ДЖОН ГОЛСУЪРТИ
A MAN OF DEVON

To my father

I

“MOOR, 20th July.

.... It is quiet here, sleepy, rather—a farm is never quiet; the sea, too, is only a quarter of a mile away, and when it’s windy, the sound of it travels up the combe; for distraction, you must go four miles to Brixham or five to Kingswear, and you won’t find much then. The farm lies in a sheltered spot, scooped, so to speak, high up the combe side—behind is a rise of fields, and beyond, a sweep of down. You have the feeling of being able to see quite far, which is misleading, as you soon find out if you walk. It is true Devon country-hills, hollows, hedge-banks, lanes dipping down into the earth or going up like the sides of houses, coppices, cornfields, and little streams wherever there’s a place for one; but the downs along the cliff, all gorse and ferns, are wild. The combe ends in a sandy cove with black rock on one side, pinkish cliffs away to the headland on the other, and a coastguard station. Just now, with the harvest coming on, everything looks its richest, the apples ripening, the trees almost too green. It’s very hot, still weather; the country and the sea seem to sleep in the sun. In front of the farm are half-a-dozen pines that look as if they had stepped out of another land, but all round the back is orchard as lush, and gnarled, and orthodox as any one could wish. The house, a long, white building with three levels of roof, and splashes of brown all over it, looks as if it might be growing down into the earth. It was freshly thatched two years ago—and that’s all the newness there is about it; they say the front door, oak, with iron knobs, is three hundred years old at least. You can touch the ceilings with your hand. The windows certainly might be larger—a heavenly old place, though, with a flavour of apples, smoke, sweetbriar, bacon, honeysuckle, and age, all over it.

The owner is a man called John Ford, about seventy, and seventeen stone in weight—very big, on long legs, with a grey, stubbly beard, grey, watery eyes, short neck and purplish complexion; he is asthmatic, and has a very courteous, autocratic manner. His clothes are made of Harris tweed—except on Sundays, when he puts on black—a seal ring, and a thick gold

cable chain. There's nothing mean or small about John Ford; I suspect him of a warm heart, but he doesn't let you know much about him. He's a north-country man by birth, and has been out in New Zealand all his life. This little Devonshire farm is all he has now. He had a large "station" in the North Island, and was much looked up to, kept open house, did everything, as one would guess, in a narrow-minded, large-handed way. He came to grief suddenly; I don't quite know how. I believe his only son lost money on the turf, and then, unable to face his father, shot himself; if you had seen John Ford, you could imagine that. His wife died, too, that year. He paid up to the last penny, and came home, to live on this farm. He told me the other night that he had only one relation in the world, his granddaughter, who lives here with him. Pasiance Voisey—old spelling for Patience, but they pronounce, it Pash-yence—is sitting out here with me at this moment on a sort of rustic loggia that opens into the orchard. Her sleeves are rolled up, and she's stripping currants, ready for black currant tea. Now and then she rests her elbows on the table, eats a berry, pouts her lips, and, begins again. She has a round, little face; a long, slender body; cheeks like poppies; a bushy mass of black-brown hair, and dark-brown, almost black, eyes; her nose is snub; her lips quick, red, rather full; all her motions quick and soft. She loves bright colours. She's rather like a little cat; sometimes she seems all sympathy, then in a moment as hard as tortoise-shell. She's all impulse; yet she doesn't like to show her feelings; I sometimes wonder whether she has any. She plays the violin.

It's queer to see these two together, queer and rather sad. The old man has a fierce tenderness for her that strikes into the very roots of him. I see him torn between it, and his cold north-country horror of his feelings; his life with her is an unconscious torture to him. She's a restless, chafing thing, demure enough one moment, then flashing out into mocking speeches or hard little laughs. Yet she's fond of him in her fashion; I saw her kiss him once when he was asleep. She obeys him generally—in a way as if she couldn't breathe while she was doing it. She's had a queer sort of education—history, geography, elementary mathematics, and nothing else; never been to school; had a few lessons on the violin, but has taught herself most of what she knows. She is well up in the lore of birds, flowers, and insects; has three cats, who follow her about; and is full of pranks. The other day she called out to me, "I've something for you. Hold out your hand and shut your eyes!" It was a large, black slug! She's the child of the old

fellow's only daughter, who was sent home for schooling at Torquay, and made a runaway match with one Richard Voisey, a yeoman farmer, whom she met in the hunting-field. John Ford was furious—his ancestors, it appears, used to lead ruffians on the Cumberland side of the Border—he looked on "Squire" Rick Voisey as a cut below him. He was called "Squire," as far as I can make out, because he used to play cards every evening with a parson in the neighbourhood who went by the name of "Devil" Hawkins. Not that the Voisey stock is to be despised. They have had this farm since it was granted to one Richard Voysey by copy dated 8th September, 13 Henry VIII. Mrs. Hopgood, the wife of the bailiff—a dear, quaint, serene old soul with cheeks like a rosy, withered apple, and an unbounded love of Pasiance—showed me the very document.

"I kape it," she said. "Mr. Ford be tu proud—but other folks be proud tu. 'Tis a pra-aper old fam'ly: all the women is Margery, Pasiance, or Mary; all the men's Richards an' Johns an' Rogers; old as they apple-trees."

Rick Voisey was a rackety, hunting fellow, and "dipped" the old farm up to its thatched roof. John Ford took his revenge by buying up the mortgages, foreclosing, and commanding his daughter and Voisey to go on living here rent free; this they dutifully did until they were both killed in a dog-cart accident, eight years ago. Old Ford's financial smash came a year later, and since then he's lived here with Pasiance. I fancy it's the cross in her blood that makes her so restless, and irresponsible: if she had been all a native she'd have been happy enough here, or all a stranger like John Ford himself, but the two strains struggling for mastery seem to give her no rest. You'll think this a far-fetched theory, but I believe it to be the true one. She'll stand with lips pressed together, her arms folded tight across her narrow chest, staring as if she could see beyond the things round her; then something catches her attention, her eyes will grow laughing, soft, or scornful all in a minute! She's eighteen, perfectly fearless in a boat, but you can't get her to mount a horse—a sore subject with her grandfather, who spends most of his day on a lean, half-bred pony, that carries him like a feather, for all his weight.

They put me up here as a favour to Dan Treffry; there's an arrangement of L. s. d. with Mrs. Hopgood in the background. They aren't at all well off; this is the largest farm about, but it doesn't bring them in much. To look at John Ford, it seems incredible he should be short of money—he's too large.

We have family prayers at eight, then, breakfast—after that freedom for writing or anything else till supper and evening prayers. At midday one forages for oneself. On Sundays, two miles to church twice, or you get into John Ford's black books.... Dan Treffry himself is staying at Kingswear. He says he's made his pile; it suits him down here—like a sleep after years of being too wide-awake; he had a rough time in New Zealand, until that mine made his fortune. You'd hardly remember him; he reminds me of his uncle, old Nicholas Treffry; the same slow way of speaking, with a hesitation, and a trick of repeating your name with everything he says; left-handed too, and the same slow twinkle in his eyes. He has a dark, short beard, and red-brown cheeks; is a little bald on the temples, and a bit grey, but hard as iron. He rides over nearly every day, attended by a black spaniel with a wonderful nose and a horror of petticoats. He has told me lots of good stories of John Ford in the early squatter's times; his feats with horses live to this day; and he was through the Maori wars; as Dan says, "a man after Uncle Nic's own heart."

They are very good friends, and respect each other; Dan has a great admiration for the old man, but the attraction is Pasiance. He talks very little when she's in the room, but looks at her in a sidelong, wistful sort of way. Pasiance's conduct to him would be cruel in any one else, but in her, one takes it with a pinch of salt. Dan goes off, but turns up again as quiet and dogged as you please.

Last night, for instance, we were sitting in the loggia after supper. Pasiance was fingering the strings of her violin, and suddenly Dan (a bold thing for him) asked her to play.

"What!" she said, "before men? No, thank you!"

"Why not?"

"Because I hate them."

Down came John Ford's hand on the wicker table: "You forget yourself! Go to bed!"

She gave Dan a look, and went; we could hear her playing in her bedroom; it sounded like a dance of spirits; and just when one thought she had finished, out it would break again like a burst of laughter. Presently, John Ford begged our pardons ceremoniously, and stumped off indoors. The violin ceased; we heard his voice growling at her; down he came again. Just as he was settled in his chair there was a soft swish, and something dark came falling through the apple boughs. The violin! You should have seen

his face! Dan would have picked the violin up, but the old man stopped him. Later, from my bedroom window, I saw John Ford come out and stand looking at the violin. He raised his foot as if to stamp on it. At last he picked it up, wiped it carefully, and took it in....

My room is next to hers. I kept hearing her laugh, a noise too as if she were dragging things about the room. Then I fell asleep, but woke with a start, and went to the window for a breath of fresh air. Such a black, breathless night! Nothing to be seen but the twisted, blacker branches; not the faintest stir of leaves, no sound but muffled grunting from the cowhouse, and now and then a faint sigh. I had the queerest feeling of unrest and fear, the last thing to expect on such a night. There is something here that's disturbing; a sort of suppressed struggle. I've never in my life seen anything so irresponsible as this girl, or so uncompromising as the old man; I keep thinking of the way he wiped that violin. It's just as if a spark would set everything in a blaze. There's a menace of tragedy—or—perhaps it's only the heat, and too much of Mother Hopgood's crame....

II

“Tuesday.

.... I’ve made a new acquaintance. I was lying in the orchard, and presently, not seeing me, he came along—a man of middle height, with a singularly good balance, and no lumber—rather old blue clothes, a flannel shirt, a dull red necktie, brown shoes, a cap with a leather peak pushed up on the forehead. Face long and narrow, bronzed with a kind of pale burnt-in brownness; a good forehead. A brown moustache, beard rather pointed, blackening about the cheeks; his chin not visible, but from the beard’s growth must be big; mouth I should judge sensuous. Nose straight and blunt; eyes grey, with an upward look, not exactly frank, because defiant; two parallel furrows down each cheek, one from the inner corner of the eye, one from the nostril; age perhaps thirty-five. About the face, attitude, movements, something immensely vital, adaptable, daring, and unprincipled.

He stood in front of the loggia, biting his fingers, a kind of nineteenth-century buccaneer, and I wondered what he was doing in this galley. They say you can tell a man of Kent or a Somersetshire man; certainly you can tell a Yorkshire man, and this fellow could only have been a man of Devon, one of the two main types found in this county. He whistled; and out came Pasiance in a geranium-coloured dress, looking like some tall poppy—you know the slight droop of a poppy’s head, and the way the wind sways its stem.... She is a human poppy, her fuzzy dark hair is like a poppy’s lustreless black heart, she has a poppy’s tantalising attraction and repulsion, something fatal, or rather fateful. She came walking up to my new friend, then caught sight of me, and stopped dead.

“That,” she said to me, “is Zachary Pearse. This,” she said to him, “is our lodger.” She said it with a wonderful soft malice. She wanted to scratch me, and she scratched. Half an hour later I was in the yard, when up came this fellow Pearse.

“Glad to know you,” he said, looking thoughtfully at the pigs.

“You’re a writer, aren’t you?”

“A sort of one,” I said.

“If by any chance,” he said suddenly, “you’re looking for a job, I could put something in your way. Walk down to the beach with me, and I’ll tell you; my boat’s at anchor, smartest little craft in these parts.”

It was very hot, and I had no desire whatever to go down to the beach —I went, all the same. We had not gone far when John Ford and Dan Treffry came into the lane. Our friend seemed a little disconcerted, but soon recovered himself. We met in the middle of the lane, where there was hardly room to pass. John Ford, who looked very haughty, put on his pince-nez and stared at Pearse.

“Good-day!” said Pearse; “fine weather! I’ve been up to ask Pasiance to come for a sail. Wednesday we thought, weather permitting; this gentleman’s coming. Perhaps you’ll come too, Mr. Treffry. You’ve never seen my place. I’ll give you lunch, and show you my father. He’s worth a couple of hours’ sail any day.” It was said in such an odd way that one couldn’t resent his impudence. John Ford was seized with a fit of wheezing, and seemed on the eve of an explosion; he glanced at me, and checked himself.

“You’re very good,” he said icily; “my granddaughter has other things to do. You, gentlemen, will please yourselves”; and, with a very slight bow, he went stumping on to the house. Dan looked at me, and I looked at him.

“You’ll come?” said Pearse, rather wistfully. Dan stammered: “Thank you, Mr. Pearse; I’m a better man on a horse than in a boat, but—thank you.” Cornered in this way, he’s a shy, soft-hearted being. Pearse smiled his thanks. “Wednesday, then, at ten o’clock; you shan’t regret it.”

“Pertinacious beggar!” I heard Dan mutter in his beard; and found myself marching down the lane again by Pearse’s side. I asked him what he was good enough to mean by saying I was coming, without having asked me. He answered, unabashed:

“You see, I’m not friends with the old man; but I knew he’d not be impolite to you, so I took the liberty.”

He has certainly a knack of turning one’s anger to curiosity. We were down in the combe now; the tide was running out, and the sand all little, wet, shining ridges. About a quarter of a mile out lay a cutter, with her tan sail half down, swinging to the swell. The sunlight was making the pink cliffs glow in the most wonderful way; and shifting in bright patches over

the sea like moving shoals of goldfish. Pearse perched himself on his dinghy, and looked out under his hand. He seemed lost in admiration.

"If we could only net some of those spangles," he said, "an' make gold of 'em! No more work then."

"It's a big job I've got on," he said presently; "I'll tell you about it on Wednesday. I want a journalist."

"But I don't write for the papers," I said; "I do other sort of work. My game is archaeology."

"It doesn't matter," he said, "the more imagination the better. It'd be a thundering good thing for you."

His assurance was amazing, but it was past supper-time, and hunger getting the better of my curiosity, I bade him good-night. When I looked back, he was still there, on the edge of his boat, gazing at the sea. A queer sort of bird altogether, but attractive somehow.

Nobody mentioned him that evening; but once old Ford, after staring a long time at Pasiance, muttered a propos of nothing, "Undutiful children!" She was softer than usual; listening quietly to our talk, and smiling when spoken to. At bedtime she went up to her grand-father, without waiting for the usual command, "Come and kiss me, child."

Dan did not stay to supper, and he has not been here since. This morning I asked Mother Hopgood who Zachary Pearse was. She's a true Devonian; if there's anything she hates, it is to be committed to a definite statement. She ambled round her answer, and at last told me that he was "son of old Cap'en Jan Pearse to Black Mill. 'Tes an old family to Dartymouth an' Plymouth," she went on in a communicative outburst. "They du say Francis Drake tuke five o' they Pearses with 'en to fight the Spaniards. At least that's what I've heard Mr. Zachary zay; but Ha-apgood can tell yu." Poor Hopgood, the amount of information she saddles him with in the course of the day! Having given me thus to understand that she had run dry, she at once went on:

"Cap'en Jan Pearse made a dale of ventures. He's old now—they du say nigh an 'undred. Ha-apgood can tell yu."

"But the son, Mrs. Hopgood?"

Her eyes twinkled with sudden shrewdness: She hugged herself placidly.

"An' what would yu take for dinner to-day? There's duck; or yu might like 'toad in the hole,' with an apple tart; or then, there's—Well!

we’ll see what we can du like.” And off she went, without waiting for my answer.

To-morrow is Wednesday. I shan’t be sorry to get another look at this fellow Pearse....

III

“Friday, 29th July.

.... Why do you ask me so many questions, and egg me on to write about these people instead of minding my business? If you really want to hear, I’ll tell you of Wednesday’s doings.

It was a splendid morning; and Dan turned up, to my surprise—though I might have known that when he says a thing, he does it. John Ford came out to shake hands with him, then, remembering why he had come, breathed loudly, said nothing, and went in again. Nothing was to be seen of Pasiance, and we went down to the beach together.

“I don’t like this fellow Pearse, George,” Dan said to me on the way; “I was fool enough to say I’d go, and so I must, but what’s he after? Not the man to do things without a reason, mind you.”

I remarked that we should soon know.

“I’m not so sure—queer beggar; I never look at him without thinking of a pirate.”

The cutter lay in the cove as if she had never moved. There too was Zachary Pearse seated on the edge of his dinghy.

“A five-knot breeze,” he said, “I’ll run you down in a couple of hours.” He made no inquiry about Pasiance, but put us into his cockleshell and pulled for the cutter. A lantern-Jawed fellow, named Prawle, with a spiky, prominent beard, long, clean-shaven upper lip, and tanned complexion—a regular hard-weather bird—received us.

The cutter was beautifully clean; built for a Brixham trawler, she still had her number—DH 113—uneffaced. We dived into a sort of cabin, airy, but dark, fitted with two bunks and a small table, on which stood some bottles of stout; there were lockers, too, and pegs for clothes. Prawle, who showed us round, seemed very proud of a steam contrivance for hoisting sails. It was some minutes before we came on deck again; and there, in the dinghy, being pulled towards the cutter, sat Pasiance.

“If I’d known this,” stammered Dan, getting red, “I wouldn’t have come.” She had outwitted us, and there was nothing to be done.

It was a very pleasant sail. The breeze was light from the south-east, the sun warm, the air soft. Presently Pasiance began singing:

“Columbus is dead and laid in his grave, Oh! heigh-ho! and laid in his grave; Over his head the apple-trees wave Oh! heigh-ho! the apple-trees wave....

“The apples are ripe and ready to fall, Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall; There came an old woman and gathered them all, Oh! heigh-ho! and gathered them all....

“The apples are gathered, and laid on the shelf, Oh! heigh-ho! and laid on the shelf; If you want any more, you must sing for yourself, Oh! heigh-ho! and sing for yourself.”

Her small, high voice came to us in trills and spurts, as the wind let it, like the singing of a skylark lost in the sky. Pearse went up to her and whispered something. I caught a glimpse of her face like a startled wild creature’s; shrinking, tossing her hair, laughing, all in the same breath. She wouldn’t sing again, but crouched in the bows with her chin on her hands, and the sun falling on one cheek, round, velvety, red as a peach....

We passed Dartmouth, and half an hour later put into a little wooded bay. On a low reddish cliff was a house hedged round by pine-trees. A bit of broken jetty ran out from the bottom of the cliff. We hooked on to this, and landed. An ancient, fish-like man came slouching down and took charge of the cutter. Pearse led us towards the house, Pasiance following mortally shy all of a sudden.

The house had a dark, overhanging thatch of the rush reeds that grow in the marshes hereabouts; I remember nothing else remarkable. It was neither old, nor new; neither beautiful, nor exactly ugly; neither clean, nor entirely squalid; it perched there with all its windows over the sea, turning its back contemptuously on the land.

Seated in a kind of porch, beside an immense telescope, was a very old man in a panama hat, with a rattan cane. His pure-white beard and moustache, and almost black eyebrows, gave a very singular, piercing look to his little, restless, dark-grey eyes; all over his mahogany cheeks and neck was a network of fine wrinkles. He sat quite upright, in the full sun, hardly blinking.

“Dad!” said Zachary, “this is Pasiance Voisey.” The old man turned his eyes on her and muttered, “How do you do, ma’am?” then took no further notice. And Pasiance, who seemed to resent this, soon slipped away

and went wandering about amongst the pines. An old woman brought some plates and bottles and laid them casually on a table; and we sat round the figure of old Captain Pearse without a word, as if we were all under a spell.

Before lunch there was a little scene between Zachary Pearse and Dan, as to which of them should summon Pasiance. It ended in both going, and coming back without her. She did not want any lunch, would stay where she was amongst the pines.

For lunch we had chops, wood-pigeons, mushrooms, and mulberry preserve, and drank wonderful Madeira out of common wine-glasses. I asked the old man where he got it; he gave me a queer look, and answered with a little bow:

"Stood me in tu shillin' the bottle, an' the country got nothing out of it, sir. In the early Thirties; tu shillin' the bottle; there's no such wine nowadays and," he added, looking at Zachary, "no such men."

Zachary smiled and said: "You did nothing so big, dad, as what I'm after, now!"

The old man's eyes had a sort of disdain in them.

"You're going far, then, in the Pied Witch, Zack?"

"I am," said Zachary.

"And where might yu be goin' in that old trampin' smut factory?"

"Morocco."

"Heu!" said the old man, "there's nothing there; I know that coast, as I know the back o' my hand." He stretched out a hand covered with veins and hair.

Zachary began suddenly to pour out a flood of words:

"Below Mogador—a fellow there—friend of mine—two years ago now. Concessions—trade-gunpowder—cruisers—feuds—money— chiefs —Gatling guns—Sultan—rifles—rebellion—gold." He detailed a reckless, sordid, bold scheme, which, on the pivot of a trading venture, was intended to spin a whole wheel of political convulsions.

"They'll never let you get there," said old Pearse.

"Won't they?" returned Zachary. "Oh yes, they will, an' when I leave, there'll be another dynasty, and I'll be a rich man."

"Yu'll never leave," answered the old man.

Zachary took out a sheet of paper covered with figures. He had worked the whole thing out. So much—equipment, so much—trade, so much—concessions, so much—emergencies. "My last mag!" he ended, "a

thousand short; the ship's ready, and if I'm not there within a month my chance is as good as gone."

This was the pith of his confidences—an appeal for money, and we all looked as men will when that crops up.

"Mad!" muttered the old man, looking at the sea.

"No," said Zachary. That one word was more eloquent than all the rest of his words put together. This fellow is no visionary. His scheme may be daring, and unprincipled, but—he knows very well what he's about.

"Well!" said old Pearse, "you shall have five 'undred of my money, if it's only to learn what yu're made of. Wheel me in!" Zachary wheeled him into the house, but soon came back.

"The old man's cheque for five hundred pounds!" he said, holding it up. "Mr. Treffry, give me another, and you shall have a third of the profits."

I expected Dan to give a point-blank refusal. But he only asked:

"Would that clear you for starting?"

"With that," said Zachary, "I can get to sea in a fortnight."

"Good!" Dan said slowly. "Give me a written promise! To sea in fourteen days and my fair share on the five hundred pounds—no more—no less."

Again I thought Pearse would have jumped at this, but he leaned his chin on his hand, and looked at Dan, and Dan looked at him. While they were staring at each other like this, Pasiance came up with a kitten.

"See!" she said, "isn't it a darling?" The kitten crawled and clawed its way up behind her neck. I saw both men's eyes as they looked at Pasiance, and suddenly understood what they were at. The kitten rubbed itself against Pasiance's cheek, overbalanced, and fell, clawing, down her dress. She caught it up and walked away. Some one, I don't know which of us, sighed, and Pearse cried "Done!"

The bargain had been driven.

"Good-bye, Mr. Pearse," said Dan; "I guess that's all I'm wanted for. I'll find my pony waiting in the village. George, you'll see Pasiance home?"

We heard the hoofs of his pony galloping down the road; Pearse suddenly excused himself, and disappeared.

This venture of his may sound romantic and absurd, but it's matter-of-fact enough. He's after L. s. d.! Shades of Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins, Oxenham! The worm of suspicion gnaws at the rose of romance. What if those fellows, too, were only after L. s. d....?

I strolled into the pine-wood. The earth there was covered like a bee's body with black and gold stripes; there was the blue sea below, and white, sleepy clouds, and bumble-bees booming above the heather; it was all softness, a summer's day in Devon. Suddenly I came on Pearse standing at the edge of the cliff with Pasiance sitting in a little hollow below, looking up at him. I heard him say:

"Pasiance—Pasiance!" The sound of his voice, and the sight of her soft, wondering face made me furious. What business has she with love, at her age? What business have they with each other?

He told me presently that she had started off for home, and drove me to the ferry, behind an old grey pony. On the way he came back to his offer of the other day.

"Come with me," he said. "It doesn't do to neglect the Press; you can see the possibilities. It's one of the few countries left. If I once get this business started you don't know where it's going to stop. You'd have free passage everywhere, and whatever you like in reason."

I answered as rudely as I could—but by no means as rudely as I wanted—that his scheme was mad. As a matter of fact, it's much too sane for me; for, whatever the body of a scheme, its soul is the fibre of the schemer.

"Think of it," he urged, as if he could see into me. "You can make what you like of it. Press paragraphs, of course. But that's mechanical; why, even I could do it, if I had time. As for the rest, you'll be as free—as free as a man."

There, in five words of one syllable, is the kernel of this fellow Pearse—"As free as a man!" No rule, no law, not even the mysterious shackles that bind men to their own self-respects! "As free as a man!" No ideals; no principles; no fixed star for his worship; no coil he can't slide out of! But the fellow has the tenacity of one of the old Devon mastiffs, too. He wouldn't take "No" for an answer.

"Think of it," he said; "any day will do—I've got a fortnight.... Look! there she is!" I thought that he meant Pasiance; but it was an old steamer, sluggish and black in the blazing sun of mid-stream, with a yellow-and-white funnel, and no sign of life on her decks.

"That's her—the Pied Witch! Do her twelve knots; you wouldn't think it! Well! good-evening! You'd better come. A word to me at any time. I'm going aboard now."

As I was being ferried across I saw him lolling in the stern-sheets of a little boat, the sun crowning his straw hat with glory.

I came on Pasiance, about a mile up the road, sitting in the hedge. We walked on together between the banks—Devonshire banks, as high as houses, thick with ivy and ferns, bramble and hazel boughs, and honeysuckle.

"Do you believe in a God?" she said suddenly.

"Grandfather's God is simply awful. When I'm playing the fiddle, I can feel God; but grandfather's is such a stuffy God—you know what I mean: the sea, the wind, the trees, colours too—they make one feel. But I don't believe that life was meant to 'be good' in. Isn't there anything better than being good? When I'm 'good,' I simply feel wicked." She reached up, caught a flower from the hedge, and slowly tore its petals.

"What would you do," she muttered, "if you wanted a thing, but were afraid of it? But I suppose you're never afraid!" she added, mocking me. I admitted that I was sometimes afraid, and often afraid of being afraid.

"That's nice! I'm not afraid of illness, nor of grandfather, nor of his God; but—I want to be free. If you want a thing badly, you're afraid about it."

I thought of Zachary Pearse's words, "free as a man."

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she said.

I stammered: "What do you mean by freedom?"

"Do you know what I shall do to-night?" she answered. "Get out of my window by the apple-tree, and go to the woods, and play!"

We were going down a steep lane, along the side of a wood, where there's always a smell of sappy leaves, and the breath of the cows that come close to the hedge to get the shade.

There was a cottage in the bottom, and a small boy sat outside playing with a heap of dust.

"Hallo, Johnny!" said Pasiance. "Hold your leg out and show this man your bad place!" The small boy undid a bandage round his bare and dirty little leg, and proudly revealed a sore.

"Isn't it nasty?" cried Pasiance ruefully, tying up the bandage again; "poor little feller! Johnny, see what I've brought you!" She produced from her pocket a stick of chocolate, the semblance of a soldier made of sealing-wax and worsted, and a crooked sixpence.

It was a new glimpse of her. All the way home she was telling me the story of little Johnny's family; when she came to his mother's death, she burst out: "A beastly shame, wasn't it, and they're so poor; it might just as well have been somebody else. I like poor people, but I hate rich ones—stuck-up beasts."

Mrs. Hopgood was looking over the gate, with her cap on one side, and one of Pasiance's cats rubbing itself against her skirts. At the sight of us she hugged herself.

"Where's grandfather?" asked Pasiance. The old lady shook her head.

"Is it a row?" Mrs. Hopgood wriggled, and wriggled, and out came:

"Did you get yure tay, my pretty? No? Well, that's a pity; yu'll be falin' low-like."

Pasiance tossed her head, snatched up the cat, and ran indoors. I remained staring at Mrs. Hopgood.

"Dear-dear," she clucked, "poor lamb. So to spake it's—" and she blurted out suddenly, "chuckin' full of wra-ath, he is. Well, there!"

My courage failed that evening. I spent it at the coastguard station, where they gave me bread and cheese and some awful cider. I passed the kitchen as I came back. A fire was still burning there, and two figures, misty in the darkness, flitted about with stealthy laughter like spirits afraid of being detected in a carnal-meal. They were Pasiance and Mrs. Hopgood; and so charming was the smell of eggs and bacon, and they had such an air of tender enjoyment of this dark revel, that I stifled many pangs, as I crept hungry up to bed.

In the middle of the night I woke and heard what I thought was screaming; then it sounded like wind in trees, then like the distant shaking of a tambourine, with the high singing of a human voice. Suddenly it stopped—two long notes came wailing out like sobs—then utter stillness; and though I listened for an hour or more there was no other sound ....

IV

“4th August.

.... For three days after I wrote last, nothing at all happened here. I spent the mornings on the cliff reading, and watching the sun-sparks raining on the sea. It’s grand up there with the gorse all round, the gulls basking on the rocks, the partridges calling in the corn, and now and then a young hawk overhead. The afternoons I spent out in the orchard. The usual routine goes on at the farm all the time—cow-milking, bread-baking, John Ford riding in and out, Pasiance in her garden stripping lavender, talking to the farm hands; and the smell of clover, and cows and hay; the sound of hens and pigs and pigeons, the soft drawl of voices, the dull thud of the farm carts; and day by day the apples getting redder. Then, last Monday, Pasiance was away from sunrise till sunset—nobody saw her go—nobody knew where she had gone. It was a wonderful, strange day, a sky of silver-grey and blue, with a drift of wind-clouds, all the trees sighing a little, the sea heaving in a long, low swell, the animals restless, the birds silent, except the gulls with their old man’s laughter and kitten’s mewing.

A something wild was in the air; it seemed to sweep across the downs and combe, into the very house, like a passionate tune that comes drifting to your ears when you’re sleepy. But who would have thought the absence of that girl for a few hours could have wrought such havoc! We were like uneasy spirits; Mrs. Hopgood’s apple cheeks seemed positively to wither before one’s eyes. I came across a dairymaid and farm hand discussing it stolidly with very downcast faces. Even Hopgood, a hard-bitten fellow with immense shoulders, forgot his imperturbability so far as to harness his horse, and depart on what he assured me was “just a wild-guse chaace.” It was long before John Ford gave signs of noticing that anything was wrong, but late in the afternoon I found him sitting with his hands on his knees, staring straight before him. He rose heavily when he saw me, and stalked out. In the evening, as I was starting for the coastguard station to ask for help to search the cliff, Pasiance appeared, walking as if she could hardly drag one leg after the other. Her cheeks were crimson; she was biting her

lips to keep tears of sheer fatigue out of her eyes. She passed me in the doorway without a word. The anxiety he had gone through seemed to forbid the old man from speaking. He just came forward, took her face in his hands, gave it a great kiss, and walked away. Pasiance dropped on the floor in the dark passage, and buried her face on her arms. “Leave me alone!” was all she would say. After a bit she dragged herself upstairs. Presently Mrs. Hopgood came to me.

“Not a word out of her—an’ not a bite will she ate, an’ I had a pie all ready—scrumptious. The good Lord knows the truth—she asked for brandy; have you any brandy, sir? Ha-apgood’e don’t drink it, an’ Mister Ford ’e don’t allaow for anything but caowslip wine.”

I had whisky.

The good soul seized the flask, and went off hugging it. She returned it to me half empty.

“Lapped it like a kitten laps milk. I misdaoubt it’s straong, poor lamb, it lusened ’er tongue praaperly. ‘I’ve a-done it,’ she says to me, ‘Mums-I’ve a-done it,’ an’ she laughed like a mad thing; and then, sir, she cried, an’ kissed me, an’ pusshed me thru the door. Gude Lard! What is ’t she’s a-done...?”

It rained all the next day and the day after. About five o’clock yesterday the rain ceased; I started off to Kingswear on Hopgood’s nag to see Dan Treffry. Every tree, bramble, and fern in the lanes was dripping water; and every bird singing from the bottom of his heart. I thought of Pasiance all the time. Her absence that day was still a mystery; one never ceased asking oneself what she had done. There are people who never grow up—they have no right to do things. Actions have consequences—and children have no business with consequences.

Dan was out. I had supper at the hotel, and rode slowly home. In the twilight stretches of the road, where I could touch either bank of the lane with my whip, I thought of nothing but Pasiance and her grandfather; there was something in the half light suited to wonder and uncertainty. It had fallen dark before I rode into the straw-yard. Two young bullocks snuffled at me, a sleepy hen got up and ran off with a tremendous shrieking. I stabled the horse, and walked round to the back. It was pitch black under the apple-trees, and the windows were all darkened. I stood there a little, everything smelled so delicious after the rain; suddenly I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. Have you ever felt like that

on a dark night? I called out at last: “Is any one there?” Not a sound! I walked to the gate-nothing! The trees still dripped with tiny, soft, hissing sounds, but that was all. I slipped round to the front, went in, barricaded the door, and groped up to bed. But I couldn’t sleep. I lay awake a long while; dozed at last, and woke with a jump. A stealthy murmur of smothered voices was going on quite close somewhere. It stopped. A minute passed; suddenly came the soft thud as of something falling. I sprang out of bed and rushed to the window. Nothing—but in the distance something that sounded like footsteps. An owl hooted; then clear as crystal, but quite low, I heard Pasiance singing in her room:

“The apples are ripe and ready to fall. Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall.”

I ran to her door and knocked.

“What is it?” she cried.

“Is anything the matter?”

“Matter?”

“Is anything the matter?”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha! Good-night!” then quite low, I heard her catch her breath, hard, sharply. No other answer, no other sound.

I went to bed and lay awake for hours....

This evening Dan came; during supper he handed Pasiance a roll of music; he had got it in Torquay. The shopman, he said, had told him that it was a “corker.”

It was Bach’s “Chaconne.” You should have seen her eyes shine, her fingers actually tremble while she turned over the pages. Seems odd to think of her worshipping at the shrine of Bach as odd as to think of a wild colt running of its free will into the shafts; but that’s just it with her you can never tell. “Heavenly!” she kept saying.

John Ford put down his knife and fork.

“Heathenish stuff!” he muttered, and suddenly thundered out, “Pasiance!”

She looked up with a start, threw the music from her, and resumed her place.

During evening prayers, which follow every night immediately on food, her face was a study of mutiny. She went to bed early. It was rather late when we broke up—for once old Ford had been talking of his squatter’s

life. As we came out, Dan held up his hand. A dog was barking. “It’s Lass,” he said. “She’ll wake Pasiance.”

The spaniel yelped furiously. Dan ran out to stop her. He was soon back.

“Somebody’s been in the orchard, and gone off down to the cove.” He ran on down the path. I, too, ran, horribly uneasy. In front, through the darkness, came the spaniel’s bark; the lights of the coastguard station faintly showed. I was first on the beach; the dog came to me at once, her tail almost in her mouth from apology. There was the sound of oars working in rowlocks; nothing visible but the feathery edges of the waves. Dan said behind, “No use! He’s gone.” His voice sounded hoarse, like that of a man choking with passion.

“George,” he stammered, “it’s that blackguard. I wish I’d put a bullet in him.” Suddenly a light burned up in the darkness on the sea, seemed to swing gently, and vanished. Without another word we went back up the hill. John Ford stood at the gate motionless, indifferent—nothing had dawned on him as yet. I whispered to Dan, “Let it alone!”

“No,” he said, “I’m going to show you.” He struck a match, and slowly hunted the footsteps in the wet grass of the orchard. “Look—here!”

He stopped under Pasiance’s window and swayed the match over the ground. Clear as daylight were the marks of some one who had jumped or fallen. Dan held the match over his head.

“And look there!” he said. The bough of an apple-tree below the window was broken. He blew the match out.

I could see the whites of his eyes, like an angry animal’s.

“Drop it, Dan!” I said.

He turned on his heel suddenly, and stammered out, “You’re right.”

But he had turned into John Ford’s arms.

The old man stood there like some great force, darker than the darkness, staring up at the window, as though stupefied. We had not a word to say. He seemed unconscious of our presence. He turned round, and left us standing there.

“Follow him!” said Dan. “Follow him—by God! it’s not safe.”

We followed. Bending, and treading heavily, he went upstairs. He struck a blow on Pasiance’s door. “Let me in!” he said. I drew Dan into my bedroom. The key was slowly turned, her door was flung open, and there she stood in her dressing-gown, a candle in her hand, her face crimson, and

oh! so young, with its short, crisp hair and round cheeks. The old man—like a giant in front of her—raised his hands, and laid them on her shoulders.

"What's this? You—you've had a man in your room?"

Her eyes did not drop.

"Yes," she said. Dan gave a groan.

"Who?"

"Zachary Pearse," she answered in a voice like a bell.

He gave her one awful shake, dropped his hands, then raised them as though to strike her. She looked him in the eyes; his hands dropped, and he too groaned. As far as I could see, her face never moved.

"I'm married to him," she said, "d' you hear? Married to him. Go out of my room!" She dropped the candle on the floor at his feet, and slammed the door in his face. The old man stood for a minute as though stunned, then groped his way downstairs.

"Dan," I said, "is it true?"

"Ah!" he answered, "it's true; didn't you hear her?"

I was glad I couldn't see his face.

"That ends it," he said at last; "there's the old man to think of."

"What will he do?"

"Go to the fellow this very night." He seemed to have no doubt. Trust one man of action to know another.

I muttered something about being an outsider—wondered if there was anything I could do to help.

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't know that I'm anything but an outsider now; but I'll go along with him, if he'll have me."

He went downstairs. A few minutes later they rode out from the straw-yard. I watched them past the line of hayricks, into the blacker shadows of the pines, then the tramp of hoofs began to fail in the darkness, and at last died away.

I've been sitting here in my bedroom writing to you ever since, till my candle's almost gone. I keep thinking what the end of it is to be; and reproaching myself for doing nothing. And yet, what could I have done? I'm sorry for her—sorrier than I can say. The night is so quiet—I haven't heard a sound; is she asleep, awake, crying, triumphant?

It's four o'clock; I've been asleep.

They're back. Dan is lying on my bed. I'll try and tell you his story as near as I can, in his own words.

“We rode,” he said, “round the upper way, keeping out of the lanes, and got to Kingswear by half-past eleven. The horse-ferry had stopped running, and we had a job to find any one to put us over. We hired the fellow to wait for us, and took a carriage at the ‘Castle.’ Before we got to Black Mill it was nearly one, pitch-dark. With the breeze from the southeast, I made out he should have been in an hour or more. The old man had never spoken to me once: and before we got there I had begun to hope we shouldn’t find the fellow after all. We made the driver pull up in the road, and walked round and round, trying to find the door. Then some one cried, ‘Who are you?’

“‘John Ford.’

“‘What do you want?’ It was old Pearse.

“‘To see Zachary Pearse.’

“The long window out of the porch where we sat the other day was open, and in we went. There was a door at the end of the room, and a light coming through. John Ford went towards it; I stayed out in the dark.

“‘Who’s that with you?’

“‘Mr. Treffry.’

“‘Let him come in!’ I went in. The old fellow was in bed, quite still on his pillows, a candle by his side; to look at him you’d think nothing of him but his eyes were alive. It was queer being there with those two old men!”

Dan paused, seemed to listen, then went on doggedly.

“‘Sit down, gentleman,’ said old Pearse. ‘What may you want to see my son for?’ John Ford begged his pardon, he had something to say, he said, that wouldn’t wait.

“They were very polite to one another,” muttered Dan ....

“‘Will you leave your message with me?’ said Pearse.

“‘What I have to say to your son is private.’

“‘I’m his father.’

“‘I’m my girl’s grandfather; and her only stand-by.’

“‘Ah!’ muttered old Pearse, ‘Rick Voisey’s daughter?’

“‘I mean to see your son.’

“Old Pearse smiled. Queer smile he’s got, sort of sneering sweet.

“‘You can never tell where Zack may be,’ he said. ‘You think I want to shield him. You’re wrong; Zack can take care of himself.’

“‘Your son’s here!’ said John Ford. ‘I know.’ Old Pearse gave us a very queer look.

“‘You come into my house like thieves in the night,’ he said, ‘and give me the lie, do you?’

“‘Your son came to my child’s room like a thief in the night; it’s for that I want to see him,’ and then,” said Dan, “there was a long silence. At last Pearse said:

“‘I don’t understand; has he played the blackguard?’

“John Ford answered, ‘He’s married her, or, before God, I’d kill him.’

“Old Pearse seemed to think this over, never moving on his pillows. ‘You don’t know Zack,’ he said; ‘I’m sorry for you, and I’m sorry for Rick Voisey’s daughter; but you don’t know Zack.’

“‘Sorry!’ groaned out John Ford; ‘he’s stolen my child, and I’ll punish him.’

“‘Punish!’ cried old Pearse, ‘we don’t take punishment, not in my family.’

“‘Captain Jan Pearse, as sure as I stand here, you and your breed will get your punishment of God.’ Old Pearse smiled.

“‘Mr. John Ford, that’s as may be; but sure as I lie here we won’t take it of you. You can’t punish unless you make to feel, and that you can’t du.’”

And that is truth!

Dan went on again:

“‘You won’t tell me where your son is!’ but old Pearse never blinked.

“‘I won’t,’ he said, ‘and now you may get out. I lie here an old man alone, with no use to my legs, night on night, an’ the house open; any rapscallion could get in; d’ ye think I’m afraid of you?’

“We were beat; and walked out without a word. But that old man; I’ve thought of him a lot—ninety-two, and lying there. Whatever he’s been, and they tell you rum things of him, whatever his son may be, he’s a man. It’s not what he said, nor that there was anything to be afraid of just then, but somehow it’s the idea of the old chap lying there. I don’t ever wish to see a better plucked one....”

We sat silent after that; out of doors the light began to stir among the leaves. There were all kinds of rustling sounds, as if the world were turning over in bed.

Suddenly Dan said:

“He’s cheated me. I paid him to clear out and leave her alone. D’ you think she’s asleep?” He’s made no appeal for sympathy, he’d take pity for an insult; but he feels it badly.

“I’m tired as a cat,” he said at last, and went to sleep on my bed.

It’s broad daylight now; I too am tired as a cat....

V

“Saturday, 6th August.

.... I take up my tale where I left off yesterday.... Dan and I started as soon as we could get Mrs. Hopgood to give us coffee. The old lady was more tentative, more undecided, more pouncing, than I had ever seen her. She was manifestly uneasy: Ha-apgood—who “don’t slape” don’t he, if snores are any criterion—had called out in the night, “Hark to th’ ‘arses’ ‘oofs!” Had we heard them? And where might we be going then? ‘Twas very earrly to start, an’ no breakfast. Haapgood had said it was goin’ to shaowerr. Miss Pasiance was not to ’er violin yet, an’ Mister Ford ’e kept ’is room. Was it?—would there be—? “Well, an’ therr’s an ’arvest bug; ’tis some earrly for they!” Wonderful how she pounces on all such creatures, when I can’t even see them. She pressed it absently between finger and thumb, and began manoeuvring round another way. Long before she had reached her point, we had gulped down our coffee, and departed. But as we rode out she came at a run, holding her skirts high with either hand, raised her old eyes bright and anxious in their setting of fine wrinkles, and said:

“’Tidden sorrow for her?”

A shrug of the shoulders was all the answer she got. We rode by the lanes; through sloping farmyards, all mud and pigs, and dirty straw, and farmers with clean-shaven upper lips and whiskers under the chin; past fields of corn, where larks were singing. Up or down, we didn’t draw rein till we came to Dan’s hotel.

There was the river gleaming before us under a rainbow mist that hallowed every shape. There seemed affinity between the earth and the sky. I’ve never seen that particular soft unity out of Devon. And every ship, however black or modern, on those pale waters, had the look of a dream ship. The tall green woods, the red earth, the white houses, were all melted into one opal haze. It was raining, but the sun was shining behind. Gulls swooped by us—ghosts of the old greedy wanderers of the sea.

We had told our two boatmen to pull us out to the Pied Witch! They started with great resolution, then rested on their oars.

“The Pied Witch, zurr?” asked one politely; “an’ which may her be?”

That’s the West countryman all over! Never say you “nay,” never lose an opportunity, never own he doesn’t know, or can’t do anything—independence, amiability, and an eye to the main chance. We mentioned Pearse’s name.

“Capt’n Zach’ry Pearse!” They exchanged a look half-amused, half-admiring.

“The Zunflaower, yu mane. That’s her. Zunflaower, ahoy!” As we mounted the steamer’s black side I heard one say:

“Pied Witch! A pra-aper name that—a dandy name for her!” They laughed as they made fast.

The mate of the Sunflower, or Pied Witch, or whatever she was called, met us—a tall young fellow in his shirtsleeves, tanned to the roots of his hair, with sinewy, tattooed arms, and grey eyes, charred round the rims from staring at weather.

“The skipper is on board,” he said. “We’re rather busy, as you see. Get on with that, you sea-cooks,” he bawled at two fellows who were doing nothing. All over the ship, men were hauling, splicing, and stowing cargo.

“To-day’s Friday: we’re off on Wednesday with any luck. Will you come this way?” He led us down the companion to a dark hole which he called the saloon. “Names? What! are you Mr. Treffry? Then we’re partners!” A schoolboy’s glee came on his face.

“Look here!” he said; “I can show you something,” and he unlocked the door of a cabin. There appeared to be nothing in it but a huge piece of tarpaulin, which depended, bulging, from the topmost bunk. He pulled it up. The lower bunk had been removed, and in its place was the ugly body of a dismounted Gatling gun.

“Got six of them,” he whispered, with unholy mystery, through which his native frankness gaped out. “Worth their weight in gold out there just now, the skipper says. Got a heap of rifles, too, and lots of ammunition. He’s given me a share. This is better than the P. and O., and playing deck cricket with the passengers. I’d made up my mind already to chuck that, and go in for plantin’ sugar, when I ran across the skipper. Wonderful chap, the skipper! I’ll go and tell him. He’s been out all night; only came aboard at four bells; having a nap now, but he won’t mind that for you.”

Off he went. I wondered what there was in Zachary Pearse to attract a youngster of this sort; one of the customary twelve children of some

country parson, no doubt-burning to shoot a few niggers, and for ever frank and youthful.

He came back with his hands full of bottles.

"What'll you drink? The skipper'll be here in a jiffy. Excuse my goin' on deck. We're so busy."

And in five minutes Zachary Pearse did come. He made no attempt to shake hands, for which I respected him. His face looked worn, and more defiant than usual.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

"We've come to ask what you're going to do?" said Dan.

"I don't know," answered Pearse, "that that's any of your business."

Dan's little eyes were like the eyes of an angry pig.

"You've got five hundred pounds of mine," he said; "why do you think I gave it you?"

Zachary bit his fingers.

"That's no concern of mine," he said. "I sail on Wednesday. Your money's safe."

"Do you know what I think of you?" said Dan.

"No, and you'd better not tell me!" Then, with one of his peculiar changes, he smiled: "As you like, though."

Dan's face grew very dark. "Give me a plain answer," he said: "What are you going to do about her?"

Zachary looked up at him from under his brows.

"Nothing."

"Are you cur enough to deny that you've married her?"

Zachary looked at him coolly. "Not at all," he said.

"What in God's name did you do it for?"

"You've no monopoly in the post of husband, Mr. Treffry."

"To put a child in that position! Haven't you the heart of a man? What d' ye come sneaking in at night for? By Gad! Don't you know you've done a beastly thing?"

Zachary's face darkened, he clenched his fists. Then he seemed to shut his anger into himself.

"You wanted me to leave her to you," he sneered. "I gave her my promise that I'd take her out there, and we'd have gone off on Wednesday quietly enough, if you hadn't come and nosed the whole thing out with your

infernal dog. The fat's in the fire! There's no reason why I should take her now. I'll come back to her a rich man, or not at all."

"And in the meantime?" I slipped in.

He turned to me, in an ingratiating way.

"I would have taken her to save the fuss—I really would—it's not my fault the thing's come out. I'm on a risky job. To have her with me might ruin the whole thing; it would affect my nerve. It isn't safe for her."

"And what's her position to be," I said, "while you're away? Do you think she'd have married you if she'd known you were going to leave her like this? You ought to give up this business.

"You stole her. Her life's in your hands; she's only a child!"

A quiver passed over his face; it showed that he was suffering.

"Give it up!" I urged.

"My last farthing's in it," he sighed; "the chance of a lifetime."

He looked at me doubtfully, appealingly, as if for the first time in his life he had been given a glimpse of that dilemma of consequences which his nature never recognises. I thought he was going to give in. Suddenly, to my horror, Dan growled, "Play the man!"

Pearse turned his head. "I don't want your advice anyway," he said; "I'll not be dictated to."

"To your last day," said Dan, "you shall answer to me for the way you treat her."

Zachary smiled.

"Do you see that fly?" he said. "Wel—I care for you as little as this," and he flicked the fly off his white trousers. "Good-morning...!"

The noble mariners who manned our boat pulled lustily for the shore, but we had hardly shoved off' when a storm of rain burst over the ship, and she seemed to vanish, leaving a picture on my eyes of the mate waving his cap above the rail, with his tanned young face bent down at us, smiling, keen, and friendly.

.... We reached the shore drenched, angry with ourselves, and with each other; I started sulkily for home.

As I rode past an orchard, an apple, loosened by the rainstorm, came down with a thud.

"The apples were ripe and ready to fall, Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall."

I made up my mind to pack, and go away. But there's a strangeness, a sort of haunting fascination in it all. To you, who don't know the people, it may only seem a piece of rather sordid folly. But it isn't the good, the obvious, the useful that puts a spell on us in life. It's the bizarre, the dimly seen, the mysterious for good or evil.

The sun was out again when I rode up to the farm; its yellow thatch shone through the trees as if sheltering a store of gladness and good news. John Ford himself opened the door to me.

He began with an apology, which made me feel more than ever an intruder; then he said:

"I have not spoken to my granddaughter—I waited to see Dan Treffry."

He was stern and sad-eyed, like a man with a great weight of grief on his shoulders. He looked as if he had not slept; his dress was out of order, he had not taken his clothes off, I think. He isn't a man whom you can pity. I felt I had taken a liberty in knowing of the matter at all. When I told him where we had been, he said:

"It was good of you to take this trouble. That you should have had to! But since such things have come to pass—" He made a gesture full of horror. He gave one the impression of a man whose pride was struggling against a mortal hurt. Presently he asked:

"You saw him, you say? He admitted this marriage? Did he give an explanation?"

I tried to make Pearse's point of view clear. Before this old man, with his inflexible will and sense of duty, I felt as if I held a brief for Zachary, and must try to do him justice.

"Let me understand," he said at last. "He stole her, you say, to make sure; and deserts her within a fortnight."

"He says he meant to take her—"

"Do you believe that?"

Before I could answer, I saw Pasiance standing at the window. How long she had been there I don't know.

"Is it true that he is going to leave me behind?" she cried out.

I could only nod.

"Did you hear him your own self?"

"Yes."

She stamped her foot.

“But he promised! He promised!”

John Ford went towards her.

“Don’t touch me, grandfather! I hate every one! Let him do what he likes, I don’t care.”

John Ford’s face turned quite grey.

“Pasiance,” he said, “did you want to leave me so much?”

She looked straight at us, and said sharply:

“What’s the good of telling stories. I can’t help its hurting you.”

“What did you think you would find away from here?”

She laughed.

“Find? I don’t know—nothing; I wouldn’t be stifled anyway. Now I suppose you’ll shut me up because I’m a weak girl, not strong like men!”

“Silence!” said John Ford; “I will make him take you.”

“You shan’t!” she cried; “I won’t let you. He’s free to do as he likes. He’s free—I tell you all, everybody—free!”

She ran through the window, and vanished.

John Ford made a movement as if the bottom had dropped out of his world. I left him there.

I went to the kitchen, where Hopgood was sitting at the table, eating bread and cheese. He got up on seeing me, and very kindly brought me some cold bacon and a pint of ale.

“I thart I shude be seeing yu, zurr,” he said between his bites; “Therr’s no thart to ’atin’ ’bout the ’ouse to-day. The old wumman’s puzzivantin’ over Miss Pasiance. Young girls are skeery critters”—he brushed his sleeve over his broad, hard jaws, and filled a pipe “specially when it’s in the blood of ’em. Squire Rick Voisey werr a dandy; an’ Mistress Voisey—well, she werr a nice lady tu, but”—rolling the stem of his pipe from corner to corner of his mouth—“she werr a pra-aper vixen.”

Hopgood’s a good fellow, and I believe as soft as he looks hard, but he’s not quite the sort with whom one chooses to talk over a matter like this. I went upstairs, and began to pack, but after a bit dropped it for a book, and somehow or other fell asleep.

I woke, and looked at my watch; it was five o’clock. I had been asleep four hours. A single sunbeam was slanting across from one of my windows to the other, and there was the cool sound of milk dropping into pails; then, all at once, a stir as of alarm, and heavy footsteps.

I opened my door. Hopgood and a coast-guardsman were carrying Pasiance slowly up the stairs. She lay in their arms without moving, her face whiter than her dress, a scratch across the forehead, and two or three drops there of dried blood. Her hands were clasped, and she slowly crooked and stiffened out her fingers. When they turned with her at the stair top, she opened her lips, and gasped, “All right, don’t put me down. I can bear it.” They passed, and, with a half-smile in her eyes, she said something to me that I couldn’t catch; the door was shut, and the excited whispering began again below. I waited for the men to come out, and caught hold of Hopgood. He wiped the sweat off his forehead.

“Poor young thing!” he said. “She fell—down the cliffs—’tis her back—coastguard saw her ’twerr they fetched her in. The Lord ’elp her mebbe she’s not broken up much! An’ Mister Ford don’t know! I’m gwine for the doctor.”

There was an hour or more to wait before he came; a young fellow; almost a boy. He looked very grave, when he came out of her room.

“The old woman there fond of her? nurse her well...? Fond as a dog! —good! Don’t know—can’t tell for certain! Afraid it’s the spine, must have another opinion! What a plucky girl! Tell Mr. Ford to have the best man he can get in Torquay—there’s C—-. I’ll be round the first thing in the morning. Keep her dead quiet. I’ve left a sleeping draught; she’ll have fever tonight.”

John Ford came in at last. Poor old man! What it must have cost him not to go to her for fear of the excitement! How many times in the next few hours didn’t I hear him come to the bottom of the stairs; his heavy wheezing, and sighing; and the forlorn tread of his feet going back! About eleven, just as I was going to bed, Mrs. Hopgood came to my door.

“Will yu come, sir,” she said; “she’s asking for yu. Naowt I can zay but what she will see yu; zeems crazy, don’t it?” A tear trickled down the old lady’s cheek. “Du ’ee come; ’twill du ’err ’arm mebbe, but I dunno—she’ll fret else.”

I slipped into the room. Lying back on her pillows, she was breathing quickly with half-closed eyes. There was nothing to show that she had wanted me, or even knew that I was there. The wick of the candle, set by the bedside, had been snuffed too short, and gave but a faint light; both window and door stood open, still there was no draught, and the feeble little flame burned quite still, casting a faint yellow stain on the ceiling like the

refection from a buttercup held beneath a chin. These ceilings are far too low! Across the wide, squat window the apple branches fell in black stripes which never stirred. It was too dark to see things clearly. At the foot of the bed was a chest, and there Mrs. Hopgood had sat down, moving her lips as if in speech. Mingled with the half-musty smell of age; there were other scents, of mignonette, apples, and some sweet-smelling soap. The floor had no carpet, and there was not one single dark object except the violin, hanging from a nail over the bed. A little, round clock ticked solemnly.

"Why won't you give me that stuff, Mums?" Pasiance said in a faint, sharp voice. "I want to sleep."

"Have you much pain?" I asked.

"Of course I have; it's everywhere."

She turned her face towards me.

"You thought I did it on purpose, but you're wrong. If I had, I'd have done it better than this. I wouldn't have this brutal pain." She put her fingers over her eyes. "It's horrible to complain! Only it's so bad! But I won't again —promise."

She took the sleeping draught gratefully, making a face, like a child after a powder.

"How long do you think it'll be before I can play again? Oh! I forgot —there are other things to think about." She held out her hand to me. "Look at my ring. Married—isn't it funny? Ha, ha! Nobody will ever understand—that's funny too! Poor Gran! You see, there wasn't any reason—only me. That's the only reason I'm telling you now; Mums is there—but she doesn't count; why don't you count, Mums?"

The fever was fighting against the draught; she had tossed the clothes back from her throat, and now and then raised one thin arm a little, as if it eased her; her eyes had grown large, and innocent like a child's; the candle, too, had flared, and was burning clearly.

"Nobody is to tell him—nobody at all; promise...! If I hadn't slipped, it would have been different. What would have happened then? You can't tell; and I can't—that's funny! Do you think I loved him? Nobody marries without love, do they? Not quite without love, I mean. But you see I wanted to be free, he said he'd take me; and now he's left me after all! I won't be left, I can't! When I came to the cliff—that bit where the ivy grows right down—there was just the sea there, underneath; so I thought I would throw myself over and it would be all quiet; and I climbed on a ledge, it looked

easier from there, but it was so high, I wanted to get back; and then my foot slipped; and now it’s all pain. You can’t think much, when you’re in pain.”

From her eyes I saw that she was dropping off.

“Nobody can take you away from-yourself. He’s not to be told—not even—I don’t—want you—to go away, because—” But her eyes closed, and she dropped off to sleep.

They don’t seem to know this morning whether she is better or worse....

VI

"Tuesday, 9th August.

.... It seems more like three weeks than three days since I wrote. The time passes slowly in a sickhouse...! The doctors were here this morning, they give her forty hours. Not a word of complaint has passed her lips since she knew. To see her you would hardly think her ill; her cheeks have not had time to waste or lose their colour. There is not much pain, but a slow, creeping numbness.... It was John Ford's wish that she should be told. She just turned her head to the wall and sighed; then to poor old Mrs. Hopgood, who was crying her heart out: "Don't cry, Mums, I don't care."

When they had gone, she asked for her violin. She made them hold it for her, and drew the bow across the strings; but the notes that came out were so trembling and uncertain that she dropped the bow and broke into a passion of sobbing. Since then, no complaint or moan of any kind....

But to go back. On Sunday, the day after I wrote, as I was coming from a walk, I met a little boy making mournful sounds on a tin whistle.

"Coom ahn!" he said, "the Miss wahnts t' zee yu."

I went to her room. In the morning she had seemed better, but now looked utterly exhausted. She had a letter in her hand.

"It's this," she said. "I don't seem to understand it. He wants me to do something—but I can't think, and my eyes feel funny. Read it to me, please."

The letter was from Zachary. I read it to her in a low voice, for Mrs. Hopgood was in the room, her eyes always fixed on Pasiance above her knitting. When I'd finished, she made me read it again, and yet again. At first she seemed pleased, almost excited, then came a weary, scornful look, and before I'd finished the third time she was asleep. It was a remarkable letter, that seemed to bring the man right before one's eyes. I slipped it under her fingers on the bed-clothes, and went out. Fancy took me to the cliff where she had fallen. I found the point of rock where the cascade of ivy flows down the cliff; the ledge on which she had climbed was a little to my right—a mad place. It showed plainly what wild emotions must have

been driving her! Behind was a half-cut cornfield with a fringe of poppies, and swarms of harvest insects creeping and flying; in the uncut corn a landrail kept up a continual charring. The sky was blue to the very horizon, and the sea wonderful, under that black wild cliff stained here and there with red. Over the dips and hollows of the fields great white clouds hung low down above the land. There are no brassy, east-coast skies here; but always sleepy, soft-shaped clouds, full of subtle stir and change. Passages of Zachary's Pearse's letter kept rising to my lips. After all he's the man that his native place, and life, and blood have made him. It is useless to expect idealists where the air is soft and things good to look on (the idealist grows where he must create beauty or comfort for himself); useless to expect a man of law and order, in one whose fathers have stared at the sea day and night for a thousand years—the sea, full of its promises of unknown things, never quite the same, a slave to its own impulses. Man is an imitative animal....

"Life's hard enough," he wrote, "without tying yourself down. Don't think too hardly of me! Shall I make you happier by taking you into danger? If I succeed you'll be a rich woman; but I shall fail if you're with me. To look at you makes me soft. At sea a man dreams of all the good things on land, he'll dream of the heather, and honey—you're like that; and he'll dream of the apple-trees, and the grass of the orchards—you're like that; sometimes he only lies on his back and wishes—and you're like that, most of all like that...."

When I was reading those words I remember a strange, soft, half-scornful look came over Pasiance's face; and once she said, "But that's all nonsense, isn't it...?"

Then followed a long passage about what he would gain if he succeeded, about all that he was risking, the impossibility of failure, if he kept his wits about him. "It's only a matter of two months or so," he went on; "stay where you are, dear, or go to my Dad. He'll be glad to have you. There's my mother's room. There's no one to say 'No' to your fiddle there; you can play it by the sea; and on dark nights you'll have the stars dancing to you over the water as thick as bees. I've looked at them often, thinking of you...."

Pasiance had whispered to me, "Don't read that bit," and afterwards I left it out.... Then the sensuous side of him shows up: "When I've brought this off, there's the whole world before us. There are places I can take you

to. There's one I know, not too warm and not too cold, where you can sit all day in the shade and watch the creepers, and the cocoa-palms, still as still; nothing to do or care about; all the fruits you can think of; no noise but the parrots and the streams, and a splash when a nigger dives into a water-hole. Pasiance, we'll go there! With an eighty-ton craft there's no sea we couldn't know. The world's a fine place for those who go out to take it; there's lots of unknown stuff' in it yet. I'll fill your lap, my pretty, so full of treasures that you shan't know yourself. A man wasn't meant to sit at home...."

Throughout this letter—for all its real passion—one could feel how the man was holding to his purpose—the rather sordid purpose of this venture. He's unconscious of it; for he is in love with her; but he must be furthering his own ends. He is vital—horribly vital! I wonder less now that she should have yielded.

What visions hasn't he dangled before her. There was physical attraction, too—I haven't forgotten the look I saw on her face at Black Mill. But when all's said and done, she married him, because she's Pasiance Voisey, who does things and wants "to get back." And she lies there dying; not he nor any other man will ever take her away. It's pitiful to think of him tingling with passion, writing that letter to this doomed girl in that dark hole of a saloon. "I've wanted money," he wrote, "ever since I was a little chap sitting in the fields among the cows.... I want it for you now, and I mean to have it. I've studied the thing two years; I know what I know....

"The moment this is in the post I leave for London. There are a hundred things to look after still; I can't trust myself within reach of you again till the anchor's weighed. When I re-christened her the Pied Witch, I thought of you—you witch to me...."

There followed a solemn entreaty to her to be on the path leading to the cove at seven o'clock on Wednesday evening (that is, to-morrow) when he would come ashore and bid her good-bye. It was signed, "Your loving husband, Zachary Pearse...."

I lay at the edge of that cornfield a long time; it was very peaceful. The church bells had begun to ring. The long shadows came stealing out from the sheaves; woodpigeons rose one by one, and flapped off to roost; the western sky was streaked with red, and all the downs and combe bathed in the last sunlight. Perfect harvest weather; but oppressively still, the stillness of suspense....

Life at the farm goes on as usual. We have morning and evening prayers. John Ford reads them fiercely, as though he were on the eve of a revolt against his God. Morning and evening he visits her, comes out wheezing heavily, and goes to his own room; I believe, to pray. Since this morning I haven’t dared meet him. He is a strong old man—but this will break him up....

VII

“KINGSWEAR, Saturday, 13th August.

.... It’s over—I leave here to-morrow, and go abroad.

A quiet afternoon—not a breath up in the churchyard! I was there quite half an hour before they came. Some red cows had strayed into the adjoining orchard, and were rubbing their heads against the railing. While I stood there an old woman came and drove them away; afterwards, she stooped and picked up the apples that had fallen before their time.

“The apples are ripe and ready to fall, Oh! heigh-ho! and ready to fall; There came an old woman and gathered them all, Oh! heigh-ho! and gathered them all.”

.... They brought Pasiance very simply—no hideous funeral trappings, thank God—the farm hands carried her, and there was no one there but John Ford, the Hopgoods, myself, and that young doctor. They read the service over her grave. I can hear John Ford’s “Amen!” now. When it was over he walked away bareheaded in the sun, without a word. I went up there again this evening, and wandered amongst the tombstones. “Richard Voisey,” “John, the son of Richard and Constance Voisey,” “Margery Voisey,” so many generations of them in that corner; then “Richard Voisey and Agnes his wife,” and next to it that new mound on which a sparrow was strutting and the shadows of the apple-trees already hovering.

I will tell you the little left to tell....

On Wednesday afternoon she asked for me again.

“It’s only till seven,” she whispered. “He’s certain to come then. But if I—were to die first—then tell him—I’m sorry for him. They keep saying: ‘Don’t talk—don’t talk!’ Isn’t it stupid? As if I should have any other chance! There’ll be no more talking after to-night! Make everybody come, please—I want to see them all. When you’re dying you’re freer than any other time—nobody wants you to do things, nobody cares what you say.... He promised me I should do what I liked if I married him—I never believed that really—but now I can do what I like; and say all the things I want to.”

She lay back silent; she could not after all speak the inmost thoughts that are in each of us, so sacred that they melt away at the approach of words.

I shall remember her like that—with the gleam of a smile in her half-closed eyes, her red lips parted—such a quaint look of mockery, pleasure, regret, on her little round, upturned face; the room white, and fresh with flowers, the breeze guttering the apple-leaves against the window. In the night they had unhooked the violin and taken it away; she had not missed it.... When Dan came, I gave up my place to him. He took her hand gently in his great paw, without speaking.

"How small my hand looks there," she said, "too small." Dan put it softly back on the bedclothes and wiped his forehead. Pasiance cried in a sharp whisper: "Is it so hot in here? I didn't know." Dan bent down, put his lips to her fingers and left the room.

The afternoon was long, the longest I've ever spent. Sometimes she seemed to sleep, sometimes whispered to herself about her mother, her grandfather, the garden, or her cats—all sorts of inconsequent, trivial, even ludicrous memories seemed to throng her mind—never once, I think, did she speak of Zachary, but, now and then, she asked the time.... Each hour she grew visibly weaker. John Ford sat by her without moving, his heavy breathing was often the only sound; sometimes she rubbed her fingers on his hand, without speaking. It was a summary of their lives together. Once he prayed aloud for her in a hoarse voice; then her pitiful, impatient eyes signed to me.

"Quick," she whispered, "I want him; it's all so—cold."

I went out and ran down the path towards the cove.

Leaning on a gate stood Zachary, an hour before his time; dressed in the same old blue clothes and leather-peaked cap as on the day when I saw him first. He knew nothing of what had happened. But at a quarter of the truth, I'm sure he divined the whole, though he would not admit it to himself. He kept saying, "It can't be. She'll be well in a few days—a sprain! D' you think the sea-voyage.... Is she strong enough to be moved now at once?"

It was painful to see his face, so twisted by the struggle between his instinct and his vitality. The sweat poured down his forehead. He turned round as we walked up the path, and pointed out to sea. There was his steamer. "I could get her on board in no time. Impossible! What is it, then?

Spine? Good God! The doctors.... Sometimes they'll do wonders!" It was pitiful to see his efforts to blind himself to the reality.

"It can't be, she's too young. We're walking very slow." I told him she was dying.

For a second I thought he was going to run away. Then he jerked up his head, and rushed on towards the house. At the foot of the staircase he gripped me by the shoulder.

"It's not true!" he said; "she'll get better now I'm here. I'll stay. Let everything go. I'll stay."

"Now's the time," I said, "to show you loved her. Pull yourself together, man!" He shook all over.

"Yes!" was all he answered. We went into her room. It seemed impossible she was going to die; the colour was bright in her cheeks, her lips trembling and pouted as if she had just been kissed, her eyes gleaming, her hair so dark and crisp, her face so young....

Half an hour later I stole to the open door of her room. She was still and white as the sheets of her bed. John Ford stood at the foot; and, bowed to the level of the pillows, his head on his clenched fists, sat Zachary. It was utterly quiet. The guttering of the leaves had ceased. When things have come to a crisis, how little one feels—no fear, no pity, no sorrow, rather the sense, as when a play is over, of anxiety to get away!

Suddenly Zachary rose, brushed past me without seeing, and ran downstairs.

Some hours later I went out on the path leading to the cove. It was pitch-black; the riding light of the Pied Witch was still there, looking no bigger than a firefly. Then from in front I heard sobbing—a man's sobs; no sound is quite so dreadful. Zachary Pearse got up out of the bank not ten paces off.

I had no heart to go after him, and sat down in the hedge. There was something subtly akin to her in the fresh darkness of the young night; the soft bank, the scent of honeysuckle, the touch of the ferns and brambles. Death comes to all of us, and when it's over it's over; but this blind business —of those left behind!

A little later the ship whistled twice; her starboard light gleamed faintly—and that was all....

VIII

"TORQUAY, 30th October.

.... Do you remember the letters I wrote you from Moor Farm nearly three years ago? To-day I rode over there. I stopped at Brixham on the way for lunch, and walked down to the quay. There had been a shower—but the sun was out again, shining on the sea, the brown-red sails, and the rampart of slate roofs.

A trawler was lying there, which had evidently been in a collision. The spiky-bearded, thin-lipped fellow in torn blue jersey and sea-boots who was superintending the repairs, said to me a little proudly:

"Bane in collision, zurr; like to zee over her?" Then suddenly screwing up his little blue eyes, he added:

"Why, I remembers yu. Steered yu along o' the young lady in this yer very craft."

It was Prawle, Zachary Pearse's henchman.

"Yes," he went on, "that's the cutter."

"And Captain Pearse?"

He leant his back against the quay, and spat. "He was a pra-aper man; I never zane none like 'en."

"Did you do any good out there?"

Prawle gave me a sharp glance.

"Gude? No, t'was arrm we done, vrom ztart to finish—had trouble all the time. What a man cude du, the skipper did. When yu caan't du right, zome calls it 'Providence'. 'Tis all my eye an' Betty Martin! What I zay es, 'tis these times, there's such a dale o' folk, a dale of puzzivantin' fellers; the world's to small."

With these words there flashed across me a vision of Drake crushed into our modern life by the shrinkage of the world; Drake caught in the meshes of red tape, electric wires, and all the lofty appliances of our civilization. Does a type survive its age; live on into times that have no room for it? The blood is there—and sometimes there's a throw-back.... All fancy! Eh?

“So,” I said, “you failed?”

Prawle wriggled.

“I wudden’ goo for to zay that, zurr—’tis an ugly word. Da-am!” he added, staring at his boots, “’twas thru me tu. We were along among the haythen, and I mus’ nades goo for to break me leg. The capt’n he wudden’ lave me. ‘One Devon man,’ he says to me, ‘don’ lave anotherr.’ We werr six days where we shuld ha’ been tu; when we got back to the ship a cruiser had got her for gun-runnin’.”

“And what has become of Captain Pearse?”

Prawle answered, “Zurr, I belave ’e went to China, ’tis onsartin.”

“He’s not dead?”

Prawle looked at me with a kind of uneasy anger.

“Yu cudden’ kell ’en! ’Tis true, mun ’ll die zome day. But therr’s not a one that’ll show better zport than Capt’n Zach’ry Pearse.”

I believe that; he will be hard to kill. The vision of him comes up, with his perfect balance, defiant eyes, and sweetish smile; the way the hair of his beard crisped a little, and got blacker on the cheeks; the sort of desperate feeling he gave, that one would never get the better of him, that he would never get the better of himself.

I took leave of Prawle and half a crown. Before I was off the quay I heard him saying to a lady, “Bane in collision, marm! Like to zee over her?”

After lunch I rode on to Moor. The old place looked much the same; but the apple-trees were stripped of fruit, and their leaves beginning to go yellow and fall. One of Pasiance’s cats passed me in the orchard hunting a bird, still with a ribbon round its neck. John Ford showed me all his latest improvements, but never by word or sign alluded to the past. He inquired after Dan, back in New Zealand now, without much interest; his stubbly beard and hair have whitened; he has grown very stout, and I noticed that his legs are not well under control; he often stops to lean on his stick. He was very ill last winter; and sometimes, they say, will go straight off to sleep in the middle of a sentence.

I managed to get a few minutes with the Hopgoods. We talked of Pasiance sitting in the kitchen under a row of plates, with that clinging smell of wood-smoke, bacon, and age bringing up memories, as nothing but scents can. The dear old lady’s hair, drawn so nicely down her forehead on each side from the centre of her cap, has a few thin silver lines; and her face

is a thought more wrinkled. The tears still come into her eyes when she talks of her “lamb.”

Of Zachary I heard nothing, but she told me of old Pearse’s death.

“Therr they found ’en, zo to spake, dead—in th’ sun; but Ha-apgood can tell yu,” and Hopgood, ever rolling his pipe, muttered something, and smiled his wooden smile.

He came to see me off from the straw-yard. “’Tis like death to the varrm, zurr,” he said, putting all the play of his vast shoulders into the buckling of my girths. “Mister Ford—well! And not one of th’ old stock to take it when ’e’s garn.... Ah! it werr cruel; my old woman’s never been hersel’ since. Tell ’ee what ’tis—don’t du t’ think to much.”

I went out of my way to pass the churchyard. There were flowers, quite fresh, chrysanthemums, and asters; above them the white stone, already stained:

“PASIANCE
“WIFE OF ZACHARY PEARSE
“‘The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away.’”

The red cows were there too; the sky full of great white clouds, some birds whistling a little mournfully, and in the air the scent of fallen leaves....

May, 1900.

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