandling." The familiar notes aroused me from my stupor. I got up and walked slowly to the harpsichord, at which Hubert was lolling and strumming.

"Well, my dear?" he asks insolently, and the notes seemed to ooze out from under his fingers, "have I got the tune right? Is that it?"

"The tune," I answered, "is this: Mr. Hubert Brandling, in the name of God Almighty, whose ministry you have defiled, and whose law you have placed yourself outside, I take it upon myself to judge and put you to death as a wrecker

and a murderer." I drew Eustace's pistol from my pocket, aimed steadily and fired. I was half stunned by the report; but through the smoke of my own weapon, I saw Hubert reel and fall across the harpsichord, whose jangling mingled with his short, sharp cry. Even after fifty years, I quite understand how I did that, and when I recall it all, I feel that, old as I am, I would do it over again. What I cannot explain is what I did afterwards, nor the amazing coolness and clearness of head which I enjoyed at that moment. For without losing a minute I went to the harpsichord, and despite the horrid, hot trickle all over my hands, I turned out his pockets and took his keys. Then I left the room, locked it from the outside, and went downstairs singing that French shepherd's song at the top of my voice. The fearful stillness was beginning to frighten me, when, just as I felt my throat grow dry and my voice faint, the same tune answered me in a low whistle, from out of Hubert's study. I knew my husband's whistle, and yet the fact of Hubert's room, the fact that Hubert had been strumming that tune, filled me, for the first time, with horror. But I found the key on the bunch, and unlocked the door. Eustace was seated in an arm chair, unbound, but his clothes torn as after a scuffle.

"Eustace," I said, "I—I have killed Hubert." But to my astonishment he barely gave me time to utter the words; and starting from the chair:

"Quick, quick!" he cries, "there is not a moment to lose. Another ten minutes and we also are dead!" and seizing my arm he drags me away, down the remaining stairs, out by the main door and then at a run across the yard and up into the dripping shrubbery.

"Eustace, Eustace!" I cried breathless, "this is not the way; we shall be seen from the stables."

"No matter," he answered hoarsely, and dragging, almost carrying, me along, "run, Penelope, for our lives."

After about five minutes of desperate and, it seemed to me, random and mad

climbing up through the wet bushes, he suddenly stopped and drew forth his watch.

"Where is Davies? At the turn of the road? Not in the house, at least, there is no one in the house? No one except—except that dead man?"

I thought that fear had made him lose his wits, and I dared not tell him that besides that dead man, the house held also a dead woman, our poor, faithful Davies.

"She is out of danger," I answered. We had, by some miracle, found our way to a place where the wall, which fortified St. Salvat's, was partly broken at the top, and overgrown by bushes. With a decision I should never have expected from him, and an extraordinary degree of strength and agility, my husband climbed on to the wall, pulled me up, let himself drop into the dry ditch beyond, and received me in his arms. Then, seizing me again by the hand, we started off once more at a mad run through the wood, stumbling and tearing ourselves against the branches.

"Up the knoll!" he repeated. "I must see! I must see!" And he seemed to me quite mad.

Once at the top of the knoll, he stopped. It was wooded all the way up, but just here was an open space of grass burrowed by rabbits and set with stunted junipers. It was full in sight of St. Salvat's, and if ever there could be a dangerous place to stop in, it was this. But Eustace pointed to the wet grass, "Sit down," he said, and sat down himself, after looking at his watch again. "There are five minutes more," he repeated, remaining, despite my entreaties, seated on the soft ground among the rabbit holes, his face turned to St. Salvat's.

"You are sure Davies is safe?" he asked, again drawing out his watch.

"Davies is dead," I answered, counting on the effect it would have on him, "Hubert had murdered her ... before ... I...."

Eustace's eye kindled strangely. "Ah! is it so?" he cried, "Then poor Davies will have a splendid funeral! All I regret is that that villain should share in the honour." So saying, he started up on to his feet, and pulling out his watch, looked from it to

the towers and battlements nestled in the trees of the hollow beneath us.

"Half past seven less a minute, less half a minute, less ... Now!" he cried.

As if he had shouted a word of command, an enormous sheet of flame leapt up into the air, like the flash at a cannon's mouth; the hill shook and the air bellowed, and we fell back half stunned. When I could see once more, my husband was standing at the brink of the knoll, his arms folded, and looking calmly before him.

The outline of towers and battlements had entirely disappeared; and only the skeletons of the great trees, black and branchless, stood out like the broken masts of wrecked vessels against the distant pale and misty sea.

"I have burnt out their nest. My house shall be polluted no more," said my husband very quietly. And then, kissing me as we stood on the brink of the green sward, with the rain falling gently upon us, "Come, Penelope," he added taking my hands, "we are outlaws and felons; but we have saved our liberty and our honour."

And, hand in hand, we walked swiftly but quietly towards the high road to Milford.

The foregoing pages are sufficient record for those of my children and grandchildren who have heard the tale from my lips, and sufficient explanation for the remoter posterity of Eustace Brandling and myself, of the mystery which overhung their family in the latter part of the eighteenth century. I have only a few legal details to add.

By the explosion which my husband's skill in chemistry and mechanics had enabled him to procure and to time, all the main buildings of St. Salvat's Castle had been utterly destroyed; hiding in their ruins the fate alike of the faithful Davies and of the atrocious Hubert; and hiding, for anything, that was known to the contrary, two other presumable victims—my husband and myself. The gang of villains, deprived of its headquarters, and deprived of its master spirit, speedily fell to pieces. Richard and Gwyn appear to have come to a violent end in quarrelling over the booty of the last wicked expedition; Simon and Evan, and some of their followers ended in

prison, on a charge of pillaging the ruins and digging for treasure while the property, in the absence of it master, was still in the hands of the law; but it is probable that this condemnation was intended to save them from a worse punishment, as the authorities gradually got wind of the real trade which had been carried on in the castle.

From the villains of St. Salvat's Eustace and I were now safe. But we had taken the law into our own hands; and the justice which had been unable to defend us while innocent, was bound to punish our acts towards the guilty. My husband's words had been true: he and I were outlaws and felons. Our case was privily placed before the King and his ministers, when we had left England and had rejoined my mother in her country. In consideration of the unusual circumstances it was decided that the baronetcy should not lapse, nor the lands be forfeited to the Crown, but be held over for our possible heirs, while ourselves should be accounted as mysteriously disappeared, and forbidden to enter the kingdom. So we wandered for many years in the new world and the old; and it was far from St. Salvat's that our children were successively born. And it was only on the death of my dear husband, which occurred in 1802, that a Brandling, our eldest son, reappeared and claimed his title and inheritance. It was the wish of my son Piers that I should accompany him and his wife to England, and help to rebuild the home which I had helped to destroy. But the recollection of the place had only grown in terror, and I have ever adhered to my resolution not to set eyes on it again. I have spent the years of my widowhood at Grandfey, my dear dead mother's little property in Switzerland, where Eustace and I had been so happy before he succeeded to St. Salvat's. And it is at Grandfey, among the meadows again white with hemlock and the lime avenues again in blossom, that I await, amid the sound of cowbells and of mountain streams, Death, who had held me in his clutches fifty years ago in that castle hidden among the trees above the white wailing Northern sea.

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A TALE OF THE WELSH COAST IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ***

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